**CONTESTED BOUNDARIES, NEGOTIATED LIVES, SHADOW ECONOMIES: CASE OF INDO-BANGALDESH BORDER REGION[[1]](#footnote-2) AND BCIM-EC[[2]](#footnote-3)**

**INTRODUCTION:** Borders, frontiers and borderlands have often been used interchangeably in common parlance but a careful analysis of the three analytic categories indicates difference in genealogy, meanings and their historical significance. Borders as political and economic entities and ‘frames’ of research become a way to theorize political economy as also a test of a nation’s sovereignty which has the right to determine who can enter its territory. In the modern times, borders and borderlands have also been the *raison de etre* for bloody wars and conflicts between nations and neighbours, a potent reason why Willem van Schendel (2005: 296) calls the Indo-Bangladesh as a ‘killer border.’[[3]](#footnote-4) However, this was not true in pre-modern times in the case of ambulant communities and other frontier groups who easily defied borders as mobility defined their way of life particularly in South Asia. (Ludden: 2003) This is not to say that during earlier times, skirmishes and violence between territorialists and ambulants did not take place but on many occasions they also lived together and had symbiotic relationship. (Casimir and Rao: 2003)

Nomads, vagabonds and Gypsies have subverted borders and crossed frontiers and are known to be carriers of ‘multiple’ traditions through the ‘regimes of circulation.’ (Markovits et all) Paradoxically enough, in current times, the promise of globalisation of an integrated, de-territorialised and borderless world enabling a ‘free’ flow of people, capital, ideas and cultural artefacts rings hollow due to exacerbated surveillance, securitisation and regimes of control and its changing relations to territory, sovereignty and citizenship. Borderland governance has become stringent and led to ‘states of exception’ on the borders and increasing cases of violence at the borders the best example of which is the ‘shoot-on-sight’ policy of the Border Security Force of India. The policy which was intended to put a check on illegal migration, terrorist activities and shadow economy besides taming the volatile nature of the Bengal borderlands has since its inception, claimed lives of 1000 Bangladeshi civilians including women and children.[[4]](#footnote-5)

While borders are containers of history, nostalgia, mobility, memory, diaspora, violence, trauma, agency and belongingness, in South Asia, they are a pre-modern and colonial construct, which makes them contestable and contentious in nationalist discourse. Today, we witness ‘gated border economy’ whereby any seesaw and political tinkering on the borders can reconfigure border region landscape and affect the livelihood of ‘border citizens.’ [[5]](#footnote-6)

The paper tries to give a brief historicity of the Indo-Bangladesh border and then deals with the land border disputes between the two nations especially the enclaves that involves ‘shadow economy’ in the border region which is a source of livelihood for many enclavers. It also highlights the issue of human trafficking that includes illegal migration, smuggling of fake currency, cattle and the sexual economy of the *‘ghats’* as also the ways in which these are operationalised.The paper then deals with how a sub-regional economic cooperation like Bangladesh China India Myanmar – Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) can help mitigate this ‘shadow economy’ and bring winds of change in the lives of the borderlanders and stateless people.

**INDO-BANGLADESH BORDER: BRIEF HISTORY AND FACTS**

During British colonial rule, Bangladesh was a part of the province of Bengal, except for the district of Sylhet, which was then in the province of Assam. After India’s partition in August 1947, the eastern part of Bengal and the district of Sylhet together made up East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. The Boundary Commission, led by Sir Cyril Radcliff, a British Judge, was given one and a half months time to draw the (4,156 Km) border between India and East Pakistan. Today, this border cuts across rivers and canals, villages and markets, agricultural lands and tropical forests. There are hardly any distinguishing geographical features marking the border and un-demarcated stretches remain as sources of tension between the two neighbours. In addition, there are a number of enclaves and adversely possessed land (APL), again relics of our colonial past, which remain unresolved. The two countries share one of the most porous borders in the world. Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and the Border Security Force (BSF) of India guard the borders on either side. These forces are to ensure proper management of the international boundary, check smuggling and illegal trafficking and ensure peace and maintain order along the border belt.

The Indo-Bangladesh border cuts across heavily populated villages, market places, roads and railways and common agricultural lands. The international border, drawn during the partition of India in 1947, divides a contiguous landscape and a population that was integrated and interdependent for centuries. The highly porous and often indistinguishable Indo-Bangladesh border becomes an unfenced wilderness giving rise to vexed issues that often vitiated relations between the two neighbours. More importantly, millions of people living on either sides of the border continue to suffer from statelessness, economic hardships and physical restrictions due to frequent incidents of violence along the border region. Part of the dispute between India and Bangladesh is the complex way in which their territories are divided. These disputes are of varying nature that range from right to river water sharing and maritime boundary dispute between the two countries to controversy over an island (*New Moore* or *South Talpatti*) etc. This paper deals with the land border dispute between India and Bangladesh and focuses specifically on the enclaves.

**TYPES OF BORDER DISPUTES**

There are three kinds of land border disputes between India and Bangladesh:

a. Undemarcated border

b. Adversely Possessed Land (APL)

c. Enclaves

**UNDEMARCATED BORDER**

Of more than 4000 km Bangladesh-India borders, 6.5 km are yet to be demarcated.[[6]](#footnote-7) All these stretches remain undemarcated because of differing technical positions taken by India and Bangladesh. Among those, Muhurir *Char* is the most talked about issue in Bangladesh-India border dispute.

**ADVERSELY POSSESSED LAND**

Adversely possessed land (APL) is another legacy of partition. Since 1947 about 3,500 acres of Bangladesh land is in India's possession and about 3000 acres of Indian land is in Bangladesh's possession in different sectors of the border.[[7]](#footnote-8) The issue of APL has remained unresolved for the last 25 years because of the differing interpretations by India and Bangladesh of the formula of the transfer. Unresolved APL issues contribute to frequent border incidents. Indian officials admit that non-ratification of the Mujib-Indira Agreement i.e. the Land Border Agreement of 1974 is the prime cause of border tension.

**ENCLAVES**

This category of border dispute also known as ‘*chitmohols’* are portion of one country surrounded by another country’s land. Along Bangladesh’s northern border with India, there are 162 officially recognized enclaves. Bangladesh has 51 enclaves inside India with an area of 7,110 acres and India has 111 enclaves inside Bangladesh with an area of 17,158 acres and involves a population of around 50,000. The confusing and complex nature of Indo-Bangladesh border include 24 ‘second order’ enclaves as well as world’s only ‘third-order’ enclave, or Dahala Khagrabari #51 which is an enclave within an enclave within an enclave is an Indian jute field encircled by a Bangladeshi village which is contained by an Indian village surrounded by Bangladesh’s Rangpur Division.[[8]](#footnote-9)

The problem of enclaves is a legacy from the days of princely states in British India. In 1947, the Maharaja of Cooch Bihar opted for the Indian Union and the neighbouring districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur came to East Pakistan. This resulted in the appearance of a number of Indian enclaves inside Pakistan and a number of Pakistani enclaves inside India. In the early days after partition, residents of these enclaves moved freely to their respective mainland, but tension between India and Pakistan led to increasing restriction on such movement. Bilateral agreements on visas and territory swap proved politically impossible and therefore the people living in these enclaves became stateless, cut off from government services and pegged to these patches of land. This means that children living in these enclaves cannot cross borders for education purposes nor the sick allowed a legal exit in order to get medical treatment. Bangladesh inherited the problem in 1971. Meanwhile, residents of the enclaves of both countries face enormous hardships because of frequent shooting incidents, poor law and order situation and a general state of uncertainty and deprivation.

The region along the Indo-Bangladesh border is among the worlds’ most heavily populated, impoverished and most complex, given the utter complexity of its fencing with claims and counter-claims of ‘keeping’ enclaves in each other’s possession. These *Chitmohols’* are a shelter for almost 3 lakh Bangladeshis and Indians on both sides of the border and is also host to terrorists and infiltrators. The border cuts across heavily populated villages, market places, roads and railways and common agricultural lands. The international border, drawn during the partition of India in 1947, divides a contiguous landscape and a population that was integrated and interdependent for centuries. The highly porous and often indistinguishable Indo-Bangladesh border gave rise to a number of issues that often vitiated friendly relations between the two neighbours.

First, the enclaves present a dramatic human security problem. The [utter lack](http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/explained-land-swap-in-offing/99/) of government services in the enclaves–many of them lack electricity, health care, and schools–has [left residents poor](http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2011/09/border-agreements), uneducated, and essentially stateless. More than 75 percent of the residents of the Bangladeshi enclaves have [spent time in prisons](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Border-dwellers-between-India-and-Bangladesh-Now-we-can-live-and-die-with-dignity/articleshow/45400301.cms) for invalid travel. Residents of Indian enclaves in Bangladesh also have been arrested in similar numbers. On the flip side, unless they leave their enclaves, these populations by definition exist [beyond the reach](http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/enclaves-along-indo-bangla-border-safe-havens-for-criminals/1/150158.html) of law enforcement. This combination of poverty and statelessness, along with the absence of legal authority, leaves the enclaves ripe for radicalization.  And indeed, in the past they have [become safe havens](http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/enclaves-along-indo-bangla-border-safe-havens-for-criminals/1/150158.html) for violent criminals and even terrorists, who fled to the enclaves in order to escape police.

Second, the enclaves prevent both India and Bangladesh from securing their borders. The enclaves dramatically increase the length of the border that must be patrolled. This in turn allows significant flows of illicit goods between the two countries. Throughout the enclaves, smuggling [is rampant](http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/enclaves-along-indo-bangla-border-safe-havens-for-criminals/1/150158.html); [some estimates](http://qz.com/226458/the-smuggling-business-between-india-and-bangladesh-is-worth-as-much-as-their-official-trade/) value illegal trade between India and Bangladesh at nearly the same level as official trade between the two nations. For example, India has banned the export of cattle, yet between 20,000 to 25,000 cattle cross the border [every day](http://qz.com/226458/the-smuggling-business-between-india-and-bangladesh-is-worth-as-much-as-their-official-trade/).

Much of that smuggling happens away from the enclaves, to be sure; nevertheless, the enclaves very existence makes interdiction that much more difficult, and thus precludes the two states from effectively slowing illicit trade.

At the same time, the constant transit between the enclaves and their respective parent states has lead to violence along the border—especially after India adopted a “[shoot-on-sight](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/libertycentral/2011/jan/23/india-bangladesh-border-shoot-to-kill-policy)” policy to deter those who might cross illegally.

Third, the status quo is commercially harmful, to say the least. Successful resolution of India’s border disputes with Bangladesh could position India and its northeast as the gateway to Southeast Asia. If India is going to increase its control over its underdeveloped northeast, economic connectivity and enhanced integration with regional actors like Bangladesh, Bhutan, and China will be essential. And India will have a much greater chance of maintaining peace in its northeastern states, and of developing them economically, with Bangladesh’s continued cooperation.

Instability along the border regions of Bangladesh may not only deter Indian investment; it may also undermine Bangladesh’s prospects of becoming a regional hub. India cannot develop its restive northeast without a broader regional security approach; reducing the risk of militant violence likewise will be essential to driving foreign investment and trade growth in both countries. The Land Boundary Agreement is one of many initiatives critical to better economic and regional integration. Movement here could open the way for other [significant agreements](http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/delhi-dhaka-and-a-new-moment/99/) on trade and commerce, border markets, the sharing of the Teesta and other rivers, and a railway connecting Agartala and Akhaura.

Finally, the enclaves act as a political wedge between India and Bangladesh. China, India’s regional rival, has used this diplomatic distance between the two countries to gain influence over Bangladesh. In the 1980s, for example, when Indo-Bangladesh relations were especially bad, [China became](http://idcr.cprindia.org/blog/india-and-bangladeshreview-bilateral-opportunities) Bangladesh’s strongest international ally and its chief supplier of arms. In that period, China issued Bangladesh dozens of fighter jets, and much of Bangladesh’s current military armament is of Chinese origin. Such patronage, combined with China’s [close relationship](http://www.cfr.org/china/china-pakistan-relations/p10070) to Pakistan, leaves India perceiving threats on its west, north, and east.

**WORKING THE BORDER / NEGOTIATED LIVES**: **SHADOW ECONOMY AND** **TRAFFICKING ON THE INDIA-BANGLADESH BORDER REGION**

Bangladesh shares the longest international border of 4096 kilometres[[9]](#footnote-10) (2979 km land border and 1116 km riverine border)[[10]](#footnote-11) with India which touches the states of Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, West Bengal and Mizoram. The length of the Indo-Bangladesh border in West Bengal is 2216.7 km. Other state’s share includes Assam (263 km), Meghalaya (443 km), Tripura (856 km) and Mizoram (318 km).[[11]](#footnote-12) The 2000 kilometres porous border which West Bengal shares with Bangladesh runs through ponds, rivers, agricultural fields, villages and even houses making cross border movement easier. The riverine configurations in the west and hilly terrain in the east, makes close surveillance of these borders an extremely difficult task that gets compounded by the shifting course of the rivers that run through them. Soil erosion and frequent floods make the task of border demarcation even tougher especially with the formation of numerous river islands and *chars*. This permeability of borders provide a launching pad for brisk illegal trade in the border regions which includes trafficking of human beings, illegal migration,[[12]](#footnote-13) smuggling of narcotics and contraband items like drugs,[[13]](#footnote-14) fake currency and arms along with food items like rice, wheat, sugar and cattle. In the recent years, infiltration by terrorists has been mounting the problems for border security forces of both the nations. The Border Security Force (BSF) has identified 46 such infiltration points.

The Indo-Bangladesh border is fraught with many problems and one of them which has been persisting and troubling both the nations for long has been the issue of human trafficking and sex work. For example, along the 151 kilometre long India-Bangladesh border in Murshidabad district, women and children are the conveyer belts in smuggling and sex work since this is a lucrative option than rolling bidis or weaving *gamchhas*. Borders are crossed with the help of professional breachers known as *‘lineman’* who run a flourishing business smuggling people into India. [[14]](#footnote-15)

Infiltration and trafficking is easy and one of the easiest ways is Maslandpur ghat where one a 1000 Rupee note can get anyone on the other side of the fence. The operation is simple and involves procuring a Yellow ticket with the picture of Lord Ganesha and the words *Amar Sobai* (we are all together) embossed on it. This yellow ticket is a powerful document that ensures safe passage between borders and has at its command a parapolitical system of local panchayat members, linemen, politicians, policemen, BSF and BDR. In case of any legal wrangle or otherwise, the network and this vast infrastructure are unleashed and the ‘crosser’ is bailed out. Other well known *ghats* guaranteeing safe passages are Tarati, Hakimpur, Swarupda, Balti and Duttapura.[[15]](#footnote-16) In many areas, villagers simply cross over on ladders. Elsewhere, smugglers have access to other formal crossing points. Bribes are common and one of the usual modes of payments is in kind that is sex. As a result, a linkage has developed between prostitution and smuggling across the Indo-Bangladeshi border.

The border problems have been exacerbated with shifting rivers and large tracts of Indian and Bangladeshi land and people living behind the man-made fences. In fact, in many cases, families split by the fencing live in harmony and join hands for smuggling. As against half a dozen legal entry points between the two countries on this stretch of the border, there are 47 illegal ones, called *ghats* or ports (literally “steps”). Like liquor vends, these ghats are auctioned and the *ghat maliks* (“crossing lords”) who are local elite set their own rates of commission for permitting the illegal activity. The entire operation is carried via a syndicate which is a loose network of *line-men*, agents and carriers who facilitate the smuggling of cattle, rice, spices, sugar, bidi, rice, medicine, garments, motorcycle parts, fertiliser, electronic items, shimmering nylon saris and *Phensedyl* … across the barrier.[[16]](#footnote-17)

Bangladesh is a country of origin for trafficking in men, women, and children. Human rights groups in Bangladesh estimate that between 10,000 and 20,000 women and girls are trafficked annually to India, Pakistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates. The Indo-Bangladesh border region has emerged as South Asia’s trafficking hub.[[17]](#footnote-18) A 2004 Indian government study cited in the International Journal for Equity in Health put the figure of trafficked women and girls at 2.8 million. The Table below gives the volume of trafficked women along with their nationality and the destinations to which they are taken.

# Table 1: Estimates of the number of women trafficked from Bangladesh and Nepal into Indian brothels:[[18]](#footnote-19)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No of Trafficked Women** | **Nationality** | **Destination** | **Sources** |
| 70% of 1000 to 10,000 | Bangladeshi | Kolkata (last 5 years) | Asian Development Bank,  |
| 800 | Bangladeshi | Kolkata (1990-92) | ADB |
| 30,000 | Bangladeshi | Kolkata | ADB, CATW |
| 2,000 | Bangladeshi | Various Cities | ADB, CATW-Asia Pacific |
| 10,000 | Bangladeshi | Mumbai, Goa | ADB, CATW |
| 200,000 | Nepalese |  - |  |
| 27,000 | Bangladeshi | ADB | ADB |
| 300,000 | Bangladeshi | Various Cities | Centre for Health and Population Research |
| 45,000 | Nepalese | Mumbai | ADB, CWIN (Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre) (Year not Provided) |
| 35,000 | Nepalese | Kolkata | ADB, CWIN (Year Not Provided) |

Glancing at the Table above, one can deduce that Bangladesh is a hot spot as far as human trafficking is concerned and majority of the trafficked victims land up in the two metros namely Kolkata and Mumbai. There are many factors responsible for a high volume of human trafficking going on the Indo-Bangladesh border region.

**FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE TRAFFICKING INFRASTRUCTURE**

Poverty, social exclusion or gender discrimination, widespread illiteracy, lack of awareness and poor governance are the main contributing factors to trafficking in persons in Bangladesh.[[19]](#footnote-20) Besides other exigencies like natural calamities, chronic poverty, kidnapping and fake marriage under duress are also responsible for cross border trafficking. Most people do not own land and 45% of the population live below the poverty line.[[20]](#footnote-21) Urban populations have increased significantly in the last two decades with more than 60% of the increase attributed to migration flows from rural areas.[[21]](#footnote-22) Uneven regional development and massive rural-urban migration have contributed to the growth of urban poverty. Poverty provides traffickers with people who have no alternatives for survival and this includes children too who are involved in smuggling as parents feel that the BSF and police will be less harsh with them if caught. Impoverished and desperate, they trust the offers of work or a fake marriage abroad which ultimately lead them to be exploited through trafficking[[22]](#footnote-23) and ends up in ‘survival sex.’

Many women in prostitution are forcibly fed *Oradexon,* (also known as ‘cow’s tablet’ in the local parlance) to make them gain weight, look better[[23]](#footnote-24) and which ultimately attracts more clients and therefore more money. Women who were initially into smuggling are now in sex work due to its lucrative ends as also to avoid harassment suffered at the hands of the BSF. Many were literally pushed into sex work because those guarding the borders demanded sexual gratification. The demand for sex trade is so high and the returns so lucrative that women who were in farming are now into sex work. In addition to women who take to the trade because they have been abandoned by their husbands and have to bring up children, there are young girls who have left homes with relatives or agents who promised them jobs in Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai and then sold them into prostitution. The third category is that of young girls who have been married by their parents to men posing as businessmen or workers from India and then sold to the brothels. It has also been seen that smuggling and sex are intertwined as smugglers regularly supply women to the BSF to facilitate passage of goods. When there is a group of women smugglers, one member offers herself to the BSF or the BDR. This is also done in rotation so that others can continue with the smuggling. [[24]](#footnote-25)

According to a Report by UNICEF, women are treated as second class citizens and often do not receive any formal schooling. Men are considered dominant in society and violence against women is a widely accepted and used tactic for maintaining control.[[25]](#footnote-26) This mentality often encourages the view of women as material objects rather as human beings, a mentality that often leads to abuse and trafficking of women.[[26]](#footnote-27) In Bangladesh, poor infrastructure encourages trafficking and which is a vicious cycle that is dictated by the prevailing price which in turn depends upon the quality of girls and the nature of officer on duty. Most Bangladeshi women who work as prostitutes in India are illiterate, were abandoned by their husbands, and have children to raise. Many were duped by members of their own community on promises of marriage or jobs. Some are actually married and their husbands sell them off while others who travel to larger Indian cities like Delhi and Mumbai as maids but end up becoming prostitutes in cities, smaller border towns or along highways. Rescued women often return to the profession or settle down in the border region again when they are released, since there are not enough shelters, training centers or job alternatives to help them do otherwise. Sometimes the rescued women have grown accustomed to their life and do not want to return to the village and to poverty. In the recent times, the collapse of the garment industries after September 2001 was another reason for the increase in trafficking of women and children.[[27]](#footnote-28)

It has often been found that the national guards on both sides of the border i.e. the Border Security Force (BSF) on the Indian side and the Border Guards of Bangladesh (BGB) often become party to the crime.[[28]](#footnote-29) According to the Bangladesh government and various human rights groups in both countries, the fencing has done more harm than good, and the BSF’s immense powers and strong arm methods are incommensurate with India’s problems on its eastern border.[[29]](#footnote-30) Hundreds of cases have been documented of BSF brutality which includes verbal assaults, intimidation, rapes and killings against both Indians and Bangladeshis living and working along the border region or dealing in legal trans-border transactions. Indian villagers are often afraid to approach BSF border checkpoints to cross over to their farms and pastures, many of which have best ridden the border, the Partition’s detested ‘Radcliffe Line’, since the Bengal Presidency in the mid-19th century.[[30]](#footnote-31)

Less than 10% of children are registered at birth, making trafficking easier.[[31]](#footnote-32) Studies have found that only 57% of teenage girls have even heard of HIV/AIDS in Bangladesh revealing that there is a lot of unprotected sex.[[32]](#footnote-33)The practice of a dowry system is yet another mechanism of trafficking. When a dowry has not been paid upfront, the husband or other family members may abuse the girl to pressure the girl’s family to speed along the dowry payment. In the process, the girl may flee to escape the abuse, thus becoming vulnerable to trafficking and prostitution.[[33]](#footnote-34)

Trafficking in Bangladesh is mainly for commercial sexual exploitation and forced labour. A 2006 study on the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) found that nearly 27,000 Bangladeshi women and children have been forced into prostitution in India, and around 40,000 children from Bangladesh are involved in prostitution in Pakistan.[[34]](#footnote-35)It is estimated that Bangladeshi women sold into brothels serve approximately 19 clients per week, few of whom use protection.[[35]](#footnote-36) Forced labor is another reason for Bangladeshi people to be trafficked. As demand for cheap labor is so high, people are trafficked into domestic work, farm work, organized begging, and factory work.[[36]](#footnote-37) Furthermore, men seeking work abroad as expatriate labor in countries, such as in Malaysia and other Middle East countries, occasionally find themselves in exploitative situations of forced labor, with conditions including restrictions on movement, threats, and physical assault.[[37]](#footnote-38)

**‘POINTS’ / NODES OF TRAFFICKING:**

In Bangladesh, it is not only women and girls that are trafficked, but a significant number of boys and men are also trafficked internally and internationally for sexual exploitation. Furthermore, official procedures for exiting and entering Bangladesh are rarely enforced and there is no specific legislation addressing cross border trafficking. The expansive and porous borders between India and Bangladesh are conducive to external trafficking.[[38]](#footnote-39) This coupled with a lack of border controls, lax documentation requirements and tacit networks with the political class and border officials allow traffickers to freely shuffle people across borders. There are as many as 20 transit points from districts of Bangladesh bordering India through which women are trafficked. Twenty-eight districts of Bangladesh have common borders with India and two districts have borders with Myanmar, and those are being used by the traffickers in human trafficking, especially women and children. According to intelligence sources, the frontier areas of Khulna, Jessore, Satkhira, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Mymensingh, Comilla, Brahmanbaria, and Sylhet are frequently used as land routes for human trafficking. Apart from these, there are several land ports attached to India such as Benapol, Hili, Sharsha, which are often used as transit point of trafficking due to corrupt land port officials and security forces of both countries. Choudanga, Jhenaidah, Meherpur, Kushtia in the South-West region and Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar in the south east region of Bangladesh are frequently used as land routes for trafficking.[[39]](#footnote-40)

In the northern region, Kurigram, Joypurhat, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Panchagarh, Thakurgoan, Dinajpur, Naogoan, Chapai Nawabganj, and Rajshahi, and in the south, Jessore and Satkhira are the areas in which women and children are most vulnerable to trafficking. Besides, Cox’s Bazar is the main point from where the children and women are gathered before being smuggled out to Myanmar.[[40]](#footnote-41)

Traffickers often use different routes at different times to avoid the police and other law enforcing agencies. However, for entering India through West Bengal, the two most common routes in the south-west region are the Benapol border in Jessore from where almost 50% of the trafficking takes place and Bhomra and Satkhira. Another significant flow of trafficking takes place through various border points like Hili, Singimari, Mogolhat, Burimari, Durgapur, Villabari, Ramkhana, Vurungamari and Batrigach in the northern region of Bangladesh.[[41]](#footnote-42) .

**ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND ROLE OF CORRIDORS: BCIM-EC, INDIA AND BANGLADESH**

After the opening up of the economy in the 1990s, borders in many parts of the world turned into conduits in enhancing trade and strengthening cultural ties between nations. In recent times, special mutual cooperative trade and development arrangements between neighbouring nations known as ‘growth triangles’ or ‘growth polygons’[[42]](#footnote-43) has given hope to many developing countries that sought to avoid regional conflict and exploit opportunities to create prosperity through regional, inter-regional or sub-regional tie-ups, cooperation and economic integration.[[43]](#footnote-44) ‘Economic Corridors’ has been a culmination of the ‘new regionalism’ of the 1990s and promises the transformation of a particular region from ‘relative heterogeneity’ to ‘increased homogeneity,’ economic corridors ways to take forward strategic regional cooperation and integration buzzwords of 21st century to strengthen regional and sub-regional cooperation and diplomatic ties between regional groupings having cultural similarities, historical commonalities and sameness of commercial ambitions. This matching of complementarity of strength and weakness is one of the founding principles of these groupings and borders become hubs of industrial development and growth. One such regional grouping is the BCIM-EC or BCIM Forum for Regional Cooperation which grew out of the ‘Kunming Initiative’ since 2011. The Forum seeks to move beyond mere economic considerations and thus includes issues of ‘multi-dimensional or multi-sectoral potential of the four nation cooperation exercise.’ Conceived as regional, inter-regional as well as sub-regional venture the ideas of ‘connectivity’ and ‘people-to-people contact’ has emerged as the major plank on which cooperation among the countries has been envisaged. These include ‘multimodal connectivity; sub-regional energy cooperation; investment and financing; trade in goods and services, border trade, and trade facilitation measures; social and human development and poverty alleviation; people-to-people contacts, including tourism development; and the institutional arrangements required to activate the various components of the BCIM-EC.’(Rana and Uberoi 2012)

The proposed economic corridor is 1.65 million square kilometres that encompasses approximately 440 million’[[44]](#footnote-45) people in China’s Yunnan Province, Bangladesh, Myanmar and areas of East and Northeast India through the combination of road, rail, water and air linkages in the region. It is hoped that the EC ‘will form a thriving economic belt that will promote common development of areas along the Corridor’.[[45]](#footnote-46) Parts of the Northeast region and the state of West Bengal (especially the south district of North 24 Parganas) in India is sought to be firmly included into the cooperation and connectivity framework as the proposed EC will run through those areas.

**CONCLUSION:** Borders need to be understood as a social process for it is a container of shared history, culture, kinship ties and affinity, memory and nostalgia. The significance of resolving the Bangladesh-India border disputes gains special impetus in the light of BCIM-EC as it will not only benefit the region’s economy but also become a multilateral form help tackle bilateral problems with immediate neighbours. Moreover this regional initiative can also help stem out insurgency in the north east as it will provide viable livelihoods to people in the region. Among India’s priorities are improving access to its underdeveloped and volatile [northeastern states](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Work-on-new-India-Bangladesh-railway-link-from-2015/articleshow/36725087.cms), reaching advantageous [water sharing agreements](http://globalvoicesonline.org/2012/06/08/india-bangladesh-water-disputes-and-teesta-river-diplomacy/), and increasing connectivity with Southeast Asia as part of New Delhi’s *‘*[*Look East Policy*](http://thediplomat.com/2014/08/india-and-asean-beyond-looking-east/)*’*. All these objectives will be difficult to achieve without Bangladesh’s support. Resolving the border crisis would grease the wheels for future cooperation, development, and trade in the region. Despite renewed efforts to resolve the crisis after Bangladesh gained independence, a promising [1974 Land Swap Agreement](http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2011/09/border-agreements) signed by the prime ministers of India and Bangladesh was never ratified by India’s parliament. The Indo-Bangladesh enclaves are detrimental to their populations and they represent India and Bangladesh’s failures to reach important, mutually-beneficial agreements. As the dominant player in the region, the onus rests on India to resolve this dispute.

In this respect, some positive steps have been taken. Already a long standing maritime dispute between the two nations was settled by the United Nations tribunal hearing in July 2014 when it awarded around 80 percent of the 25,000 sq km of disputed waters to Bangladesh.[[46]](#footnote-47)

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1. Willem van Schendel uses the term ‘Bengal borderland’ to refer to the Indo-Bangladesh border region that ‘bisects and encircles a region historically known as Bengal.’ (2005: 2) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. It stands for Bangladesh China India Myanmar–Economic Corridor and is a sub-regional economic cooperation to bring peace and prosperity in the region through pursuing soft power policy that involves greater economic, cultural and educational ties. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. According to the May 21-27th issue of the *Economist*, the border delineating India and Pakistan is world’s most dangerous border. Available at <http://www.geocurrents.info/geopolitics/india%E2%80%99s-second-most-dangerous-border>. Accessed on 12.03.2015 at 23:20. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Available at [http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/libertycentral/2011/jan/23/india-bangladesh-border-shoot-to-kill-policy. Accessed at 20:18](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/libertycentral/2011/jan/23/india-bangladesh-border-shoot-to-kill-policy.%20%20Accessed%20at%2020%3A18) on 12.03.2015.

From 2001 to 2012, the Indian Border Security Force [killed 907 Bangladeshis](http://idcr.cprindia.org/blog/india-and-bangladeshreview-bilateral-opportunities). [A border clash](http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/south/04/26/india.police/) in 2001 left 3 Bangladeshi and 16 Indian soldiers dead, leading India to file complaints of war crimes against Bangladesh. The case of Felani who was killed by the BSF on the Indo-Bangladesh border region in January 2011 is a fresh reminder of the atrocious nature of this policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/openindia/nimmi-kurian/india%E2%80%99s-subaltern-border-citizen>. Accessed on 12.03.2015 at 20:45. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. *The Daily Prothom Alo,* Dhaka, 26 April 2001 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. According to another source, there are 111 Indian enclaves (17,158 acres) in Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves in India (7,110 acres), besides 34 places (2892.31 acres) of Indian land under adverse possession of Bangladesh and 40 places (2251.66 acres) of Bangladesh land under adverse possession of India. (Upadhayaya 2009: 68) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Available at <http://www.popularsocialscience.com/2013/08/06/the-extraordinary-enclave-dahala-khagrabari-51/>. Accessed on 7.03.2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. There are different versions for the length of the Indo-Bangladesh border. According to Panjiar Prashant’s ‘A Great Divide,’, *Caravan,* November, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Out of these 4000 plus kilometres, almost 6.5 km remains un-demarcated. According to <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/enclaves-along-indo-bangla-border-safe-havens-for-criminals/1/150158.html> Moreover 180 kms of maritime border is geographically porous. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. See [http://mha.nic.in/hindi/sites/upload\_files/mhahindi/files/pdf/BM\_Fence(E).pdf](http://mha.nic.in/hindi/sites/upload_files/mhahindi/files/pdf/BM_Fence%28E%29.pdf) For more details Accessed on 13.03.2015 at 01:41. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Millions of Bangladeshis have entered India through this porous border and acquired Indian citizenship. Official figures stand at 1.2 million but the latest Census figures of 2001 show that the demography of the six border districts of West Bengal have dramatically changed because of illegal migration. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. One of the mild drugs used for curing cough is Phensedyl and if taken in large doses act as an intoxicant. Its production is prohibited according to Bangladesh’s pharmaceutical rule since 1982. The huge demand for this drug in Bangladesh has led to the establishment of number of Indian Phensedyl companies along the Bangladesh border which supplies Phensedyl across the border into Bangladesh. A bottle of Phensedyl in India costs about Rs. 75 and is sold in Bangladesh for Tk 700. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Available at <http://www.globalissues.org/news/2011/05/08/9552>. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
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