

Module A

Violence in the borderland and forced migration in West Bengal–Bangladesh Border

The present state system in South Asia, in particular the state system of the sub-continent, is a result largely of the partitions in the eastern and western parts of the erstwhile united India, giving birth to three states – India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The borders dividing these countries are markers of past bitter history, current separate, distinct, and independent existence, and the sign of the territorial integrity of these states. The bitterness of the past has been exacerbated by the lack of mutual confidence at present. This makes migration across these borders extremely contentious. There is another added dimension to the borders and that is the existence of thousand and one linkages across these borders that make the South Asian borders and migration across it as a unique phenomenon. South Asian borders then are lines of hatred, disunity, informal connections and voluminous informal trade, securitised and militarized lines, heavy para-military presence, communal discord, humanitarian crisis, human rights abuses, and enormous suspicion resulting in making migration a violent affair. Yet migration across these borders never stops.

While the Indo-Pakistan border (including the Line of Control) is in the eye of world attention, therefore closely monitored, the border in the East – Indo-Bangladesh border – remains neglected in terms of attention. Security concerns overwhelm all other equally legitimate concerns and values. Military security dominates over human security in the border region. As a result of this, States often forget that borders are not only lines to be guarded, they are also lines of humanitarian management, because borders are not lines but borderlands – that is to say these are areas where people live, pursue economic activities, and lead civilian lives attuned to the realities of the borders. Human security in the borderlands would mean first security of the civilian population along the borderlines.

This workshop is meant to analyze the human rights and the humanitarian situation on the Indo-Bangladesh border. It will discuss some of the aspects given below:

- (a) Analyze how immigrants are prima facie accused of illegal entry and do not get due recourse to law;
- (b) The border security forces on both sides engage in forcible push-backs – harsh methods of deportation resulting in loss of limbs, lives, money, and dignity.
- (c) Long and undue detention at jails and sub-jails;
- (d) Rampant sexual abuses, and killings in no man's land;
- (e) Distress of inhabitants of border enclaves;
- (f) Boundaries running through villages and consequent harassment of villagers;
- (g) Fencing and electrifying the fence with high voltage;

- (h) Forcibly stranded people on the no-man's land as security forces on both sides refuse to accept them;
- (i) Communalisation of border villages and subsequent killings of apprehended immigrants;
- (j) Shifting of river-bodies, problem of people living around them.
- (k) Chitmahals and violence faced by people living therein.
- (l) Different types of boundaries in different sectors (river, village, train line, no natural demarcation, hills, etc.
- (m) Existence of stateless population
- (n) Widespread trafficking in labour, sex, animals, and goods
- (o) Insecurity of security guards

The module will discuss these research papers:

1. The chitmahals and the condition of people living in these enclaves.
2. Bangladeshi women caught up in Indian jails.
3. Impact of border violence on migrants and people in the border lands.