



## Bangladesh-India Relations: Addressing the Border Killing Concerns

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### ABSTRACT

The relationship between Bangladesh and India is characterized by a complex interplay of historical, geographical, political, and socio-economic factors. Despite numerous shared interests and efforts to foster collaboration, one persistent cause that continues to strain this relationship is the incidence of border killings along the Bangladesh-India border. Drawing upon a variety of primary and secondary sources, including official statements, reports, academic literature, and media coverage, this research examines the historical context and geopolitical dynamics that have contributed to the phenomenon of border killings between the two countries. It explores the role of factors such as border disputes, illegal migration, cross-border crime, and security concerns in exacerbating tensions and leading to violent confrontations along the border regions. It also investigates the responses and strategies employed by both governments to address the issue, including border management measures, bilateral agreements, and diplomatic initiatives. By shedding light on its causes, consequences, and potential remedies, it aims to inform policymakers, and the general public about the urgent need for concerted scholarly efforts to mitigate this longstanding challenge and foster greater mutual understanding and cooperation between the two neighboring nations.

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## INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh and India are two neighbouring countries located historically and geographically in South Asia. The total length of the Bangladesh border is about 5,138 km, of which 4,427 km is land border and 711 km is water border. Bangladesh shares a common border of 4156 km with India and 271 km with Myanmar. On the other hand, Bangladesh has 32 border districts while India has five border provinces. India is an important factor in Bangladesh's foreign policy. India's contribution to the freedom movement gave a solid foundation to the relationship between the two countries. India's support was crucial in Bangladesh's victory over Pakistan. India trained Bangladeshi 'muktibahini' (liberation fighters), it hosted the Bangladeshi government in exile and India sheltered more than 10 million refugees during the 9-month war of independence. But none of these issues can overshadow the prevailing problem in view of the Indo-Bangladesh border killings. Despite claiming to be a friendly neighbour, India has already fenced 2,500 km of its total border of 4,096 km, a phenomenon not found on the most hostile of neighbours' borders. On India's part, they argue that they have fenced the border only to prevent illegal immigration. However, the number of people they killed at the border increasingly told a different story. Indian security forces have killed nearly 1,000 people in the last 10 years, mostly Bangladeshis. The people of Bangladesh are surprised by the Indian government's sensitivity to the killing of Bangladeshi citizens and the resulting public perception of India being negative. Thus, border killing has become a big obstacle in the way of Bangladesh-India cooperation. West Bengal border alone has 68 smuggling corridors and 149 sensitive villages. Cattle smuggling is a very lucrative business for people living on both sides of the border. It is said that cows are sold at three-four times higher prices in Bangladesh than in India. So, it is a very profitable trade for both Bangladeshis and Indians. But this significant, informal and undocumented trade, carried out across the Indo-Bangladesh border, is semi-legal in nature, and is often described as 'informal' rather than illegal, because of the large participation of local people in border areas. Also, cattle traders can pay duty as soon as they enter Bangladesh and the business becomes legal.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To find out whether the killing of Bangladeshi citizens at the border has any effect on the general population of Bangladesh.
2. To investigate whether border killings have any impact on Bangladesh-India relations.

Also to find out why the border of Bangladesh has become the deadliest border in the world and to find out the reason why the extrajudicial killings on the border have not stopped. Highlighting the human rights situation at the border and finding solutions to stop border killings.

1. What is the reaction of the general public of Bangladesh as a result of the killing of Bangladeshi citizens at the border?
2. Does the border killing have any effect on Bangladesh-India friendly relations?

3. Why has the border of Bangladesh become the most deadly border in the world?

### **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

The concept of indiscriminate border killings is a rare occurrence in modern times. There are very few theorists who explain border killings from a theoretical perspective. For this lack of literature, I looked at articles on border militarization. By combining knowledge of that literature with news reports, I conclude that a constructivist perspective on border killings can be described. According to Wendt, International relations are shaped by the ideas and beliefs that people hold about the world, rather than by material forces such as military or economic power. In other words, the way that states see themselves and their relationships with other states determines how they interact with each other. The India-Bangladesh border conflict is an example of how constructivist ideas shape international relations. The two countries have different historical narratives and understandings of borders. India sees the border as a means of protecting its national security, while Bangladesh sees it as a symbol of its struggle for independence from Pakistan. The killings on the border are the result of this different belief. Indian border guards are often accused of shooting Bangladeshi civilians who Indians believe are trying to cross the border illegally. Bangladesh views this behavior as a violation of its sovereignty and a violation of the rights of its citizens. India, on the other hand, considers these measures necessary to prevent illegal immigration and protect its borders. According to Wendt, constructivism is a structural theory of the international system that makes the following key claims: (1) states are the main unit of analysis in international political theory, (2) the basic structures of state systems are not material but inter-subjective; and (3) state identity and interests are important parts of this social system. Constructivism returned international theorists to fundamental questions including the nature of the state and concepts of sovereignty and citizenship. The main theoretical proposition that all constructivists accept is that state behavior is shaped by elite beliefs, identities and social norms. Without realism, constructivists avoid frameworks. One of the most well-known constructivist theorists, Alexander Wendt, argued that political structures, anarchy or material power, explains nothing. It tells us little about state behavior. 'It does not predict that two states will be friends and enemies, recognize each other's sovereignty, have dynastic relations, have revisionist or status quo powers and so on. 'What we need to know is identity, and identities change in relation to cooperative behavior and learning. Whether the system is anarchic depends on the distribution of identities, not the distribution of military capabilities, as realists would have us believe. If the state introduces itself, the system can become anarchic. If the state identifies with the other, then there is no anarchy.

In the light of constructivism, Bangladesh-India relations are analyzed as a conflict of two identities. Strong India on one hand, state sovereignty on the other. A historically strong Indian identity has been forged through many bilateral contacts between Bangladesh and India. India handles most of the

agreements as its own in terms of Bangladesh India agreements Bangladesh is far less powerful than India in most areas of power.

Constructivism is a broad approach that "incorporates Weberian interpretive sociology, symbolic interactionism, forms of Marxism, Weberian institutionalism, post-structuralism, and hermeneutics. Despite its broad nature, constructivism has been extremely popular as an international relations theory. Constructivism emerged as a reorientation of the study of international relations at the end of World War I. Constructivism criticizes traditional rationalist theories as they embrace the state and society. Constructivists try to go beyond description to explain how things behave and what causes political outcomes. It emphasizes empirical analysis. Although constructivism there are many forms, but constructivism has three main arguments, that is:

1. Constructivists hold that normative or ideological structures are material structures just as important.
2. Identities are important because identities inform interests and, in turn, actions.
3. Constructivists claim that agents and structures are mutually constitutive.

It is known in the history of the subcontinent as "Bangabhang Raad". The British government had to reunify Bengal in 1911 due to strong opposition from Calcutta elites and Congress support for the movement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research paper was going for mixed methods, where both quantitative and qualitative data were used. It also relies on both primary and secondary data collection methods. Quantitative methods mainly rely on charts, graphs and other numerical data to prove their assumptions. This paper examines the reality of border killings on the Bangladesh-India border quantitative information is used to show the image and its intensity. But quantitative data cannot provide any Most of the data used in this method was collected by primary data collection method. The qualitative method relies on words that are not measurable and uses that explanation to support its argument.

### **Primary Sources of Data Collection**

Participant male and female participants were selected for interviews to collect data for this study. My informant collected information about some people in Maheshpur border area. Then I select the participants who will represent a truth of the social class to get the opinion of the general population of Bangladesh. I balanced male and female participants. Opinions of people from different professions and religions have been taken for data collection. Among them, 27 daily labourers, 22 housewives, 21 farmers, 12 shopkeepers, 11 traders, 11 students and some teachers and other professionals were also present.

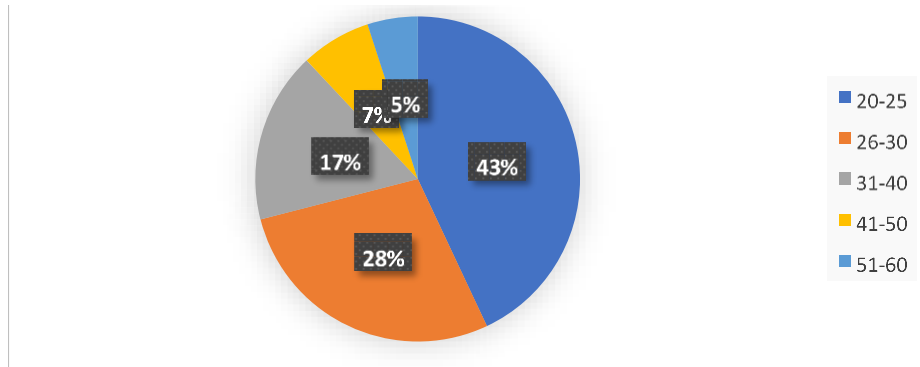


Figure 1. Age of Participants

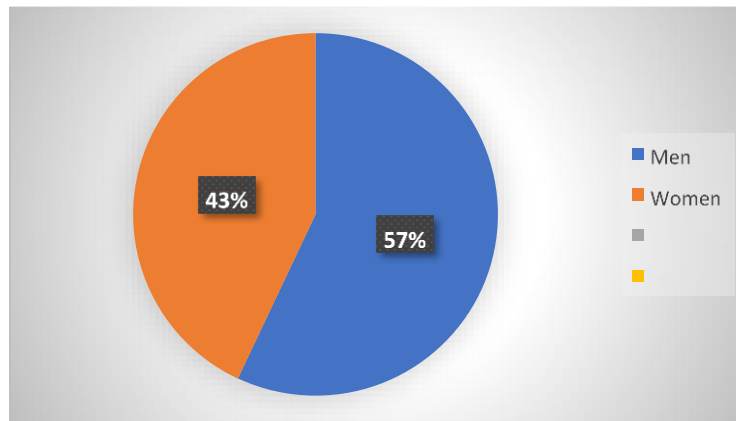


Figure 2. Ratio of Female and Male Participants

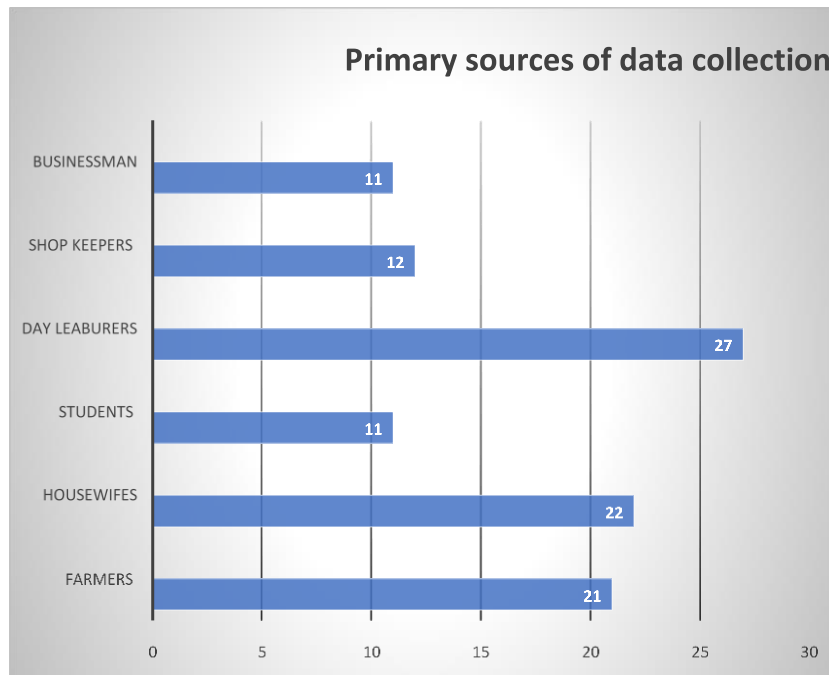


Figure 3. Occupation of Participants

### **Secondary Sources of Data Collection**

Secondary sources of information has been collected from domestic and foreign books, journals, newspapers and various reports. The use of webpages was important as it provided articles from Indian newspapers and expert opinions. It was important to keep a balanced view of the research. For the theory part, various books and journal articles were used. I have also used documents and survey reports published by various Bangladeshi NGOs, who work on the subject. Notable among them are the Centre for Rights and Law and Shalish. These articles have focused on different aspects of the issue, many of them showing the issue as part of the main India-Bangladesh nexus. Some, on the other hand, have focused on the subject itself. India's view was also reflected in this article. A major weakness of secondary articles is that there is a serious lack of scholarly articles on the subject. Articles by Bangladeshi NGOs take an adversarial view and place greater emphasis on the experiences of victims and the brutality of the BSF. However, articles written by mostly Indian writers seem to support the BSF's move.

### **Sampling**

The sample is a representative portion of the specified population. Sampling is just a tool to learn about the characteristics of the universe or population by making a small test. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect primary data. Purposive sampling is the method of selecting units in the sample that represent particular characteristics of the population based on preference and experience. I collected data from 110 respondents. Out of which 43% are women and 57% are men. These include daily labourers, housewives, farmers, shopkeepers, traders, students, teachers and other professionals to name a few.

### **Data Processing and Analysis**

Collected data is analysed, verified, summarized, performed calculations, arranged, tabulated and classified according to research objectives. Also an attempt has been made to collect some data from some of the pre-determined studies. MS WORD & MS EXCEL have been used for the purpose of data analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **In-Depth Investigation into Illegal Infiltration and Border Killings in India**

The field results are truly eye-opening. It has been able to point out a number of factors not previously mentioned in the conventional literature. The results also showed that neither the claims of the Bangladeshi officials nor the claims of the Indian officials were entirely true. There are aspects of the issue that cannot be explained by newspaper reports alone; rather, there is a reality that is much more vivid than imagined from the outside. The reason for Bangladeshi migration to India is not as one-dimensional as it appears from newspaper articles. One of the main reasons for coming to India, especially for women is to work as a domestic worker in India. This factor has never been included in the prevailing literature on the Bangladesh-India border.

Participants also answered truthfully that they went to India to smuggle "sari" or worked for cattle smuggling. This result also confirmed that illegal trade and smuggling are taking place in the border areas and the people of the border villages are involved in them. This part of the findings and analysis focuses on how people move into and out of India. The results were surprising in many ways but in others, they actually confirmed our hypothesis.

### **Human Rights Violations on India-Bangladesh Border**

America's world news site "The Global Post" has rightly stated that the India-Bangladesh land border line is a wall of death between the two neighboring countries Bangladesh and India. The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) has been resorting to a brutal shoot-to-kill policy to stop cattle smugglers and other civilians from crossing the border. According to BSF sources, they use this policy only against extremists, drug and arms smugglers. But New York-based human rights watchdog Human Rights Watch (HRW) released an 81-page report titled 'Trigger Happy: Excessive Use of Force by Indian Troops at the Bangladesh Border', saying the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) routinely kills cattle despite scant evidence of any wrongdoing. Animal smugglers and other civilians cross the border into Bangladesh and are shot dead. While the BSF only says the suspects were killed in self-defence or to avoid arrest, HRW says it has found no evidence of a death documenting that the individual was involved in any activity that would justify such an extreme response. It can be said that they (BSF) may consider themselves unique and uncontrolled on the Indo-Bangladesh border line. They can do anything with impunity. They are in the India-Bangla border area, they transfer themselves as judges by inhumane execution or other punishments. In the last 27 years, 291 innocent Bangladeshis have been killed and 163 injured as a result of human rights violations by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). Where in 11 years, the number of dead has increased to 967 and 761 Bangladeshis have been injured. In execution of judgment, BSF kills Bangladeshi nationals on border line and they turn border area into bloody border line though using lethal force or lethal weapons which should not be used except strictly necessary to save life in border area Indian Border Security Force (BSF) is just innocent. Not only are they killing Bangladeshis, but they are also engaged in arresting, torturing, beating to death, abducting and stoning Bangladeshis.

### **BSF and Bangladeshi: A Strained Relationship**

According to a study, the first question the researcher asked the participants was whether they had any problems with BSF and how they dealt with them. A large proportion of the participants said that they had actually faced problems from BSF. Some participants said the BSF "caught" them because he was a cattle smuggler while another said the BSF beat him because he could not pay enough bribe. Most of the participants admitted that they bribed the BSF for safe entry into India. Some participants said it was "managed" by both Border Patrol forces. While another section of participants said they could cross the border without being noticed by the BSF or the

Bangladeshi border patrol. This finding provided an important insight into the causes of persistent border killings. Bribery has become a major factor in border abuse, and this finding suggests ideas from Bangladeshi NGOs argues that BSF is actually corrupt in many cases and tortures people when they don't get enough bribe.

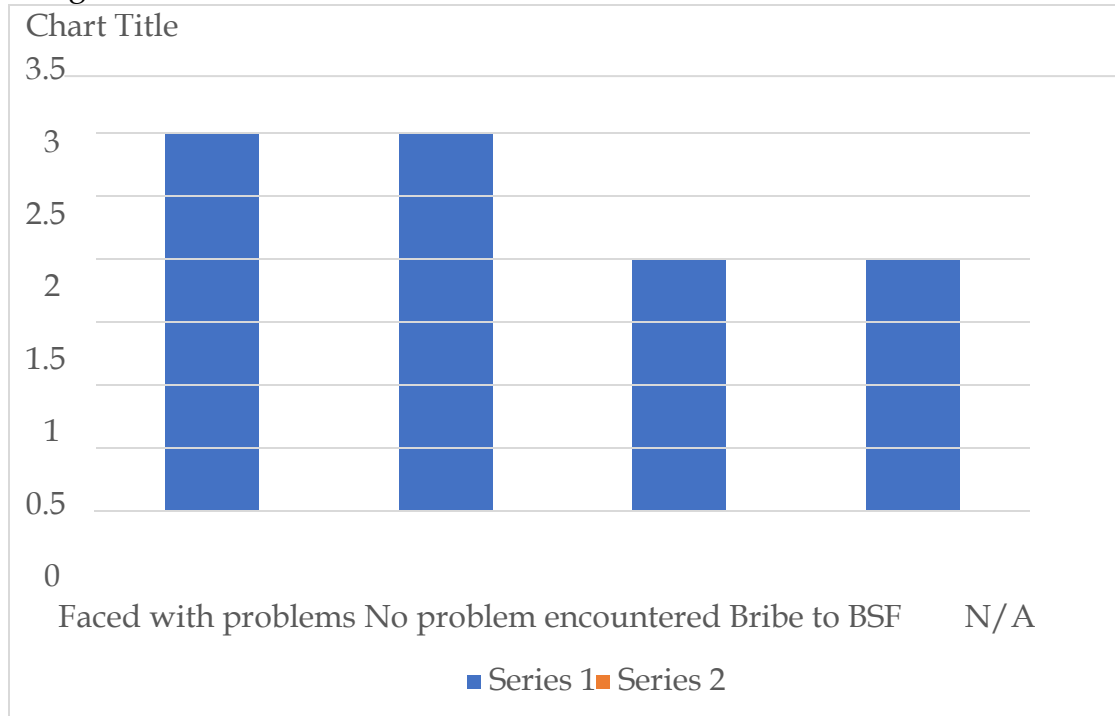


Figure 4. Participant Experience with BSF

## Case Study Report

### Case Study 1

Masum (not real name) is a Bangladeshi boy living near Ballarhat border in Phulbari upazila. He belonged to a poor family and helped smuggle cattle into India illegally. He was never in charge of the trad. He was a middleman who brought cattle from India to Bangladesh. During one such visit, he was killed on the spot by BSF firing. His aunt admits that he is what he did was illegal, but also said he had no other means of survival and livelihood. When asked what was the response of the bangladeshi border force, he said that they only held a flag meeting with the BSF. Moreover, no other NGO or government has taken any action to provide any justice or financial assistance to the family.

### Case study 2

A father has described how his sons were beaten up by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) officers. Indian Border Security Force (BSF) personnel surrounded the boys and beat, kicked and slapped them with rifle butts without any reason. There were nine soldiers there, and they beat him mercilessly. Even as the boys fell down, the BSF personnel kept kicking them mercilessly on the chest and other sensitive parts. Half of the participants said they actually know of incidents where innocent people are often "picked up" by the BSF and tortured, beaten up. Another significant percentage accused the

BSF of wrongfully killing people. Only 20% said they had never heard of innocent victims being tortured by the BSF. The important point here is that "convicts" refer to persons who were involved in the smuggling of cattle or other goods. These people have never faced any legal process, all they get is a kind of hanging style "vigilante" justice from the BSF.

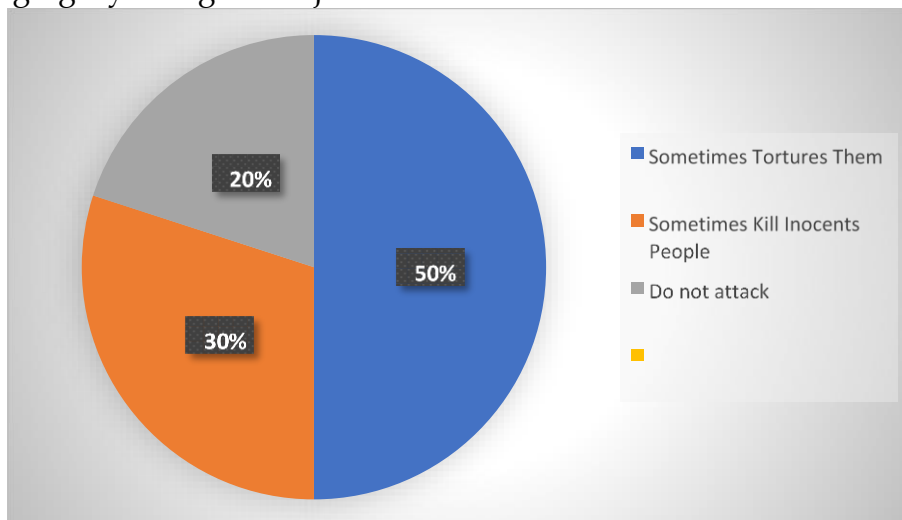


Figure 5. BSF Attack on Innocent People

### Ineffective Role of Border Guard Bangladesh

In some cases, the irresponsibility of Bangladeshi border guards is responsible for the border violence. Most news reports seem to ignore crime. I asked participants about the role of Bangladeshi border patrols in border violence. However, many Bangladeshis living near the border line have alleged that border guards have actually taken bribes and facilitated smuggling. Another 29% said that they actually took some action, but mostly it was when a Bangladeshi citizen was shot dead, and the action was a flag meeting with the BSF, and they failed to help the Bangladeshi citizen. Sadly, border officials in Bangladesh have also suggested that such killings are acceptable if the victim is involved in smuggling. The results showed that there was indeed corruption in the force and reflected the inability of Bangladeshis to take ineffective action. It is also part of the search for answers as to what causes the continued border killings. Bangladeshi border guards are supposed to protect their people and stop illegal activities. But in reality both failed. Rather, it has become an enabler of corrupt and illegal businesses, a serious image crisis for Bangladesh.

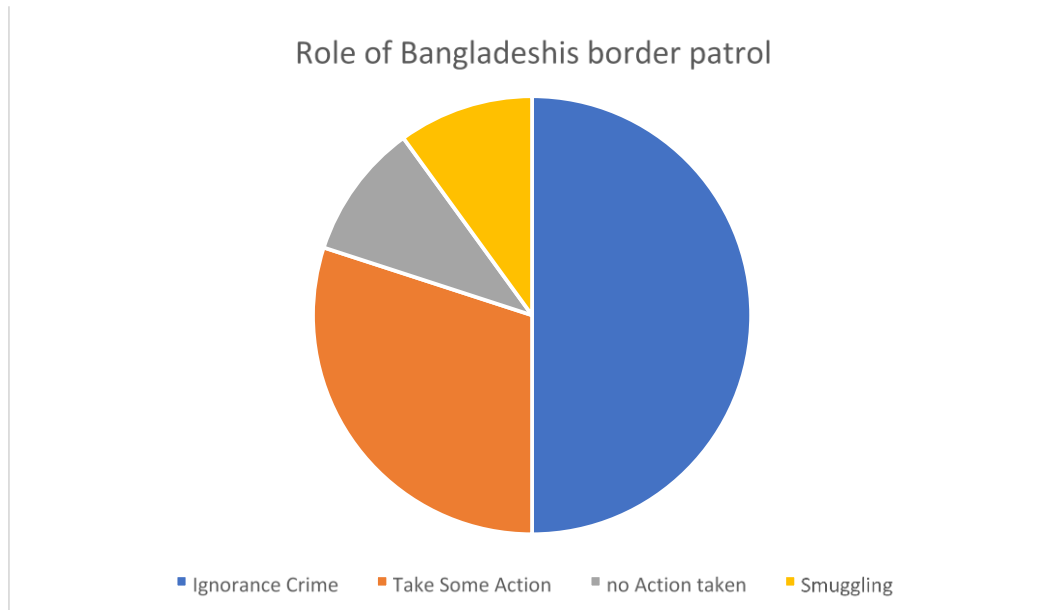


Figure 6: Role of Bangladeshis Border Force in Border Violence

### NGOs in the Field: Not Active

Websites of Bangladeshi NGOs are replete with statistics and articles on border killings. They act as the main voice against these atrocities and play an important role in tarnishing the image of India and BSF. However, their role in the field is not so active. Participants were asked if they had received any help from NGOs or the government after being a victim of border violence. Most of the participants said that they received no help from the government and NGOs. Some participants said that NGO members only interviewed them, but did not provide any assistance. A father of the victim (who has been killed, and is on trial) says that many NGOs helped him to move in the right direction, but now they are only a few on his side. Although NGOs have a major role to play in keeping the issue of border killings in the lime light and to burnish the image of BSF in the national and international spheres, few are actually focusing on the victims and their needs. The poor people of the border villages are neglected as always, they have no chance to cross the border again.

### Impact on Bangladesh-India Relations

As India is a neighboring country of Bangladesh on three sides, there are many disputes between Bangladesh and India. Bangladesh is blocked by India on its western, eastern and northern sides. Water is one of the main causes of conflict and illegal immigration is also a cause of conflict between the two. From water to borders, from construction of floodgates to islands, there are many issues that the two countries disagree on. There are various issues related to delimitation, enclave change, maritime boundary and latest border killings. Border killings have historically not been a human problem, people have been crossing borders for decades. Cattle trading is not the only reason people cross borders. So in the last few years why border killing increased? The answer to this question can be found by looking at Bangladesh-India relations as a whole. Border killings have increased due to bilateral relations between the two

countries. On the other hand, border killings have certainly created a deficit in India-Bangladesh relations. If we are newspaper looking at the report, we find that border killings came into the limelight only after 2011, before which the number of border killings was regular, but has increased in the past few years. Despite efforts by the Bangladesh government to improve bilateral issues between India and Bangladesh, the killing of unarmed Bangladeshi civilians remains unresolved. Border issues are still being worked on. Repeated killings of unarmed Bangladeshi civilians have hampered bilateral relations between the two countries. The two countries have a bilateral trade of US\$ 6 billion, of which over 90 percent is India's exports to Bangladesh.

### **Border Killings and Reaction of General Population of Bangladesh**

The issue of border killing is not well seen by the common people of Bangladesh. Due to various reasons, anti-India sentiment has been created among the common people of Bangladesh. Border killings are one of the reasons for the anti-India attitude of the people of Bangladesh. The general public of Bangladesh is worried due to the indiscriminate killing of Bangladeshi citizens by the Indian BSF forces on the Bangladesh border. Every killing has been protested by Bangladesh and the human rights organizations of Bangladesh have been protesting these killings at the national and international levels. However, as if the Indian authorities have not taken any action in this regard, they continue to violate human rights one after another through border killings. Which is very sad for Bangladesh. The common people of Bangladesh, students, political parties, many social and human rights organizations including Dhaka University have been protesting for years, but they have not received any benefit from the Indian authorities, they have continued the border killings.

That is why anti-India sentiment is increasing among Bangladeshis. Participants in this study were asked:

- a. How do you feel about the killing of Bangladeshi citizens by BSF on the border?

Most of the respondents expressed concern on this question. They expressed apprehension about India-Bangladesh friendly relations in the future. In this question, 54 % respondents expressed concern, 25% respondents expressed anger, 16% respondents expressed fear and 5 % respondents expressed indifference. This shows that the common people of Bangladesh are very concerned and angry about the border killings.

- b. The participants were asked, are you worried about the possibility of Bangladesh's tension with India increasing with border killings?

Most of the respondents expressed concern on this question. They expressed their concern to maintain India-Bangladesh friendly relations. Here 64 % expressed concern, 26 % were not concerned and 10 % respondents were somewhat concerned. From this it can be understood that Bangladesh is common people take border killing very seriously. They want an immediate solution to this problem.

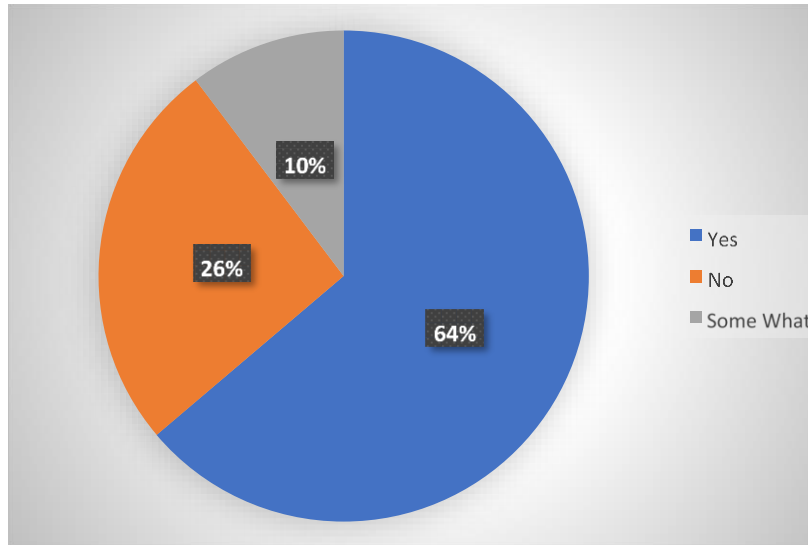


Figure 7. Expression of Public Concern Over Bordar Killings

- c. Respondents were asked, do you agree that the government is unable to take strong action on border killings due to political reasons?

Here 51% respondents agreed, 29% strongly agreed, 14% disagreed, 6% strongly disagreed. Neighbouring country India is an important factor in the political sphere of Bangladesh, so India has influence in the elections of Bangladesh. So, no matter which party comes to the state power in Bangladesh, they consider who they are in India. That is why Bangladesh cannot take any strict action against the big country India regarding border killings. But this helplessness of the government is not seen well by the common people. That is why people think that the government is not taking this matter seriously.

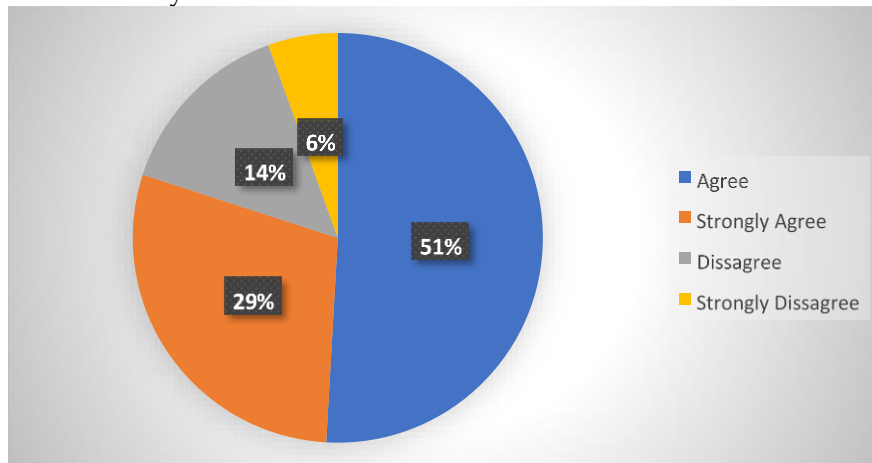


Figure 8. Government Unable to Take Firm Action due to Political Reasons

- d. Respondents were asked, how do you see the response of the Bangladesh government on border killings?

Most of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this question, with 59 % dissatisfied, 13% satisfied, 14% neutral and 14% concerned. Participants expect stronger action from the government.

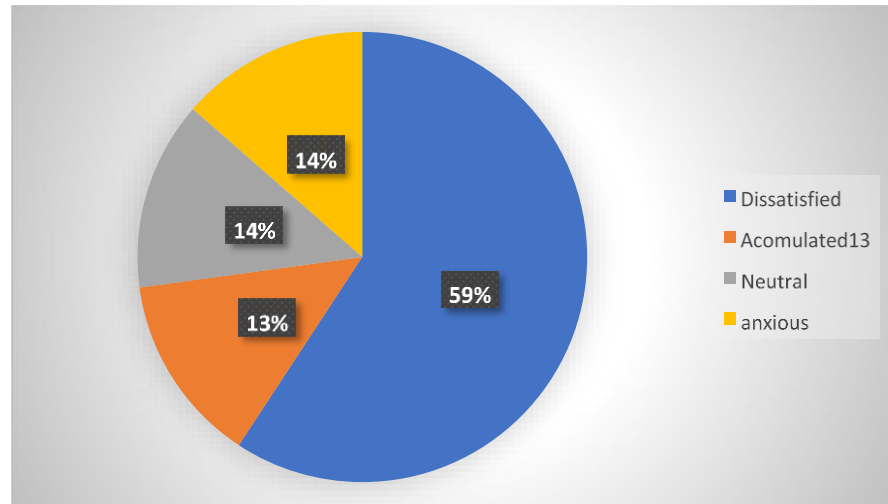


Figure 9. Public Opinion Bangladesh Governments Response to Bordar Killing

- e. Respondents were asked, are you in favor of a diplomatic solution to the border problem?

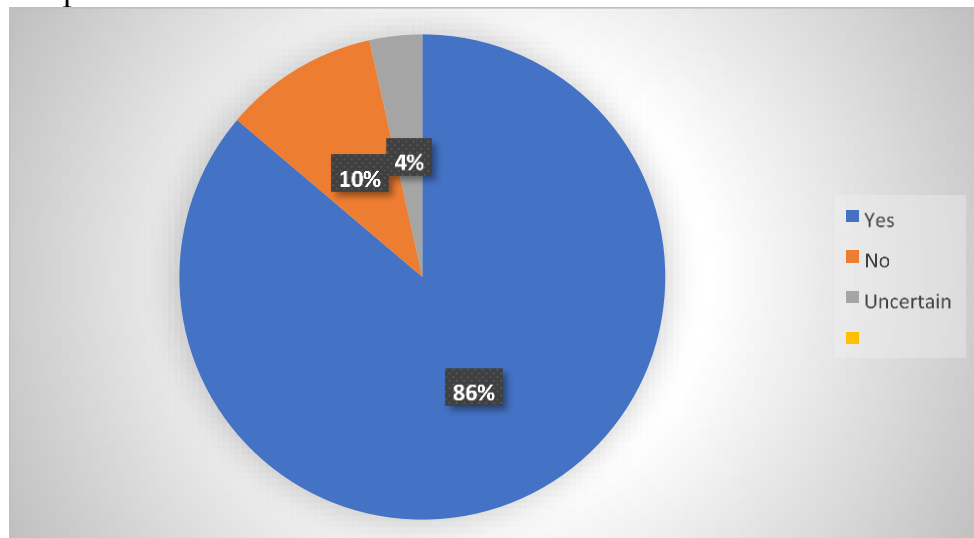


Figure 10. Opinion of the general Public in Favor of a Diplomatic Solution

In this question, 86. % of the respondents gave their opinion in favor of it. 10% unsure and 4%. Respondent opined against it. The general public believes that strong diplomatic efforts by the government can bring a solution to this problem.

- f. Respondents were asked, with the statement "Injustice is one of the causes of border killings" do you.

In this question 50% of the respondents agreed with the statement, 43% of the respondents strongly agreed and 7% disagreed with the statement. The common people think that impunity is one of the causes of border killings. They feel that the border killings would have been reduced to a great extent if criminals could be brought to justice and punished.

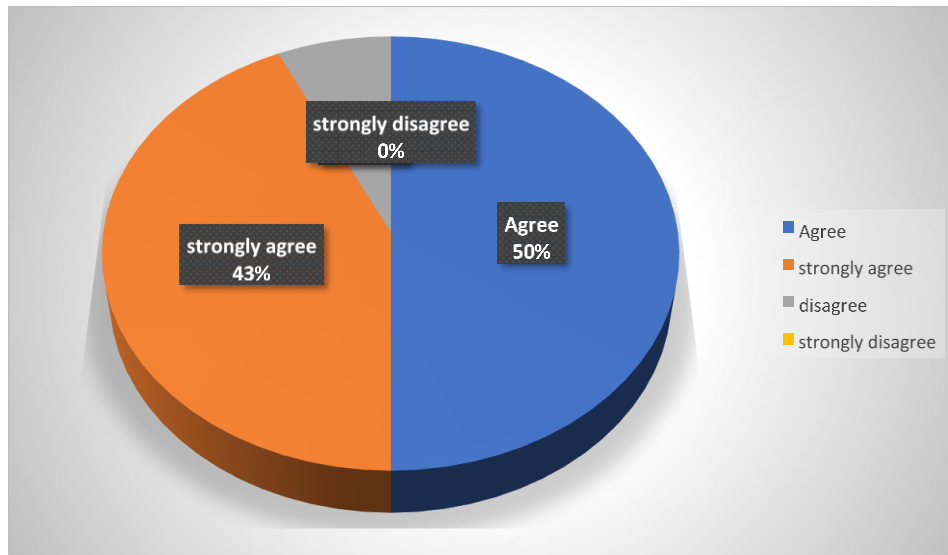


Figure 11. General Public Opinion in Favor of Prosecuting Border Killings

- g. Respondents were asked, do you agree with the statement that media is not covering border killings properly.

To this question 60% respondents agreed, 24% respondents strongly agreed, 14% respondents disagreed and 2% respondents strongly disagreed. In fact, even though the issue of border killings comes up again and again in the Bangladeshi media, the Indian media does not adequately publicize the issue of killing innocent Bangladeshi citizens by the BSF.

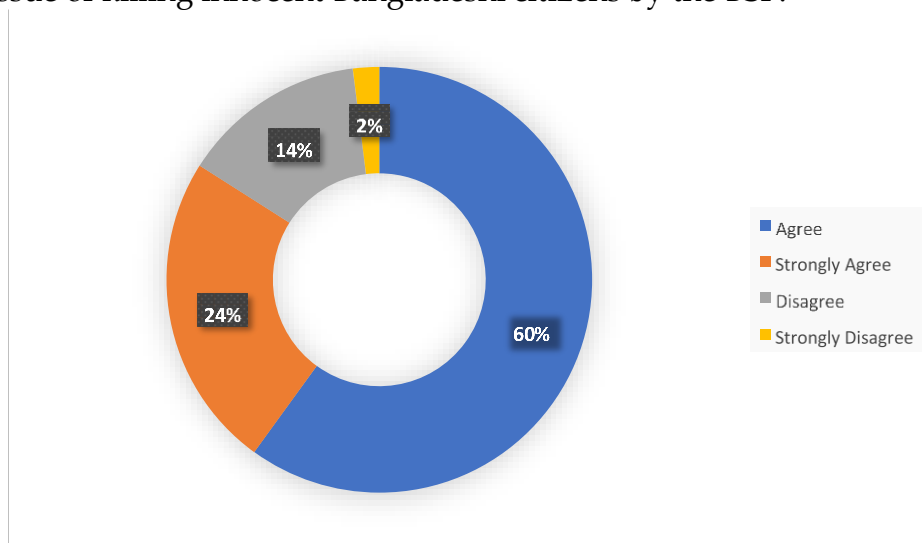


Figure 12. General public Opinion About Media

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Border killings have become a big problem for Bangladesh. Newspaper reports show that since 2000, more than 1,000 people have been shot dead along the India-Bangladesh border. Despite continued concern expressed by Bangladesh and international human rights groups; The Indian government has not done much to solve the problem. Indian media also gives little coverage of the issue, so there is little scope for growing public support in India to stop this problem. On the other hand, the media of Bangladesh gives the highest priority

to the issue. This created widespread public awareness of the brutal behavior of the Indian border guards and resulted in hatred against India among the people of Bangladesh. In the modern era, diplomacy is not limited to high-ranking government officials. Human-to-human agreement is also very important. But given the behavior of the BSF and the seeming indifference of Indian officials to the matter, it is very difficult to believe that India has any concern for Bangladesh. We need to take this matter to the international forum so that the world understands what is really happening here. Undoubtedly, Indo-Bangladesh border killings are one of the major bilateral issues for both countries. The region can function economically without help from neighboring countries. On the other hand, in this era of free trade and a borderless world, killing people simply for crossing borders is undoubtedly an outdated policy. However, the situation on the India-Bangladesh border is that much more complicated than you can imagine. Cattle trading is not the only reason people cross the border, nor is it the answer to killing Bangladeshis to stop illegal infiltration. The event is not just a rivalry between two nations, but thousands of people and their mentality has a lot to do with it.

### **Recommendations**

1. Investigating corruption and crimes by the forces of both countries and bringing the perpetrators to justice.
2. Strengthening border security. Taking all measures to prevent illegal smuggling and infiltration.
3. The Indian police must register a complaint against the BSF in cases of torture against Bangladeshi nationals. The Indian Police will not deny its responsibility by saying that dealing with BSF abuses is a matter for BSF's internal courts. The BSF must follow the guidelines of the National Human Rights Commission to investigate all incidents of death during security operations.
4. Legalization of India-Bangladesh cattle trade. Then the border killings will be greatly reduced as most of the people killed are involved in cattle smuggling.
5. The Government of India will ensure that there are no more killings of Bangladeshis at the hands of its border guards at the border. This promise should be realised. Will investigate all complaints reported by various human rights organizations.
6. The Indian police must register a complaint against the BSF in cases of torture against Bangladeshi nationals. It is the duty of the BSF internal court to deal with the abuses of the BSF that the Indian police will not deny on this ground.
7. The BSF must follow the National Human Rights Commission guidelines to investigate all incidents of death during security operations.
8. Finally, an independent and impartial commission of inquiry must be established for serious violations of international human rights law. Both Indian and Bangladeshi nationals should be invited to submit evidence and

make allegations in this inquiry. Investigations should be closed and transparent and have the power to provide protection to witness

### **FURTHER STUDY**

This research still has limitations so further research needs to be carried out on the topic "Bangladesh-India Relations: Addressing the Border Killing Concerns."

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