A MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF BORDER SECURITY CHALLENGES IN BANGLADESH: NAVIGATING OPERATIONAL COMPLEXITIES, TRANSNATIONAL THREATS, AND HUMANITARIAN CRISES

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Abstract: This research explores the complex challenges of border management in Bangladesh, highlighting the operational, security, and humanitarian issues that stem from its strategic geographical location and the intricacies of its border enforcement strategies. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study gathers insights from diverse stakeholders, including security forces, analysts, human rights activists, NGO workers, and journalists, to thoroughly understand the multifaceted nature of Bangladesh's border security challenges. The findings reveal a widespread perception of the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) as a tool of governmental power rather than a protective service, which undermines trust and cooperation from local communities. Furthermore, bureaucratic hurdles significantly impede the coordination among various governmental agencies involved in border security, such as immigration, customs, police, intelligence agencies, and the BGB, thereby complicating border security management. Bangladesh's strategic position is also a pivotal transit point for transcontinental criminal networks and separatist movements. The porous nature of its border with Myanmar exacerbates these challenges, facilitating not only drug trafficking but also the continuous influx of Rohingya refugees. This situation demands a nuanced understanding and strategic approach to address the intertwined security, governance, and humanitarian concerns at the borders.

Keywords: Transnational Security, Collaborative Approach, Refugee, Arms Smuggling, Drugs Dealing, Border Management.

Introduction

Proper border management is of immense importance for every country's socioeconomic development in this era of globalisation. (Hobbing, 2006). Trade and tourism across the border contribute significantly to this socio-economic development. (Timothy, 2002). Still, without effective border management, no country can benefit from cross-border trade and tourism opportunities. (Kieck, 2010). The borders of the modern global village engender fear and tension due to terrorism, organised crime, arms and drugs dwelling, and so on. (Hanlon & Herbert, 2015; Shelley, 2010; Staudt, 2009)Poor and fragile border management also disrupts a country's economic well-being, corrodes its political stability, and thus debilitates its democratic institutions. (Achumba *et al.*, 2013; Marc *et al.*, 2015). India surrounds Bangladesh on almost all three sides except some areas in the southeast part of Bangladesh, which shares a boundary with Myanmar. (Basil, 2011; Cons, 2012; Khan, 2016). Like most other developing countries, Bangladeshi authorities have long faced numerous challenges managing its border. (Das, 2008; Hashmi *et al.*, 2011; Jamwal, 2004)Bangladesh's geostrategic location lures transcontinental criminal syndicates and separatist groups to use its border as one of their main routes in South Asia. (Bailey, 2011; Weigand, 2020). Sometimes, it has been noticed that the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) cannot even patrol certain regions inside the country because of the mines and explosives that the separatist groups have buried in those areas.

The poor fencing with Myanmar enables massive *Rohingya* influx in Bangladesh and encourages the drug mafia to use this slack borderline for their evil purposes (Lasco, 2020; Judah, 2017). The not-so-well-fortified border management entices the enemies and other culprits to use some regions like hilly areas as conduits for drug smuggling and gun running to destroy the growth of the country as well as destabilise it politically and financially (Das, 2008; Jamwal, 2004; McDuie-Ra, 2012, 2014). For these reasons, border management has been a burning issue for Bangladesh. Effective border management does not necessarily mean the mere check-post operation on the border; instead, it focuses considerable attention on reinforcing multiple strategies for surveillance of the movement of people, goods, and transportation in the border regions (Doyle, 2010; Lamptey, 2013; Wolff, 2008). Thus, this study aims to explore various challenges and threats to border security in Bangladesh. Specifically, it seeks to assess the effectiveness of the existing border management strategies and infrastructure in Bangladesh and to understand the socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and lack of education, that contribute to the vulnerability of local

populations to smuggling and trafficking activities. The study's findings, if taken into consideration by the concerned authorities, might have a long-term and operational impact on effective border management in Bangladesh, which will significantly contribute to ensuring the country's safety, security, economic well-being, and political stability.

Literature Review

Statehood and state sovereignty are primarily associated with the concept of the border. (Crawford, 2006), which restricts a zone and differentiates between countries' territories (Craven, 2010; Pickering, 2004). Within a border, a state exercises its jurisdiction, and the border gives it the legitimacy to accomplish development activities and the power to enforce its policies and laws. (Abizadeh, 2017). Thus, the border provides a state with legal and geographical validity. (Neuman, 2010). Conventionally, the border separates two states, and the people, vehicles, and goods from one state must enter another country, complying with the latter's laws. (Ismer & Neuhoff, 2007; Newman, 2011). A border is usually drawn considering the diverse ethnic lines, zones of economic encouragement, and geographical distribution. (Gituanja, 2013). However, some scholars used the term 'border' interchangeably with boundary (Fall, 2003). The Inland border consists of a land boundary or fence. In the sea or river, it refers to territorial water. Moreover, at the airport, it relates to boarding. (Prescott, 2014). Some airport borders are hundreds of kilometres away from the boundaries. (Park, 2010) The maritime boundaries encompass 12 nautical miles to over 200 nautical miles, depending on the continental shelf's limit. (Jagota, 2021).

The origin of the term 'border' is steeped in the study by Anderson and Bort. (Anderson & Bort, 2001). They argue that the border reflects the Westphalian concept of sovereignty. For Europe, the border specifies the boundary of modern nation-states. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the term 'border' symbolised the power of European colonial empires. They further argue that the border has gradually become a security concern, and its boundary has remained a form of social construction. Over time, the focus of border management has expanded to include sensitive issues such as internal and external security, natural resources, human rights, migration, and organised crimes. Kohler-Koch and Rittberger (Kohler-Koch & Rittberger, 2006) They argued that inter-state conflicts in many modern nation-states occurred due to borders during the Cold War. After the Cold War, many European countries governed their borders strategically. Thus, the tension and conflict at borders

became vaguer. Many actions at the border dissolve the tension with peaceful means. Therefore, transnationalization has shifted the concept of traditional security into a fuzzy position.

Bartlett and Ghoshal (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002) described the economic benefit of effective border management. They opined that a state's success in implementing its global strategies and plans hinges much on its ability to organise and manage its borders effectively and efficiently. The fundamental objective of border management is to protect the national interest and maintain peace, security, and economic development. In a broader sense, border governance covers immigration, customs and excise, and policing to regulate the movement of individuals and properties at the border.

Some studies investigated the challenges in managing the India-Bangladesh border. Jamwal (2004) mentioned that confrontation, tension, internal politics, and poor security systems thwart effective border management. Das (2008) speculated that the India-Bangladesh border is the problem area of tomorrow. Her study identified massive human trafficking, illegal migration, drug and arms smuggling, and transnational terrorist outfits as significant threats to the safety and security of the countries.

Methodology

The research utilised a qualitative methodology, collecting data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through comprehensive face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire. The snowball sampling method was employed to identify suitable participants. Interviews were conducted with twelve key informants: five members of the security forces, two security analysts, two human rights activists, two NGO workers, and one journalist. The security force personnel interviewed included five Bangladesh Army officers who had served as commanders in the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) across various units in Chottogram, Jashore, and Rajshahi—regions of strategic importance and vulnerability in Bangladesh. The security analysts interviewed comprised one individual with experience in Bangladesh intelligence and another with a solid academic background in security studies. The human rights activists interviewed were involved at the national level in efforts to curb illegal human trafficking and assist refugees. NGO workers from the hilly regions of Bangladesh were also interviewed to provide a more detailed perspective. Finally, a local journalist was interviewed to gain insights into the less visible aspects of the border areas in Bangladesh. The identities of

all respondents were kept confidential to maintain the sensitivity of the subject matter. Ethical consent was obtained from the participants to ensure the confidentiality of the information provided during the data collection process.

Data Analysis, Findings, and Discussion

Bangladesh has a 4,156 km long land and river border with India. (Das, 2008) and 271 km with Myanmar (Hazarika, 2001). It includes plain land, hilly areas, and marshy land. Bangladesh's border with these two countries has different characteristics, which pose diverse challenges to its border management mechanism. (Datta, 2010). This study has identified border management challenges, which are discussed below.

Table 1: Summary of Border Security Challenges and Recommendations in Bangladesh

Aspect	Challenges	Recommendations
Trust and Cooperation	Lack of trust between local communities and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).	Enhance community engagement and trust-building initiatives.
Bureaucratic Efficiency	Inefficient coordination among various governmental bodies like immigration, customs, and police.	Streamline processes and improve inter-agency coordination.
Collaboration with Neighbors	Limited collaboration with neighbouring countries leads to security lapses.	Foster stronger bilateral relations and joint operations for border security.
Geographical Challenges	Difficult terrain and porous borders facilitate smuggling and other illicit activities.	Implement advanced surveillance technologies and increase physical patrols in vulnerable areas.
Socioeconomic Factors	Poverty and lack of education contribute to local involvement in smuggling and trafficking.	Develop socioeconomic programs to provide alternative livelihoods and education opportunities.
Infrastructure Gaps	Inadequate infrastructure like roads and border observation posts (BOPs).	Invest in infrastructure development to enhance security forces' mobility and response capabilities.

This table encapsulates the core findings and recommendations from the manuscript, providing a clear and concise overview that can be easily referenced by policymakers, security experts, and academic researchers interested in border security issues in Bangladesh.

Broken Trust, Blurred Lines: The Disconnect Between BGB and Border Communities

This study reveals that local communities perceive the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) as an instrument of the ruling government rather than a protective force. This perception leads to a lack of cooperation between the local communities and the BGB, with locals often siding with smugglers and hesitating to testify in court (Imam, personal communication, June 28, 2023). This statement also suggests that the security forces in Bangladesh have not been victorious in integrating with local communities or prioritising this issue. This situation can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the geostrategic position of Bangladesh, particularly its proximity to India, has historically influenced its security dynamics. (Dasgupta, 2004). Secondly, inadequate focus on integrating security forces with local communities can lead to mistrust and hostility. This is not unique to Bangladesh; similar situations have been observed in other regions, such as Northern Nigeria, where the security forces' reliance on violence and lack of engagement with social and economic realities have exacerbated security problems. (Liman, 2013). Thirdly, the perception of the BGB as a tool of the ruling government rather than a protective force could result from political dynamics within the country. For instance, the decision to construct a barbed-wire fence along the Assam-Bangladesh border, which led to conflict between the Bangladesh Rifles and India's Border Security Forces, was driven by domestic politics and was seen as a demonstration of governmental folly. (J. Singh, 1955).

The Labyrinth of Bureaucracy

This study reveals a significant challenge in managing the Bangladeshi border: the need for more effective coordination and cooperation among various governmental bodies. These bodies include immigration, customs, police, intelligence agencies, and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB). This lack of coordination is a crucial factor hindering effective border management. The bureaucratic red tape characterising these agencies' interactions is at the heart of this issue. Even simple coordination efforts between the BGB and other government agencies are subject to unnecessary and time-consuming procedures. This inefficiency slows down the border management process and creates opportunities for lapses in security and oversight (Aziz pseudonym, personal communication, June 2023). For example, if intelligence officers find out about smugglers, they should be able to tell the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) quickly. Instead, they get stuck in a slow system, sending reports

through a long process that might need several approvals before the BGB even hears about it. This slow response can give smugglers a chance to get away. This problem is more than just with the BGB and intelligence. Customs might know about risky shipments, but sharing this with immigration services is slow because of all the steps involved. Different groups do not share critical information quickly, which can let criminal activities go unnoticed. Even when different groups try to work together, like the BGB and police, during a joint operation, they often get tangled up in their own rules and procedures, which could be more apparent and make the operation more effective. This lack of teamwork has profound effects. It makes it harder to patrol the border, collect information, and quickly react to dangers. Criminals take advantage of these weaknesses, which can threaten the country's safety. To fix this, the government must make it easier for different groups to work together. They should create straightforward ways to talk to each other and encourage them to cooperate. Practising together and setting up ways to share information can help close the gaps. Technology that allows instant communication and information sharing can also make a big difference.

The Case for Improved Collaboration Between BGB and Neighboring Countries

This study reveals that the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) needs to effectively collaborate with neighbouring countries to control its frontier, a complex issue. The lack of efficient collaboration can be seen in the limited exchange of intra-state intelligence data, the scarcity of vital cross-cutting knowledge sharing, and the infrequency of coordinated border patrols, which are essential to address cross-border problems (Islam, personal communication, July 2, 2023). Effective border management requires a multifaceted approach that includes intelligence sharing, joint operations, and mutual trust between neighbouring countries (Bac, 2023). The absence of these collaborative efforts can lead to gaps in security, which can be exploited by smugglers, traffickers, and other criminal elements. (Omolewa *et al.*, 2023). Intelligence sharing is crucial as it allows border forces to anticipate and respond to cross-border criminal activities. Proactively (Yol *et al.*, 2022). Without it, each country's border force operates with limited information, reducing the overall effectiveness of border control measures. (Wagner, 2022). Coordinated patrols serve as a deterrent to illegal activities by presenting a united front against cross-border crime. They also facilitate the sharing of best practices and foster a sense of camaraderie among border security personnel from different countries. (Farion *et al.*, 2022).

When such coordination is lacking, it weakens border security and signals insufficient regional cooperation.

Uncontrolled Bangladeshi Border Regions: A Breeding Ground for Illicit Activities

Bangladesh shares a significant portion of its borders with India and Myanmar, encompassing diverse terrains that include 429 kilometres of mountainous regions, the coastal boundary with the Bay of Bengal, and riverine landscapes in the southern part of the country. These areas are difficult to monitor and control and face environmental and security challenges.

This lack of constant vigilance exposes the nation to a formidable danger in terms of frontier defence. The mountainous terrain, characterised by its dense jungles, poses significant obstacles to effective border surveillance and control (Hasanat, personal communication, July 13, 2023). The rugged landscape makes it difficult for law enforcement and military personnel to maintain a constant presence, which in turn allows for illicit activities such as smuggling of arms and drugs, illegal fishing, and the dumping of hazardous and toxic waste (Reza, personal communication, July 5, 2023). These activities threaten national security and have detrimental effects on the local ecosystems and biodiversity. The coastal regions and the Bay of Bengal are equally challenging. The Bay of Bengal is subject to various natural hazards, including cyclones and rising sea levels exacerbated by climate change. (Tashmin *et al.*, 2018). These environmental challenges threaten the livelihoods of coastal communities and increase their vulnerability. (Uddin *et al.*, 2021). Illegal fishing and waste dumping in these waters further compound the ecological crises, depleting fish stocks and polluting marine environments. (Alam, 2023; Mozumder *et al.*, 2023). The need for a comprehensive and adaptive approach to border management is evident, recognising the unique characteristics of the terrain and the diverse array of threats that emanate from these challenging border regions.

The Wide Net with Large Holes

Establishing border observation points (BOPs) represents a crucial measure for safeguarding national borders, ostensibly serving as bulwarks against illicit activities such as smuggling and unauthorised border crossings. However, despite implementing these BOPs along land borders, a critical flaw emerges from the vast expanses between them. In Bangladesh, the gaps between BOPs are reported to be almost 10 kilometres, which presents a substantial challenge

for border security personnel (Reza, personal communication, July 5, 2023). This is particularly concerning given the complex and multifaceted nature of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, which has been a source of tension and conflict, as well as a conduit for human trafficking, drug trafficking, and arms trafficking and used as transit routes for irregular migrants from South Asian and Middle Eastern countries, which complicates border management (Denïz, 2022). Moreover, the porous nature of these borders threatens national security and facilitates the proliferation of organised crime networks, which exploit these vulnerabilities for their illicit operations (Karim *et al.*, July 9, 2023). Similarly, the situation in Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan Province demonstrates how organised crime can, directly and indirectly, influence national security, with factors such as isolated borders and lack of cross-border control contributing to the problem (Javadi & Amini, 2023). The situation is further complicated by the influx of over 1.1 million Rohingya refugees who fled violence in Myanmar and sought shelter in Bangladesh, crossing through these porous borders. (Rahman *et al.*, 2022). Addressing this critical issue necessitates a comprehensive reassessment of border security strategies, including the strategic placement and density of BOPs along vulnerable stretches of land borders.

Furthermore, a border security cooperation framework is crucial for managing these transnational threats, which include not only smuggling but also the movement of illegal immigrants and potential terrorists. (Sa'ad & Huda, 2023). The need for cooperation is underscored by the shared challenges among bordering countries, such as the trans-border malaria transmission (Elahi *et al.*, 2013). The use of advanced technologies such as Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), General Packet Radio Service/Global System for Mobile Communications (GPRS/GSM), Global Positioning System (GPS), and Geographic Information System (GIS) has been proposed to enhance the security and management of cross-border operations (Katara & Pokhriyal, 2017).

A Complex Tapestry: Cultural Ties

The cultural and socioeconomic interconnections between India and Bangladesh, particularly in frontier areas, have deep historical roots that continue to influence contemporary relations and border dynamics. These connections manifest in various forms, including shared markets and unsettled territories due to the legacy of colonial-era border demarcation.

In northern Bangladesh, traditional markets known locally as "Haat" serve as vibrant examples of the enduring economic and cultural ties between

the two countries. Historically, these markets have been spaces where people from India and Bangladesh gathered to buy and sell necessary commodities. They symbolise the continuation of pre-partition economic practices and social interactions, underscoring the intertwined lives of communities living along the border. Such markets facilitate trade and cultural exchange, reinforcing shared identities and mutual dependencies that transcend geopolitical boundaries. Often, these shared cultural and geographical features are being exploited. Smugglers leverage the ease of movement and familiarity to engage in illegal activities, hindering effective border management (Rabindra, personal communication, July 3, 2023). The porous nature of the India-Bangladesh border and socioeconomic interdependencies present significant challenges in border management. Smuggling and illegal activities exploit these complexities, with cattle smuggling being a notable example. (Sur, 2020). The border's permeability facilitates the unauthorised movement of goods and people, complicating efforts to regulate and secure the boundary.

Moreover, the partition of British India in 1947, which led to the creation of India and Pakistan (East Pakistan becoming Bangladesh in 1971), involved the drawing of new national boundaries. The demarcation process, conducted by Cyril Radcliffe, resulted in the arbitrary division of territories, often splitting communities and leaving a legacy of unsettled territories. This has led to complex scenarios where citizens of one country own land across the border in the other country. Consequently, individuals must navigate the challenges of crossing international borders to manage their agricultural lands, leading to unique socioeconomic interdependencies. These arrangements highlight the artificiality of the boundaries in the face of longstanding communal ties and shared livelihoods (Mehdi, personal communication, June 25, 2023).

The presence of unsettled territories and the necessity for cross-border movement for land management further complicate surveillance and enforcement measures. For instance, it fosters smuggling and illegal crossings. Enclaves provide convenient entry points across the border, as people with land on the other side can freely cross without much scrutiny. This facilitates the smuggling of goods, drugs, and even people. The enclaves are hiding places for smuggled goods or individuals, making them difficult to detect and apprehend. There is also evidence of potential for terrorism. The enclaves provide safe havens for terrorist groups to recruit and train members. They are used as staging grounds for attacks or to store weapons and supplies as they offer easy access across the border and limited scrutiny.

Comparative Disadvantage

India has taken significant steps to secure its borders by erecting boundary fences and constructing pitched roads in most frontier areas, which facilitates security forces' rapid movement and response. In contrast, Bangladesh has yet to develop similar infrastructure along its borders. To address this gap, the Bangladeshi government has equipped the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel with motorcycles to enhance their mobility and enable them to conduct more effective surveillance between Border Patrol Outposts (BPOs). However, the lack of pitched roads in the border areas hampers the optimal use of these motorcycles, as the terrain does not allow for quick and efficient travel. This infrastructure deficit poses a significant challenge to law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh, as it impedes their ability to respond swiftly to illegal activities, such as those carried out by mafias and smugglers (Maula, personal communication, June 27, 2023). The lack of adequate road infrastructure in the border regions of Bangladesh means that BGB personnel can only partially leverage the mobility that motorcycles are supposed to provide. This limitation affects the response times to smuggling incidents and other illegal cross-border activities and impacts the overall surveillance capabilities of the BGB. The inability to use the provided motorcycles effectively due to the terrain constraints illustrates a broader issue of resource utilisation and infrastructure development in the context of border security. It underscores the need for a comprehensive approach that includes not just the provision of equipment but also the development of supporting infrastructure to ensure that law enforcement agencies can operate effectively and address the challenges of transnational crime.

Poverty and Peril: The Allure of Cattle Smuggling for Bangladeshi Youth

Smuggling in Bangladesh, particularly along its borders, is driven by various factors. The primary cause is the fragile socioeconomic background of the inhabitants, especially those living in rural areas with minimal survival options. This study reveals a concerning trend among young individuals residing near the Bangladesh border. These individuals, predominantly from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, are often susceptible to being lured into smuggling activities as a means of survival. They are commonly recruited to serve various roles within the smuggling network, including transporters, communicators, and retailers. For example, a typical smuggling operation involving the transportation of cattle from India to Bangladesh can

yield significant earnings for these individuals. In a single trip, one could earn between BDT 7,000 and 10,000 (equivalent to $85 to $120), representing a substantial sum, particularly within rural village life. Their roles in the smuggling operations vary, ranging from transporters who physically guide the cattle across the border to communicators who relay information and act as lookouts. Some even become retailers, selling the smuggled cattle within Bangladesh.

Understanding that these young people are not hardened criminals motivated by greed is crucial. They are caught in a web of economic hardship, where smuggling presents a seemingly viable, albeit illegal, option to put food on the table and support their families. This study finds a vicious cycle. Poverty pushes young people towards smuggling, which exposes them to dangers like violence, legal repercussions, and potential injury. These experiences can further limit their future opportunities, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and vulnerability. This financial incentive is a powerful motivator for young people who face limited economic opportunities and may be compelled to engage in illicit activities to support themselves and their families.

Desperation Fuels Vulnerability

The phenomenon of smuggling and trafficking along the borders of Bangladesh, particularly involving vulnerable populations, is a complex issue rooted in socioeconomic and educational deficiencies. The lack of employment opportunities and access to education, compounded by poverty, makes the local communities susceptible to the allure of smuggling and trafficking as a means of livelihood. This vulnerability is exploited by traffickers who offer seemingly lucrative opportunities to carry illicit goods, such as narcotics and firearms, across borders. For individuals living in these marginalised communities, engaging in such activities often does not equate to criminal behaviour due to their desperate circumstances and lack of awareness (Zulfikar, personal communication, June 12, 2023). These conditions are not unique to Bangladesh but are familiar drivers of smuggling globally. Education, or the lack thereof, plays a critical role in this context. It is both a tool for prevention and a point of vulnerability. When families cannot afford education or when children are forced to leave school to work, it increases their susceptibility to exploitation. Education equips individuals with knowledge and skills that can lead to stable employment, reducing their vulnerability to smuggling.

Human trafficking is another dimension of transnational organised crime propelled through poverty in the country. Even though human trafficking

has been whittled down in recent years, in most cases, it has been noticed that to achieve better job opportunities and sustainable livelihoods in India. Poor, marginalised, uneducated young men and women were tempted for a brighter future and sold to human traffickers. Poor people tend to cross the border illegally. A mafia group operates at the frontier in this aspect, providing secure contact with the human traffickers and security force personnel from both sides. The traffickers ultimately compel these citizens to live under harsh circumstances in India, including oppression and prostitution (Begum, personal communication, June 27, 2023). In addition to these, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation, with the loss of employment and disruption in education placing children and youth at high risk of early marriage, exploitation, and trafficking (GFC, 2019).

The Infiltration of Insurgent groups into Bangladesh's mountainous frontier regions

The findings of this study shed light on a concerning development. The insurgent groups have managed to infiltrate the frontier regions of Bangladesh's hills and mountains. Specifically, areas such as Khagrachori, Bandarban, and Chottogram districts are highlighted as vulnerable due to their precarious and lightly guarded borders. These insurgents have capitalised on these regions' remote and rugged terrain, using them as bases for clandestine activities. They frequently establish training camps in the mountainous jungles, exploiting the meagre surveillance and control.

Furthermore, these areas are convenient hiding spots for weapons and equipment acquired from transnational criminal networks. What is particularly alarming is security agencies' apparent complicity or inability to address this threat effectively. They seem unable to resist these radical groups, allowing them to operate with relative impunity. The hesitancy of security personnel to engage with these terror organisations stems from a fear of retaliation outside of the battlefield, given the advanced weaponry and ammunition at their disposal (Reza, personal communication, July 5, 2023). The study on insurgency in Nagaland (M. Singh, 2009) This study discusses the challenges of insurgency in a region with complicated geography and borders shared with other countries, analogous to the situation in Bangladesh's hill tracts. The study underscores the urgent need for robust border security measures and proactive counterinsurgency efforts to prevent further destabilisation of these frontier regions and safeguard the nation's security. (Jones, 2009).

Transnational Criminal Activities Threaten Bangladesh: Drugs, Arms, and the Shadowy Networks

The research finds that Myanmar has established numerous Yaba and illegal narcotics industries close to the Bangladesh border. Yaba, known for its high methamphetamine content, is a significant issue in the region, contributing to widespread drug abuse and criminal activities. The transportation of cocaine and Yaba through cargo containers and offshore routes in the southern regions of Bangladesh indicates a sophisticated network of drug trafficking. This complex nexus poses a significant threat to public health and security within Bangladesh (Maula, personal communication, June 27, 2023). Previous studies have corroborated the fact that Bangladesh has become a crucial transhipment route for drugs and arms from South Asia to Southeast Asia. References to works by Mohsin (2006), Pohit & Taneja (2003), and Rather (2013) echo the strategic use of Bangladesh's geographical location by transnational criminal organisations to facilitate the movement of illegal goods across borders. (Mohsin, 2006; Pohit & Taneja, 2003; Rather, 2013).

On the other side, India's mafia has been reported to have established illicit factories along the Bangladeshi border. These factories produce phenyl and beer, unlawful small arms, and light weapons. This development highlights the multifaceted nature of criminal activities facilitated by transnational criminal organisations. The production of illegal goods contributes to the proliferation of black markets. It risks public safety by fueling organised crime and violence in the region (Hasanat, personal communication, July 13, 2023). The establishment of Yaba and illegal narcotics industries by Myanmar near the Bangladesh border, coupled with India's mafia setting up illicit factories, presents a complex challenge to public health and security in Bangladesh. The sophisticated networks of drug trafficking and the production of illegal goods by transnational criminal organisations underscore the multifaceted nature of criminal activities in the region. These developments necessitate concerted efforts to combat drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and the proliferation of black markets to ensure the safety and security of the public.

Fractured Frontier: How the Influx of Rohingya Refugees Challenges Bangladeshi Security

The influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh through its southeastern border has significantly challenged the control and management of the Bangladeshi border, particularly in Cox's Bazar district (Ahmed *et al.*, 2018; Filipski *et al.*, 2019). The arrival of hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas has overwhelmed

the region's infrastructure and disrupted effective border management. Mafia syndicates and smugglers have exploited the weakened border control in Cox's Bazar, using the Rohingya refugees as conduits for smuggling drugs and illicit arms from Myanmar. The refugee camps have become hotspots for these illegal activities, with refugees often turning to smuggling as a means of income in the face of limited opportunities (Jahed, personal communication, July 9, 2023). The dire situation in the camps has also left young Rohingya women vulnerable to exploitation. With no work available, they become easy targets for criminal gangs who lure them into prostitution and sell them to other countries. This not only represents a grave human rights violation but also contributes to the complexity of the crisis at the border. The volatile circumstances at the border have allowed multinational human trafficking agencies to operate with greater impunity. The chaos and lack of effective governance provide these agencies with the cover they need to carry out their activities, further endangering the lives of the refugees and compromising regional security (Mehedi, personal communication, July 5, 2023). Other studies also find that the Rohingya refugee crisis is also highlighted as a security challenge for Bangladesh, with displaced people engaging in various criminal activities, including drug and arms smuggling (Sakib, 2023).

Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the complex challenges Bangladesh faces in managing its borders, influenced by historical events like the 1947 partition, socioeconomic factors, and rugged terrains. The division of communities and the creation of interdependent socioeconomic relationships across borders have complicated enforcement and surveillance. At the same time, mistrust between the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and locals, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and poor international cooperation further hinder effective border control. The challenging geography of the Bangladesh-India and Bangladesh-Myanmar borders facilitates illicit activities such as smuggling and trafficking, exacerbated by gaps in border surveillance infrastructure. Additionally, socioeconomic issues, including poverty and lack of opportunities, drive individuals towards criminal activities for survival. The study suggests a comprehensive border management approach, incorporating infrastructure improvements, international collaboration, strategic BOP placement, advanced technology use, and socioeconomic initiatives to address the root causes of smuggling and trafficking, as essential for securing Bangladesh's borders and safeguarding national interests.

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