INDIA'S APPROACH
TO
BORDER MANAGEMENT
From Barriers to Bridges

Pushpita Das

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To Kalyan...

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

As markers of the territorial sovereignty of a state, borders perform interrelated but contradictory functions to protect the state they enclose. On one hand, borders act as barriers to undesirable elements such as goods, services, capital, people, and ideas considered harmful for the domestic territory and population. On the other, they serve as bridges to facilitate legitimate socio-economic and cultural exchanges across countries. Traditionally, the primary role of borders has been to prevent threats such as cross border terrorism, illegal migration, trafficking of narcotics and drugs, smuggling, etc. from entering the country and jeopardising its security.

The advent of a globalised world coupled with revolutions in mass communication and information technologies enabled an increase in cross border movement. Free flow of people, goods, services, and capital across countries was necessary for the growth of the globalised markets. In this context, the barrier role of the borders was espied as a hindrance to 'free flow of trade, limiting the size of the market, and increasing transaction costs',[1] and therefore needed to be transformed into facilitators for greater economic integration through enhanced trade and connectivity. Consequently, borders acquired a new 'bridging' function.

Border management is the process by which countries exercise control at their borders and optimise the functioning of their borders and includes border security – preventing unauthorised crossings, and trade and travel facilitation – allowing rapid movement of authorised people and goods with minimal interference.[2] Effective border management requires a precise conception of what constitutes a legitimate crossing and what an irregular crossing and therefore a

threat. Equally, it requires judicious deployment of resources and policy solutions to tackle the threat while at the same time allowing efficient clearance of legitimate traffic.

Defining the objectives of border management, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) (2014) states, 'Securing the country's borders against interests hostile to the country and putting in place the systems that are able to interdict such elements while facilitating legitimate trade and commerce are among the principal objectives of border management'.[3] Border management, thus, involves development of appropriate policies and legislation, administrative structures, operational systems and human resource base to respond effectively to diverse challenges. Proper border management requires efficient coordination and concerted action by various agencies such as security, regulatory, intelligence, diplomatic, administrative and economic.

Depending upon their assessment of threats and available resources, different countries have devised different strategies to manage their borders. While some countries have tried to manage their borders unilaterally, other have sought the cooperation of their neighbours. Some countries have given priority to security and hardened their borders, while others have emphasized on soft borders to facilitate greater trade and contact.

Given that it has been facing cross border threats such as insurgencies/militancy, cross border terrorism, illegal migration, smuggling and trafficking, India has naturally concentrated on securing its borders. It has attempted to do so by placing restrictions on the free movement of people across borders in particular. Besides, the predominance of a security first approach has been reinforced by an absence of large scale trade and commerce with the neighbours, which would otherwise have necessitated the softening of borders to facilitate the smooth movement of people and goods.

It was only in the 2000s, when the country experienced substantial economic growth, that a qualitative shift in the country's attitude towards the border areas was heralded. Faster economic growth has meant a huge increase in trade and investment flows. It has also forced India to look at countries in its immediate and

extended neighbourhoods as economic partners. As the country's economic orientation is changing, and India is beginning to seek economic integration at the regional and global levels, borders are coming to be increasingly seen as avenues for the easy circulation of goods and people instead of being perceived as physical obstructions.

This change in attitude towards borders and increasing trade with neighbours have led India to embark upon programmes for the accelerated, integrated and sustainable development of border regions through increased investments in the border areas and developing connectivity. Thus, India's border management approach has transformed from a predominantly security centric and unilateral approach to a trade facilitative and cooperative one.

Rationale of the Book

Border security as a subject of public policy agenda and academic interest has gained prominence after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the United States. During the decade before these attacks, border security was not considered a national security matter even though the forces of globalisation facilitated the increased movement of people, goods, and capital across borders without being hindered by controls exercised by national governments.[4]

However, the events of 9/11, which saw 19 terrorists from four different countries hijacking commercial airplanes to attack US targets, revealed the flip side of globalisation, that is, the easy movement of nefarious elements across borders alongside the legitimate movement of people and goods. The fact that these terrorists could enter the US without raising suspicion among immigration authorities highlighted the importance of putting in place effective border controls. Thus, securing the borders by regulating the overwhelming flow of people, vehicles, and containers as well as filtering out dangerous elements became policy objectives for governments world-wide.

In contrast, in academia, the study of borders and borderlands adopted approaches that were very different. Some scholars saw borders as institutional constructs of the State with its policy of

inclusion and exclusion based on national security concerns.[5] Others focused on the socio-economic and cultural spaces of the borderlands and argued that, in the brave new world of the post-Cold War era, these official constructs are being challenged by 'national communities' as well as by market forces.[6]

Scholars have tended to argue that in order to formulate effective border security policies, emphasis should be on studying borderland 'realities' and their interplay with government practices. Understanding the security policies of neighbouring countries as well as inter-state cooperation across borders is also deemed vital for the formulation of effective border security policies.[7]

In India, the Kargil War of 1999, the events of 9/11, and the terrorist attack on Parliament in 2001 propelled policymakers to redouble focus on securing borders through better border management practices. Accordingly, the union government increased investments in security personnel, building fences, and installing identification and detection devices as well as integrating the borderlands through developmental schemes. These government initiatives, in turn, fuelled scholarly interest in the study of borders and borderlands.

Yet, academic focus has largely been on the socio-economic, cultural and ethnic milieus of the borderlands. Issues such as illegal migration, trafficking, smuggling, the marginalisation of border inhabitants, and their acts of resistance to government's border policies have all been analysed in great detail.[8] The 'xenophobic dimensions' of border security, 'fortress India', and 'militarisation' of border controls are some of the phrases used by scholars to portray Indian government's efforts to secure its international borders.[9] These studies highlight the 'imprecise fit between nations and states,' and challenge the official narratives on borders and borderlands. They are, in general, critical of the government and its policies.

While issues of the marginalisation of border inhabitants and the hardships they endure because of the artificial divide imposed by national borders are important topics of enquiry, equally important are the issues of border security and border controls that constitute the first line of defence against external threats and challenges. Since

the security and well-being of a state and its people depend on secure borders and well-integrated borderlands, states naturally tend to view the exercise of control over borders as being one of their more fundamental tasks.

Establishing and maintaining control over borders through effective security policies, thus, comprise the core activity of governments. Given that the Indian state has been increasing its presence along its borders through various policies and schemes, it is important to study and evaluate its actions and the factors impelling them.[10]

Literature on how India has responded to the threats and challenges emanating across the border has primarily emphasised the security and defence of international borders, with special focus on border guarding forces and the army.[11] There is, therefore, an absence of studies providing a comprehensive understanding of India's multipronged strategy towards managing its international borders.

In this context, this book attempts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the circumstances that have shaped India's attitude towards its international borders and the framework it has developed to better manage its borders. Besides discussing the threats and challenges that India faces along the borders, the book aims to develop an understanding of India's border management practices by analysing various programmes and initiatives such as the raising of border guarding forces; the establishment of modern facilities for smoothening legitimate cross-border travel; the development of the border areas through special programmes; and increasing trade and connectivity as well as other cooperative bilateral mechanisms.

A Thematic Glimpse

The book is composed of eleven chapters besides the introduction and the conclusion. The first chapter describes in detail the threats and challenges that India faces along its international borders and the attitude of the political leaders towards security of the border. The second chapter provides a historical narrative of the evolution of different border guarding forces and discusses the component of

border guarding. The third chapter is a continuation of the second chapter and analyses the infrastructure – physical and virtual – for border guarding.

The fourth chapter is devoted exclusively to the discussion of the development of roads and railways along the India-China border. The fifth chapter articulates the component of regulation at the borders and deals with various agreements and protocols that India has entered into with its neighbours over decades to allow trade and travel across their mutual borders. The sixth chapter contains a discussion on the various custom and immigration stations that dot India's borders. The seventh chapter focuses on the third component of development of the border areas and analyses the border area development programme.

The eighth and the ninth chapters provide a detailed picture of the development of transportation networks in the border areas as well as across them. The tenth chapter analyses the issue of border trade as a means to bring prosperity to the underdeveloped border areas. The eleventh chapter studies the fourth component of cooperation of the neighbours in the management of the international borders and critically evaluates India's experience. The book concludes by positing a few suggestions to address shortcomings in India's strategy for border management.

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1. Security Threats to India's Borders

At the time of Independence, India's borders with its neighbours were not well defined, and were at various stages of evolution. Some borders were demarcated on the ground; others were only delineated on the map; a few were not even defined. While aware of these anomalies, the Indian leadership did not concern themselves much about the state of the country's borders and their security in the early years of Independence.

This lack of interest in the frontiers and borders on the part of the Indian leadership in the years following Independence could be attributed to a combination of factors, such as personal convictions and beliefs, other unfolding events at the time that demanded their immediate attention, and the prevailing status and situation of the international borders and border areas.

To begin with, the leadership believed that the security of the borders depended primarily on the kind of relations two neighbours share. If bilateral relations were good, then the shared borders remained peaceful; but if the relationship between two neighbours were strained, this would be manifested at the borders in the form of transgressions, frictions and, in extreme cases, even invasion.

Jawaharlal Nehru always believed that India will not be invaded by any power from any side because of the existence of a balance of power in the world. He was convinced that power politics among the great powers would safeguard India's security. This belief of his was explained in two articles that were published in 1931. According to him,

It may be that some will covet her, but the master desire will be to prevent any other nation from possessing India. No country will tolerate the idea of another acquiring the commanding position which England occupied for so long. If any power was covetous enough to make the attempt, all the others would continue to trounce the intruder. This mutual rivalry would in itself be the surest guarantee against an attack on India.[1]

Nehru also believed that India was surrounded by friendly countries and, therefore, securing the country and its borders from external aggression was not a cause of immediate concern or his government. In a speech delivered at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), on March 22, 1949, he said,

As far as other countries are concerned, our relations with them are quite friendly. Take for instance, Afghanistan. Our relations with Afghanistan are exceedingly friendly and our relations with Tibet, Nepal and all the neighbouring countries are also very friendly. In fact, I think I am justified in saying that there is no country in this wide world today with which our relations may be said to be inimical or hostile.[2]

Even in the case of China, Nehru could not imagine a 'military invasion from [the] Chinese side, whether in peace or in war'.[3] A war with China was conceivable only 'if there was a world war and if India was a belligerent country opposed to China.'[4] Besides, the Indian leadership also believed that India's long and unguarded borders could be best protected if it had friendly relationships with its neighbours. On March 28, 1951, B.V. Keskar, Deputy Minister for External Affairs, explained India's policy in regard to the Indo-Tibetan frontier in the Lok Sabha,

The Government is not unmindful of the protection of our frontiers adjoining Tibet. I may go further and say that the Government feels that the best way of protecting that frontier is to have a friendly Tibet and a friendly China. It is obvious that such a complicated and big frontier cannot be well-protected if we have a border

country which becomes hostile to us. Therefore, we feel that in tackling the question of Tibet and China, we should always keep in mind that a friendly China and a friendly Tibet are the best guarantee of the defence of our country.[5]

Thus, the conviction of an enemy less neighbourhood prevented Indian policymakers from shoring up the security and defence of its international borders.

Second, the partitioning of the Indian sub-continent and its accompanying challenges significantly influenced the Indian political leadership's policies towards managing the country's international borders. The partition of the Indian subcontinent into two dominions – India and Pakistan – had created new borders dividing land, families, and communities (thus ripping apart the socio-economic, cultural, and political fabric of India) and caused immense political and administrative hardships. The partition itself was preceded as well as followed by numerous cycles of communal violence and counter violence, resulting not only in the massacre of roughly 7 million people but also triggering the largest mass migration in human history.

An estimated 14.5 million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims migrated across the borders, either by choice or by force.[6] Most of these refugees settled in the border areas. As a result, the border residents had to grapple not only with the problem of disruption of their age old socio-economic and cultural ties but also with the largescale settlement of refugees as their neighbours. In fact, the largescale flow of people from across the borders caused frictions between the local people and the migrants.

Given the situation, the state governments sharing borders with East Pakistan favoured the hardening of the international border. The national leadership, on the other hand, recognized the hardships of the local people and the refugees and instructed the state governments that while they should extend their administrations to the border areas, exceptions had to be made for border inhabitants when it came to border crossings so that the border people were not further inconvenienced and were able to carry on with their day-to day activities.

Further, given that the refugee flow through the East Pakistan border was not sudden and torrential, the political leadership was hopeful that the refugees could be encouraged to return to their respective countries sooner rather than later.[7] In fact, the Indian government, in agreement with the Pakistani government, kept the India-East Pakistan border soft to allow people residing on either side who had land rights on the other side to travel freely across the border to attend to their 'legitimate businesses'.[8]

They also permitted the border inhabitants to continue buying their essential personal requirements and sell their individual produce across the border.[9] Thus, the considered decision of the political leadership to keep the border with East Pakistan porous necessitated a soft border management approach, which essentially entailed policing of the borders without the heavy deployment of border guarding forces.

A similar policy of keeping the borders fluid was also followed with Myanmar. This policy was necessitated by the fact that substantial areas along the India-Myanmar border were either yet to be administered or explored.[10] At the time of Independence, both the Indian as well as Myanmar government did not have administrative control over large swathes of the borderlands located between the two countries.

Absence of an administrative set up meant that the border was not officially imposed on the ground. It also meant that the government was unable to provide basic amenities or commercial opportunities such as hospitals, schools, or market places to the people residing in these remote areas. As a result, the inhabitants of these areas were compelled to look beyond the borders for their daily social and economic requirements. The tribes inhabiting these remote areas also shared strong ethnic and cultural affinities with their counterparts across the border and, therefore, continued to remain a unified community, despite being divided by an international border.

In fact, the international border between the two countries itself was not formally delimited or demarcated. Negotiations for settling the border between India and Myanmar did not take place in the decade following Independence because both the countries were

preoccupied with their respective problems. Myanmar was grappling with a number of armed ethnic and communist insurgencies since its independence in 1948.[11] To make matters worse, the Kuomintang troops, fleeing Communist forces in China, entered Myanmar and were fighting alongside the Karen rebels against the Myanmar government forces.[12]

India was also preoccupied with the problems of an irredentist Pakistan and a belligerent China along its western and northern borders respectively, besides dealing with the domestic issues of refugee rehabilitation and nation building. Taking these facts into consideration, the political leadership took the decision to allow the hill tribes of the Burma border lands to enter India without any passport, provided they did not proceed beyond 25 miles from the land border.[13] In the north, the international borders with Nepal and Bhutan were open by virtue of the Friendship treaties signed with both the countries. As a part of the agreements, the residents of Nepal and Bhutan were free to cross into India without any passport or visa restrictions, and vice versa.

Third, while a new India was attempting to establish sovereignty within a territorially bounded space, perhaps its political elite did not have a clear conception of India's precise territorial limits and the location of its borders. For instance, on November 20, 1950, answering a question in Parliament on whether India had any well-defined boundary with Tibet, Nehru stated,

> The frontier from Bhutan eastwards has been clearly defined by the McMahon line which is fixed by the Simla Convention in 1914. The frontier from Ladakh to Nepal is defined chiefly by the long usage and custom … our maps show that the McMahon line is our boundary and that is our boundary – map or no map. The fact remains and we stand by that boundary and we will not allow anybody to come across that boundary.

Yet, Indian official maps published in 1950 showed the status of the India-Tibet boundary in the western and middle sector as 'undefined', and the McMahon line in the eastern sector as

un-demarcated. The 'undefined' frontier of the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) border with Tibet did not concern the Indian political leadership much at that time because the future of J&K itself was not clear, given that it was contingent upon the United Nations (UN) supervised plebiscite after the withdrawal of the Pakistani invading troops. The Indian position on J&K hardened only after Pakistan signed the military aid agreement with the United States in February 1954.[14]

Even then, the UN resolution of 1957 acknowledged that both the Indian and the Pakistan governments recognise and accept the provisions of the UN resolutions of January 1948 and January 1949.[15] As far as the McMahon line – which formed the boundary between India and Tibet in the east – was concerned, the Indian government did nothing to enforce it on ground.

This is evidenced by the fact that even after four years of India's Independence, Tawang continued to be administered by Tibet whose officials collected taxes and tributes from the local people.[16] It was only when China annexed Tibet in 1950, that Major Bob Khating, the Assistant Political Officer (APO), was dispatched to Tawang. Major Khating established Indian administration in Tawang on 9 February 1951, and prohibited the Tsona Dzongpen and other Tibetan officials from exercising authority over villages located south of Bum La.[17]

Ironically, the unfolding events at its borders and neighbourhood presented contrary pictures. The creation of Pakistan post Partition presented India with a neighbour who has remained a constant challenge since inception. Within two months of Independence in October 1947, when the Indian government was still grappling with the problem of providing food, shelter, and rehabilitation to millions of refugees arriving especially from West Pakistan in India,[18] the country was confronted with Pakistan's irredentist claims on J&K, and its efforts to forcibly incorporate it within its domain by sending in tribal raiders and army regulars.[19]

India responded by sending its troops to defend J&K, resulting in a military conflict between the two countries that lasted for close to fifteen months – till the end of 1948. While the war was brought to

an end by a ceasefire effected on January 1, 1949 and the acceptance of a ceasefire line defined by the UN observers,[20] the threat of an imminent attack on J&K by Pakistan remained.

In the East, problems experienced by the Indian government were of a different kind. People residing along the newly crafted India-Pakistan international border refused to accept it as a line dividing the two countries. Defying the official orders to maintain the integrity of the international borders, the local people continued with their traditional practice of visiting relatives as well as rural markets, and even engaging in trade with their counterparts who/which were now located across the international border.

Since such movements and trade were considered as infiltration and smuggling by the civil administration and the police, action was often taken against the locals who indulged in such practices. More often than not, unauthorised trade also resulted in armed conflicts between the border guarding personnel and the local people.[21]

The second event was the invasion of Sinkiang in September 1949, and Tibet in October 1950 by the Chinese Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA). With both the regions falling to the PLA, the northern borders of India became contiguous with Communist China, raising the danger of Chinese intrusions.[22] The annexation of Tibet by the PLA not only obliterated the carefully created buffer between India and China but also changed the hitherto peaceful India-Tibet border into a contested one.

In response to Chinese belligerence in Tibet, and to secure the country from external aggression from the North, the Indian leadership signed friendship treaties with the cis-Himalayan states of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan during 1949-1950, and also undertook steps to strengthen the defence of the northern borders from within.[23]

Based on the recommendations of the North and North East Border Defence Committee, in the next six to seven years, the Government of India's efforts were concentrated on extending civilian administration in the frontier areas, augmenting the strength of the armed forces, setting up of check posts along the northern borders, and development of border areas by providing substantial financial help to the state governments under the Five Year Plans.[24]

However, given the scarce resources, the shortage of well-trained manpower, and the general lack of interest in the government officials, most of the efforts were scattered and piecemeal and, consequently, proved ineffective in securing the country's borders. For instance, while the Assam Rifles (AR) were reorganised in 1953 as recommended by the Committee, their strength was not augmented with adequate manpower and weapons.[25]

Meanwhile, the PLA had consolidated their position in Tibet, and started probing southward along Indian borders. The first instances of Chinese intrusions into Indian territory took place in the middle sector when in the summer of 1954, the PLA camped in Bara Hoti.[26] In subsequent years, these intrusions gradually spread to other sectors of the border as well. Notably, the PLA had sneaked into Indian territory in Ladakh and built the Sinkiang-Gartok road running through Aksai Chin. While the Indian intelligence establishment had been aware of the Chinese road building activities in the vicinity of Aksai Chin since 1951, it had failed to detect the existence of the road *inside* Indian territory as no border guarding force patrolled the border areas.[27]

The situation along the India-China border became direr in 1959 when close to 80,000 Tibetan refugees, along with the 14th Dalai Lama, fled to India in the wake of the Khampa rebellion.[28] Following the flight of the Dalai Lama, China became more belligerent, and the PLA started frequently intruding inside the Indian territory – in some instances, forcibly evicting small detachments of Indian border guards from their posts.

The Indian government was still occupied with the Pakistani threat and Chinese belligerence along its western and northern borders, when the Naga insurgency erupted along its eastern borders. During the time of Independence, the tribal elites in Northeast India opposed the merger of the region with India, arguing that since the people of the Northeast belong to a different racial stock, and their socio-political and economic life is quite different from that of the mainland, they do not belong to India. The Nagas acquiesced to be part of India after the Nine Point agreement (the Naga-Hydari Accord) was signed between the moderate faction of the Naga

National Council (NNC) led by T. Sakhire and the Governor of Assam, Akbar Hydari, on June 29, 1947.

A minority group within the NNC, under Zaphu Angami Phizo, rejected the accord and declared independence on August 14, 1947.[29] Five years later, the NNC led by A.Z. Phizo conducted a 'referendum' in May 1951, wherein it was claimed that 99 per cent of the Naga population wanted independence. On September 8, 1954, Phizo formed the underground Republican Government of Free Nagaland (RGN) as well as the Naga Armed Wing, and started an insurrection against the Indian state.[30]

Initially, the Assam Rifles were brought in to conduct operations against the Naga rebels; but once the insurgency became more violent and widespread, the Army was deployed in August 1955 to contain it. The fact that the Naga territory lay astride the poorly administered India-Myanmar border, and the Naga rebels were crossing the international border with impunity to escape Indian military operations. This became a major cause of concern for the Indian security establishment.

These events brought to the fore the importance of borders and the need to defend and control them in order to safeguard the country's territorial integrity as well as to maintain internal peace and order. Despite the fact that the country faced external aggression and numerous border violations, the realisation that securing its international borders is of paramount national interest dawned on the Indian leaders only gradually. This fact is amply proven by the assessment of cross border threats by the security establishment and the steps taken to guard against them.

For the India-Pakistan border, the military planners assessed that the country's western border in J&K would face conventional threats from Pakistan and, therefore, the bulk of the Indian army was deployed there. For the rest of the border in Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Bengal, and Assam, the Indian security establishment's considered opinion was that similar invasions by Pakistan in these areas were highly unlikely. However, 'border incidents' such as cross-border firings, unauthorised crossings, and smuggling were viewed as inevitable, which could be managed by the state police.[31]

Security concerns regarding the India-China border were limited to the 'infiltration and intrusions of small groups'[32] of communists. The Indian intelligence establishment feared that China, with the intention of furthering the doctrine of International Communism in India, would attempt to incite Indian communists to overthrow the Nehru government as well as foment dissent in the border areas. Therefore, apprehensions were raised that an aggressive China would help Indian communists by supplying them with arms, infiltrating trained agents, and facilitating direct contact with Chinese communists.[33] It was speculated that China would 'indoctrinate Tibetans and push them across the Indian frontier as it would be impossible for Indians to identify'[34] them.

The India-Myanmar border was remote and inaccessible, and even though the sanctity of the international border had been violated by the Naga rebels, it was assumed that the presence of Indian security forces fighting the Naga insurgency would prevent the easy crossings of the border by the rebels and thereby secure the border.

Based on assessment that majority of the cross-border threats are non-conventional in nature, the Union government entrusted the responsibility of securing India's international borders to the state governments who shared their borders with the neighbouring countries. The state governments, in turn, deployed their armed police forces to guard the borders. During any emergency, however, units of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the AR were deployed *ad hoc* in border areas to tackle particular threats.[35] Thus, for securing the border with West Pakistan sans J&K, the Rajasthan Armed Constabulary Force, the Punjab Armed Police, the Gujarat Police, and the CRPF were deployed. Similarly, for East Pakistan, the Eastern Frontier Rifles (West Bengal), the Assam Rifles, and the Tripura Rifles performed border guarding duties.

In the case of the India-China border, the Ladakh militia, the CRPF, the Uttar Pradesh Armed Constabulary, and the Assam Rifles were deployed to patrol the border in Ladakh, Uttar Pradesh, and Arunachal Pradesh [(then North East Frontier Agency (NEFA)], respectively. The border with Myanmar was manned by only three

battalions of the Assam Rifles. However, the main responsibility of the Assam Rifles in this area was counter insurgency operations against the Naga rebels, and they were mainly stationed at their headquarters in Kohima, Imphal, and Aizawl, leaving the border with Myanmar poorly guarded.[36]

That the strength and capabilities of the state armed police force to man and guard the borders were grossly inadequate is an understatement. The state police were primarily involved in maintaining law and order in the hinterland, and did not have enough personnel to deploy in the border areas for border guarding duties. The small number of state armed police that were stationed at the border were armed with rudimentary weapons, and were also thinly spread out. They were, therefore, unable to detect and prevent intrusions by both civilians and militaries of the neighbouring countries.

For instance, the border with East Pakistan was so porous that it allowed unrestricted movement of people and goods across it. As a result, large masses of people fleeing religious persecution and acute poverty in East Pakistan were able to enter West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura illegally. The acuteness of the problem can be ascertained from the 1963 Report of the Registrar General of Census's Report, which had put the number of such 'infiltrates' into Assam at 2,20,691.

In fact, the high porosity of the border was evidenced by the fact that most of the migrants who were deported from Assam in the 1960s re-entered the country without being detected by the Assam Police. Similarly, in West Bengal, the census estimated, that between 1951 and 1961, approximately 4.5 lakh migrants from East Pakistan, mostly Hindus, had entered the state.[37] Besides infiltrations, smuggling, and other petty crimes were rampant as the law and order machinery in the border areas were poor and near absent.

To give an example, the border police of West Bengal had reported that the 'smuggling of food grains, textile goods, and all kinds of commodities from West Bengal to East Bengal territory by all conceivable and ingenious means continues unabated.'[38] The

small strength of the border police was no match to the armed smugglers who not only defied the sanctity of the country's borders but also attacked the police with impunity.[39]

The situation along the India-China border was dire. With the increase in incidents in which the Indian police personnel patrolling the border were either killed or imprisoned by the PLA, the Indian government realised that the security of its border with China could not be left to the ill quipped and poorly trained police forces. Thus, in September 1959, the responsibility of the defence of the India-China border was formally given to the Indian army, and the Assam Rifles was placed under it.[40]

The Assam Rifles moved closer to the Chinese border in NEFA, and set up a chain of small outposts in the forward areas. Unfortunately, the small contingents of the Assam Rifles were too thinly spread along the border to effectively patrol every inch of it. To compound the situation, the AR battalions were only armed police personnel, and did not have the training to fight wars. As a result, when China launched an attack on October 20, 1962, the Assam Rifles suffered heavy casualties as the PLA wiped off these small numbers of outposts in the first wave of the attack itself.[41] The Sino-Indian border war of 1962 ended in a humiliating defeat for India.

Significantly, three years after the India-China border war, the entire border with West Pakistan also witnessed infiltrations by the Pakistani army and irregulars which again culminated in a war between India and Pakistan. The first incident of infiltration by the Pakistani army was reported in May 1964 in the Karanjkot area of the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat. The area under discussion was disputed by Pakistan, and formed part of the larger Sind-Kutch border dispute.[42]

After a lull of a few months, the issue again flared up in January-February 1965, when the Pakistanis built up their forces in these areas and occupied Karanjkot.[43] Fearing an Indian counter operation to evict them from Karanjkot, the Pakistani army crossed the border on April 8, 1965, and attacked Indian border posts initially manned by the State Reserve Police, and later on reinforced by some companies

of the CRPF.[44] This attack was followed by further Pakistani attacks on Indian positions as well as counter attacks by the Indian army. The conflict was brought to an end in May 1965 through the British mediation, and a ceasefire agreement was signed on June 30, 1965.[45]

Meanwhile beginning January 1965, the international borders in J&K continued to experience increased firing and shelling by Pakistan. Between January and May, 1347 incidents of ceasefire violations of the J&K border by Pakistan were recorded as compared to 522 in the previous year.[46] By August 1965, the situation in the state became grim as large numbers of Pakistani infiltrators invaded J&K under a plan code named 'Operation Gibraltar'. The objective of the infiltrators was to create chaos in the state, and incite a revolt against the Indian government.

Pakistani misadventure was based on the false notion of them being victorious in the Rann of Kutch incident. They also wrongly inferred that the willingness to accept a third party arbitration for the border dispute by the Indian leadership was an indication of a demoralised Indian army, and therefore, it would be able to wrest Kashmir from India after a limited military encounter.[47] However, instead of inciting large scale uprising by the Kashmiris, 'Operation Gibraltar' resulted in an all-out war with India in September 1965. The war ended after both the Indian and Pakistani governments agreed to a cease-fire proposal on September 21-22, 1965.

During the 1965 war, China had deployed troops along its border with India to show solidarity with Pakistan and put pressure on India. It was during that time that India vacated Jelep La in Sikkim (then a protectorate of India), which remains in the Chinese possession since then.[48] Two years later in September 1967, Sikkim again witnessed two skirmishes between the PLA and the Indian army. The first clash happened on 11 September 1967 at Nathu La, when the PLA objected to India laying wire fences to demarcate the border leading to an argument and subsequent exchange of fire between the two armies. The situation was brought under control after five days. This incident was followed by brief fighting on 1 October 1967, at Cho La, few kilometres north of Nathu La.[49]

Three decades later, Pakistani Army orchestrated yet another intrusion in Kargil which resulted in a brief war in the summer of 1999. In January/early February 1999, Pakistan executed an intrusion across the Line of Control (LoC) by its Northern Light Infantry into Kargil, Dras, Kaksar, Mashkoh, Batalik in J&K, and occupied posts vacated by the Indian army during the previous winter season.[50] The Pakistani army's infiltration was aimed at severing communication links between Kashmir and Ladakh, occupying Indian territory south of LoC, and reviving militancy in the Kashmir Valley.[51] The intrusion was subsequently detected on 3 May 1999 by a shepherd, and the Indian army launched 'Operation Vijay' to evict Pakistani intruders from the Indian territory. The ensuing battle lasted for two months and ended on July 26, 1999 with the Indian army recapturing all posts in the Kargil heights and declaring victory.

Non-Traditional Threats

Territorial claims and border disputes leading to wars and conflicts with Pakistan and China were the two major threats that impacted national security. However, the rise of separatist movements in the Northeast, Punjab, and J&K since the mid-50s, made these border regions extremely vulnerable to a number of non-conventional threats such as infiltration, gun running, narcotics trafficking, etc. The fact that countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, and Myanmar actively trained and sheltered insurgent groups and supported their secessionist activities compounded these threats, and precluded their peaceful resolution. Some non-traditional threats from across the international borders that India has encountered, and continues to grapple with since independence, are listed below.

Exfiltration and Infiltration by Terrorists

Since the inception of insurgency in the Northeast in the 1950s, the Naga insurgents have been crossing over into Myanmar to set up bases, especially in the Kachin state and the Sagaing Region. The trend of such cross-border movements of insurgent groups became more pronounced since the late 1960s after the Meiteis, the Mizos, the Tripuris, and the Assamese rebelled against the Indian state. The

tacit approval of the Myanmar government[52] and the active support of the Bangladesh government facilitated the establishment of these safe havens in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

In fact, the Bangladesh government, in connivance with the Pakistani Inter Service Intelligence (ISI), was proactive in offering training and shelter to the insurgent groups.[53] Around 150-200 insurgent camps existed in the Chittagong, Khagrachari, and Sylhet districts before there was a change in the mind-set of ruling elite in Bangladesh against terrorism. This changed mind-set enabled Dhaka to take into account New Delhi's concerns and close down all insurgent camps operating in its territory.[54] The Bhutanese territory was similarly exploited by the insurgent groups from Assam to establish bases in the 1990s.

Initially, Bhutan was reluctant to take action against these insurgent groups, but when their presence started creating law and order problems, the Royal Bhutanese government woke up to the detrimental effects of hosting foreign insurgent groups on its soil. Consequently, in December 2003, it took action against the insurgent groups, and in a coordinated operation with the Indian army, chased them out of Bhutan.[55]

The bases or camps built by the insurgent groups in neighbouring countries have been a cause of major security concern for the Indian government as they provide safe havens for insurgents groups where they can rest, recoup, train, plan and launch future offensives, as well as hide when pursued by the Indian security forces. These camps also help different insurgent groups to establish fraternal ties with each other, which further help them to train, shelter, finance, weaponise, as well as establish links with governments hostile to India.

Besides, these bases provide an opportunity for various insurgent groups to pool in their resources and work together against the Indian establishment under a single banner. For example, on April 17, 2015, four groups – the NSCN-K, the ULFA (Independent), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland-Songbijit (NDFB-S), and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) – formed a joint forum called the United National Liberation Front of Western

South East Asia (UNLFWSEA), which allowed the rebels to offset disadvantages in terms of shelter, training camps, weapons, and finance, and provided them with an opportunity to operate out of their traditional areas of influence.[56]

Similarly, attempts by terrorists and militants to infiltrate into Indian territory from Pakistan through the international boundary has been a recurring challenge. Infiltration was extremely high during the 1980s and 1990s when Punjab and Kashmir militancy were at their peak. During the years of the Punjab militancy, Sikh youths used to cross over to Pakistan to receive training in various terrorist camps set up by the ISI. Some of these camps used to be located as close as 75 metres from the international boundary. The flow of Sikh militants to these training camps picked up in 1984 following Operation Blue Star, and increased substantially in the subsequent years.[57]

Once their training was complete, the militants used to sneak back into Punjab with sophisticated arms and explosives. Between 1986 and 1992, security forces in Punjab had apprehended 45,650 persons trying to cross the international border,[58] and had seized around 2500 AK series of assault rifles in the state.[59] However, as Sikh militancy waned, cases of militants entering the state with arms and explosives also declined steeply. Disturbingly, recent reports indicate that Pakistan is trying to revive Sikh militancy in Punjab. The ISI is reportedly training Sikh youth, and providing them with arms and explosives.

The fact that the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has accused the Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF) – which was revived in 2009 – to be involved in the murder, and attempted murder, of several Rashtriya Sayam Sevak (RSS) leaders and a pastor in 2016 and 2017 respectively – highlight the activities of the militant group to create religious disharmony and foment anti-India sentiment in the state.[60] Earlier, in 2012, the Police recovered a large cache of arms and explosives in Punjab and arrested a few terrorists attempting to infiltrate through the Punjab and Rajasthan border.[61]

Like their Sikh counterparts, Kashmiri separatist groups have also received moral and material support for their anti-India

activities from across the border. By the mid-1990s, Pakistan had also started sending its own *jihadi* terrorists and veterans of the Afghan war to revive the flagging insurgency in the state. In the initial years, the terrorists infiltrated through the LoC, and not through the international border as the Kashmir valley is proximate to the LoC. The comparatively flat terrain and a predominantly Hindu population along the international boundary in Jammu also did not allow adequate cover and shelter for the terrorists.[62] However, with the tightening of security along the LoC, terrorists started infiltrating through the international border in Jammu. Significantly, Sikh and Kashmiri militants have also exploited the open India-Nepal border to infiltrate into India through Nepal during the eighties and the nineties.[63]

Although militancy in J&K has abated and the security situation has improved substantially, incidents of terrorist attempting to infiltrate into the erstwhile state from across the border has not stopped altogether. If anything, infiltration has increased following the killing of Burhan Wani in July 2016. For example, the net estimated infiltration reported in 2015 was 33, which increased to 136 in 2017, and 128 by October 2018.[64] It is important to mention that the level of terrorist violence in J&K is closely linked to infiltration across the border and action against terrorists.

In addition, several 'home-grown' terror operatives such as the Indian Mujahedeen (IM) have also been exploiting the porous borders to slip out of the country and hide in the neighbouring countries after committing acts of terror in India. The arrests of high profile terrorists in Nepal, like Adul Karim Tunda, Mohammed Ahmed Sidibappa alias Yasin Bhatkal, and Asadullah Akhtar (the latter two belonging to the IM) bear testimony to the fact.[65]

Similarly, terrorist groups active in neighbouring countries also sneak into India for shelter as well as to perpetrate acts of terror. According to a media report, the Bangladesh government had informed the Indian government that an estimated 2010 extremists belonging to the Harkat-ul-Jihadi al-Islami (HuJI) and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) had entered India between 2015 and 2017. The report stated that 'while nearly 720 men made a

safe passage through the Bengal border, the remaining 1,290 are suspected to have entered through Assam and Tripura.'[66]

Corroborating the infiltration reports, a Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) notification states that terror groups such as JMB plan to make permanent bases within a 10 km belt along the India-Bangladesh border.[67] Furthermore, investigations in various terror related incidents have revealed that the large numbers of mosques and madrassas catering to the vast migrant Muslim population in the border belts provide ideal hideaways for terror operatives.

These mosques and madrassas are also exploited by terror organizations to indoctrinate and recruit youths in terrorist outfits.[68] In fact, the JMB and its formations (like JMB-India or JMB-Hindustan) have been promoting as well as committing acts of terror, and have been radicalising and recruiting youths for terrorist activities in India.[69] The NIA has established the involvement of a JMB cadre in the Burdwan bomb blast on October 2, 2014, and the Bodh Gaya blasts on January 19, 2018.

Criminal groups operating in border states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and West Bengal also use Nepal and Bangladesh as a sanctuary from where they mastermind crimes like car-theft, kidnappings, extortions, etc. Petty criminals also cross over to the other side to keep away from the Indian police.

Gun-running

While militancy/terrorism requires funds, support, recruits, and infrastructure to thrive, weapons and munitions constitute a major requirement for its sustenance. The ability of any militant/terrorist group to procure and maintain a flow of weapons is essential for their military strength to threaten the State and challenge public order. The military strength of a group also influences its ability to gain attention, public support and new recruits.

In this aspect, the Northeast insurgent groups have been able to acquire weapons quite easily from various sources. In the initial years, they received weapons from China and Pakistan as well as from other Myanmar-based insurgent groups. In later years, the Indian insurgent groups were able to access the covert arms markets

of Southeast Asia with the help of the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) and Karen National Union (KNU).[70]

In the late 1990s, the Yunnan mafia, which has access to Chinese state-run ordnance factories, emerged as another source of weapons for insurgent groups.[71] It is believed that, in an attempt to turn the state-run ordnance factories into profit centres, the Chinese state-run company Norinco started selling huge quantities of weapons even to mafia groups based in Yunnan, from whom the Indian insurgent groups source their armaments.[72] Lately, the Myanmar-based rebel group, the United Wa State Army (UWSA) has become the 'principle supplier' of Chinese arms to the Northeast insurgents.[73]

The bulk of the weapons purchased from the black markets in Thailand and Cambodia are shipped through the Andaman Sea to the Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh, and thereafter to different parts of the Northeast through the thickly forested tracks of Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram borders.[74] The first evidence of arms and ammunition from Southeast Asian black markets being smuggled through the India-Bangladesh border surfaced in 1995 when the Indian army initiated 'Operation Golden Bird' to intercept a column of Northeast rebels; this was followed by the accidental seizure of two shiploads of sophisticated arms and ammunition at Chittagong port in April 2004, allegedly meant for northeast insurgents. These incidents proved that the border has been repeatedly transgressed for arms smuggling.[75]

Some of the arms and ammunition for the insurgent groups are also smuggled overland through the India-Myanmar border with the help of Chin and Arakanese insurgents. These weapons are often brought in as headloads by Indian insurgents and local villagers, both of whom are seldom checked by the border guarding forces.

Routes for the smuggling of weapons along the India-Myanmar border are similar to those used for drug trafficking. Weapons produced in China are routed across the Myanmar border at Ruili, and then trucked via Lashio, Mandalay, and Monywa to enter the Indian border[76] through Phek, Chandel, Churachandpur, and Champai.[77] In recent years, Mizoram has emerged as the most preferred route through which weapons are smuggled into the

Northeast. One of the reasons for this is that the state has remained peaceful for decades with no militant movements. As a result, vigil along the border has remain relaxed as compared to the other states along the international border.[78]

Furthermore, small arms manufactured in the illegal factories of West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are smuggled from India into Bangladesh and Nepal by gun-runners. There is a high demand for Indian-made pistols, pipe guns, revolvers, and rifles, as the prices of these items are comparatively cheaper than other foreign-made arms in these countries. The India-Nepal border has in recent years become an easy route for the smuggling of Chinese sourced weapons for the Northeast insurgent groups.

Arms ranging from sophisticated AK-47s and 56s as well as country-made weapons are smuggled across the border through the districts of Pilibhit, Lakhimpur Kheri, and Bahraich. In addition to insurgent groups, the emergence of criminal gangs, especially in the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, have created a demand for these smuggled weapons.

Trafficking of Narcotics and Drugs

Proximity to the narcotics and drugs producing regions of the Golden Triangle (Myanmar-Thailand-Laos) and Golden Crescent (Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran), coupled with a porous and poorly guarded international border, have made India a transit hub as well as a destination for heroin, hashish and psychotropic drugs produced in these regions. In addition, various psychotropic and pharmaceutical preparations and precursor chemicals produced domestically as well as in various parts of the world are also trafficked through the Indian territory.[79]

Heroin was first trafficked into India in the mid-seventies from the Golden Triangle through the poorly guarded India-Myanmar border. The growing demand for psychotropic substances among the local population in the northeastern states, political instability and insecurity brought about by numerous insurgencies, strong trans-border ethnic linkages, and criminal networks provided the enabling environment for traffickers to smuggle in heroin from Myanmar.

Heroin produced in Myanmar is trafficked into India through the India-Myanmar border into the states of Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland from Bhamo, Lashio, and Mandalay.[80]

However, the quantity of heroin trafficked through the India-Myanmar border into the Northeast has always been very small, indicating that it is meant for local consumption only. The Golden Crescent, on the other hand, has remained the primary source of large scale trafficked heroin in the country since the early 1980s, when traffickers started re-routing heroin through India following the Iran-Iraq war. The rise in militancy in Punjab and J&K also contributed to the increase in heroin trafficking through the Pakistan border.

Although the end of the war and re-opening of the Balkan trafficking route in the late 1980s resulted in a dip in heroin trafficking in the country, this trend did not sustain for long. After a gap of almost a decade and a half, it again picked up in 2012.[81] The increased production of opium in Afghanistan, greater domestic demand in India, and the connivance of state government officials and border guarding personnel contributed towards this increase in heroin trafficking, especially through the Punjab border. Heroin and hashish are also trafficked into India through the border states of Gujarat, Rajasthan and J&K.

Apart from narcotics, India has been experiencing a significant rise in the use of psychotropic substances and medicinal preparations among addicts since the late 1990s. Stringent narcotics and drugs laws, the rising price of heroin, and the easy availability of synthetic drugs have propelled this shift in consumption patterns, and hence their trafficking. Amphetamine Type Stimulant (ATS) and methamphetamine produced in large quantities in Southeast Asia, especially in the Golden Triangle, are trafficked into India through the porous India-Myanmar border.

India also manufactures a large quantity of synthetic drugs and precursor chemicals which are smuggled out of the country. Pharmaceutical preparations containing dextropropoxyphene and codeine are trafficked to neighbouring countries, especially to Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Similarly, ephedrine and

pseudo-ephedrine-used for manufacturing ATS and acetic anhydride used for the manufacturing of heroin – are smuggled to the Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle from India through the India-Pakistan and India-Myanmar borders.

The two-way illegal flow of these drugs and chemicals not only violates India's borders, it also poses a significant threat to national security. For one, the breach of the international borders of the country by drug traffickers implies that the same routes could be used for smuggling weapons as well as terrorists into the country. In fact, it has been established that the arms and explosives used in the 1993 serial bomb blasts in Mumbai were transported by the Dawood Ibrahim gang through traditional trafficking routes.[82] Investigations into the Pathankot attack that took place on December 31, 2015 also hinted that the terrorists had entered into India from Pakistan through the routes tried and tested by drug traffickers.[83]

The nexus between drug traffickers, criminal networks, and terrorists is another potent threat. The exploitation of the trafficking routes by terrorists with the help of well entrenched criminal networks to infiltrate with arms and explosives adds a critical dimension to the security of India's borders.[84] It has been proven that the 'D Company' facilitated the activities of Islamic terror groups in India by supporting their cross-border movement, and providing them with funds and shelter in the country. The composite seizure of drugs and arms by security forces at the borders also points to a close nexus between drug traffickers and anti-national elements.

Further, the money generated by the illegal sale of narcotics and drugs is used for financing terrorist activities. In India, Kashmiri, Sikh, and Northeast militants have used drug money to finance their 'struggle' against the Indian state. It is estimated that 15 per cent of the finances of the J&K militants were generated through the sale of drugs.[85] In the Northeast, while smaller insurgent organisations are directly involved in drug trafficking to generate quick funds, bigger insurgent organisations collect protection money from drug peddlers in lieu of the safe passage of drug consignments through their territory.[86]

Last but not least, the large scale availability of narcotics and drugs encourages their demand by the domestic population. The

intake of these substances produces dysfunctional behaviour among the consumers, thereby creating a law and order problem in society. It also causes a huge economic drain on the country through the loss of production and the diversion of resources for the care and rehabilitation of the drug addicts. Drug trafficking also has direct bearing on the political process as drug cartels are known to subvert, penetrate, and further corrupt state institutions to control illegal drug trade.[87]

Trafficking of Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN)

India's borders have been vulnerable to the smuggling of a variety of items across its borders. While most of these activities are a by-product of the dynamics of supply and demand, others are conducted by smugglers and their handlers with the sole objective of harming India's stability and integrity. One such activity is the smuggling of high quality counterfeit Indian currency notes that India has been experiencing since the1990s.

The fact that the counterfeiting of high denomination Indian currency requires sophisticated machines and capital investment indicates that it is not a petty criminal activity, but a well-orchestrated state sponsored enterprise, intended to adversely impact India's economic security.[88] Many experts have termed smuggling of FICN as 'economic terrorism'. While India had always known that the ISI was behind this act of economic terrorism against India,[89] it was only in 2013 that the NIA conclusively established Pakistan's role in printing high quality FICN and pushing them into India. Forensic analysis by the NIA has revealed that the paper used for printing counterfeit rupee notes matched perfectly with the legal tender of Pakistan.[90]

Consignments of FICN originating from Pakistan have a distribution network from Thailand in the East to the United Arab Emirate (UAE) in the West, with Dubai, Dhaka, Kathmandu, Colombo, and Bangkok emerging as major transit points.[91] Initially, the India-Pakistan border was exploited to push in FICN given that the circulation and seizure of fake currency notes were first reported from the border districts of Punjab, Gujarat, and Rajasthan.[92] Later

on, Pakistan started channelling in FICN through almost all the land borders of India.

The India-Bangladesh border has become particularly vulnerable to the trafficking of FICN, with Kalaichak in the Malda district together with several adjoining areas in Malda and Murshidabad districts becoming nerve centres for FICN trafficking.[93] Between 2010 and 2015, FICN valued between 24 and 44 crore have been seized inside the country.[94] Since then, however, FICN trafficking has seen a declining trend, and since the withdrawal of legal tender status of bank notes of denomination of Rs. 1000 and Rs. 500 in November 2016, there has been no reported cases of seizure of high quality FICN.[95]

Illegal Migration

One of the major consequences of a porous border is the easy and illegal crossing of the border. The trend of illegal migration from Bangladesh into India has continued since Independence. Political upheavals, religious persecution, demographic pressures, and environmental crises are some of the 'push' factors that have contributed to the large-scale influx of Bangladeshis into India.[96]

The 'pull' factors that attract migrants from Bangladesh to India are the availability of land, access to facilities like employment opportunities, medical care, education, and similar cultural landscapes. While it is an established fact that illegal migration from Bangladesh has been taking place unabated over the decades, there have been no authentic official statistics to ascertain the actual number of illegal migrants in India. One of the frequent refrains of the Government of India on the lack of data on illegal migration is that since illegal migrants enter the country clandestinely and surreptitiously, it is impossible to have data on the Bangladeshis illegally staying in various parts of the country.

However, the Government of India has periodically provided statistics on the estimated number of illegal migrants in India. For example, in March 1992, the MHA revealed that till 1991, more than 7 lakh Bangladeshis were identified as staying illegally in different border states of the country.[97] On May 6, 1997 Inderjit

Gupta, the then Home Minister of India, stated in Parliament that there were 10 million illegal migrants residing in India.

The Task Force on Border Management in 2001 put the figure at 15 million, with 300,000 Bangladeshis entering India illegally every month.[98] In 2004, Sriprakash Jaiswal, Minister of State (Home), stated in the Rajya Sabha that as on December 2001, an estimated 12 million illegal Bangladeshi migrants were staying in the country, including 5 million in Assam and 5.7 million in West Bengal.[99] In 2016, Kiren Rijiju, Minister of State (Home), stated in the Rajya Sabha that there are an estimated 20 million Bangladeshis staying illegally in India.[100]

Illegal migration has, and will continue to have, a severe negative impact on the internal security of the country. The impact of illegal migration on the country's security can be assessed in two ways. First, the political instability caused by the mobilisation of popular perception against them by political elites to grab political power, and the resultant conflict over scarce resources, economic opportunities, and cultural dominance. In Assam and Tripura, the resistance to Bengali migrants has had both socio-economic and cultural dimensions, which have brought the issues of ethnicity and migration to the fore.

On the one hand, the assertion of ethnicity by locals soon morphed into raging insurgencies, which plunged the entire border region into a spiral of violence and instability. On the other hand, persistent attacks against illegal migrants especially Muslims, in Assam has unfortunately given way to radicalisation within certain sections of the Muslim community. These radicalised persons formed militant organisations such as the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA), the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA), etc., which profess jihad against India to avenge the attacks.[101]

The second aspect impacting internal security is the undermining of the rule of law and integrity of the country by illegal migrants engaged in illegal and anti-national activities. The presence of a large number of illegal migrants in the border areas has created a 5-10 km deep zone peopled by poor Bangladeshis. This has not only

blurred the international border, but also made the border areas a breeding ground for criminals and anti-national elements.

Mafias operating in these grey zones solicit the illegal migrants to act as their couriers, who happily collude with them in return for easy money or a hassle-free stay in India. They smuggle cattle, consumer items, drugs and narcotics, arms as well as human beings across the border through the well-established smuggling networks.[102] Lax law enforcement, corrupt and indifferent administration, pervasive underdevelopment, and the lack of economic opportunities have contributed substantially in aggravating the situation.

Reasons for the Vulnerability of India's borders

The vulnerability of India's international borders to the various threats and challenges discussed stems from their nature and character. Some of them are elaborated in the following paragraphs.

Artificial and Superimposed Borders

India's borders are superimposed and artificial. Except the Himalayas – which have functioned as natural barriers to human interactions for centuries and form the border with China – other borders, which India shares with its neighbours are man-made as they were imposed by the British on the socio-economic landscape of the Indian subcontinent. These superimposed boundaries cut across villages, houses, and fields, thus erecting artificial barriers.

Border residents have seen their kith and kin separated and forced to live as citizens of two different countries. They, therefore, refuse to accept such arbitrary lines and continue to travel across the borders without valid documents to maintain links with their relations. The fact that villages and houses are build right on the international border reinforces the fact that some of India's borders have not yet crystallised as lines separating two sovereign countries.[103]

While these cross-border ties have been allowed to continue so that people residing along these borders are able to maintain their cultural, social, and religious way of life, these ties have also proved detrimental to the security of the country. For one, such strong trans-border ethnic linkages have impaired the nation-

building process in the Northeast. Further, many insurgent groups have been able to find shelter across the international border among their own tribesmen and community who are sympathetic towards their cause. While poorly guarded borders have facilitated easy ingress and egress across the border, the presence of strong trans-border ethnic linkages among local people has been instrumental in providing shelter and succour to insurgents in neighbouring countries.

In fact, many insurgent bases are located closer to the international border because being nearer to settlements on this side of the border allows the villagers to supply these camps with food and other essential items without difficulty, and without attracting the attention of the Indian security forces. Similarly, migrants from Bangladesh find it easier to crossover into India illegally and find shelter and jobs as they find a welcoming population amongst their relatives residing on this side of the border.

Since the detection of such illegal migrants is difficult as people on both sides of the international border have similar ethnic composition, many anti-national elements and criminals exploit this lacuna and are able to sneak into the country in the guise of illegal migrants. The economic interdependence of the people on the two sides of the political boundaries has also given rise to informal channels of trade.[104]

Challenging Terrain

India's international boundaries traverse diverse terrains. In the west, the border passes through marshy lands, salt pans, and the creeks. In Gujarat, the creeks with their numerous interconnected water bodies, create a maze of channels that weave in and out of the international borders. This makes the border extremely porous through which infiltrators and smugglers can easily move. In Rajasthan, the border traverses through deserts, with shifting sand dunes and extreme climatic conditions where the temperature can vary from 50 degrees Celsius in the day to 10 degrees Celsius at night. The shifting sand dunes, destroy border infrastructure such as fences and observation posts.

In the north, the border is characterised by mountainous terrain, with elevations as high as 23,000 ft interspersed with deep valleys. Guarding the borders in such difficult terrain and harsh climatic conditions is extremely difficult. In the east, the India-Myanmar and India-Bhutan borders are heavily forested. The rugged and heavily forested terrain makes policing of these borders difficult as they do not lend themselves easily to the construction of roads and border out posts. The India-Bangladesh border, on the other hand, has a mix of hills, forests, and flat plains with no physical barriers. This diverse mix of topographical features makes the border extremely porous through which illegal migrants, smugglers, criminals, insurgents, and terrorists freely circulate.

In addition, rivers such as the Brahmaputra, the Muhuri, the Feni, etc. – which also constitute the riverine border – branch into multiple channels as well as constantly shift courses. Similarly, along the India-Nepal riverine border, the rivers constantly shift their course, inundating existing land and throwing up newer land, which is then encroached upon by the local people. Such encroachments result in tensions and frictions not only among locals but also between the two governments as the issue of jurisdiction on the newly emerged land is disputed.

Underdeveloped Border Areas

The border areas of the country are economically depressed as they lack basic infrastructure such as road and rail connectivity, health and education, as well as industrial and commercial complexes. This inadequate development of infrastructure and economic opportunities in the border areas has not only led to the isolation of these areas from the rest of the country but has also alienated the inhabitants. In many instances, it is observed that because of lack of jobs and other means of livelihood, many living in the underdeveloped border region get involved in smuggling and other criminal activities.

In addition, underdevelopment along the borders is also forcing people – especially in the higher reaches along the India-China border – to gradually migrate to the foothills. Such a trend does not

augur well for the country when it is fighting a territorial dispute with China in Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh because the physical presence of population in the border areas is necessary to reinforce India's territorial claim over these areas.

Border Disputes

Some of India's borders with its neighbours are disputed, and therefore are not demarcated. The unsettled nature of the borders not only causes tensions between India and its neighbours but also makes patrolling along them very difficult. For example, the present boundary between India and China came into existence after the 1962 border war. It is known as the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and is a military held line.

However, there exist differences in perceptions among the border guarding forces of both the countries about the actual alignment of the boundary on the ground. These differences in perception have led to incursions by the armies in each other's territories. While most of these border violations are considered harmless, a few of them – such as the Sumdurong Chu (1986), Depsang (2013) and Chumar (2014) incidents – had resulted in scuffles and standoff between the armies of India and China for many months.[105]

More recently, however, intrusions in Ladakh by the Chinese troops and subsequent response by the Indian army resulted in a violent clash. The Chinese soldiers had intruded in areas of areas of Galwan Valley, Kugrang Nala (north of Hot Springs), Gogra and north bank of Pangong Tso in May 2020.[106] These intrusions were discovered only after few weeks when the Indian patrolling team visited these areas. It was during one such routine patrolling in Galwan valley on June 15, 2020 that the Indian and Chinese soldiers came face to face resulting in a sanguinary confrontation in which 20 Indian soldiers and an unspecified number of Chinese soldiers were killed.[107]

The territorial dispute over J&K has prevented the delimitation of some section of the India-Pakistan border. In fact, the border in the erstwhile state is divided into three segments: (i) the International Border (IB), also known as the Redcliff line, which runs from Gujarat to north banks of Chenab in Akhnoor in Jammu; (ii) the

Line of Control (LoC), which is 740 km long and runs from Sangam (Jammu) to Pt NJ 9842.[108] It is a ceasefire line which came into existence after the 1948 and 1971 wars between India and Pakistan. It was delineated in the Simla Agreement (July 1972) whereby both sides agreed not to alter it unilaterally; and (iii) the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) which starts at Pt NJ 9842 and goes up to Indira col in the north. Pakistan has been indulging in cross border shelling and sniping along the IB and LoC, first to demonstrate to the world that J&K is a disputed region; and second, to provide fire cover to terrorists who try to sneak into India.

India's border with Myanmar is demarcated except at two stretches – Lohit sub-sector of Arunachal Pradesh (136 km), and, Kabaw valley in Manipur (35 km).[109] The position of nine border pillars in Manipur is also disputed by Myanmar. Similarly, India's border with Nepal is disputed along two stretches – Kalapani and Susta. Regarding these two stretches, both the countries agreed that a solution will be arrived at politically through negotiations. Nepal, however, reneged on this agreement and claimed Kalapani along with Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh. It even passed a resolution in the Nepali parliament to include these three places in its official political and administrative maps.[110] The rest of the India-Nepal border is delineated and partially demarcated. It is only with Bhutan that India has a completely demarcated border, except along the tri-junctions with China.

Different Types of Borders

Added to the problem of disputed borders is the issue of different types of borders. There are different types of boundaries that India has with its neighbours. These boundaries have come into being because of various political, economic and social reasons. For example, the India-China boundary can be described as a hard boundary because interaction of any kind, be it social, cultural, or economic, were officially stopped after the 1962 border war, and not much meaningful cross-border interaction takes place even today. Presently, only limited economic interactions by means of border trade and pilgrimage to Mansarovar and Kailash are allowed through the India-China border.

The India-Nepal and India-Bhutan borders, on the other hand, are open – that is, people can move across the borders without any visa restrictions. However, there is a slight difference between the two open borders. While along the India-Nepal border one does not require any travel documents, in the case of Bhutan, there is more regulation in the sense that permits from the Bhutanese authorities are required to be procured before proceeding further into the interior in Bhutan.

The India-Myanmar boundary is partially open, but only for the tribes residing along the border. Considering that the tribes have strong traditional socio-economic and cultural ties with their fellow members across the border, these tribes are allowed to travel to and fro across the boundary without any special permits. Earlier, the permissible limit was 40 km; but, in 2010, the limit was reduced to 16 km on either side of the border. They are also allowed to carry goods equivalent to a head load. Although designated routes have been marked for crossing the border, it has been observed that, more often than not, tribes cross the boundary at their points of convenience.

The India-Bangladesh border is a regulated border – that is, visa and passport are required to cross the border; and, people, goods, and vehicles can travel through the border at designated immigration check points and land custom stations. At the same time, it is important to note that this boundary is also extremely porous, making it possible for people to across it at will.

Securing such diverse borders against threats and managing safe and efficient socioeconomic interactions through it is indeed a challenge. The following chapters provide detailed analysis on how India has been managing its borders since Independence.

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2.   Guarding the Borders

Borders are referred to as the first line of defence. A secure border is, therefore, indispensable for the security of a country. Secure and developed borders are representative of national security, development, and power. Controlling and allowing goods, persons, services, and ideas to enter or exit a country makes for border security, which ensures the sovereignty of a country, its territory, and people as well as economic prosperity. Border security, as against border defence, primarily focuses on guarding or protecting the country's international borders against any unauthorised entry or exit of people and goods.

In other words, border security provides security against non-conventional threats such as infiltration by terrorists, illegal migration, and cross-border crimes (such as smuggling of drugs, narcotics, weapons, persons, etc.), as well as protecting the border population. Securing international borders, therefore, depends on factors such as the nature and intensity of non-military threats from across the borders, the terrain and population profile of the border areas as well as the level of infrastructural development.

Thus, depending on the levels of threats, border guarding responsibilities range from the policing of the borders (between the ports of entry and exit) involving vigilance through effective surveillance and intelligence to protecting the borders through tactical planning and adopting defensive measures.[1] Border security is an essential element of national security during peace time.

World over, the task of guarding the borders is undertaken by border guarding forces involving either the military or the armed police force. In the case of India, the guarding of its international

borders is primarily entrusted to four central armed police forces (CAPFs). These are the Assam Rifles (AR) guarding the India-Myanmar border, the Border Security Force (BSF) guarding the India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh borders, the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) policing the India-Nepal and India-Bhutan borders, and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force (ITBP) guarding the India-China border. These border guarding forces are the first responders against border violators, and act as a law enforcement agency by enforcing various customs, immigration, anti-narcotics, and other criminal laws of the country. They also have the power to arrest, search and seize, besides being the first respondents against external aggression.[2]

The intrusions by Chinese and Pakistani armies across the international border, which culminated in the 1962 and 1965 wars, respectively, triggered the creation of India's exclusive border guarding forces post-Independence. The undefined and disputed nature of India's international borders had made the country susceptible to the machinations of China and Pakistan to surreptitiously intrude inside Indian territory and grab land in order to redraw the borders by force.

As stated earlier, the responsibility of guarding India's borders was with the armed police force of the respective states sharing the international borders. The police force primarily dealt with intrusions, smuggling, petty thefts, and murders along the borders. They were helped by the Indian army and the CRPF during the time of crisis as the state armed police forces were

> financially not well endowed, improperly trained and not sufficiently disciplined for the task assigned to them, lacked sufficient reserves, had a large proportion of older men whose mental alertness and physical fitness left a lot to be desired...[3]

The incapability of the state police forces to effectively guard India's external borders was quite evident during the run up to the border war with China in 1962, and Pakistan in 1965, when large-scale aggressive intrusions took place along the borders. Following

these two wars, policymakers and the security establishment in New Delhi recognised the necessity of raising dedicated border guarding forces to protect its international borders.

In all, four border guarding forces were established by creating new borders guarding forces as well as by expanding the role and duties of the existing ones.

The Assam Rifles

At the time of Independence, the only border guarding force that India had was the Assam Rifles, which it inherited from the British Raj. The Assam Rifles, in its earlier avatar known as 'Cachar Levy', was raised in 1835 to guard the borders from Cachar to the Brahmaputra valley in Assam[4] as well as to carry out small scale punitive expeditions into the hills of Assam. The Assam Rifles were deployed in strong detachments in Nowgong and Silchar in small posts all along the 400 km frontier, from the foothills of Naga Hills to the plains of the Surma Valley.

In its present form, the force was organised in 1920 under the Assam Rifles Act of 1920. The 5 battalions raised were paramilitary in character, but were placed under the authority of a civil officer.[5] The force was essentially tasked to defend the Assam plains from the tribes inhabiting the adjoining hills. Accordingly, one battalion each was deployed in the Lushai, the Naga, and the Manipur Hills, and rest of the two battalions were stationed in the Assam plains facing the hills of Bhutan and NEFA.[6] The Assam Rifles Act – a Central Act – which came into effect in 1941 transformed the character of the Assam Rifles from a quasi-military police force to an armed force.[7]

Post-Independence, the size, character, and functions of the Assam Rifles witnessed many changes. In 1949, the rank of Inspector General of the Assam Rifles was upgraded to a Brigadier, and the strength of the force was also gradually increased. Their deployment patterns were also changed keeping in view the evolving security situation, especially along the India-China border. In 1950, the occupation of Tibet exposed the NEFA (then North East Frontier Tract) to Chinese aggression and, therefore, two battalions of the Assam Rifles were pushed uphill from the Assam plains.

The force functioned as a Police force as well as frontier guards manning a dozen or so posts set up along major access routes along the McMahon Line. A further strengthening of the force was carried out following the recommendations of the Himmatsinhji Committee and, by 1955, three more battalions were raised.[8] In 1955, the Assam Rifles was entrusted with the task of maintaining law and order in the Naga Hills as well as performing counter insurgency operations against the Naga rebels, along with the Indian Army. Given the increasing commitments of the Assam Rifles, the Government of India decided to further augment the force by raising two battalions per year from 1956 to 1959.[9]

Furthermore, to meet the growing communication as well as construction needs, the Assam Rifles Signals and two Assam Rifles Construction and Maintenance Companies (ARC & MC) were raised for the purposes of communication as well as the construction and maintenance of operational tracks connecting the outposts.[10] Again, the rank of the Inspector General of the Assam Rifles was upgraded to a Major General.

Following the Longju incident in 1959, a plan was formulated to deploy all units of the Assam Rifles (except those involved in the Naga counterinsurgency) much closer to the frontiers in the NEFA under 'Operation Onkar'.[11] By then, the strength of the Assam Rifles had increased to 17 battalions. By early 1962, they were moved forward, right up to the India-China border not only to establish ownership on the territory claimed by India but also to deter the Chinese from intruding and occupying areas claimed by them.

While the small units of the Assam Rifles proved to be gravely insufficient in withstanding Chinese aggression in 1962, they did delay the onslaught for the Indian Army to take over whatever defences they could manage.[12] Following the border war with China, on August 1, 1965, the administration of the NEFA was transferred from the Ministry of External Affairs to the MHA; so also was the Assam Rifles. However, as the force got increasingly involved in counter insurgency operations against the Naga, Meitei, and the Mizo insurgents, it remained under the operational control of the Army, and hence the Ministry of Defence (MoD).

The Assam Rifles is, thus, the only force functioning under two ministries: the MHA and the MoD. Over the years, the Assam Rifles has expanded from 21 battalions in 1968 to 31 in 1988 and, currently, it has a strength of 46 battalions.[13] The Force comprises a Directorate General Headquarters, three Inspectorate General Headquarters, 12 Sector Headquarters, one Training Centre, and the administrative element with a total strength of 65,143 personnel.[14] The Assam Rifles is headquartered in Shillong, and is completely deployed in the Northeast to carry out counter insurgency operations as well as guard the India-Myanmar border.

The Indo-Tibetan Border Police

The Chinese intrusions and the subsequent war also led to the creation of two border guarding forces: the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the Sashastra Seema Bal [earlier Special Service Bureau (SSB)]. The genesis of both the ITBP and the SSB can be traced to a realisation among the political and intelligence establishment in October 1962 that defensive positions in jungles and mountains were not effective in defending the country's borders against the Chinese, given that they could not be held for long.

What was required, therefore, was a well-trained and well-equipped mobile guerrilla force, which could attack Chinese positions north of the McMahon line if the Chinese were found to be preparing for an attack.[15] But, at that point in time, 'India did not have an organisation, which could operate behind the Chinese lines if the Chinese advanced into the Indian territory.'[16] Furthermore, security assessments during and after the war also brought to the fore the fact that intelligence check posts along the border were hitherto static in nature, which meant that once the army withdrew from its vicinity, that particular post had to be abandoned due to the absence of security, thereby ceasing all intelligence gathering activities.

Hence, there was a need felt for an armed organisation back up so that the intelligence posts could continue to function even when the army suffered reverses and the territory was occupied by the enemy.[17] There was also the realisation that the country's northern border with China, especially in Ladakh, Punjab (now Himachal

Pradesh), and Uttar Pradesh (now Uttarakhand) were poorly guarded, and no dedicated border guarding force existed to guard the northern borders during peace time.

Keeping these considerations in view, the Government of India sanctioned the raising of the ITBP in October 1962. The ITBP was originally conceived as a small force for the protection of check posts and the regulation of the movement of goods and people across the mountain passes along the India-Tibetan border following the signing of the Sino-India Trade Agreement of 1954.[18] However, during the war with China in 1962, it was transformed into a 'guerrilla-cum-intelligence-cum-fighting force, self-reliant with its own supplies, communication, intelligence, equipment, transport, etc.'[19]

The responsibility for the raising and training of the new force was entrusted to the Intelligence Bureau (IB), and the Joint Director (IB) was appointed as the first Inspector General of the ITBP. Initially, only four battalions, largely drawn from the CRPF, were sanctioned for the ITBP under the CRP Act of 1949 and the CRP Rules of 1955.[20] The training of the four battalions started on 24 October 1962 in Karera in Madhya Pradesh. This day is observed as the raising day of the force annually.[21]

The ITBP was tasked with guarding the India-China border from the Karakoram Pass in J&K to the Lipulekh Pass in Uttar Pradesh (now Uttarakhand) as well as the tri-junction of India, Nepal, and China. Its primary duties were to protect the IB posts and carry out guerrilla operations in conjunction with the SSB. The force was also assigned the responsibility of indoctrinating and motivating border inhabitants in developing a sense of patriotism and belonging to the nation as well as training and preparing them for resisting aggression, subversion, and insurgency.[22] For these purposes, two battalions were deployed at Rekang Peo and Sarahan in Himachal Pradesh, and one each was stationed at Gwaldam in Uttar Pradesh and NEFA.[23]

While raising the ITBP battalions, emphasis was placed on drawing new recruits from the local people as they are physiologically better suited to operate in the high mountainous border areas. Accordingly, two battalions of Kumaonis and Garhwalis for Uttar

Pradesh, three battalions of Dogras, Himachalis, Sikhs, and Jats for Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, one battalion comprising the tribal people for NEFA, and one battalion of Pakistani refugees for north Bengal, were raised.[24]

By July 1965, the ITBP was an eight battalion strong force.[25] However, one battalion of Tibetans – which was raised under the ITBP in 1965 – was later discharged, and transferred to the Special Frontier Force (SFF). Similarly, two battalions raised for NEFA and West Bengal were transferred to the SSB on September 1, 1965.

In 1965, the ITBP was transferred from the IB, and placed under the administrative and operational control of the Director General (Security) in the Cabinet Secretariat and, on September 1, 1971, it was again transferred to the MHA. Over the years, with the creation of the SSB and the increased deployment of the Indian Army in the border areas, the functions of the ITBP became blurred, often overlapping with the SSB and the Indian Army.

Therefore, the MoD felt that the role and duties of the ITBP should be spelt out precisely and made at par with the BSF. To review the functioning of the ITBP in its entirety and suggest suitable course corrections, the Government of India set up a committee under the Chairmanship of K.F. Rustamji in 1975. Based on the recommendations of the Committee, the role of the ITBP was redefined by the Committee of Secretaries on June 26, 1976 as:[26]

- To keep vigil on ingress routes and prevent border violations in coordination with the security forces
- To provide a sense of security to the population living on the border
- To control trans-border traffic, crime (including smuggling) and unauthorised civilian ingress and egress, in coordination with the IB
- To provide protection and all facilities to the IB to enable it to carry out its assigned duties both during peace and war
- To function under the operational control of the Army as may be required in sensitive areas
- To function in a role similar to that of the BSF in a war situation.

In September 1978, the ITBP was further reorganised with the restructuring of the training centres and the battalions. The Specialist and Advanced Training Centres were re-designated as the High Altitude Defence and Survival Academy, and shifted from Madhya Pradesh to Mussoorie. The force also received four specialist battalions: the Service and Supply Group battalion; the Transport battalion; the Tele-communication battalion and Support battalion.

By 1992-93, the ITBP had 24 service battalions, 4 specialist battalions, and 3 training centres.[27] In 1992, the Indian parliament enacted the ITBP Act, and the rules were framed in 1994. In 2003, following the Group of Ministers' (GoM) recommendations, the ITBP has been assigned the additional responsibility of guarding the borders with China in Arunachal Pradesh. The ITBP relieved the units of the Assam Rifles in this sector and took charge of the India-China border in Arunachal Pradesh in 2004. At present, the ITBP, guards the entire India-China border – from the Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Jachep La in Arunachal Pradesh, and operates through 5 Frontier Headquarters, 15 Sector Headquarters, 56 Service Battalions, 4 Specialised Battalions, 2 Disaster Management Battalions, and 14 Training Centres with a total sanctioned strength of 89,437 personnel.[28]

The Sashastra Seema Bal

A supportive and resourceful border population is necessary for effectively guarding the border during peace time, and for army operations and intelligence gathering during war. During the 1962 border war, while the local people remained loyal to India and did not support the Chinese PLA, there was a perception among the Indian intelligence and security establishment that the border inhabitants did not go out of their way to help the Indian army. Rumours were rife that the local people had helped the PLA by providing them with intelligence and logistical support.

It is a matter of fact that the Chinese were indeed more successful in developing an intelligence network in the Monpa areas through their agents who entered India in the guise of Tibetan refugees. They also closely questioning the Monpa traders who went across the

border about troop deployment, their stations, outposts, etc.[29] To prevent such future occurrences, the Government of India, as a short term measure, set up a number of fair price shops along the major routes leading to Tibet so that the basic requirements of the people could be met locally, which would prevent traders from crossing the border and interacting with Chinese agents. However, it was felt that the training and preparation of border inhabitants are necessary to garner their active support.

Prime Minister Nehru argued that it was an urgent necessity to integrate the border areas with India to safeguard the country against future Chinese attacks or its efforts at subversion. He advocated that

> the entire frontier people should be ideologically and physically built up to a high state of preparation so that they could confidently face any future Chinese onslaught; and even if the Indian army was compelled to withdraw from these areas, the local population would no longer be passive but carry on active opposition against the Chinese in every village.[30]

The idea was based on the understanding that the 'security of the borders was not the responsibility of [the] armed forces alone, and that it also require[d] a well-motivated and trained border population'.[31] To give shape to this idea, the SSB was conceived in November 1962, and established in 1963.[32] The SSB functioned under the Prime Minister's Secretariat from January 1, 1965 for eight months and, subsequently, it was transferred to the Cabinet Secretariat on September 1, 1965.

The organisation was initially functional in the region of the then NEFA, North Assam, North Bengal as well as the hills of Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu. Subsequently, its activities were extended to other border areas in Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, South Bengal, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and in some areas of the Kashmir valley.[33]

The objective of the SSB was to 'build up the morale and capability of the border population against threats of subversion, infiltration and sabotage from across the border'.[34] Its role was

to inculcate a sense of security and spirit of resistance amongst the border populace, promoting national awareness and security consciousness among the people of the border areas, generating mass support in the border areas through national integration programmes and welfare activities, organizing and preparing [the] border population to resist enemy and perform 'Stay Behind' role during invasion/occupation and countering enemy propaganda through psychological war operations and awareness campaigns.[35]

For the purposes of training the villagers to defend their own villages and, if the situation demanded, to participate in a 'stay behind role' for the nation, various village level training programmes and refresher training courses in civil defence were started. The trained volunteers undertook civic welfare programmes, such as teaching children in schools, conducting medical camps, organising vocational training courses, and becoming the eyes and ears of the SSB.

The role, responsibility and organisational structure of the SSB underwent a major transformation in January 2001 when it was designated as a border guarding force. It was mandated to guard the India-Nepal as well as the India-Bhutan borders following the recommendations of the GoM Report. The SSB took over the responsibility of guarding the India-Nepal border on 19 June 2001, and the India-Bhutan border on 12 March 2004.[36] The force was renamed as Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) on 15 December 2003, and its charter of duties was amended and redefined through the Sashastra Seema Bal Act of 2007.

The present charter of the SSB's duties include, *inter alia*, safeguarding the security of the assigned borders of India and promoting a sense of security among the people living in the border areas; preventing trans-border crimes, smuggling and any other illegal activities; preventing unauthorised entry into or exit from the territory of India; and carrying out civic action programme in the area of responsibility.[37]

The force is deployed in seven border states: Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, and Arunachal

Pradesh. The current strength of the force is 79,441 personnel, with 73 operationalised battalions. The sanctioned strength comprises 6 Frontiers, 18 Sectors, 73 Battalions including 2 National Disaster Management Relief Force (NDRF) Battalions, 4 Recruit Training Centres, 2 Wireless and Telecom Training Centres, and 1 SSB Academy.[38]

The Border Security Force

The infiltration of Pakistani irregulars and regular troops along the India-Pakistan borders, especially in the states of Gujarat and J&K during May 1964 and January 1965, compelled the Indian political leadership to review the country's strategy towards the security of its western borders. Accordingly, in January 1965, the Emergency Committee of Secretaries set up a Study Group under the chairmanship of Lt. Gen. Kumaramangalam, Vice Chief of the Indian Army, 'to examine the possibility of streamlining and reducing the multiplicity of para-military forces in the border areas.'[39]

The terms of reference for the committee was to evaluate questions of leadership, training, and the arming/equipping policy of the police battalions deployed on the borders as well as to recommend necessary co-ordination arrangements between the armed forces and the border battalions.[40] The Study Group submitted its report in April 1965. The report was examined by the Home Secretary, L.P. Singh, and the Chief of Army Staff, General J.N. Chaudhuri, who then prepared a scheme for the creation of a central force for the border.[41]

Meanwhile, Pakistan had launched a military offensive in Gujarat, and had attacked and occupied several border posts manned by the State Reserve Battalion (SRB) of Gujarat, comprising state armed police and the CRPF. The reverses suffered by the Gujarat SRB highlighted the incapability of the state police forces to secure the country's borders.

The defeats also forced the government to take a relook at its policy of deploying state police as border guarding forces. The April 9 incident also brought home the fact that, during the time of conflict

requiring the services of the Indian army, it would be difficult to integrate the heterogeneous units of the state police under the Indian army's plan of action, and coordinate with them.

Keeping these shortcomings in mind, the government set up another Study Group in late April 1965 consisting of an officer of high standing nominated by the Chief of the Army Staff, a Joint Secretary of the Home Ministry, and the Inspector General of Police on Special Duty in the Home Ministry 'to examine and recommend the most effective way of manning the entire Indo-Pak border.'[42] In fact, the then Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, wanted a separate border force under the aegis of the Union government to man the international borders of the country.

In a meeting of the state home ministers and police chiefs in the first week of May 1965, Shastri declared that his government would raise a new central border force.[43] Following this declaration, consultations among the Home Secretary, the Army Chief, and the Defence Secretary regarding the role and organisation of the central border force were held, and a note prepared by L.P. Singh was submitted to the government on May 17, 1965, which laid down the framework for the creation of the BSF. The important points of the notes were:[44]

- All the police forces to be employed on border security duties should come under the control of the Ministry of Home Affairs. They should be divided into three or four regional groups, each under the command of an officer of the rank of Inspector General of Police.
- There may be a small central organisation with responsibility for supervision, co-ordination, etc.
- The force should not have aged men, and there should be careful screening of officers. The officers taken from the police should all be volunteers and the force should draw upon officers from the Armed Forces to the extent necessary.
- Each battalion should have the same strength – about 700 – and should be armed and equipped on a standard scale.
- All battalions should be given further training by training teams to be sent out from the Armed Forces.

- There should be co-ordination with Defence at the central and appropriate lower levels; to facilitate this, there should be a senior military officer at the Defence Headquarters for liaison with the head of the border security force.
- The state administrations will have to be kept in the loop, and it would be necessary for the regional Inspector General to see that there is mutual understanding and cooperation between the border security forces and the state authorities.
- The duties of the border security police would include the collection of intelligence, the protection of life and property against depredations from the other side of the border, the prevention of smuggling and infiltration, dealing with minor intrusions, and the like. If a more serious threat develops, the Armed Forces would take charge, and the security police would then come under the operational control of the Army.

General J.N. Chaudhuri also presented his perspectives on the character and role of the new border guarding police in two articles published in *The Statesman* in April and September 1965.[45] In his first article, General Chaudhuri asked how the India-Pakistan border, which was witnessing numerous skirmishes, should be looked after, in peace, in a cold war, and when that cold war heats up.

> Should the responsibility lie with the police in the initial stages, and if so, at what stage should the Army take over? What equipment should these border forces have? How should they be organized? And, under whose control should they act? How should liaison be maintained between the armed forces proper and a border force? Should the border be a State or Central responsibility? And, how should the financial burden be shared?[46]

He argued that a police force rather than the military should guard the border during peace time because border protection duties during peacetime involved such matters as smuggling, dacoity, and minor intrusions by civilians both intentional and unintentional, which could be handled by the armed police as they do not require

a very high standard of military training and leadership.[47] He was in favour of a lightly armed police force along India's borders as the presence of an overly weaponised force could lead to the escalation of any conflict.

The army, he argued, should be tasked to protect the 'difficult sections of the borders like the ceasefire line in Jammu and Kashmir' where the police could be placed under the command and control of the army.[48] He was of the opinion that the Centre should shoulder the responsibility of the border up to a depth of 15 miles. This would pave the way for raising a border police force raised and controlled by the Centre.[49] In his second article, General Chaudhuri stated that the role of the border guarding police should be two-fold: performing policing duties during peace time, and holding the line during war till such time that it is relieved by the army.[50]

The second study group submitted its final report on October 3, 1965, after the cessation of hostilities with Pakistan. The committee recommended the incorporation of various state armed police battalions guarding the borders into a single border guarding force. The committee also recommended that the force should function under the MHA and, the entire expenditure for the raising and functioning of the force should be borne by the Union government. Further, it was recommended that all state armed police battalions were to be reorganised under a pattern for all segments of the international border.[51]

The reports of the two Study Groups were merged, and presented to an *ad hoc* group of secretaries that met in New Delhi on November 16, 1965. This committee examined the merged documents, and came to 'certain conclusions', which formed the basis for the establishment of the BSF.[52] On September 1, 1965, 25 and a half battalions of different states were made part of the BSF under the MHA.

Finally, on December 1, 1965, the BSF was formally established under Item II of List I, Schedule VII of the Constitution of India under the leadership of its founding Director General, K.F. Rustamji.[53] The role and duties of the BSF were divided into two categories: peace time and war time. During peace time, the role

of the BSF was to promote a sense of security among the people living along the borders by providing protection to life and property against depredations from across the border, prevent smuggling and infiltration, and also deal with minor intrusions and incidents of firing from across the border.[54]

During war, the BSF's role include performing duties within the overall plan of the army formations, providing guides and escorts, protecting vital installations, vulnerable areas and vulnerable points, and anti-infiltration duties.[55] As mentioned earlier, the BSF was initially raised by taking over battalions of the state armed police force, which were manning the international border with Pakistan since the security conditions of 1965-66 did not permit the release of men from other central forces.[56]

Thus, the BSF started with a strength of 25.5 battalions, which increased to 52 battalions once it took over 15 more battalions deployed in J&K in 1966.[57] The battalions were, however, heterogeneous in their composition, training, equipment, and manpower, and required reorganisation and readjustment for making the force uniform. By 1971, the BSF had 75 battalions.[58]

The BSF was deployed for guarding India's borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as Myanmar where a small unit was deployed in Manipur and Nagaland under the operational control of the Indian army. Besides, the BSF was also deployed for internal security duties, especially in Punjab and J&K during the Sikh and Kashmiri militancy in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively. These additional responsibilities necessitated not only an augmentation of the strength of the force but also its modernisation.

Accordingly, the next stage of expansion of the BSF took place in 1986 when a 5-year plan to strengthen the BSF was sanctioned. Under the plan, a total of 54 battalions were to be raised – 25 battalions for India-Pakistan border and 29 for India-Bangladesh border, besides procuring vehicles and high tech equipment, such as hand held torch lights (HHTL), binoculars, night vision devices (NVD), etc., for enhancing the mobility and surveillance of the force.[59] In 1992-93, the BSF had 149 battalions and by 2000, it was a 160 battalion strong force.

With the waning of Sikh and Kashmiri militancy, the BSF was withdrawn from internal security duties, and it could once again focus its attention on guarding the country's international borders, with an increased emphasis on Bangladesh border, which was turning into a conduit for infiltration by terrorists, traffickers, and smugglers.[60] The effective guarding of the problematic border required manpower augmentation.

Consequently, in 2009, the government sanctioned the raising of 29 additional battalions over a period of five years 'for further strengthening the deployment on the Indo-Bangladesh border and also to ensure regular training, and rest and recuperation of the personnel.'[61] At present, the BSF has 192 battalions, including 3 NDRF battalions headquartered in New Delhi. Its field formations include 2 Special Directorates General, along with 13 Frontiers and 46 Sector Headquarters, Water Wing, Air Wing, and other ancillary units. It had a sanctioned strength of 2,63,905 in March 2019.[62]

Besides the border guarding forces, some of the border states, which have witnessed widespread militancy, illegal migration and trafficking of narcotics, have raised their own special border police. For example, under the Prevention of Infiltration into India of Pakistani Nationals (PIP) scheme launched in June 1962, border police in Assam and Meghalaya, and Mobile Task Forces in West Bengal and Tripura were constituted to carry out the specific job of the detection and deportation of illegal migrants.[63]

The police was vested with the responsibility of setting up observation posts in immigrant settlement areas so as to identify and deport any new migrants, and act as a second line of protection along the international border. Furthermore, in 1987, additional posts were sanctioned for police departments of the states concerned under the Prevention of Infiltration of Foreigners (PIF) scheme so that adequate manpower could be provided to apprehend illegal border crossers. For example, 3,153 posts for Assam,[64] 165 posts for West Bengal, 144 posts for Tripura, and 194 posts for Meghalaya in the police were sanctioned.[65]

Guarding the Borders

Physically guarding the international borders between various designated ports of entry and exit along the border forms the first element of India's comprehensive border management strategy. Border guarding essentially involves the following responsibilities:

- Safeguarding the territorial limits of the country by maintaining the sanctity of the boundary line.
- Providing protection to the population inhabiting the border areas.
- Preventing illegal crossings of persons and goods across the international border.
- Gathering intelligence/information of the border areas as well as across the border.
- Protecting vital installations and places in border areas.
- Maintaining a limited aggressive posture against hostile neighbours, and handling minor skirmishes along the borders.
- Supplementing the efforts of the armed forces in the event of war.

To carry out these responsibilities, as mentioned above, India has raised various border guarding forces and deployed them along its international borders. Prior to 2001, multiple border guarding forces were deployed along the same border as deployments did not follow any prescribed principle. For example, while the BSF was deployed along the India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh borders, the AR and the ITBP were manning the India-China border.

The India-Myanmar border saw the deployment of both AR and the BSF; whereas the India-Bhutan and India-Nepal borders did not have any border guarding forces. Such a pattern of deployment did not ensure effective border guarding as the multiplicity of forces generated a conflict of command and control as well as the lack of accountability. To remedy the situation, the GoM Report of 2001 recommended that the principle of 'one border one force' be applied while deploying forces at the borders.[66]

Thus, beginning 2001, a single border guarding force was deployed along a single international border: the BSF along the

India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh borders; the SSB along the India-Nepal and India-Bhutan borders; the AR and the ITBP along the India-Myanmar and India-China borders, respectively. These border guarding forces are, in general, deployed in a linear pattern along the international borders to cover the maximum area. This pattern of deployment is necessary because of the absence of statutory provisions of depth applicable to the border belt as well as the inadequacy of surveillance equipment.[67]

'Area dominance' is the method employed by the border guarding forces to guard India's borders. Under the method, a string Border Out Posts (BOPs) (see Table 1 for details) is established. The setting up of the BOPs depends upon factors such as terrain, habitation, the vulnerability of the border to cross-border crime, the nature and alignment of the border, the defence potential, the area of responsibility of flanking BOPs, the location of neighbour's BOPs, the availability of the means of transportation and communication, and international considerations, etc.

For example, in areas where habitation is close to the international border – like in Punjab or West Bengal or Tripura – the BOPs are established in forward areas; in places where habitation is well behind the borders, the BOPs are located in the interiors.[68] The BOPs are essentially defensive in nature, and meant to demonstrate a show of force to criminals and smugglers as well as hostile neighbours to deter them from committing crimes, intrusions, encroachments, and border violations.

However, these BOPs are not strong enough to withstand or counter conventional attacks. They can, at best, hold the line, and delay and disrupt the advance of the enemy till the army takes over the operations.[69] BOPs provide all the necessary infrastructure for the accommodation, logistical support, and combat functions of the border guarding forces troops deployed on the international borders.

The primary task of BOPs is to send out regular patrols to areas under its responsibility. Patrolling is considered the most effective method of border surveillance and domination. Patrolling of the border and the adjacent areas by border guarding personnel is carried out daily, both during daytime as well as at night, to detect and deter

illegal crossings. Units of the Border Police, the border wing of the Home Guards as well as members of the Village Volunteer Force (VVF) of different border states also participate in the patrolling of the international borders.[70]

Besides patrolling, ambushes or *nakabandi* are laid in the night to apprehend smugglers, intruders, and criminals. Observation posts (OPs) are erected at suitable distances in order to reduce disadvantages of large inter-BOP gaps and enhance surveillance. These OPs are manned by the border guarding personnel in shifts, and generally in pairs.[71] The riverine stretches and creek areas of the border along the India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh borders are guarded with the help floating BOPs which maintain vigil over the entire area with the help of patrol boats which are dispatched frequently for patrolling the rivers and creeks.

The floating BOPs also have a host of surveillance equipment, such as radars, communication devices like very high frequency (VHF) and HF radios, along with surveillance equipment, to keep a check on illegal activities. Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) missions are also deployed to keep a strict vigil in the area. The BSF has also raised two anti-terrorist commando forces – the Crocodile Commando Force,[72] and the Desert Scorpion[73] – to patrol the creeks and deserts, and to thwart infiltration by terrorists in Gujarat and Rajasthan, respectively.

Table 1: Battalions and BOPs on Various International Borders

Border	Border Guarding Force	No. of Battalions	No. of Border Outposts
India-Bangladesh	Border Security Force	82	1011
India-Pakistan	Border Security Force	57	656
India-China	Indo-Tibetan Border Police	32	172
Indo-Nepal	Sashastra Seema Bal	31	473
Indo-Bhutan	Sashastra Seema Bal	16	157
India-Myanmar	Assam Rifles	15	83 (COBs)

Source: 203rd Report on Border Security: Capacity Building and Institutions, Lok Sabha, 11 April 2017.

Ideally the inter-BOP distance should be 2.5-3.5 km; but, in reality, the distances between the BOPs vary greatly. For example, earlier, the inter-BOP distance along the India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh borders was approximately 9 km; however, this has been gradually reduced to an average of 4-4.5 km.[74] To further reduce the inter-BOP distance, the Government of India had sanctioned the setting up of 509 additional BOPs along the India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh borders in February 2009.[75]

The project was scheduled to be completed by 2013-14; but because of delays in land acquisition, clearances from various ministries, and protests by local people, it could not be completed in the stipulated time.[76] Incidentally, in 2016, the scope of the project was revised by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) and the number of BOPs was reduced from 509 to 422.[77]

Along the India-China border, the 176 BOPs of the ITBP are located not only at the very high altitude of above 10,000 feet, but inter-BOP distances are vast, which hamper the effective patrolling of the border. To rectify the problem, the Government of India has decided to build 96 additional BOPs for the ITBP, which will enhance the operational capabilities of the personnel as well as act as deterrents against repeated Chinese transgressions and incursions into Indian territory.[78]

While BOPs are the norm along all the international borders, along the India-Myanmar border the Assam Rifles has established company-operated bases (COBs) to dominate the border. These COBs have to be operational, seamless, and grid-based, incorporating areas along the Indo-Myanmar border as well as the hinterland. Therefore, they are established deeper inside in a non-linear pattern at locations facilitating better reconnaissance and are close to population centres.

Such deployment patterns of the border guarding forces are undertaken for two reasons: (a) the need to protect population centres in the hinterland, and (b) to control the access routes for infiltration. Besides, a number of factors, such as rugged terrain, sparse population, the lack of roads, the absence of accompanying infrastructure, and the shortage of manpower also prevented the deployment of the Assam Rifles personnel closer to the border.

In addition to the tasks of patrolling and surveillance, the border guarding forces also interact and liaise with the state concerned and union government agencies such as customs, immigration, intelligence, civil administration, as well as their counterparts in the neighbouring countries for effective border management. Being designated as the Lead Intelligence Agency (LIA) for their respective borders, the border guarding organisations hold LIA meetings at the district level once every month with the stakeholders concerned.

The meetings help not only in seeking and sharing intelligence but also in building rapport with nodal officers in other organisations. Besides, they also interact with their counterpart organisations of the neighbouring countries, and raise and discuss various border security and management issues during the various meetings held at the director general, frontier, sector, commandant, and local commander levels.

Factors Hampering Border Guarding

Despite the numbers, border guarding forces face an acute manpower shortage, which adversely affect their operational capability. Several factors are responsible for the shortage in manpower. First, a large number of personnel either resign or take voluntary retirement from the forces because of diverse reasons ranging from poor working conditions to personal health issues. In fact, there have been several casualties because of heart and liver problems arising out of stressful working conditions.

Between 2015 and 2018, approximately 11,198 BSF personnel, 1,122 SSB personnel, 994 AR personnel, and 518 ITBP personnel have left their respective organisations.[79] Second, despite the GoMs' recommendations that border guarding forces should not be involved in internal security duties, the BSF, the ITBP, and the SSB have been entrusted with additional duties, such as anti-Naxal operations, elections, and maintaining law and order in states affected by violent civil disturbances. As a result, a number of units from these organisations are pulled away from the borders and deployed in the affected areas.

While it is true that the Government of India cannot afford not to deploy border guarding personnel for internal duties, consideration should be given to suitably strengthening the fighting force of the border guarding forces. Third, a sizeable personnel go on leave or attend training at a given point of time; but they are not replaced, leaving the units with reduced manpower and additional workload.[80] Finally, even though recruitments are regularly carried on to fill the vacancies, the induction of fresh recruits into the force is a slow process as they have to undergo training for approximately one to two years. As a result, these organisations continue to face the problem of manpower shortage.

Along with the shortage of manpower, the lack of adequate infrastructure is also a matter of concern. Many BOPs are not connected by roads, and therefore, remain inaccessible. This problem is particularly acute along India-Myanmar border where the COBs are located in remote areas. Consequently, an average solider has to walk for 8 to 10 km on foot every day to carry out various operational and administrative tasks.[81] Furthermore, a majority of the BOPs along the border are temporary structures and do not have enough room to house the personnel.

The problem of accommodation has been further aggravated with the induction of women into the force, for whom prior arrangements for staying in the BOPs have not been made.[82] Many BOPs do not have a regular supply of drinking water or power or telephone connectivity. The BOPs located in high altitudes lack proper heating arrangements. Moreover, no asphalt roads exist along the fences in the Rajasthan, Punjab, and Jammu sectors, which makes the movement of BSF personnel extremely difficult and slows down their response time in case an infiltration is detected.[83]

The lack of coordination among the agencies involved in border guarding is another problem area as it creates a hindrance in effectively securing the border. Coordination problems among various organisations stems from factors such as a lack of common understanding about the threats and challenges to the borders, the absence of proper channels of communication, turf wars and, most importantly, the differing organisational goals of the

concerned agencies. This lack of coordination is most glaring during intelligence-sharing meetings. The border guarding force along a particular border, being the LIA, organises these meetings; but the level of participation from other agencies, especially from the civil administration, is poor.

Most of the agencies do not share information/intelligence with other agencies because of structural constraints as well as to score brownie points.[84] The agencies concerned also have differing perceptions about border management, which do not match their goals. For instance, although one of the goals of the customs department is anti-smuggling, its goals of revenue maximisation through the facilitation of trade overrides other goals and compels its officials to relax security norms.[85] Such a systemic mismatch adversely impacts the effective guarding of the borders.

To overcome some of the shortcomings of coordination, the Government is establishing a Border Protection Grid (BPG). The BPG entails the setting up of an integrated mechanism ahead of the fence, on the fence/border, and behind the border to detect and tackle intrusions, to keep watch on other related suspicious activities, and to have a proper response mechanism. The BPG is being established in every border state involving all the agencies concerned such as the border guarding force, the state police, the Army, and intelligence and other state agencies as part of an integrated whole.

Notes

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2. "Section 139 (1)", *The Border Security Force Act, 1968*, the Gazette of India Extraordinary, Part II, Section 1, September 2, 1968, New Delhi, p. 61.
3. Anirudh Deshpande, *The First Line of Defence: Glorious 50 years of the Border Security Force*, New Delhi: Shipra, 2015, p. 8.
4. The Cachar Levy was raised in 1835, and Jorhat Militia was raised in 1838. The men were drawn from Bengal Civil Police. The Cachar Levy and the Jorhat Militia were merged a few years later and was subsequently renamed as "Frontier Police" in 1883 and then as "Assam Military Police" in 1891 and then again as "Assam Rifles" in 1920. For details, see Leo E. Rose and Margaret W. Fisher, *The North-East Frontier Agency of*

India, Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, n.d., p. 57; Col. L.W. Shakespear, *History of the Assam Rifles*, Aizawl: Firma KLM Pvt Ltd, 1929, pp. 7-9. "From the Ahom Kings to Today", *Government of Assam* at https://police.assam.gov.in/about-us/detail/from-the-ahom-kings-to-today, accessed on August 6, 2020.

5. The Assam Rifles Act of 1920 (Assam Act 1) of 1920 was further modified by The Assam Rifles Act of 1941.

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7. *Report of Sarkaria Commission* at http://interstatecouncil.nic.in/wpcontent/uploads/2015/06/CHAPTERVII.pdf, accessed on September 27, 2018.

8. *Assam Rifles at 180*, March 2015 p. 95 at https://issuu.com/unigross/docs/ar_at_180_new/44, accessed on October 8, 2018.

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13. *Annual Report 2018–19*, New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2019, p. 122.

14. Ibid.

15. B.N. Mullik, note 11, pp. 486-487.

16. Ibid., p. 493.

17. Ibid., pp. 490-491.

18. The six mountain passes were: Ship Ki Pass, Mana Pass, Niti Pass, Kungri Bingri Pass, Darma Pass, and the Lipulekh Pass. See, *Agreement Between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse between Tibet Region of China and India*, April 29, 1954 at https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/7807/Agreement+on+Trade+and+Intercourse+with+Tibet+Region, accessed on October 29, 2018.

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20. Giriraj Shah, *Elite Forces of India*, Vol. II, New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1994, p. 343.

21. D. Banerjea (ed.), note 19, p. 97.

22. Giriraj Shah, note 20, p. 343.

23. Ibid., p. 344.

24. Ibid., p. 345.

25. Ibid., p. 344.

26. Ibid., p. 346.

27. *Annual Report 1992–93*, New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1993, p. 24.

28. *Annual Report 2018–19*, note 13, p. 131.

29. Leo E. Rose, note 4, p. 66.

30. B.N. Mullik, note 11, p. 492.

31. *One Hundred and Twenty Third Report on Sashastra Seema Bal Bill*, Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs, 2006, Rajya Sabha, February 27, 2007 at http://www.prsindia.org/uploads/media/1167469057/SCR%20sashastra%20seema%20bal%202006.pdf, accessed on October 12, 2018.

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33. See note 31.

34. *Annual Report 2015–16*, New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2018, p. 177.

35. See note 31.

36. "Sashastra Seema Bal", *Ministry of Home Affairs* at http://www.ssb.nic.in/index1.aspx?lsid=38&lev=2&lid=10&langid=1&Cid=0, accessed on October 11, 2018.

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50. Ibid., pp. 269-270.

51. Surinder Singh, note 1, pp. 38-39.

52. Anirudh Deshpande, note 3, p. 11.

53. Giriraj Shah, note 20, p. 34. Also see, P. V. Rajgopal (ed.), note 41, p. 248.

54. Ibid.

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57. P. V. Rajgopal (ed.), note 41, p. 248.

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3. Border Infrastructure: Fences and Equipment

Fences or barriers are described as 'fortified boundaries' – formidable, yet not as robust as militarised boundaries – constructed for enhanced border controls.[1] They are asymmetrical physical barriers, constructed to not completely stop the cross-border movement of illegal immigrants, insurgents, terrorists, smugglers, and traffickers but to impose costs on would-be infiltrators and, in so doing, deter or impede infiltration.[2] The idea is that the fence will slow down the movement of the infiltrator, thus making it easy for the security forces to apprehend him. Fences are, therefore, often a combination of obstructions, such as barbed wires, concrete walls, ditches, along with watch towers, sensors, cameras, and patrolled by semi-militarised forces.[3]

The popularity of fences can be gauged from the fact that building physical barriers to prevent intruders is one of the oldest security measures undertaken by the States. Jericho is believed to be the first habitation, which had constructed a 600-metre stone wall around the city to protect it against floods and raiders.[4] Ancient Sumerians and Greeks also built walls around their cities to fend against intruders. During the 3rd century BCE, the Chinese and the Romans constructed a number of fortified defences along their border to protect their empire from the barbarians.

The Great Wall of China, the Hadrian's Wall, the Antonine Wall, the Constantine Wall, etc. were some of the famous fortifications constructed by the Chinese and Romans to mark the outer limits of their empires.[5] In the contemporary age, large numbers of fortified

defences were constructed along the borders by countries, especially during the World Wars. The Hindenburg, the Siegfried and the Maginot Lines are famous examples of heavily fortified defences along the Franco-German borders built by the Germans and French against invasions from each other during the First and Second World Wars, respectively.[6]

In the Cold War era – that is, between 1945 and 1991 – 2019 walls or barriers were constructed along international borders by various countries. Interestingly, the initial years following the end of the Cold War saw the 'downgrading of walls as political institutions' as well as the dismantling of some of the walls, such as the Berlin Wall and the Morice Line. Other walls – such as the Sahara Wall, the barrier between the two Koreas, the separation line on Cyprus, India and Pakistan, etc. – continue to exist. Fences or barriers continued to be constructed by countries even after the end of the Cold War. Between 1991 and 2001, as many as 7 fences were added to the list.[7]

The cataclysmic event of September 11, 2001 reinforced the function of borders as barriers preventing the flow of unwanted persons and goods and sparked a surge in barrier construction. In all, 28 more border barriers/fences were either constructed or planned by various countries following the September 11 terror attacks. At present, there are around 77 fences or barriers, totalling more than 30,000 km, the world over.[8] Most of these fences or barriers are constructed to prevent infiltration by terrorists, illegal migration as well as organised criminal activities such the trafficking of drugs, persons, weapons, etc.

A country that builds a fence tends to do so after perceiving a threat from illegal immigrants, smugglers, insurgents, or terrorists from its neighbouring country(s). Most often than not, countries construct border fences unilaterally in response to the perceived threats because their neighbours are either unwilling to, or incapable of, stopping the egress of unwanted persons and goods from their territory.

Hence, countries who built fences have had to brave protests from neighbours and affected parties as well as criticism from the international community. India, which is perhaps the first country to build a border fence to prevent illegal migration had encountered a

lot of protests and oppositions from its neighbours while constructing the border fences.

The India-Bangladesh Border Fence

Among all its international borders, India constructed its first fence along the India-Bangladesh border. The idea of fencing the border with Bangladesh to stem the tide of illegal migrants was first put forward by the Assam government in January 1965. The proposal was to erect barbed wire fences along some vulnerable patches of the international border with the approval of the Union government. However, the shortage of barbed wire and the inability of the Assam government to clear a mile-deep area of habitation along the border, which was required for constructing the fences, prevented the implementation of the fencing project.[9]

The idea, however, did not fade away and resurfaced during the Assam agitation against foreigners. The widespread violence unleashed during the agitation, especially the Nellie massacre in February 1983, and repeated petitions by Assam representatives to build a fence along the Bangladesh border compelled the Union government to debate the possibility of fencing the country's international border with Bangladesh to prevent illegal migration. After much deliberation, in August 1983, the Government of India approved a set of measures to prevent illegal migration from Bangladesh, which included the construction of barbed wire fences and roads along the border for effective patrolling.[10]

Following the decision, the Indian government decided to start constructing the border fence in April 1984. The commencement of work on the fencing, however, angered Bangladesh, leading to firing and counter firing by the border guarding forces of both the countries. The clash left a few BSF personnel and members of a survey team dead. This unfortunate episode forced India to suspend further construction.[11]

That border fencing is a potential tool to prevent illegal migration found mention a year later in the Assam Accord of 1985. Clause 9 of the Accord stipulates, '[T]he international border shall be made secure against future infiltration by [the]

erection of physical barriers, like walls, barbed wire fencing, and other obstacles at appropriate places'.[12] To implement this clause, the MHA in February 1986, sanctioned a sum of Rs. 371.76 crore for the construction of 2660 km of roads and 337 km of a barbed wire fence in Assam and Meghalaya.[13] The construction of fences and roads along the Bangladesh border commenced in May 1987. The implementation of the project was, however, slow because of a number of reasons such as delays in land acquisition, short working hours, the time taken for establishing an organisational structure for the implementation agency, changes in the initial specifications regarding the length of roads, bridges, etc. The scope of the project was also increased subsequently as many vulnerable stretches were included within the project.

Taking into consideration all these issues, the MHA approved a revised project, with an amount of Rs. 831.17 and a completion date of 1998.[14] It is important to point out that earlier construction of border fences was envisaged only for Assam and Meghalaya, but when the project was revised, West Bengal, Mizoram and Tripura were also included. However, funds for the construction of border fences were sanctioned only for West Bengal (507 km) and not for Tripura and Mizoram.[15]

As mentioned, initially a decision was taken to fence only 844.12 km (20 per cent) of the India-Bangladesh border – the most vulnerable stretches, given the enormous cost involved and the understanding that fencing the entire border was not feasible.[16] However, as increasing cases of illegal migration, cross-border movement of insurgents and smuggling were reported, the MHA realised that piecemeal efforts will not resolve the problem as a substantial portion of the border continued to remain vulnerable, especially to infiltration by Bangladeshi nationals.

Consequently, on October 14, 1999, the High Level Empowered Committee monitoring the implementation of Phase I of the fencing approved a proposal for constructing an additional 2429.5 km of fences along the entire border.[17] On June 12, 2000, the Union government sanctioned Rs. 1335 crore for the construction of 2468 km of fencing under Phase II.[18]

In addition, a proposal to re-erect fences that was constructed during Phase I but were damaged because of various reasons such as faulty construction designs, repeated submergence and vagaries of weather was also approved. Of the total of 3326.14 km of fences which was finally sanctioned, 3120.032 km have been constructed till September 2020.[19] In addition, in 2017 during the biannual Directors General level talks between the BSF and the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB), it was decided that those villages which lay between the zero line and the border fence and are particularly vulnerable to cross-border crimes, should be fenced by a single line wire fence. These villages, totalling approximately 250 (148 villages fully ahead of the fence and 137 partially ahead of it) are located in West Bengal.[20]

A pilot project of floodlighting 277 km of border fences in West Bengal to provide better visibility of the border areas during the night was also undertaken in 2003 and completed in June 2006.[21] Following the encouraging outcome of floodlighting, the CCS cleared a proposal to put up flood lights along the entire Indo-Bangladesh border at a cost of Rs. 1,327 crore in November 2007. At present, 2357.29 km of the border fence is illuminated with floodlights.[22]

The India-Pakistan Border Fence

The construction of fences along the India-Pakistan border was propelled by Sikh militancy in Punjab. Punjab grappled with raging militancy and rampant trafficking of narcotics across its international border in the 1980s. The crossing over of Sikh militants into Pakistan and returning with arms and explosives to perpetrate terror activities in the state and neighbouring areas compelled the government of India to put in place measures to cut off their access routes into Punjab from Pakistan.

These measures, which were announced in April 1988, included erecting a barbed wire fence with wire obstacles along the vulnerable stretches of the border, floodlighting, improving existing tracks by laying jeepable tracks, and procuring sophisticated electronic devices for border surveillance.[23] Two districts of Rajasthan adjoining Punjab – Ganganagar and Bikaner – were also added to the project.

The project for the construction of 433.92 km of border fences in Punjab and 332.72 km in Rajasthan was completed by 1993.[24]

In the following year, fencing and floodlighting of the rest of the border districts of Rajasthan was also taken up. Surprisingly, Pakistan did not object to the construction of fences in the Punjab sector. In fact, it welcomed India's efforts, and stated that if it had the financial wherewithal, it would build similar fences to prevent infiltration from India.[25] Pakistan also went so far as to suggest that building fences along their mutual border could be a joint effort in which the cost of fencing could be shared by the two countries.[26]

Even as Sikh militancy was raging in Punjab, a separatist movement started in J&K in 1989, plunging the erstwhile state into a spiral of violence. Like the Sikh militants, the Kashmiri militants also crossed over to Pakistan to receive training in committing terror activities and smuggling in arms and explosives. Meanwhile, the construction of border fences in Punjab and Rajasthan had effectively closed infiltration routes not only for Sikh militants but also for traffickers and smugglers, forcing the traffickers to divert their traffic of narcotics to the unfenced border areas in Kashmir and Gujarat.[27]

Faced with the dual problem of infiltration and trafficking in J&K, the Cabinet (March 1995), approved the construction of 180 km of fencing, and the floodlighting of 195.8 km along the international border in the Jammu sector. Significantly, while construction of fencing in Punjab was not opposed by Pakistan, fencing in Jammu attracted strong protests from Pakistan claiming that since the status of J&K is disputed, India should not unilaterally change the ground situation by constructing border fences. Thus, the construction of fencing in Jammu, which started in June 1995, had to be suspended as the Pakistani Rangers resorted to firing.[28]

Work on the fencing in the Jammu sector could recommence only after a gap of five years during the end of 2000, after the Indian government resolved to 'seal the border' in Jammu following the Kargil War. Progress on the construction of the fence was, however, slow as Pakistan unleashed heavy firing to obstruct the work. So by March 2003, only 30 km of fencing and 15 km of flood-lighting

could be completed.[29] The situation was eased after the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement in November 2003 with Pakistan and the project was completed in 2007.[30]

As mentioned above, fencing and increased surveillance along the Punjab and Rajasthan borders increased the vulnerability of the Gujarat border to infiltration and other illegal cross-border activities. So in 2000, the Government approved a comprehensive proposal for installing fencing and flood lighting along with the construction of link roads and BOPs in a stretch of 310 km in the Gujarat sector.[31]

Till March 2020, of the 2289.66 km fence sanctioned by the Government, 2040.559 km have been completed. Similarly till March 2019, of the 2043.76 km for floodlighting, 1983.76 km has been finished.[32] Like those along India-Bangladesh border, these fences have gates that allow farmers to cultivate their fields which lie beyond the fencing. Identity cards have been issued to regular farmers and labourers by the unit commandant of BSF after verification. In 2009, BSF also inducted female constables to frisk women farmers who cross the gates along the fences. To have a clear line of sight beyond the fence, crops more than four feet height are not allowed.[33]

The fences along the most vulnerable stretches in Punjab are reinforced with five live wires carrying a charge of 11,000 volts; this deters militants and smugglers from cutting the fences and entering India. The LoC with Pakistan has also been fenced. By 2004, 680 km along the LoC was fenced by the Indian Army. For the detection of unauthorised entry, an automatic alarm system and electrification for non-lethal shock on contact have been provided. Underground sensors, surveillance radars, and observation systems have been co-opted with the fence to enhance coverage and detection capability.[34]

The India-Myanmar Fence

The Indian government decided to build a 10 km long fence along the international border at Moreh (between Pillars no. 79 and 81) in Manipur as this stretch along the border is most porous to the movement of insurgents and traffickers. Significantly, the decision to construct a fence has met with opposition, domestically as

well as externally. First, the Myanmar government objected to the construction of the fence; but the matter was resolved after negotiations, and it allowed India to construct the fence.

However, a caveat that the fence should be built after leaving a 10-metre 'no construction zone' along the international border was imposed by Myanmar.[35] The construction of the fence began in 2010 and, by March 2013, around 4 km of the international border was fenced.[36] Work on the border fencing had to be suspended in August 2013 following largescale protests by the local people.

Hurdles in the Construction of Fences

The construction of fences has not been easy. One of the major hurdles in the process has been the hostile attitude of neighbours. As mentioned earlier, Bangladesh had raised serious objections against India's decision to build a fence along their mutual border. In August 1983, while interacting with Indian media persons, General Hussain Muhammad Ershad said, 'I do not accept this theory of infiltration. There is no reason either to have a wall or a fencing.'[37] He claimed that Bangladesh felt humiliated and belittled, and expected to be consulted before the fencing was built.[38]

Responding to Bangladesh's protests, India initially declared that since the fences will be constructed on the Indian territory, there was no reason to 'bilaterilise' it. Later, in March 1985, India back-tracked after the unfortunate incident of firing at the border and sent its foreign minister to hold parleys with his Bangladesh counterpart; but Bangladesh remained uncooperative.[39] Faced with Bangladesh's intransigence, India decided to unilaterally construct the fence.

As expected, India continued to face stiff resistance from Bangladesh. Referring to border fencing as a 'military wire obstacle', Bangladesh objected on the ground that the construction of any defensive structure within 150 yards of the international boundary is a violation of the guidelines agreed to in 1975. India has maintained that the fence is not a defensive structure as it cannot impede the movement of military vehicles. India also maintains that it is the demolition of defensive structures and not the construction of fences that forms a part of the 1975 guidelines. India further argues that the

1975 agreement provided for a stop to unauthorised immigration and smuggling, and that the fence would help do both. India also faced stiff resistance from Bangladesh at 265 disputed spots as the security forces of both the countries differed on their perception of the location of the boundary in these spots.[40]

Likewise, India faced opposition from Pakistan when it undertook the project of the fencing and floodlighting of the Jammu sector of the international boundary. Pakistan Rangers had fired at BSF personnel and the construction workers involved in erecting fences. Pakistan has started disputing the international border in the Jammu area, arguing that since the whole of Jammu and Kashmir is disputed, the border with Jammu is also disputed. They refer to the international border in Jammu as the 'working boundary'. Notably, this change in their position on the international border took place after the inception of the Kashmir insurgency in 1989.[41] As mentioned earlier, Myanmar also raised objections to India constructing fences along their mutual border.

Another hurdle in the construction of border fences is the delays in the acquisition of land for fencing. Land is a state subject in India, so it is the responsibility of the state governments to provide the required land. However, state governments and local administrations entrusted with the task of acquiring land from people are either incapable or unwilling. In many instances, it has been observed that respective state governments with vested political interests have deliberately tried to stall the fencing process itself because they treat the Bangladeshi migrants as vote banks.[42]

Moreover, since the fences are erected 150 yards inside Indian territory, many villages and agricultural land fall ahead of the fences. In these areas, the local people have been vehemently protesting against the construction of fences as they fear that they might have to forfeit their agricultural land falling beyond these fences. In Meghalaya, fencing work has been stalled because villagers demand that the fences be constructed at the zero line to protect the land and villages of the state. They have also formed an organisation called the Co-ordination Committee on Border Fencing (CCBF) to present a united front and press ahead with their demand.[43]

Similarly, work on the fence along the India-Myanmar border had to be stopped after the locals protested alleging that the fences were being constructed inside Indian territory, and that this would result in Manipur losing substantial portions of its territory to Myanmar. They demanded that the Union government should first resolve the issue of disputed border pillars with Myanmar and conduct a joint survey of the border before constructing the fence.[44] In most cases, even though local residents living beyond the fence are worried about their safety, they do not shift to a new place and give up their land for fencing. Where people were forced to vacate, the fact that the rehabilitation of displaced persons has not been done properly raises more protests against fencing.[45]

Factors Undermining the Effectiveness of the Fence

While fencing has been successful to some extent in preventing easy access, it has not stopped people from illegally entering India altogether. This is because the infiltrators have devised means to surmount the fence or circumvent it. There are numerous reports of migrants either cutting the fences or placing wooden ladders and planks to climb over them. The unfortunate incident of Felani Khatun is a case in point. In highly vulnerable stretches along India-Pakistan border where live wires are installed, fences are either cut by using shockproof fence cutters or destroyed by Integrated Explosive Device (IED) mines to allow traffickers and terrorists to sneak in.

Migrants also exploit the poorly guarded Sunderbans and the sea route to enter India. Furthermore, desperate to find a better livelihood, migrants have started relying on the services of smugglers. Mafias involved in smuggling and trafficking of persons have proliferated and entrenched themselves along the border. Corrupt government personnel and political patrons operating hand-in-glove with smugglers have ensured that migrants are able to not only cross the border easily but also procure the necessary documents to enable them to live in India as 'citizens'.

Fences have also proven ineffective in areas where they cut through villages and houses. In compliance with the mutually agreed guidelines, fences have been built 150 yards from the zero

line. However, in many places fences are built at varying distances (400-900 metres) from the international boundary due to terrain constraints. As a result, a large number of villages are either left out of the fences, or the barbed wires run through the middle of the villages, causing hardship to villagers.[46] At the same time, it is being observed that some inhabitants of such houses and villages which are left outside the fences occasionally provide shelter to illegal migrants and also indulge in smuggling.[47]

Yet another major terrain constraint faced while constructing border fences is that fences cannot be constructed over the riverine and marshy stretches along the boundary, making these areas vulnerable to infiltration. Riverine stretches constitute 12.36 per cent of the Indo-Pakistan border and 37 per cent of the India-Bangladesh border over which border fences cannot be constructed. In deserts, fences are damaged by shifting sand dunes that engulf and destroy them. The case is similar is snow bound stretches of the international borders.

Faulty designs of the fences and the use of substandard material for their construction cause decay, further reducing the effectiveness of the fences.[48] Also, unlike in the India-Bangladesh border, roads along the fences have not been constructed along the India-Pakistan border. The absence of paved roads slows down the movement of BSF personnel and hampers their rapid response in case of any eventuality. While the policymakers realise the importance of roads along the fences, but the Union government has only approved the construction of a 255 km-long Gaduli-Hajipir-Santalpur road along the international border in Gujarat.

That the fence has never been meant to completely stop illegal migration all by itself had not been lost on policymakers. In fact, the Minister of External Affairs, Jaswant Singh, had told the Rajya Sabha in March 2002 that

> The nature of the Indo-Bangladesh border is such that it is very difficult to fence the entire border. Out of 4000 km of the border, there is a proper fencing only in a fraction of it. A large part of this border is riverine; a large part of this border keeps changing as the rivers keep changing their course. On account of these various

factors, infiltration cannot be stopped simply by putting barbed wire fences on this very difficult terrain, on this very difficult border. There are complex social and economic reasons behind infiltration, the illegal infiltration from Bangladesh. There are economic factors; there are factors of land, and unless all these are taken into account, it will be impractical and unwise to address it in one particular manner.[49]

As observed, physical fences constructed to impede the infiltration of persons are constantly being cut, climbed over, or otherwise bypassed, and cannot in themselves constitute meaningful barriers without active surveillance by the border guarding forces. There are also vast stretches of the borders which cannot be fenced or manned round the clock by the border guards.

It is to address these problems that governments world over, whether in developed or in developing countries, have been incorporating technological solutions to secure their borders.[50] The argument in favour of application of high technologies for surveillance and detection is that it creates virtual or smart fences along the borders, which are smart enough to deliver security while at the same time not impede crucial cross-border flows.

Virtual or Smart Fences

A virtual or a smart fence involves increasing the density of and upgrading the existing technologies for surveillance and detection along the boundary by deploying near-ground radar systems, high-resolution visual cameras on high towers, ground sensors, and satellites to detect the movement of persons. It also involves the integration and processing of information from these detection systems in computers, as also developing models to define the direction of such movements in the vicinity of the border. These serve as a guide for border personnel on the ground to arrest unauthorised entrants.[51]

In the case of India, a series of successful infiltrations by Pakistani terrorists through the India-Pakistan international border, and subsequent attacks on strategic installations in past years have raised serious concerns about the effectiveness of the present border

security system to thwart such border breaches. However, in spite of repeated intrusions by terrorists and smugglers, and in spite of pleas by the BSF that an effective surveillance system is required to be put in place, especially along the India-Pakistan international border, the MHA did not react.

The only exceptions were in 2012 when the MHA released an Expression of Interest for a Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) and, in 2014, when the BSF submitted a report on the CIBMS.[52] Meanwhile, the Pathankot terror attack took place in the intervening night of January 1 and 2, 2016,[53] subsequent to which a warning was issued by the division bench of the Punjab and Haryana High court that if no decision to protect the India-Pakistan border was taken before February 16, 2016, stern action would be taken against the MHA officials.[54]

Following the warning from the Punjab and Haryana High Court, a meeting was convened under the chairmanship of Home Secretary and, on January 29, 2016, the implementation of CIBMS through two pilot projects was sanctioned. The objective of the CIBMS is to deploy high tech surveillance devices in an integrated manner for the effective security of the border.[55]

That the MHA is keen on finding high-technological solutions to secure India's border was further reinforced by that fact that it constituted a committee under the chairmanship of Madhukar Gupta on March 29, 2016 to find gaps in the fencing and other vulnerabilities along the India-Pakistan border, and to recommend measures to strengthen the security of the border. The Committee was tasked to suggest technological solutions to secure the border besides strengthening manpower.[56] The committee also had two directors from the Indian Institute for Technology (IIT) to facilitate the task.

The Present System of Border Surveillance

Emphasis on the use of high tech gadgets for border security is not new. In fact, the militancy in Punjab during the 1980s necessitated effective methods of protecting the India-Pakistan border against infiltration. Accordingly, the number of BOPs were increased, border fences were constructed, and the BSF was provided with

night surveillance capabilities, such as Passive Night Vision Goggles (PNG), Night Weapon Sight (NWS), Hand Held Search Lights (HHSL), Hand Held Deep Search Metal Detector (HHMD), etc.

In subsequent years, as cross-border threats increased and the BSF embarked on a modernisation process, the organisation acquired more sophisticated devices, such as Hand Held Thermal Imagery (HHTI), Long Range Reconnaissance Observation System (LORROS), Battle Field Surveillance Radars (BFSR), etc. for remote surveillance of the international borders.[57] Thermal imagery indicates the body heat signatures of any living being that moves towards the boundary in the dark of the night at a distance of 3 km, while NVD, long-range radars, battlefield surveillance radars, etc. catch the slightest of vibrations.

No doubt, these equipment enhanced detection and interception capabilities of the BSF personnel, which have resulted in several successful interception of infiltrators and contraband leading to an appreciable fall in infiltration by militants, especially, in Punjab. Such successes enthused the BSF who believed that induction of high tech equipment have acted as *force multipliers*.

Although such advanced electronic surveillance equipment has boosted the capabilities of the BSF personnel, sustained attempts by infiltrators in breaching the international border leading to a few high profile incidents such as the Pathankot attack has raised serious doubts about the efficacy of their use in the present system of border guarding.

Review of the present system has revealed a number of shortcomings. First, the high-tech equipment does not provide all round security, and does not work in adverse climates. Second, it fails to cover gaps, such as rivers and *nullahs* along the fences effectively. Third, the present system is manpower intensive, and is not effective in providing rest and relief to the troops. Fourth, the effectiveness of the present system is hampered by the fact that it is not an integrated system providing a Common Operating Picture (COP) at all levels.[58]

Given these shortcomings of the present system, the BSF argued that a new and more efficient system for border guarding is the need of the hour.

The Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System

The CIBMS is presented as a more robust and integrated system, which would address the gaps in the present system of border security by seamlessly integrating human resources, weapons, and surveillance equipment. The CIBMS essentially constitutes three components. The first component is surveillance devices, such as sensors, detectors, cameras, ground based radar systems, micro-aerostats, lasers, etc., which captures images of movements of persons. This also includes the existing surveillance equipment deployed for round the clock surveillance of the international border.

The second component is an efficient and dedicated communications network consisting of fibre optic cables and satellite communication to transmit the data gathered by these diverse high tech surveillance and detection devices. The third component is the command and control centre. All the images captured by the high-tech devices is transmitted and integrated to a set of computer screens in the command and control centre, which are established to update senior commanders about the happenings on the ground thus, providing them with a composite picture of the international border.

This composite picture helps senior commanders analyse and classify the threats and mobilise resources accordingly to assist the field commander. Moreover, instead, of being deployed in a linear manner along the border as is the present case, the CIBMS allows the border guarding personnel to be organised as Quick Reaction Teams (QRTs) for quick interception of intruders. The aim of the CIBMS is to replace manual surveillance with high tech equipment to improve the monitoring of border areas as well as the reaction capabilities of the BSF personnel.

In subsequent stages, a gate management system along the fences is also proposed to be incorporated within the CIMBS. This system would comprise a large database containing information about farmers, such as their name, address, land, vehicle, etc., and also include their biometric data. It might include issuing the farmer's biometric identity cards and card readers for use by the BSF. This

would help establish the identity of the farmers more efficiently, and allow them to cross the gates smoothly so that they are able to cultivate their fields, which lie beyond the fences, without much difficulty.[59]

The Present Status of CIBMS

The CIBMS is being implemented as a pilot project, and it is believed that this system will be 'up-scaled after analysing [the] effectiveness of the pilot project.' Two stretches of approximately 5 km each along the Samba sector of the Jammu frontier have been selected for the implementation of the pilot project. The areas chosen have a difficult terrain, broken by deep nullahs and have dense growth of elephant grass.

Such a terrain has provided a conducive atmosphere for intrusions as many infiltration bids have been detected, and several intruders with large consignments of heroin and FICNs have been arrested. A tunnel has also been discovered in the selected stretch of the international border.[60] The pilot project is aimed to test the system regarding the requirement of man power, user friendliness, technical training, as well as repair and maintenance.

For the implementation of the pilot project, the BSF, invited (on March 22, 2016) proposals for supplying technological solutions for the CIBMS.[61] It required the vendors to supply, design, install, test, commission, train, and comprehensively maintain CIBMS for 24×7×365 surveillance at two different locations in the Jammu region of India's international border.[62] In June 2017, the Tata Powers SED (Strategic Engineering Division) and DAT Con got the contracts for implementing the project.[63]

After a few trials, the pilot project in Jammu was formally inaugurated on September 17, 2018 by Union Home Minister, Rajnath Singh. In his speech Rajnath Singh said,

> Though our security forces keep guarding our borders, this technology called the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) will make border guarding more effective … There is no second opinion that [the] BSF retaliates strongly to their (Pakistan's) firing, but [the] CIBMS will now

reduce [the] casualties of our jawans, their stress will go down, and the dependence on physical patrolling will also go down … I dedicate this CIBMS to martyrs, who have made supreme sacrifices on the borders for the nation.[64]

A similar project of erecting a virtual fence along the India-Bangladesh riverine border has also been implemented. The 61 km of border area in Dhubri in Assam – where the Brahmaputra enters Bangladesh – is characterised by innumerable river channels and vast char lands. Such a terrain does not permit the construction of physical fences and makes border guarding a daunting task, especially during rainy season.

To overcome this problem, in 2017, the MHA decided to explore technological solutions to guard the porous border, besides augmenting the presence of the BSF personnel. A year later, in January 2018, the BSF initiated a project called BOLD-QIT (Border Electronically Dominated QRT Interception Technique). Under this project, different kinds of intrusion detection sensors – radar, electro optics, unattended ground sensors, optical fibre cable (OFC) based sensors, mini aerostat as well as day and night cameras – have been placed along the unfenced area of Brahmaputra and its tributaries. These gadgets provide feeds to the BSF control rooms set up along the border, and enable BSF QRTs to thwart any unauthorised border crossings and crimes. The project was inaugurated in March 2019.[65]

The use of high technology equipment for border surveillance as an integrated instrument for border security has been used by many countries, including the United States with mixed results. In this context, a comparative discussion on the USA's Secure Border Initiative *net* (SBI*net*) with that of CIBMS is being attempted in the following section.

The SBI*net* Project of the USA

Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack, the Department of Home Security (DHS) in the USA launched the Secure Border Initiative (SBI) in November 2005, and described it 'as a departure from the traditional ways of thinking about border security.'[66] In

April 2006, the DHS launched the high-tech component of Secure Border Initiative-network called the SBI*net*. The SBI*net* was to comprise 'surveillance technologies, such as sensors, cameras, and radars, as well as command, control, communications, and intelligence (C3I) technologies, including software and hardware to produce a Common Operating Picture (COP)'.[67]

The goal of the project was 'to field the most effective mix of current and next generation technology, infrastructure, staffing, as well as response platforms, and integrate them to provide a common operating picture of the border environment, which will provide commonality within the DHS components and interoperability with the stakeholders outside DHS.'[68] The SBI*net* was implemented as a pilot project in two stretches along the US-Mexico border spanning 53 miles in the Tucson sector.

The SBI*net* project, however, did not prove to be a success story in border surveillance. In 2010, four years after the SBI*net* was implemented, the DHS conducted an assessment of the viability and cost effectiveness of the SBI*net*, with inputs from the field agents at the border, quantitative and science based analysis of alternatives, and the scientific analysis of experts based in the DHS.[69] Based on the assessment, the DHS concluded that the SBI*net* programme was not viable and cost effective as it did not, and could not, provide a single technological solution to border security. The SBI*net* programme had cost nearly US$ 1 billion for two regions along the US-Mexico border. Plagued by poor assessment, shoddy testing, and missed deadlines, the SBI*net* was finally shelved on January 14, 2011.[70]

It is noteworthy that the SBI*net* was not the first programme where high tech solutions for border security met with failure. Between 1997 and 2006, the Department of Justice and the DHS spent US$ 439 million on two electronic surveillance projects, which were largely abandoned because of system failures. Those two programmes were the Integrated Surveillance Intelligence System (ISIS) and its successor, the American Shield Initiative.[71]

The assessment reports of those two programme stated that 90 per cent of the sensor alerts resulted in 'false alarms.' On the Mexican border, only 2 per cent sensor alerts resulted in apprehension; and

along the Canadian border, the figure was less than one percent.[72] Like SBI*net*, these surveillance programmes claimed to be force multipliers; but the border patrol could not quantify the supposed force multiplication benefits. Besides many flaws, the ISIS was severely undermanned, especially in monitoring the output of the surveillance system.

Criticism of SBI*net* and Parallels with the CIBMS

One of the criticisms that was levelled against the SBI*net* programme is that while the DHS was clear that it wanted a technical infrastructure that would complement the two other components – tactical infrastructure (border fence) and personnel – it was vague about the kind of electronic surveillance system it was seeking. So, instead of issuing the objective with specific specifications, the DHS had asked the prospective contractors to create their own vision for the project. The DHS also failed to specify performance metrics to judge the final product.[73]

In the case of the CIBMS too, the request for the proposal by the BSF asked the solution providers for the 'supply, designing, installation, testing, commissioning, training, and the comprehensive maintenance of the CIBMS for round the clock surveillance at two different locations in the Jammu region of the international borders.'[74] It further stated that based on the information provided by the BSF, the bidders must form their own conclusions about the solution needed to meet the requirements.

The bidders were also asked to quote their own prices for the products.[75] This clearly demonstrates that the BSF does not have the required technical expertise to judge the request for the proposals or the products. This are precisely the reasons why there were numerous technical glitches which were reported while the CIMBS was being operationalised.[76]

Another criticism of the SBI*net* was that the Custom Border Patrol (CBP) had claimed that its own officers were capable of managing the SBI*net* from command and control centres. However, they did not have the required expertise: they handed over the electronic surveillance to contractors with little direction or oversight. Various

reports highlighted the Department's over reliance on contractors not only to carry out departmental functions but to oversee the management and outsourcing of these projects. In short, there were no systems in place to 'oversee and assess contractor performance and effectively control costs and schedules.'[77]

In the case of India, it is commonly accepted that the operation and maintenance of these sophisticated systems remain a problem. At present, many of the high tech devices deployed by the BSF are not optimally used because the required technical expertise is not uniformly available among the personnel. The exorbitant costs of these electronic devices, coupled with the difficulty in procuring spare parts, act as a deterrent against their use.[78]

As regards the establishment of a command and control centre, it still remains to be seen if the BSF officials have the competence to manage the centres. Even if the control centres are manned properly by the BSF officials, such centralised decision making could prove to be detrimental for an effective response on the ground, given that the detection and interception of infiltrators at the border require quick responses, which are achieved only through a decentralised decision making process. Besides the lack of technical expertise, erratic power supply and adverse climatic and terrain conditions in the border areas could potentially undermine the functioning of the sophisticated system.

The Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan

Learning from the failures of the SBI*net* programme, the DHS and the CBP approached border technology requirements in more manageable pieces, tailored to specific regions on the border. They described this approach as the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan (ATP) and launched it in January 2011 as a pilot project in Nogales and Douglas in Arizona. The focus of the ATP is on: (a) technology that meets the needs of local border conditions; (b) a multi-year effort to make it cost effective; (c) a mix of fixed and mobile technology; and (d) the use of non-developmental technology (pre-existing tested technology).[79]

The CBP created detailed acquisition plans for each of the technologies. While asking for RFP, the CBP also clearly stated that

they are looking for a 'sensor [which] should be able to detect a single, walking, average size adult, and provide a sufficient high resolution video of that adult at a range up to 7.5 miles in daylight and darkness.'[80] The project is being implemented by the Elbit System of America at a cost of US$ 145 million.

In June 2014, the CBP launched the Southwest Border Technology Plan (SBTP) which incorporates the ATP, and includes deployments to the rest of the southwest border, beginning with areas in Texas and California.[81] In July 2017, the CBP completed the deployment of select technologies to areas in Arizona, Texas, and California. For example, the CBP deployed an all planned Remote Video Surveillance Systems (RVSS) and Mobile Surveillance Capability (MSC) systems, and 15 of 53 Integrated Fixed Tower (IFT) systems in Arizona. The CBP also deployed all planned MSC systems in Texas and California, and completed contract negotiations to deploy RVSS in Texas.[82]

Periodic reviews of the ATP and the SBTP revealed that the CBP has not been able to assess the contributions of border fencing and advanced surveillance technologies in border security operations because it failed to develop performance metrics for their assessment. So, even after spending approximately US$ 2.3 billion between 2007 and 2015 in erecting fences along the border, the CBP could not assess the extent to which these large investments were helpful in securing the US southwest border.[83]

Technical solutions are necessary to augment and complement the traditional methods of border guarding by the personnel. They not only enhance the surveillance and detection capabilities of border guarding but also improve the impact of the border guarding personnel against infiltrations and trans-border crimes. However, caution must be exercised while advocating high tech and high cost electronic devices for border security. The experiences of countries deploying these high tech devices demonstrate that while the costs of the high tech solutions are prohibitive, they do not provide comprehensive solutions to border problems.

Tough posturing on border security could lead to wasteful expenditure of precious national resources. Tried and tested high-tech border security solutions should be deployed so that wasteful

expenditure of precious national resources can be reduced. They should be also introduced gradually, so that personnel are well versed in their operation. In sum, a judicious mix of manpower and affordable technological solutions can achieve optimum security for India's borders.

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4. Strategic Roads and Railways in the Border Areas

While there are no disagreements that a robust transportation network is necessary to bring about over all development of the border areas by enhancing interactions within and across the borders, contrary views exist when it comes to building roads for security purposes. The proponents of the mobility thesis, such as German economist Friedrich List and German General Helmuth von Moltke state that increasing the density of transportation networks in the border areas is the best way to counter a threatening enemy. They argue that road and railway networks not only facilitate the rapid deployment of large scale troops but the added mobility provides the defenders with enough time to respond to the moves of the attackers in the battlefield.[1]

In contrast, advocates of the immobility thesis as propounded first by Prussian King Frederick II, argue that the ideal strategy to respond to an enemy attack is to deny access by leaving the border areas devoid of any transportation networks, thus keeping it as a barrier to foreign invasion. Transportation networks, which make militaries mobile, also make the States possessing such networks more vulnerable to outside attacks.[2] The mobility-immobility theories sum up the dilemma States face in developing transportation networks along their border areas when faced with a threatening enemy. However, studies have established that States facing adverse neighbours are increasingly investing in transport infrastructure along their borders as the 'advantages of mobility are generally believed to outweigh the defensive benefits of difficult-to-traverse

terrains.'[3] India presents a classic example where these two opposing views have been in play.

To begin with, the political elites of newly independent India did not find any merit in developing transportation and communication networks close to the borders to secure the country. This lack of understanding of the necessity of strategic infrastructure along the borders was based on two strongly held views. The first was the firm belief that a war with China was inconceivable. And, even if such an eventuality occurred, large scale military operations would not take place along the northern and northeastern borders.[4] To quote Jawaharlal Nehru regarding the security of northern borders:

> It would be desirable to have a military appreciation, but I do not think that there is any military danger of military operations on a scale there. The only possibility of such operations of such operations will be if there was a world war and if India was a belligerent country opposed to China. Even then, no major operations are likely there because not only of the difficulties of the terrain, the fact that the war will be fought in other vital theatres.[5]

The second belief was that the Himalayas were an impenetrable barrier along the entire length of the northern boundary. This notion was suitably expounded by Jawaharlal Nehru in December 1950 when he stated that the Himalayas are our 'magnificent frontier' and 'principal barrier'.[6] The fact that such a magnificent impenetrable barrier can be breached was unthinkable. There were, however, a few strategists who cautioned against such notions, and drew attention to the vulnerability of the Himalayas.

Referring to the mountain ranges as 'the Himalayan Maginot Line',[7] K.M. Panikkar argued that the belief that the Himalayas stood as a solid barrier and protected the subcontinent and its people from outside attack instilled a sense of false security among the Indians. This false sense of security prevented them from envisaging any attacks from neighbours and, therefore, they 'were surprised when an invasion took place, as they never looked beyond the mountain barrier.'[8]

He even argued that in the age of aircraft, atomic bombs, and self-propelled artillery, the Himalayas in themselves could prove to be an ineffective barrier.[9] Panikkar, however, argued that if the Himalayas are considered together with the barren and inhospitable Tibetan plateau, then the Himalayas will maintain their 'position as the impenetrable mountain range'[10] and 'immune from attack from the North'.[11]

The Chinese Threat and India's Road Building Project

The occupation of Tibet by Communist China in October 1950 rendered the Himalayan barrier ineffective, and exposed the country's entire north and northeastern borders to potential infiltrations as well as external aggression. Added to this problem was the fact that the north and north eastern regions of India were remote, economically backward, with poor communication links, and practically no administration.

Providing a picture of the state of roads in the border areas, B.N. Mullik writes:

> In Ladakh, even Leh was not connected with Srinagar by a road. And there were no roads in Ladakh itself: not even bridle paths; only foot or goat tracks existed. The Rohtang Pass, 10 miles east of Manali, effectively barred access to Lahaul and Spiti for the major part of the year, and even when the pass was open from May to September, only journey by foot was possible. There was no communication in Chini tehsil except for a bridle path to Shipki La. In Uttar Pradesh, motorable roads existed up to Almora, Pauri, Tehri, Srinagar, and Chamoli. There were good bridle paths to Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath. In the rest of these hills, there were only foot tracks. In NEFA no roads existed, even in the foothills.[12]

Realising the threat that China posed to India because of its expansionism in Tibet, the Indian government began to improve the administration, defence, communication, etc. of its frontiers areas. The steps taken were based on the recommendations of the North

and North Eastern Border Defence Committee set up in February 1951.[13] Most importantly, India initiated a strategic road building programme in the border areas to improve communications links, especially in the tribal areas in the Northeast. The task of the construction of the roads was entrusted to Army engineers as well as the Ministry of Transport.[14]

In the eastern sector, as communication links in NEFA were particularly poor, the Indian government sanctioned special road building projects in the first Five Year Plan in 1953.[15] Of the total projected outlay of Rs. 30 million in the First Five Year Plan, 45 per cent was allocated for communication projects.[16] The projects included building a total of seven roads, besides constructing trails for porters, mules, and horses as well as airstrips. The roads that were planned for improving the transportation network were: Tezpur-Bomdila, Kimin-Ziro Camp, Sadiya-Denning, Lokra-Kimin, Pasighat-Ledum-Sagong, Margherita-Khonsa, and Mokokchung-Tuensang.[17]

These roads were, however, located entirely in the more accessible foothills, and communication in the interiors was exclusively restricted to mule tracks or bridle paths. The lacunae were rectified in the Second Five Year Plan in which the development of road networks further in the interiors was emphasised; this would provide accessibility to various district headquarters established in the interior. The responsibility for the construction of the roads was entrusted to the NEFA Public Works Department (PWD) and, by the end of Second Five Year Plan, all the five district headquarters were connected with motorable roads.[18] Most importantly, by late 1959, the Kimin-Ziro road was completed and the Tezpur-Bomdila road was partially finished.[19]

In the middle sector of the India-China border, transportation systems in the border areas were comparatively better. Emphasis was, therefore, laid on improving the existing roads. Work on the Hindustan-Tibet road commenced in 1951 and it was extended from Shimla to the Tibetan border. In addition, projects to connect places of strategic importance in the Kumaon hills were launched in June 1954.[20] Two roads connecting border villages in Himachal Pradesh

– the Mile 85/0-Karam-Chini Shipki La and the Shimla-Rampur-Chini – were also planned.[21] In Ladakh, upgrading the mule tract connecting Srinagar to Leh into a motorable road started in 1954.[22] In the same year, work on the improvement of the existing Leh-Manali road also started.

While the Government of India had embarked upon a rapid road building exercise to connect far away border areas, it soon realised that the construction of roads in the border states posed an enormous challenge. Inhospitable terrain, high and elongated ridges and deep valleys, weak geological structure with unstable rocks, and high mountain passes demanded high technical road building expertise, which was hardly available in the country. In addition, extreme climatic conditions – such as heavy snow-fall and frequent landslides due to heavy monsoon rains – restricted the working season.[23]

Moreover, road building was a state subject under the Constitution; therefore the responsibility of building roads in these areas rested on the state PWD. However, the state PWDs were unable to accomplish the task as they had neither the financial resources nor the technical expertise to build roads in these hostile conditions. The problem of financial mismanagement and irregularities further undermined the efforts of efficient road building.[24] To cite an example, work on the Srinagar-Leh road had to be suspended in 1958 when it was discovered that contractors and the engineers concerned were involved in corruption.[25] As a result, the progress of road building in the border areas was extremely slow over the first two Five Year Plan periods.

An important factor that further undermined India's defence preparedness in these inaccessible border areas was the decision of the Indian government not to build roads close to the borders. In the run up to the preparation of the Third Five Year Plan, the matter of communication in the NEFA was reconsidered and a meeting was convened of the officials concerned in December 1959 to discuss the issue. During the meeting, the Government of India took note of the MoD's opposition to building roads in the vicinity of the India-China border.

After being entrusted with the responsibility of defending the India-China border in September 1959, the Army had undertaken an assessment of the communication networks of the northern borders and decided against building roads, which would connect the borders with the interiors.[26] The Army argued that 'connecting forward areas with the interior would serve Chinese offensive purposes more than India's defensive purpose.'[27] This argument was accepted by the political leadership and a policy was adopted under which roads were not to be constructed within 30 miles of the borders.[28]

Thus, in the Third Five Year Plan, emphasis was laid on building roads connecting the plains and defensible positions in the hills.[29] Border states were encouraged to plan strategic roads and were given the authority to execute the road building schemes for which provisions were made in the Third Five Year Plan. For instance, the Punjab government planned to develop 100 miles of roads in Lahaul-Spiti at an estimated cost of Rs. 68.38 crore, and the Uttar Pradesh government planned to construct 12 roads in the hill areas bordering Tibet at a cost of Rs. 65.84 crore.[30]

Similarly, for NEFA an outlay of Rs. 2 crore was earmarked for the construction of '419 miles of jeep road, 153 miles of mule track, and 841 miles of porter tracks as well as the improvement of an additional 416 miles of existing road.'[31] Besides these, the Indian Army also conceived their own road-building plans in border areas.[32]

However, the state PWDs, as mentioned earlier, were hobbled with problems of inefficiency, corruption and the lack of expertise. To overcome these constraints, and to coordinate road building projects of the various state governments as well as the Army, the Government of India established a single executive body, the Border Road Development Board (BRDB) on March 29, 1960, and its executive wing, the Border Road Organisation, (BRO) on May 7, 1960.[33] The consolidated plan was to construct around 4000 km of new roads, and improve 2500 km of existing roads for an estimated cost of Rs. 120 crore, spread over three years.[34]

To implement these projects, the BRO started several project units. The first two units that were set up were: (1) Tuskar (renamed

Project Vartak in 1963) in the east, with headquarters at Tezpur; and (2) Beacon in the north, with headquarters at Srinagar. Project Tuskar was entrusted with the responsibility to build the Bhalukpong-Tenga-Bomdila-Tawang Road, and Project Beacon the Srinagar-Leh highway.[35] The BRO completed both the roads in October and August 1962, respectively.[36] The Srinagar-Leh highway was further extended to Chushul towards the Chinese border in September 1962.[37]

In the East, the BRO made attempts to take the Bomdila-Tawang road further north, and connect the forward posts near the Chinese border by constructing a jeepable road to Tawang. Under Project Deepak, the BRO undertook the responsibility of constructing the Joshimath-Malri-Rinkin Road as well as extend and improve the Hindustan-Tibet Road in 1961 (see Map 1). All the road building projects, however, came to a halt when China launched an attack in the NEFA and Ladakh sectors on October 20, 1962.

Map 1: Road Network (BRO Roads 1961-62)
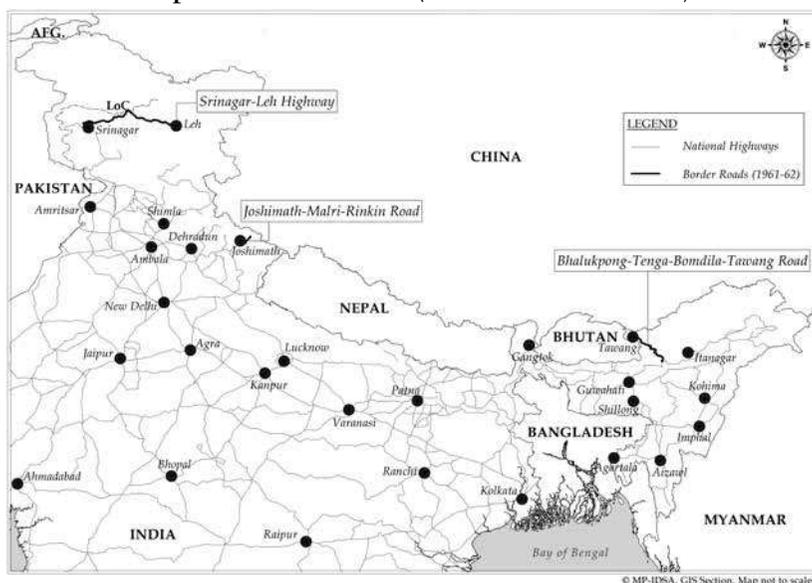
Following the defeat in the India-China border war of 1962, while the construction of hitherto unfinished roads was taken up and completed in the next three to four years, the Indian security

and political establishment continued with the policy of not building any roads within 30 miles of the border. This decision was probably reinforced by the revelation that, during the 1962 war, the PLA had used existing footpaths and mule tracks to enter NEFA. The NEFA sector had a number of foot paths and mules tracks emanating from the main Bum La road coming from Tibet.[38] While the mule tracks were usually used by the local people to reach their villages and settlements, the foot paths were used by Tibetan traders to travel to the Assam plains. It was these footpaths that were exploited by the Chinese Army to enter into the Indian territory, bypass the Indian defences, and cut off the latter's logistics and communication lines from the rear.[39]

For instance, in the Dirang sector, the Chinese had acquired information about the Se La-Mago and Mago-Poshing La routes and used this knowledge to march into the Indian Territory with ease. The PLA was also able to enlist the assistance of the local population to carry rations and transport other heavy equipment.[40] The Indian security establishment could have been, therefore, convinced that if road networks are built in the frontier areas, they would provide the PLA easier access to the Indian hinterland in an event of another war with China.

The Chinese Road and Railway Project in Tibet

Meanwhile, China continued to build new roads and improve the existing ones in Tibet. Unlike the Indian political leadership who built roads in the border areas only in response to a potential Chinese threat, the Chinese leadership appreciated the importance of building strategic infrastructure in Tibet, which would help it secure its borders and consolidate its hold over the newly 'liberated' regions. China considers Tibet as its backdoor through which all kinds of foreign influences and intervention could enter China and, therefore, required to be secured.[41]

Therefore, immediately after the PLA entered eastern Tibet and Xinjiang (Sinkiang), the Chinese embarked upon massive projects to build roads in Tibet and Xinjiang to connect both the regions with China.[42] Road building programmes and the development of other strategic infrastructure, especially in Tibet, was given utmost

priority. By 1959, 5,648 km of roads were built and thrown open to traffic.[43] These extensive road networks stood China in good stead during the 1962 border war with India.

In the 1960s and 1970s, China invested more than 1 billion yuan on road building and, by 1975, it had completed 91 highways totalling 15,800 km in Outer Tibet alone, which connected 97 per cent of the region's counties by motorable roads.[44] In particular, four strategic highways – the Szechuan-Tibet Highway (South Military Road measuring 2,413 km); the Qinghai-Tibet Highway (the Northern Military Road measuring 2,122 km); the Xinjiang-Tibet Highway; and the Yunnan-Tibet Highway – were built. Besides, China also built other complex road systems running parallel to the Himalayas which connected Tibet not only with nearby Chinese provinces but also with important strategic areas along the international border with India.[45]

Between 1980 and 2010, China organised five conferences with exclusive focus on the socio-economic development of Tibet. Following the 'Third Work Conference on Tibet' held in July 1994, China substantially increased investments in Tibet's road construction projects. Between 1996 and 2000, 4.86 billion yuan was invested in 62 projects aimed at bringing socio-economic development in Tibet.[46] The increased investment accelerated the pace of highway construction in Tibet and, by the end of 2010, 40,000 km of roads were constructed in Tibet, with all 72 counties (except Medog County which was connected by road only in 2013) comprising 90 per cent of towns and 70 per cent of administrative villages were connected by roads.[47]

In addition to the construction of roadways, China also constructed a network of Railways in Tibet and connected it with far flung border areas. In July 2006, the 1,956 km Qinghai-Tibet Railway (QTR), connecting Lhasa with Gormo (or Golmud), was inaugurated. The line was extended further to connect Shigatse in August 2014, and from there to Yatung, situated just a few kilometres from Nathu La.[48] Other areas – which would be eventually linked with the QTR – are Nyingchi (a town north of Arunachal Pradesh), Gyirong (China-Nepal border), and Kashgar and Hotan in Xinjiang province. This railway connectivity, besides enhancing connectivity in Tibet, gives

Beijing the capability to mobilise up to 12 army divisions in a month and deploy them right along the border with India.[49]

The ability to deploy troops at a rapid pace along the border in Tibet gives China an enormous and decisive edge over India in a probable future scenario of a border war between the two countries. A sector-wise comparative analysis of the existing road heads in Tibet and India along the border brings out the stark contrast. While Indian road heads end between 5 and 85 km from the LAC in Eastern Ladakh, the Chinese ones are right up to its perception of the LAC in most areas.

In the middle sector, Indian road heads terminate 30 to 70 km short of the border, whereas China has built road heads 5 km before the border. Likewise, in Sikkim, Indian roads end 10-15 km before the border whereas China has last mile connectivity to the passes. In Arunachal Pradesh also, road heads end anywhere between 20 and 50 km from the border whereas Chinese roads are mostly up to the LAC.[50]

India-China Border Roads and Railways

The feverish development of roads and railways in Tibet that strengthened Chinese military positions along the border, especially in the 1990s, was witnessed by the Government of India with great concern. It realised that to facilitate the security and effective management of the borders and the development of infrastructure in these inaccessible areas, it is necessary to build similar infrastructure on its side of the border. Accordingly, an assessment of the road networks in the border areas with China was carried out, which revealed that while the western borders along J&K (Plains), Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat were reasonably well connected and fairly accessible, the northern and eastern border areas required roads to improve connectivity and accessibility.

Consequently, the government asked the China Study Group (CSG) 'to study the requirement of road communication along the China border to facilitate [the] brisk movement of troops in case of any aggression along the Northern and Eastern frontiers.'[51] In 1997, the CSG identified 13 roads to be built along the LAC which would enable Indian troops to access and patrol areas close to the India-China border. The road proposal by the CSG (costing Rs. 676

crore) was approved by the CCS in 1999. The proposed roads were slated to be completed between 2003 and 2006; however, because of various reasons, which contributed to delays in their execution, the completion date was extended to 2006-2011.[52]

A dose of urgency for developing road networks along the India-China border was further introduced in 2006 when China laid claims to the whole of Arunachal Pradesh. In an interview to CNN/IBN in November that year, the Chinese Ambassador Sun Yuxi said, '[I]n our position, the whole of the state of Arunachal Pradesh is Chinese territory. And Tawang is only one of the places in it. We are claiming all of that. That is our position.'[53]

Alarmed by this Chinese pronouncement, together with increased border intrusions as well as the wretched condition of infrastructure at the borders, in 2006 the CCS laid stress on the timely completion of the 13 CSG roads which were vital for India to assert its territorial claims and enhance the operational capability of its border guarding forces in these areas. Since the BRO was the main agency executing the project, the CCS realised that the organisation required further strengthening and accordingly sanctioned funds to raise 151 additional units in September 2006.[54]

To provide further impetus to connectivity in the northern border region, a sub-committee was constituted in June 2007 under the chairmanship of the Director General Military Operations (DGMO), which identified 33 General Staff (GS) roads as part of infrastructure development along the LAC.[55]

In addition, the ITBP, in consultation with the DGMO, also identified 27 roads totalling 608 km to be built along the India-China border.[56] Thus, a total of 73 strategically important roads along the India-China border were identified as India-China Border Roads (ICBRs). Of these 73 roads, the construction of 61 roads comprising 13 CSG, 33 GS, and 15 ITBP roads totalling 3409.27 km were entrusted to the BRO, with the targeted completion date of 2012.[57] The rest of the 12 roads were to be built by other agencies, such as the Central Public Works Department (CPWD)-8 roads; the National Projects Construction Company (NPCC)-2 roads; and Himachal Pradesh PWD-2 roads.[58]

Furthermore, 17 underground tunnels and 410 strategic bridges were also planned for the development of a holistic road infrastructure to provide much stronger connectivity to the LAC. By 2009-10, the Government had drawn up the Long Term Perspective Plans (LTPP) for the augmentation of infrastructure on India's borders in a phase wise manner. Under LTPP-Phase 1, 277 roads of the length of 13,100 km costing Rs. 24,886 crore were planned to be constructed by 2012. Similarly, under LTPP-Phase 2, 281 roads measuring 14,857 km at a cost of Rs. 25,268 crore were to be constructed by the year 2022.[59]

Along with road networks, the government has also been planning to construct railway networks for the rapid and easy movement of troops and heavy military equipment to the borders. In this regard, the Indian army had proposed, in January 2010, 28 strategic railway lines along the northern borders to augment the movement and sustenance of troops during war and peace.[60] In December 2012, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) prioritised 14 of these proposed railway lines as strategically important for national security at an estimated cost of Rs. 2.1 lakh crore. Of these 14 lines, 9 railway lines were proposed to be constructed along the India-China border (see Map 2).

Map 2: Railway Network

© MP-IDSA, GIS Section. Map not to scale.
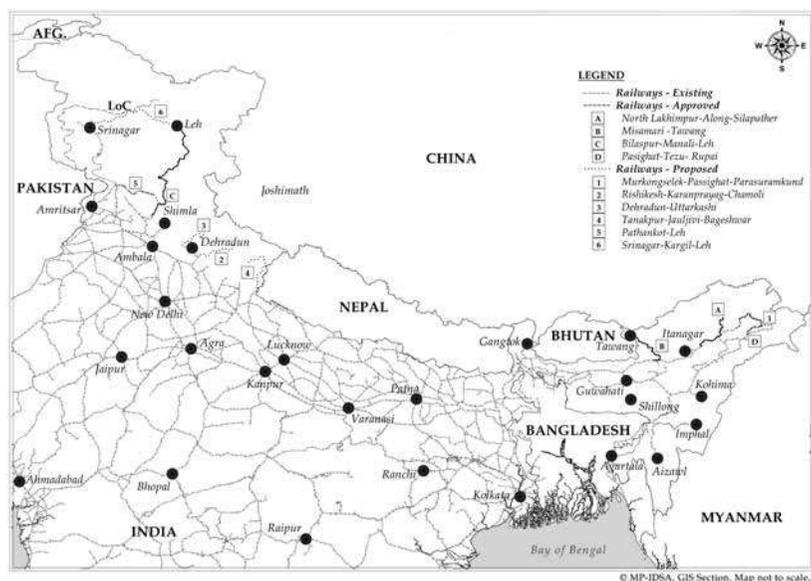
These are:[6]

- The Murkongselek-Passighat-Tezu-Rupai-Parasuramkund: 128 km
- The North Lakhimpur-Along-Silapather: 380 km
- The Misamari -Tawang: 378 km
- The Rishikesh-Karanprayag-Chamoli: 160 km
- The Dehradun-Uttarkashi: 90 km
- The Tanakpur-Jauljivi-Bageshwar: 245 km
- The Bilaspur-Manali-Leh: 498 km
- The Pathankot-Leh: 400 km
- The Srinagar-Kargil-Leh: NA

Border Roads and Railways: Unfulfilled Dreams

That Indian policymakers had finally jettisoned the earlier defensive mind-set regarding the building of roads in the India-China border areas was further ascertained by A.K. Antony, the then Defence Minister of India who, while addressing a function organised by the BRO, said, 'Earlier, the thinking was that inaccessibility in far-flung areas would be a deterrent to the enemies.' He acknowledged that this was an 'incorrect approach', and stated that the government had decided to upgrade roads, tunnels, and airfields in the border areas.[62]

The ability to build roads in such difficult terrain – which tests not only engineering acumen and human capacity but also demands huge financial resources – was, to a large extent, made possible by the steady economic growth that India was experiencing in the mid-2000s. The economic buoyancy provided the financial resources to the Indian government to plan and execute these strategically important projects with greater confidence.

Unfortunately, this changed defensive mind-set of policymakers did not translate on the ground. India is still struggling to build roads along its borders. The 73 strategic roads planned along the LAC (which were to be completed by 2012) are nowhere near completion. According to the Comptroller and Auditor's (CAG) Report of 2017 on the construction of ICBR reveals that of the 61 ICBR under construction by the BRO, only 15 were completed by

2012, and another 7 were completed by March 2016. The CAG Report states:

> The initial targets fixed in Annual Works Plan (AWP) with respect to individual component of a road viz. formation, surfacing, permanent works and bridge works were never achieved during the period 2012–13 to 2015–16. Even the reduced targets at the Revised Estimates stage could not be achieved during the years 2012–13, 2013–14 and 2015–16, and the shortfall in achievement ranged to the extent of 79 percent (with respect to formation).[63]

It also reveals that cost escalation is quite high as far as ICBR is concerned. It states that of Rs. 4644 crore which was sanctioned for 61 roads, Rs. 4536 crore (98 per cent) had been utilised to construct only 22 roads (36 per cent) by March 2016.[64] When asked about the slow pace of construction of ICBR by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence in 2010, the BRO argued that it was not proper to expect speedy completion of the task given that it was only in the past couple of years that the Government of India had changed its mind to build roads near the border.[65]

The BRO also highlighted a number of factors, which constrained it from constructing the strategic roads on time. The main hurdle was forest and wildlife clearance by the ministry concerned. According to the BRO official,

> The biggest stumbling block to develop infrastructure in border areas has been the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) 1980 and the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) 1972 whose various provisions lead to considerable delay in obtaining permission to construct roads as also impose large financial costs.[66]

Even though the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) had reduced the processing time for border roads along the India-China border from 90 days to 30 days at the state government level, and from 60 days to 30 days at the Union government level, and introduced a single window system to eliminate procedural delays,

the average time to obtain forest clearance still takes three to nine years.[67] In 2017, 71 road projects in the Northeast were awaiting clearance from the MoEF,[68] all of which were finally cleared by 2020.[69] Besides, the non-availability of ground staff in revenue and forest departments at the state level, delays in conducting joint surveys, and poor coordination among the agencies concerned are largely responsible for delays in obtaining forest clearances at the state level where most of the delays happen.[70]

The second factor that causes delays is the acquisition of land for the purposes of road building. The acquisition of land involves lengthy and complex legal processes that take years to resolve. Added to the problem is the fact that land records are not well maintained, and cadastral surveys are not conducted in many states. Land being a state subject, the non-cooperation of state governments in allotting land to the BRO also adds to the problem. In some states, especially in the Northeast, land is held by communities posing peculiar problems in acquisition of land. Frequent changes made in the pricing of land by the revenue and forest officials also contribute towards enormous delays in land acquisition.[71]

Third, extreme weather conditions constrain construction work, especially along the India-China border. In Arunachal Pradesh, for instance, the rainy season lasts for more than eight to nine months. As a result, the newly cut terrain becomes slushy, making it difficult for the workers to work. Similarly, in high altitudes, winters are early and prolonged, and are accompanied by heavy snowfall and snowstorms. Such inclement weather conditions reduce the number of months available for work and, consequently, completing road projects on time becomes impossible.

Fourth, since the terrain is hilly and difficult, heavy construction machinery has to be airlifted to the site. The shortage of airlift capability of the BRO results in inadequate logistics feeding and the deployment of equipment, resulting in slow progress. Fifth, the lack of competent and willing contractors as well as skilled and experienced labour in these remote areas also make road construction difficult. Last but not least, hard rock formations, the shortage of construction material at the site, and damages to road

because of natural disasters such as landslides, mudslides, etc., also delay the completion of the road project.[72]

While the reasons for delays cited by the BRO are genuine and need to be taken on board to give the organisation a fair chance, the CAG also reported a number of lapses on the part of the BRO. According to the CAG, the Reconnaissance, Survey and Trace Cut (RSTC) done to collect data regarding the alignment of the roads and prepare project documents and cost estimates were shoddily executed by the BRO, resulting in delays and cost escalations. The AWP were delayed because of late submission of the Plans and their approval by the BRDB.[73] The Report further stated that

> [O]ut of 24 selected ICBRs, works executed on 17 roads were afflicted with non-linkage of stretches, steep gradients, defective alignments, turning problems, poor riding conditions, inadequate drainage facilities, non-availability of road furniture, abandonment with massive delays and improper contract management.[74]

The Report further revealed that six of the completed roads 'were not fit for running of specialised vehicles or equipment such as Smerch, Pinaka and Bofors'[75] due to the above mentioned inadequacies. Seventeen roads, on which Rs. 1,797.28 crore, had been spent by March 2016, were of substandard quality, causing heavy losses to the exchequer.[76] Besides, an enquiry by the BRDB revealed serious technical and financial irregularities in the construction of these roads by the BRO.

The state of affairs is even dire in the case of strategic railway lines. The plan to construct 14 new railway lines (and upgrade existing ones) proved to be too ambitious as the Indian government does not have the required financial wherewithal to invest in these projects. The Ministry of Railways – which is the main agencies to execute these projects – is extremely reluctant to fund these projects as these lines are not commercially viable. Additional funds have also not provided to the Ministry of Railways even though these projects are of national importance.

In fact, the Planning Commission declined funding stating that they were not priority projects. The Railways was also concerned that, because of difficult terrain in the border areas, these projects would lead to cost escalation and, therefore, it insisted on conducting a field location survey (FLS) to determine the estimated project cost. Finally, in December 2015, the CCS gave approval to only four of the 9 strategic railway lines to be constructed on a priority basis.[77]

These are: (i) Missamari-Tenga-Tawang; (ii) Bilaspur-Manali-Leh; (iii) Pasighat-Tezu-Rupai; and (iv) North Lakhimpur-Bame (Along)-Silapathar. The Ministry of Railways initiated the FLS of these four identified strategic lines in 2016 for which funds were provided by the MoD.[78] According to Railways officials, the FLS is in progress, and once the reports are submitted, then a decision regarding the commencement of the projects will be taken up.[79]

Building strategic roads and railways along the India's borders is an imperative for the defence and development of the country. Although this realisation has finally dawned on the Indian policymaker, but there is a lack of urgency in initiating as well as completing various strategic road and railway projects along the China border. Financial constraints aside, the organisations involved in road and rail building also need to realise the importance of these projects and put their houses in order. At present, India is lagging decades behind China in developing infrastructure along its borders. If it desires to match China, then the Indian government has to show greater resolve in completing these infrastructure projects on time with minimal financial overshoot.

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5.   Regulating India's Borders: Cross Border Movement

The separation of Burma (Myanmar) from colonial India and the partitioning of the Indian Subcontinent bequeathed an independent India with six international land borders: with Afghanistan, Pakistan (later Bangladesh in 1971), Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Tibet (later China). As a sovereign country, the first step for India was to establish effective control over its international borders by setting up institutional and administrative structures for regulating the entry/exit of goods and people into its sovereign territory. The establishment of border controls was not an immediate but a gradual process, determined by treaty obligations with neighbours, national policies, ground realities, and the enforcement capabilities of the government agencies.

Regulating the Cross Border Movement of People

As a first step towards regulating the movement of people across the borders, in July 1948, India adopted the Indian passport system to control the international travel of Indians. At the same time, a system of passes and permits was introduced to regulate the entry of travellers from countries sharing a land border with India, such as Tibet and Pakistan.

Permits were also imposed on the residents of the Portuguese and French territories in India who desired to enter India as these colonies were yet to be liberated.[1] While the permit and pass system continued for Tibet and the colonies without any changes, in the case of Pakistan, the system was modified from time to time. On the

whole, entry, exit and stay of foreigners in India is governed by the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920.

The India-Pakistan Border

Given the nature of Partition and its politico-social and economic aftermath, a considered decision was taken by India and Pakistan to maintain status quo in matters affecting trade and movements between the two Dominions up to February 29, 1948.[2] This meant that people and goods were allowed to move freely across the borders without any customs barrier for six months following Independence.[3] The termination of the 'standstill agreement' at the end of February 1948 required the two dominions to establish border controls to regulate the movement of goods and people.

However, the difference in the cross border flow of people between India and the two parts of Pakistan necessitated a differentiated approach towards border regulations. On the one hand, Punjab witnessed intense communal violence and a 'swift, bloody and almost complete expulsion of minority populations from both its parts immediately following Partition',[4] on the other hand, the violence in Bengal was sporadic and, therefore, the flight of refugees was intermittent and gradual. The absence of intense communal violence in Bengal convinced Indian policy makers that the flight of refugees across this part of border was insignificant and temporary in nature.[5]

This understanding was also underlined by the realisation that both the governments were incapable of coping with another refugee problem on the scale of Punjab in the east.[6] Asserting that the mass-migration of refugees was not in the interest of India and Pakistan, both dominions agreed to discourage such cross-border flows by establishing peace and persuading the 'evacuees' to return, for which border controls were considerably softened. Subsequently, intense inter-governmental negotiations and discussions were carried on to agree upon the procedures and modalities to handle inter-dominion migration.[7]

Finally, a set of proposals and recommendations forwarded by the Expert Committee on Economic Issues was agreed upon by both the countries in the Inter-Dominion Conference held on April 15-18,

1948 at Calcutta. To begin with, it was decided that for easy and hassle free travel between the two dominions, *inter alia*, common and simple baggage rules should be applied to passengers; personnel searches should be carried out only in case of genuine suspicion of smuggling; and, once a passenger had passed the customs frontiers, no further examination of the luggage or person would be carried out.[8] While agreeing to the fair and equitable principles was easy for India and Pakistan, the implementation of these principles was infrequent and shoddy.

Meanwhile, India was beset with a new problem – Muslims 'refugees' who had earlier migrated to West Pakistan but were now returning to India. As this reverse migration was causing lot of social and economic friction in Delhi and the adjoining areas,[9] the Government of India decided to introduce a permit system along its western borders with Pakistan under the Influx from Pakistan (Control) Ordinance on July 19, 1948 [later Influx from Pakistan (Control) Act, 1949]. Under the system, a person travelling from Pakistan to India was required to possess a permit.

The permit system had five categories: temporary visits; permanent resettlement (for Hindus); permanent return to India (for Muslims); repeated journeys (for businessmen and officials); and transit travel (for travelling across the two halves of Pakistan).[10] At first, Pakistan protested against this move; but it soon followed suit and introduced a similar permit system in September 1948 under the Pakistan (Control of Entry) Ordinance citing security concerns from 'undesirable characters from India.'[11]

The permit system was, however, not introduced along India's border with East Pakistan based on the argument that thousands of people crossed the border daily, and the imposition of permits would cause great hardship to them.[12] The permit system, as expected, became highly unpopular, and its provisions were violated more often than not. Be that as it may, the system was the first instance when the Indian state exercised full authority to regulate the hitherto free cross-border movement.[13]

The failure of the permit system to achieve its intended goal of stemming the migration of Muslims, and the riots of 1950 and

1952 in East Bengal forced Pakistan to suggest the introduction of the passport system to regulate cross-border movement.[14] India opposed the proposal citing the situation along the eastern border, but jurisdictional needs after the promulgation of the Indian Constitution in 1950 as well as the need to standardise cross-border mobility along its borders with Pakistan compelled India to eventually agree.[15] After extensive discussions on the modalities during May 15-19, 1952, the India-Pakistan Passport and Visa Scheme was introduced on October 15, 1952.[16]

The scheme required that Indians travelling to Pakistan and vice-versa, would require a passport from India as well as a visa from Pakistan, and travellers would have to cross the border through designated checkpoints. In 1953, the different kinds of permits issued earlier were converted into short term and long term visas, with categories ranging from A to F as well as W. All these categories of visas were required to be cleared from the MHA in consultation with state governments. India and Pakistan agreed to set up more offices to issue visas and passports. For example, Shillong and Bombay for Pakistan, and Rajshahi and Hyderabad (Sind) for India.[17] Pakistan also agreed to open additional check points at Chhatak and Hatipagar for Assam, and one each for Tripura and West Bengal.[18]

The implementation of the passport and visa scheme, however, did not help the matter. Incongruence in the interpretation of the passport as a travel document or a certificate of nationality created confusions, resulting in the filing of numerous court cases, especially by those who remained indecisive about their choice of country for residence. Visas were also routinely violated as they largely became short term (3 months).[19]

This cross-border movements with Pakistan, especially across the western border, came to an abrupt halt after the India-Pakistan war of 1965, while along the eastern border such movements continued, albeit in lesser magnitude. In 1967, with the enactment of the Passport Act of 1967, the India-Pakistan Passport was merged with the international one.

Following the 1971 India-Pakistan war, bilateral relations which were snapped before re-established in 1974. This paved the way for

a couple of agreements regarding regulating travel across borders. The first agreement regarding visa was signed on September 17, 1974, which provided for issuance of visas to diplomats, officials and other visitors. While the diplomatic visa was valid for one year, the official visa was valid for a month (single entry). The visitor's visa was valid for three months to one year, but they were allowed to travel to only those places mentioned on the visa.

For immigration through land borders, Attari and Munabao were the designated check posts. Pakistani travellers were also required to register themselves within 24 hours of arrival as well as departure.[20] In addition, a protocol on visits to religious shrine was also signed between India and Pakistan on the same day, which *inter alia*, stipulated that a list of shrines to be visited in both the countries be finalised and revised from time to time. The protocol also allowed a group of 20 people to visit religious shrines in each other's territory.[21]

The 1974 agreement between the two countries was revised in 2012. The 2012 Visa Agreement allows Pakistani visitors to visit five places in India instead of three. It provides for a visa on arrival (at Attari checkpoint) for persons above the age of 65 and below the age of 12. It also allows entry and exit from different designated immigration check posts. The agreement introduced business visas and exempts some categories of businessmen from police reporting. However, since Pakistan falls under the Prior Reference Category (PRC) list, prior clearance from the MHA is mandatory before visas are issued to its citizens.[22] India also grants long term visas to Pakistani nationals who have fled religious persecution and come to India.

India-Bangladesh Border

The inauguration of Bangladesh as a new country in 1971 necessitated signing of new agreements between India and Bangladesh to regulate the movement of people across their mutual border. Accordingly on September 1, 1972, both the countries signed an agreement on Passport and Visa system. Under the system, in addition to the international passport, two new passports called the

'Bangladesh Special Passport' and the 'India-Bangladesh Passport' were introduced by Bangladesh and India respectively to enable travel between the countries.

Nationals of both the countries were required to carry valid visas to enter into each other's countries.[23] The categories of visas comprised the diplomatic and official visa, long term and short term visas (3 months), as well as transit and re-entry visas. Unlike Pakistani nationals, Bangladeshi nationals were free to travel to any part of the country (except the restricted areas).

The agreement was revised on May 23, 2001, which further liberalised the visa system. It provided for visa free regime on reciprocal basis for diplomats; easing of norms for long term visas; provision for multiple entry for work permit holders, investors, businessmen, professionals and students/scholars; and issuance of double entry and medical visas for three months with three attendants, etc.[24]

The provisions of Revised Travel Agreement (RTA) was further revised in 2013. Most importantly, the system of the Bangladesh Special Passport and the India-Bangladesh Passport ceased to exist. Some of the other provisions in the RTA were increasing the days for free visa regime including for the officials from 30 days to 45 days; double entry for short term visas; and multiple entry for long term, medical and journalist visa holders.[25] The RTA was again updated on July 15, 2018 to further liberalise the visa regime including enhanced duration for employment and student visas.[26]

The India-Nepal-Bhutan Borders

India's defence and security imperatives along its northern frontiers with China as well as strong cross-border socio-economic and cultural linkages compelled India to continue the British Raj practice of keeping the border between India and Nepal, and between India and Bhutan, open. The British had an interest in keeping the border with Nepal open for two reasons. First, impressed by the fighting skills of the Gurkhas, the British wanted to recruit them into the Indian army. Second, Nepal was seen as a market for finished goods from India. To achieve these objectives, it was necessary to provide

unrestricted cross-border movement for both goods and people, and hence the idea of an open border.

Post-Independence, faced with an assertive China along its northern borders, India decided to shore up its defences by limiting Chinese influence on the cis-Himalayan countries viz. Bhutan and Nepal. The Himalayas have been historically perceived as the northern barrier that guards India. In the absence of a well-defined natural barrier between India and these countries, Indian policy-makers came to view the Himalayas as a natural barrier between India and China. This line of thought was highlighted by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in a speech in parliament in December 1950.

> And regardless of our feelings about Nepal, we are interested in our own country's security, in our own country's borders. Now, we have had from immemorial times, a magnificent frontier that is to say, the Himalayas. It is not quite as difficult as it used to be, still it is difficult, very difficult. Now, so far as the Himalayas are concerned, they lie on the other side of Nepal, mostly not on this side. Therefore, the principal barrier to India lies on the other side of the Nepal, and we are not going to tolerate any person coming over that barrier. Therefore, much as we appreciate the independence of Nepal and we cannot risk [our] own security to anything going wrong in Nepal which permits either that barrier to be crossed or otherwise weakens our frontier.[27]

Thus, the defence and security of India required that the northern borders of Nepal and Bhutan be considered as the natural barriers of India and, therefore tightly integrating these two countries with India by allowing free cross-movement of people and goods and preventing any Chinese influence over them. The concept of an open border between India and Nepal was institutionalised in the Treaty of Peace and Friendship that the two countries signed in 1950. Article VII of the Peace and Friendship Treaty with Nepal stipulates that,

> [T]he Government of India and Nepal agree to grant, on a reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature.[28]

The above mentioned article provides that the residents of India and Nepal are authorized to enter into each other's territory from any point on the border without any passport or visa restrictions. The open border between India and Nepal has not only addressed mutual security considerations but also fostered friendly relations between the two countries.

Similarly, Article 7 of the India-Bhutan Treaty of Friendship of 1949 states that,

> The Government of India and the Government of Bhutan agree that Bhutanese subjects residing in Indian territories shall have equal justice with Indian subjects, and that Indian subjects residing in Bhutan shall have equal justice with the subjects of the Government of Bhutan.[29]

This provision was repeated in Article 5 of the revised Treaty of Friendship between the two countries signed on February 8, 2007. By virtue of these treaties, citizens of India and Bhutan are authorised to enter into each other's territory from any point on the land border without any passport or visa restrictions. However, Indians coming to Bhutan by road are required to obtain an 'entry permit' on the basis of a valid travel document such as a valid Indian Passport having a validity of a minimum of 6 months; and/or voter identity card issued by the Election Commission of India.

The entry permit can be obtained from the Immigration Office of Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) at Phuentsholing. The 'entry permit' allows an Indian tourist to visit Thimphu and Paro only. Any tourist going beyond Thimphu and Paro needs to acquire a 'special area permit' from the RGoB Immigration Office at Thimphu.[30]

The India-Myanmar Border

In the case of Myanmar, formal overland travel was not allowed through the India-Myanmar border until August 8, 2018. Visitors desirous of crossing the land border had to obtain special permits from Indian or Myanmar governments. Once the permit was procured, travellers had to apply for a visa, along with US$ 40 as fee for a travel guide. However, these travel restrictions were not applicable for the tribespeople inhabiting the border areas. The Indian government had realised that areas across the international border comprise a single socio-economic space for the tribes, and the location of the border amidst it had created hurdles for them to carry on with their traditional way of life and livelihood.

This realisation propelled the government to allow the tribespeople residing along the border to travel on either side of the international border for a distance of 25 miles (40 km) without a visa, passport, or any other travel documents. In fact, this decision mirrored the Burma Passport rules of 1948, which stipulated that the indigenous nationals (hill tribes) of those countries who share a common land border with Burma are exempted from passports or permits to enter into Burma, provided they reside within 25 miles from the land border.[31]

The tribespeople were also allowed to carry items equivalent to a headload. In addition, the Government of India provisioned that citizens of Myanmar could stay for 72 hours in India, while the Myanmar government allowed only a 24 hours stay for Indians in Myanmar.[32] This unique arrangement is called the Free Movement Regime (FMR). While the FMR helped the tribes maintain their age-old ties, unfortunately its provisions were exploited by Indian insurgent groups.

They cross over to Myanmar, receive training in arms, establish safe havens, and re-enter India to carry out subversive attacks.[33] Consequently, in August 1968, when Naga, Mizo, and Meitei insurgencies were raging, the Government of India reconsidered the provisions of the FMR, and introduced permits for travelling across the Myanmar border.[34] This provision remained in place for the next 40 years.

However, growing incidents of drug trafficking and arms smuggling as well as the increased movement of insurgents through the India-Myanmar border during the 1990s and early 2000s compelled the Indian government to yet again review the FMR to prevent its misuse by anti-national elements. Consequently, in 2004, India reduce the FMR limits to 16 km, and allow tribespeople to cross the international border only through three officially designated points.[35]

Since, no formal agreement on the free movement of tribes across their shared border existed between India and Myanmar at that time, the Indian government prepared a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and forwarded to the Myanmar government for a negotiated discussion.[36] Myanmar government took some years to arrive at a decision and finally, on May 11, 2018, both countries signed the Agreement on Land Border Crossing.[37]

The Agreement formalized the hitherto informal nature of FMR between the two countries by facilitating movement of people across the international land border on the basis of valid passports and visas.[38] The Agreement was officially implemented when two designated ports of entry/exit – Tamu-Moreh and the Rihkhawdar-Zowkhawtar along the India-Myanmar border – were simultaneously opened for overland travel on August 8, 2018.[39]

The India-Tibet (China) Border

Cross-border travel between India and Tibet immediately after independence was free. However, the annexation of Tibet by China in 1950 and the subsequent rush of refugees into India forced the Indian government to implement a permit system in April 1951 wherein the refugees were required to get a permit to enter into India.[40] Subsequently, this cross-border movement was guided by the *Agreement on Trade and Intercourse with Tibet Region of China and India* signed on April 29, 1954.

The agreement provided for the travel of pilgrims and traders through stipulated passes and routes: (1) the Shipki La pass; (2) the Mana pass; (3) the Niti pass; (4) the Kungri Bingri pass; (5) the Darma pass; and (6) the Lipu Lekh pass.[41] While officials, diplomats, and

nationals of both countries were required to possess passports and obtain visas to travel over land into each other's territory, traders and their dependents were required to produce only certificates duly attested by local governments. Similarly, porters and mule team drivers engaged in transportation services as well as pilgrims were required to carry certificates of goods and a permit for pilgrimage, respectively, instead of passport and visas. Inhabitants engaged in petty or local trade, or visiting their relatives across the border, were allowed to cross the border at any point without any travel documents.[42]

Unfortunately, the India-China border conflict in 1962 severely strained relations between the two countries. One of the casualties of this frozen relationship was the suspension of all cross-border trade and travel. Even the movement of people and goods through Nathu La in Sikkim, which was then a protectorate of India, was stopped. The re-establishment of ambassadorial relations between the two countries after a gap of 15 years in July 1976 did not result in the resumption of overland cross-border interactions, except the annual pilgrimage by Indian nationals to Kailash and Mansarovar in Tibet, which resumed in 1981 through Lipulekh.

It was only the visit of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to China in December 1988 that mended the bilateral relationship and provided opportunities to expand it in a meaningful way.[43] As a first step towards the normalisation of the relations, cross border trade was revived through the Shipki La and Lipulekh in 1991-1992 after the MoU on the Resumption of Border Trade was signed in December 1991, and the Protocol on Entry and Exit Procedures for Border Trade in July 1992.[44] Later on, Nathu La was opened as another route for border trade in 2006 and for pilgrimage to Kailash Mansarovar in 2015.[45]

Regulating the Cross-Border Movement of Goods

The India-Pakistan Border

Following Partition, the cross-border movement of goods between India and Pakistan was governed by the Standstill Agreement, which gave the inter dominion trade a semblance of internal trade. With the expiry of the Standstill Agreement on February 25, 1948, India

declared Pakistan a foreign country for trade purposes from March 1, 1948.[46] Pakistan had already declared India a foreign country for import and export on November 14, 1947.[47] Since India and Pakistan were heavily dependent on each other economically, in May 1948, both the countries agreed to mutually supply each other with essential commodities till a formal trade agreement was signed.[48] It was only in June 1949, that both the countries entered into a Trade Agreement to normalise bilateral trade relations.[49]

Meanwhile, for facilitating cross border trade between the newly independent countries, India and Pakistan had agreed to set up parallel Customs posts as near to each other as possible so that for each Customs post in one Dominion there is an opposite number. Subsequently, India notified a number of places as Land Customs Stations (LCSs) along its border with Pakistan in 1948 and 1949.

Some of the oldest LCSs are: Attari and Hussainiwala in Punjab; Munabao in Rajasthan; Suchetgarh in J&K; Bholaganj and Sutarkandi in Assam; Dawki in Meghalaya; and Agartala in Tripura. All these LCSs were notified under the erstwhile Land Customs Act, 1924.[50] Both countries also agreed that duties should be levied only on specified articles, leaving the rest free, and that both dominions should take effective measures for the smooth implementation of transit facilities.

However, a review of the Calcutta Agreement in December 1948, found that while India had set up the LCSs, Pakistan had not complied fully; that both countries continued to levy duties on essential items; and that both countries had not posted liaison officers at the Customs and other important checkpoints for facilitating the transit of goods and people.[51] Non-conformity to the agreed principle on trade by India and Pakistan indicate that both countries followed deliberate economic policies to become self-sufficient and independent of each another.[52]

To cite an example, Pakistan gradually reduced the export of raw jute to India and India, concurrently, stopped export of cotton piece goods to Pakistan. These two items constituted 75 per cent of the total India-Pakistan trade.[53] As a result, bilateral trade declined from Rs. 184.60 crore in 1948-49 to 13.40 crore in

1958.[54] Mutual distrust, political hostility, the currency exchange rates that were initially pegged with the United Kingdom Sterling, and State interventions in economic activities also contributed to the deterioration of trade relations between India and Pakistan. The bilateral trade – which touched an all-time low of Rs. 10.53 crore in 1965-66 – came to a complete stop between 1966 and 1974 after a trade embargo was imposed following the India-Pakistan war in 1965.[55]

Trade relations between the two countries resumed after a rapprochement between the two countries nearly a decade later and the signing of a trade protocol in December 1974. In January 1975, both the countries signed a Trade Agreement wherein Article 4 stipulated, '[T]he two Governments shall accord to each other in their trade regulations the most favoured nation treatment in accordance with the provisions and decisions of the GATT.'[56] Trade between the two countries started on a limited scale based on a mutually agreed Positive List.

Since 1982, Pakistan has been announcing a list of items, which can be traded by the private sector. This List has been gradually enlarged over the years. Upon signing the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreement in 1996, India unilaterally granted most favoured nation (MFN) status to Pakistan and discontinued its Positive List for trade in goods with that country.[57] But, Pakistan did not reciprocate and continued with the Positive List.

It was only in March 2012 that Pakistan made a transition from a Positive List of 1870 items allowed to be imported from India to a Negative List of 1209 items, which were not allowed to be traded with India. In addition to maintaining the Negative List, Pakistan also maintains a list of 138 products, which are allowed to be imported from India only through the Attari-Wagah road route.[58] India and Pakistan do not have a bilateral trade agreement. Trade between the two countries is carried out under the SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA), and the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA).[59]

India-Pakistan trade has experienced an upward trend over the years. Total bilateral trade increased from US$ 344.68 million in

2003-04 to US\$ 2,412 million in 2017-2018.[60] Bilateral trade used to be predominantly carried out through the overland rail route. In fact, prior to 1965, there were seven rail links operational through Punjab and Rajasthan: Attari-Wagah, Hindumalkot-Qassamwal, Chananwala-Amruka, Hussainwala-Ganda Sindhwan, Khem Karan-Kasur Tabil, Dera Baba Nanak-Jassar, Munabao-Khokhrapar.[61]

However, after the 1965 war, only the Attari-Wagah link was reopened. Nevertheless, railways still continue to remain the predominant mode of transportation for bilateral trade because of the absence of a road route and a restrictive Maritime Protocol. This was the scenario even two decades ago. For example, in 1995-96, the share of trade by the rail route was 63 per cent, and the share of the sea route was 33 per cent. However, with the opening of the road route and amendments to the Maritime Protocol in 2005, the share of road and sea routes in bilateral trade has been steadily increasing.[62]

The share of the road in total trade has increased from nil in 1995-96 to 23 per cent in 2014-15, whereas the share of railways has declined to 8 per cent in 2014-15.[63] The Attari-Wagah land route – both road and rail – accounted for 17.3 per cent of India's exports and 53.4 per cent of India's imports from Pakistan in 2016-17. The ICP Attari accounted for 53. 4 per cent of India's imports and 51 per cent of India's exports with Pakistan in 2016-17.[64]

The India-Bangladesh Border

India commenced trade relations with Bangladesh with the signing of a Trade Agreement in March 1972. Article 3 of the Agreement specified that both the countries will trade in specified goods and commodities worth Rs. 25 crore, and in case the value exceeds the limit of Rs. 25 crore, then such trade would be permitted based on the prevalent laws and regulations in either of the countries.[65] The agreement also provided for trade of specified commodities between communities residing within 16 km of the border;[66] but this provision was revoked by Bangladesh within six months claiming that largescale smuggling was being carried out in the garb of border trade.[67]

Since 1972, India-Bangladesh trade relations have been governed by various trade agreements which have been revised and renewed periodically. The most recent is the trade agreement of June 2015 which was renewed for a period of five years, with a provision for auto renewal.[68] The trade agreement does not prescribe any preferential tariffs for the import of products into the other country, and is only a facilitative mechanism for enhancing bilateral trade.[69]

Besides bilateral trade agreements, trade relations between the two countries are also governed by SAFTA, SAPTA, and the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA). Under SAPTA, in 2011, India provided duty free/quota free access to Bangladesh for all tariff lines, except tobacco and alcohol. Bangladesh extends preferential tariffs to Indian exports of products outside the sensitive list maintained by it, which contains 993 items from India.[70]

India's trade with Bangladesh has witnessed rapid growth in recent years. In terms of merchandise trade, the total trade has increased from US$ 1 billion in 2001 to around US$ 4.4 billion in 2012.[71] At present, Bangladesh is India's biggest trading partner in South Asia. India's export to Bangladesh for the financial year 2018-19 was worth US$ 9.21 billion, and import from Bangladesh for the same period was worth US$ 1.22 billion.[72] The bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh is mainly carried out through the land route. Roadways are the main means for the transportation of goods. Trucks accounted for 46. 5 per cent of India's exports to Bangladesh, and 76.2 per cent of its imports in 2016-17. Railways, on the other hand, accounted for a mere 0.5 per cent of exports, and 2.6 per cent of imports.[73]

Cross-border trade is conducted through 56 LCSs established across the entire border between India and Bangladesh. Among all the LCSs, Petropole is the largest gateway to Bangladesh, accounting for 35 per cent of India's total exports, and 57. 86 per cent of India's import in 2016-17. It was followed by a distant Ghojdanga at 4.71 per cent and 4.10 per cent for India's export and import, respectively.[74] Incidentally, Bangladesh has imposed port restrictions on the import of products through LCSs with India. Such port restrictions have restricted the full utilisation of the LCSs, particularly the ICP at Agartala.[75]

The India-Nepal Border

India is Nepal's largest export market and the biggest source of its imports. The movement of goods between India and Nepal, which takes place primarily through their shared land border, is regulated by various trade and transit agreements, protocols, a memorandum, and a Letter of Exchange that the two countries have signed from time to time. The first formal treaty on Trade and Commerce between independent India and Nepal to regulate the traditional trade practices and procedures was signed in July 31, 1950.

Since then, trade treaties between the two countries have been renewed with revisions periodically (1971, 1978, 1991, 1996, 2002, 2009, and 2016). Under these treaties, India and Nepal agreed to facilitate cross border flow of trade 'through simplification, standardisation and harmonisation of customs, transport and other trade related procedures and development of border infrastructure.'[76] Both sides have also agreed on 'measures to reduce or eliminate non-tariff, para-tariff and other barriers that impede promotion of bilateral trade.'[77]

Accordingly, India and Nepal offer tariff and other duty exemptions and concessions on primary and manufactured products imported from each other's territory on a non-reciprocal basis. However, Nepal levies an Agriculture Reform Fee for the import of certain agricultural goods from India. Nepal provides India a rebate in the chargeable customs duty based on ad valorem on manufactured goods.[78]

India's duty concessions to Nepal on manufactured goods have varied over time, and are based on the rules of origin criteria. Under the 1971 treaty, India and Nepal granted each other specially favoured treatment, which allowed duty-free access to items manufactured in Nepal with 90 per cent Nepalese/Indian material content for import to India.[79] This was reduced to 80 per cent in 1991, and then further to 50 per cent in 1993. In 1996, India provided duty free access to all products manufactured in Nepal on the basis of a Certificate of Origin and no value-added criteria.

The 2002 and 2009 revisions of the treaty re-introduced two conditions for duty free access of Nepalese products into India,

and a tariff rate quota was imposed on four items: vegetable ghee, acrylic yarn, copper products, and zinc oxide. Such products would enter duty free up to the level of assigned quotas, but subsequent exports would attract India's normal MFN rates.[80] The bilateral trade between India and Nepal is also covered under different regional trading agreements such as SAFTA and SAPTA. Under these Agreements, India has provided duty free access to all products from Least Developing Countries (LDCs) of SAFTA (except 25 lines pertaining to alcohol and tobacco) and, accordingly, such duty free access is also available to all products from Nepal.

Trade between India and Nepal has increased substantially in the past decade. Between 2006-07 and 2017-18, bilateral trade grew over six times: from Rs. 5,585 crore to Rs. 53,526.20 crore. During the same period, exports from Nepal to India more than doubled: from Rs. 1384 crore to Rs. 2912.8 crore; and India's exports to Nepal grew over eight times: from Rs. 4201 crore in 2006-07 to Rs. 50613.3 crore.[81] Bilateral trade is conducted through mutually agreed trade routes along the international border. Most of these trade routes are traditional, which were subsequently sanctified as well as increased through various agreements over the years. For example, till 1977, the mutually agreed routes for bilateral trade between India and Nepal were 21. This number was increased to 22 under the treaty of trade of 1991 by including the Darchula/Dharchula route.[82]

At present, 27 trade routes across the India-Nepal land border are operational, with the inclusion of the Maheshpur/Thutibari (Nawalparasi), the Sikta-Bhiswabazar, the Laukha-Thadi, and the Guleria/Murtia routes.[83] Raxaul, Nautanwa, Jogbani, Nepalgunj, and Panitanki are the top 5 LCSs, which accounted for 91.42 per cent of exports to Nepal in 2016-17, and 97.11 per cent of the total imports from Nepal. Raxaul in Bihar is the largest gateway to Nepal, contributing 45 per cent of total exports, and 44 per cent of imports in the year.[84]

India also provides transit facilities to Nepal. Being a landlocked country, Nepal's access to sea ports for the import and export of goods is essential for its economic wellbeing. India recognises

Nepal's full and unrestricted right of commercial transit of all goods and manufactures through the territory and ports of India under the Treaty of Trade and Commerce of 1950.[85] Accordingly, it allows the import of goods destined for Nepal or export of goods from Nepal from any Indian ports without breaking bulk and without payment of any duties.[86]

However, Nepal has insisted that it should enjoy unrestricted transit facilities and demanded that trade and transit treaties should be separated. So, a separate Treaty of Transit between India and Nepal was first signed in 1978, which was renewed with modifications in 1991 and 1999. Following the review, the treaty signed on January 6, 1999, and subsequently extended for a period of seven years up to January 6, 2006 and in force until January 5, 2013, is extended for a period of seven years until January 5, 2020 without any changes to the existing treaty.[87]

The Treaty of Transit outlines the rights, duties, and obligations of India and Nepal regarding the transit movement of goods, and details the modus operandi of such movements. The transit treaty specifies mutually agreed 22 entry-exit points and specified routes from Kolkata and Haldia ports to Nepal for its third country trade. It also describes the warehouses and open spaces to be provided and gives detailed guidelines on simplified administrative procedures.[88] India has also extended to Nepal direct transit routes to Bangladesh for bilateral and third country traffic. An MoU to this effect was signed in August 1978 and an addendum to the MoU was signed in September 2011 to provide rail transit to Nepal.[89]

Presently, there are two transit routes notified: a road route through the Kakarbitta-Panitanki-Phulbari-Banglabandha corridor, and a rail route through the Radhikapur-Birol interchange point on the India-Bangladesh border.[90] India also agreed to allow Nepal to utilise port facilities in Vishakhapatnam. India and Nepal also signed a Rail Services Agreement (RSA) in May 2004, to extend cargo train services to the Inland Container Depot (ICD) at Birgunj in Nepal. The creation of ICD in Birgunj and the extension of the railway line from Raxaul to Birgunj has facilitated the direct movement of goods in transit by rail to Nepal.[91]

Besides, India and Nepal have established a high level Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) on trade, transit, and cooperation to control unauthorised trade between India and Nepal. The IGC, which meets at regular intervals, provides a platform for reviewing the implementation of past trade and transit agreements. It also discusses new measures to facilitate bilateral trade and investment as well as transit facilities provided by India to Nepal, and improvement of infrastructure at land customs stations, etc. The 4th meeting of the IGC was held at Kathmandu, Nepal on April 26-27, 2018.[92]

The India-Bhutan Border

India and Bhutan enjoy a very close economic relationship, which is guided by the Friendship Treaty of 1949. Article V of the Treaty states that there shall be free trade and commerce between the two countries, and that the Indian government agrees to provide transit facilities to Bhutanese produce by land and water through its territory.[93] The first formal trade agreement between India and Bhutan was signed in January 1972, which reaffirmed the idea of free trade between the two countries, and also provided for duty free exports and imports from third country.

The agreement also stipulated that Indian citizens and Bhutanese subjects will have the right to carry on trade in each other's country.[94] It provided for the bilateral trade to be transacted in Indian Rupees as well as in Bhutanese Ngultrums. The trade agreement was revised in 1983 which, while preserving free trade between India and Bhutan, also simplified Bhutan's trade with third country. The Protocol of the Agreement mentioned the entry points in India as well as the import and export procedures.

For the purposes of trade, India allowed Bhutan to utilise eight land ports along their borders. These were: Jaigaon (road route); Chamurchi (road route); Ulta Pani (road route); Deosiri (road route); (5) Darranga (road route); Dhubri (road/riverine route); Gitaldha (rail route); and Panitanki (road route).[95] In 1990, India and Bhutan renewed the Agreement which remained valid till 1995. Under this agreement, two more trade routes were notified for Bhutan to

trade with Nepal and Bangladesh: Raxual (road/rail route), and Changrabandha (road route).[96]

The 1995 Trade Agreement with Bhutan stipulated that the agreement will remain in force for a period of ten years. After the lapse of ten years, the Agreement was renewed in July 2006, which continued with the free trade arrangements between India and Bhutan with simplified procedures, and additional facilities and routes for Bhutan's transit trade with third countries. The points for entry and exit were increased from 12 to 16.[97] The Trade Agreement was further renewed for a period of ten years in November 2016 wherein besides procedures for trade facilitation, points for entry and exit for imports and exports from Bhutan were increased to 21.[98] India-Bhutan trade is also carried out under the SAFTA and SAPTA in which preferential access is given to member countries.

India is Bhutan's largest trading partner. Bilateral trade has seen tremendous growth since 2001. It is driven largely by the rapid economic growth and greater commercial integration between the two countries. Total trade has increased from US$ 22.2 million in 2001 to US$ Rs. 1,026.80 million in 2018-19.[99] Like Nepal, India is Bhutan's largest export market as well as the biggest source of its imports. India's share in Bhutan's export to the world has averaged 92 per cent in the last five years – that is, from 2014 to 2018. Similarly, India's share in Bhutan's total import from the world, on average, has been close to 88 per cent during the same time period. However, it has to be kept in mind that electricity and ferro-silicon comprise 71 per cent of Bhutan's exports to India.[100]

Almost all trade between India and Bhutan takes place through the land border. There are 10 land customs stations along India-Bhutan border, of which two LCSs were established in 2017, and three existing LCSs were upgraded to permanent LCSs from seasonal LCSs.[101] In 2016-17, 97 per cent of India's export to Bhutan took place through the land routes. Jaigaon, Hatisar, and Chamurchi are the three top ports for trade between India and Bhutan. Of these, Jaigaon is the largest land port, which accounted for 78 per cent of India's exports to Bhutan and 93.40 per cent of its imports from Bhutan in 2016-2017.[102]

The India-Myanmar Border

India and Myanmar established formal economic interaction with the signing of the Agreement on Trade in September 1956.[103] Under the agreement, trade was to be conducted in commodities mentioned in Schedule A and Schedule B. However, for several decades, bilateral trade was conducted only through the sea and air routes. Trade between the border residents of the two countries through the land route did take place but it was considered illegal because a formal agreement on overland trade was absent. It was only in January 1994, after relations between the two neighbours improved, that India and Myanmar signed the Border Trade Agreement under which border trading points were established in Moreh (Manipur)-Tamu (Myanmar), and in Zokhawthar (Mizoram)-Rhi (Myanmar) to facilitate the border residents in conducting trade.[104] Border trade between the two countries has been carried out according to a mutually agreed list of 62 items since 1995.

In addition to border trade, Article III of the Agreement of 1994 also permits overland trade in all goods through the Moreh LCS. Bilateral trade is conducted in freely convertible currencies or in currencies mutually agreed upon by the two countries, including through counter trade agreements.[105] In the absence of proper banking and other infrastructural facilities, normal trade between the two countries did not take off as expected. Hence, during the 3rd India-Myanmar Joint Trade Committee meeting in October 2008, both countries agreed to upgrade border trade to normal trade in order to promote bilateral trade and establish required banking facilities.[106]

Accordingly, in November 2015, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), through a notification, declared that barter trade between India and Myanmar would be carried out as normal trade. The RBI notification states,

> [B]arter trade was initially permitted to facilitate [the] exchange of locally produced commodities along the Indo-Myanmar border. As such, these transactions were not captured in the banking system or reflected in the trade statistics. However, over a period of time, the trade basket has diversified and adequate banking presence is

in place to support normal trade with Myanmar. It has, therefore, been decided, in consultation with [the] Government of India, to do away with the barter system of trade at the Indo-Myanmar border, and switch over completely to normal trade with effect from December 1, 2015 … Accordingly, all trade transactions with Myanmar, including those at the Indo-Myanmar border with effect from December 1, 2015, would be settled in any permitted currency in addition to the Asian Clearing Union mechanism.[107]

The Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) issued a notification on December 17, 2015 declaring that border trade at Moreh will be upgraded to normal trade, and that all previous agreements and notifications stand rescinded. However, there remains a lack of clarity regarding trade through Zokhawthar since it was not mentioned by the DGFT.[108] With the 'normalisation' of trade along the India-Myanmar land border, the bilateral trade is governed by Duty Free Tariff Preference (DFTP) Scheme, and the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITGA). Under these schemes and agreements, duty free market access is given to LDCs which includes Myanmar.[109]

Bilateral trade has expanded significantly from US$ 12.4 million in 1980-81 to US$ 1070.88 million in 2010-11, and to US$ 1.6 billion in 2017-18.[110] India's imports from Myanmar are dominated by agricultural items – mainly beans, pulses, timber, and wood products. India's main exports to Myanmar are steel and pharmaceuticals. As mentioned earlier, more than 90 per cent of the total trade between India and Myanmar takes place through the sea route. Trade through the land route, most of which is border trade, constitutes less than 1 per cent of the total trade.[111]

Incidentally, the normalisation of the overland bilateral trade by the RBI had an adverse effect on overland trade because of increased documentation and the absence of financial and infrastructural facilities. Moreh is the predominant LCS through which maximum trade occurs, followed by Zowkhathar. Besides these two LCSs, Nampong in Arunachal Pradesh is being notified as a LCS, but it remains non-functional.

Trade and Travel Facilitation: Lowering Barriers, Improving Infrastructure

Until a couple of decades ago, India's attitude towards its international borders was largely seen through the prism of national security. Discordant political relationships with its neighbours, the outbreak of three wars and two border conflicts, secessionist insurgencies in its border states with active moral and material support from its neighbours – all compelled India to harden its borders. Besides, post-Independence, India implemented an import substitution economic policy and widespread restrictions on trade, which were aimed at fostering development of indigenous industries and the national economy. Such restrictive and insular policies, over a period of time, led to a rapid decline in the pre-1947 pattern of trade and people-to-people contact, thus making the South Asia region the least integrated.[112]

After decades of strict regulations and industrial inefficiency, India found itself in a dire economic condition during the late 1980s. This was compounded by the Gulf crisis with the concomitant increase in the cost of oil imports and the collapse of Soviet Union in the early 1990s.[113] Faced with the twin challenges of a balance of payment crisis and the loss of a reliable market, India was forced to carry out economic reforms, and open up its economy to foreign trade and investments by lowering tariff barriers.

Trade liberalisation, together with an efficient domestic private sector, propelled economic growth in the country. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew to the tune of 6 per cent between 1992-93 and 2001-2002.[114] Thereafter, the GDP growth rate increased and reached a high growth trajectory of more than 9 per cent between 2005 and 2008.[115]

The accelerated economic growth and the important role that foreign trade played in this regard, transformed India's way of viewing its international borders as barriers. It realised that the country's prosperity hinges upon free trade, especially with its neighbours. For this purpose, it was important to construct an economically integrated South Asian region ushered in by enhanced trade and economic cooperation among neighbours. Hence, as a first step towards realising the potential for trade and the development of

the region, India, along with its South Asian neighbours signed the SAPTA in December 1995.

This introduced an integrative trading arrangement in the region with preferential treatments to the LDCs. A decade later, the SAFTA was signed in January 2004, which entered into force on January 1, 2006. The agreement provides for the free movement of goods between countries through the elimination of all tariff, para-tariff and non-tariff barriers as well as quantitative restrictions, the progressive harmonisation of legislations and trade facilitation.[116] While the implementation of the SAFTA provisions are proceeding according to the terms of the agreement, India has also signed other regional initiatives, such as the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) under the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) on February 8, 2004 and the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA) on November 2, 2005 for enhancing trade and regional integration.[117]

The signing of these agreements, unfortunately, did not automatically lead to enhanced intraregional trade. In fact, intraregional trade accounts for only 5 per cent of South Asia's total trade, in contrast with East Asia whose intraregional trade accounts for 50 per cent of its total trade.[118] The poor trade performance of South Asia is due to several institutional and logistical barriers to trade.[119] For example, despite the SAFTA, trading with neighbours is not 'free' because a long list of tradable items are not included under the concessional tariff of SAFTA.[120]

Furthermore, poor cross-border land transportation and logistics infrastructure as well as complicated and non-transparent non-tariff measures drive transaction costs disproportionately high in the region. The lack of integrated transport connections across the region significantly hinder intra-regional trade. Inadequate facilities at the border crossings – such as warehousing, parking, banking, etc. – as well as excessive documentation requirements, the insufficient use of information-technology, the lack of transparency, unclear import and export requirements, and the lack of co-operation among customs authorities result in inordinate delays, and increase the complexity of cross-border trade transactions.[121]

In fact, in South Asia, commercial transactions require the highest number of documents and the longest clearance time. In 2016, the World Bank Report on Trading Across Borders had ranked India 143rd among countries in documentary and border compliance. According to the Report, it takes 65 hours to finish the documentation process and a whopping 307 hours to clear customs and other regulatory inspections for imports at the Indian borders. For exports the corresponding figures are 58 hours and 85 hours, respectively.[122]

Eliminating non-tariff barriers to trade has, therefore, become imperative for India if it desires to benefit from enhanced intraregional trade. India initiated trade facilitation measures aimed at simplifying border management procedures for expanding trade with the outside world. Trade facilitation measures, broadly, include a set of measures to ease trade between countries through a variety of efforts such as streamlining regulatory requirements and harmonising standards as well as the reform and the modernisation of ports and customs.[123]

Trade facilitation was introduced at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meetings in 1996. In December 2013, during the 9th WTO Ministerial Conference, participating countries signed the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which contains provisions for expediting the movement, release, and clearance of goods, including goods in transit; effective cooperation between customs; other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance issues; technical assistance and capacity building in this area.[124]

India ratified the Agreement in April 2016 and constituted a National Committee on Trade Facilitation (NCTF) under the Chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary.[125] On July 20, 2017, the NCTF adopted a 76-point National Trade Facilitation Action Plan 2017-2020, which was aimed at transforming the 'cross border clearance eco-system through efficient, transparent, risk based, coordinated, digital, seamless, and technology driven procedures which are supported by state of-the-art sea ports, airports, land border crossings, rail, road and other logistics infrastructure.'[126]

The Plan states that trade facilitation comprises four components: Transparency (access to information); Technology (digital and detection); Procedures (simplification, standardisation, harmonisation and risk based approach); and Infrastructure (augmentation in road and rail connectivity, improvement of sea and air ports, and land customs stations). These measures are being implemented through intra-government and inter-agency cooperation and collaboration.[127] Implementing the TFA is a significant milestone in India's attempt to soften its borders for achieving regional economic integration.

Facilitating cross-border people to people contact also forms a significant part of crafting an integrative South Asian region. In this regard, India has made efforts to liberalise, simplify and rationalise its visa system. In general, India has introduced multiple entry tourist and business visas for a period of 5 years for 160 countries; grant of medical visas within 48 hours of receiving applications with a validity for 6 months; granting visas for internship, shooting for films and documentaries; extension for long term visas, etc. India also offers e-visa and visa on arrival for nationals of various countries.[128]

For ensuring efficient facilitation of travel across the borders while maintaining appropriate security levels, the MHA had introduced the Immigration, Visa and Foreigners Registration & Tracking (IVFRT). The system has been developed with the objective of implementing a secure and integrated delivery service through series of measures. These include standardisation of visa applications, more secure visa stickers, standard Foreign Regional Registration Office (FRRO) application and an integrated online visa application system. The IVFRT system helps 'in tracking of foreigners by integrating and sharing information captured during visa issuance at Missions, during immigration check at ICPs, and during registration at FRRO/FROs'.[129]

Notes

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No. VII on Economic Relations (Control) to maintain status quo on cross border trade and movement. See, "Extract from the AIDE-MEMOIRE of the Government of Pakistan on the disruption of trade between India and Pakistan, Karachi, October 12, 1947", in Avtar Singh Bhasin (ed.), *India-Pakistan Relations 1947–2007, A Documentary Study, Vol. VIII*, New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2012, p. 6221.

3. Anwesha Sengupta, "Of Men and Things: The Administrative Consequences of Partition of British India", *Refugee Watch*, 39 and 40, June and December 2012, p. 6.

4. Md. Mahbubar Rahman and Willem Van Schendel, "'I Am Not a Refugee': Rethinking Partition Migration", *Modern Asian Studies*, 37 (3), July 2003, p. 579. By December 1947, most of the refugees stranded in Punjab were evacuated by the Military Evacuation Organisation. See also, Joya Chatterji, "Secularisation and Partition Emergencies, Deep Diplomacy in South Asia", *Economic & Political Weekly*, XLVIII (50), December 14, 2013, p. 44.

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6. Joya Chatterji, note 4.

7. Pallavi Raghavan, "The Finality of Partition: Bilateral Relations Between India and Pakistan, 1947- 1957", Ph.D Dissertation, Cambridge: University of Cambridge, September 2012, p. 11 at https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/42337394.pdf, accessed on February 14, 2019.

8. "Agreement at the Inter-Dominion Conference at Calcutta, April 15-18, 1948", note 2, pp. 6235-6237.

9. Zamindar argues that while there was a growing disaffection against the Indian refugees or Muhajirs in Sindh, the security situation for the Muslims in Delhi appeared to have ameliorated following Gandhiji's fast, and after his assassination, many Muslims felt emboldened that the Hindu right wing activists were discredited, making it safe for them to return to India. Their return to India and reclaiming their earlier property was creating lots of tension between them and the Hindu and Sikh refugees who had been given the evacuee properties. For details, see, Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, pp. 86-87.

10. Ibid., p. 104.

11. Ibid., pp. 99-100.

12. The East Pakistani residents wishing to cross the border were often required to provide documentary proof of their domiciles. See, Haimanti Roy, note 1, p. 334. Also see, Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, note 9, p. 179. See also, Joya Chatterji, note 5, pp. 999-1000.

13. Haimanti Roy, note 1, pp. 335-336.

14. Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, note 9, p. 161.

15. Haimanti Roy, note 1, p. 336.

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6. Integrated Check Posts and Land Customs Stations

Facilitating legitimate trade and travel through points of entry along the international border while giving due regard to the security of the country is an essential element of effective border management practices. This involves two conflicting processes: first, maintaining control and regulating the cross-border movement of people, cargo, and vehicles through a range of interventions, such as documentary and physical monitoring, screening, scanning and testing; and second, enabling efficient trade and travel by minimising the impact of interventionist strategies as far as possible.[1]

In sum, it means the procedures applied to persons and objects crossing the international border should ensure that they are compliant with the laws, rules, and regulations of the countries they are exiting as well as entering and, at the same time, detecting and apprehending offenders.[2] A border as an international gateway is not necessarily at the periphery of the country; in fact, it could well be inside its domestic territory such as airports, railway stations, river ports on international waterways, inland clearance depots, economic zones, etc., which are treated as border stations.[3]

'Border stations are official points of entry into a country, where its national sovereignty is officially and administratively established and where traffic is controlled to ensure compliance with its laws.'[4] In other words, a border station is a facility that 'serves as a point of contact for travellers entering or leaving the country for the purposes of enforcement; the prevention of illegal aliens from entering the country; the collection of revenue; the prevention of injurious plants, animal pests, human and animal diseases from entering the country; the examination of export

documents; the registration of valuable articles being temporarily taken out of the country; and commercial transactions.'[5]

A border station, therefore, should accommodate regulatory and enforcement agencies such as:

- *Customs*: accounts for the passengers and goods entering the country; enforcement of various provisions of the Customs Act; collects customs and excise duties (Department of Customs, Ministry of Finance).
- *Immigration*: verifies the identities of people entering or leaving the country and confirms their legal authority to do so by checking passports and visas (Bureau of Immigration, Ministry of Home Affairs).
- *Quarantine*: prevention of infectious diseases, disinfecting vehicles, monitoring health regulations, checking health carnets (Ministry/Department of Health and Sanitation).
- *Sanitary and phytosanitary*: ensure the safety of imported food for domestic consumers based on documentary evidence (certificates), and occasional sampling and testing (Ministry/Department of Agriculture).
- *Narcotics*: detects and prevents the smuggling of banned narcotics and drugs (Narcotics Control Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs).
- *Police*: maintain law and order (state government).
- *Intelligence*: gathers information/intelligence about passengers and cargo in sensitive border points (Intelligence Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs & Department of Revenue Intelligence, Ministry of Finance).
- *Border guarding force:* guards the perimeter of the border station (Ministry of Home Affairs).

Opening a border crossing, and establishing a border station to allow legitimate cross border trade and travel depends upon a number of factors. First, countries open a border crossing as a first step towards normalisation of their relations as well as symbolising their desire to deepen bilateral relationships. Such decisions are political in nature and do not take into account such aspects as cross-border traffic and how the traffic is handled.[6]

Second, the existence of strong cross-border socio-cultural and familial links between border residents and their counterparts exerts strong pressure on respective governments to open border crossings to ease cross-border travel. More often than not, countries accommodate such demands so that border residents are allowed to sustain such socio-cultural relations and prevent generation of secessionist tendencies among border residents.

Third, economic considerations are an important factor in a country's decision to open border crossings. The volume and pattern of cross-border trade and travel determines the need for opening up additional border crossings. In such cases, countries agree to establish border stations and work out the modalities, regulations, etc. to operationalise them with the view that the stations are conveniently located, and serve the interests of local and business communities of both the countries.[7]

Land Customs Stations

India's trade with neighbouring countries is primarily conducted through land borders. In 2018-19, trade worth US$ 13 billion, constituting 55 per cent of the country's total trade, passed through its land borders.[8] Trade with Nepal and Bhutan is carried out almost exclusively through land based trading points or LCS. Similarly, overland exports and imports to Bangladesh constitute 75 and 50 per cent, respectively. Even with Pakistan, 48 per cent of India's imports are conducted through the land border (for details, see Table 2).

Table 2: Share of India's Trade through Land Borders in 2017–2018

Country	Import		Export	
	Total Amount ($ million)	% Share	Total Amount ($ million)	% Share
Bangladesh	685	75	8614	50
Bhutan	377	53	546	96
Nepal	438	99.8	6612	97
Pakistan	488	48	1924	14

Source: Director General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (as quoted in *The Economic Times*, October 14, 2018).

There are 109 designated border trading locations as LCS in the country, of which 85 are operational.[9] The LCSs on India's international borders are notified by the Ministry of Finance under clause (b) of sub-section (1) of Section 7 of the Customs Act, 1962, for the clearance of goods imported or to be exported by land or inland water. Before any LCS is notified, several ministries and departments – such as the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, the MHA, the Department of Commerce, and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) – are consulted to ascertain issues such as anti-smuggling, security, the availability of infrastructure and the availability of a counterpart LCS on the other side of the border.[10] Cross-border travel takes place through the Immigration Check Posts, notified under the Foreigners' Act of 1946. Immigration check posts are usually located along with LCSs.

The LCSs are established primarily to facilitate and promote greater trade with neighbouring countries and the world. However, the quantity and quality of trade depend a lot on the infrastructure that is available at the LCSs. In the case of India and its neighbours, poor infrastructure in the LCS and weak institutional facilities have led to increasing transaction costs, thereby creating barriers for trade.

In general, the LCSs along India's international borders lack basic infrastructure such as X-ray machines or scanners for non-intrusive inspections, automated cargo clearance, electronic feeding and retrieving of data, ware housing, cold storage facilities for perishables, cranes and forklifts, testing laboratories, banks, parking, etc. The paucity of space at the LCSs makes the inspection of incoming traffic extremely difficult and time-consuming.

Roads are the primary means by which trade is conducted in South Asia. However, road and railway networks in the border areas are not only sparse but in bad condition. Given that these LCSs are located in underdeveloped border areas, roads leading to the LCSs are narrow and in dilapidated condition. Traffic is also not streamlined, with cars, trucks, and bullock carts jostling for space. The problem is worse along roads where the volume of traffic is higher.

Basic facilities and support services such as uninterrupted electricity, drinking water, banks, hotels and restaurants, internet, etc., are either absent or inadequate. Furthermore, different regulatory agencies such as customs, immigration, etc., are located at a considerable distance from each other, resulting in coordination problems. Multiple forms and different windows exist for obtaining clearances; and these are often manned by very few officials. All these lead to delays in the checking and clearance of cargo and passengers, resulting in huge economic losses and harassment.

Although, all the LCSs suffer from similar inadequacies, the case of Petrapole LCS can be cited as an example to reinforce the argument. Petrapole in West Bengal is the most important LCS along the India-Bangladesh border in terms of volume and value of trade. The corresponding LCS in Bangladesh is Benapole. Before the LCS was upgraded into an Integrated Check Post (ICP) and inaugurated on February 2, 2016, physical infrastructure and the institutional systems for trade and travel in the station were very poor.

Following section provides a snapshot of the inadequacies that were and still are widespread at the Petrapole LCS:

Dilapidated Building and Unsatisfactory Service

The rooms housing the customs and immigration clearance was dark and dingy and the office infrastructure was inadequate. Electricity supply was infrequent and the voltage low. The Electronic Data Information (EDI) system, which was introduced at the customs office for streamlining the system, lay idle as its implementation had been a failure due to poor planning. Poor internet connectivity also rendered the functioning of the EDI ineffective.[11] Consequently, the clearing of papers was done manually, which was time consuming and led to massive delays in customs clearance.[12]

Further, although the working hours at the LCS are 6.00 am to 6.00 pm, work begins only after 10.00 am and shuts down by 5.00 pm. Moreover, immigration and customs officials are often rude to passengers.[13] Visitors carrying cash above permissible limits were often fleeced by staff members involved in the scrutiny.[14] Similarly, the building that houses the passenger terminal is in a dilapidated

condition. Passengers from Bangladesh travelling to India have to enter the building through the back door instead of the front. There is no proper information signage and passengers have to figure out everything for themselves. There are no clear demarcations at the main hall and the passengers, onlookers, and touts moved about freely. Lax security permits anyone to enter, pose as an Indian citizen and mingle with international passengers.

Narrow Road, Inadequate Parking and Warehousing

The approach road to the Petrapole LCS is very narrow and passes through congested towns such as Barasat, Dutta Pukur, Ashoknagar, Habra, and Bongaon on the way from Kolkata. Besides congestion, a narrow bridge on the way makes it impossible for bigger trucks to ply on the road and, as a result, trans-shipment has to be carried out, either in Kolkata or in Bongaon, causing massive delays.[15] The Petrapole LCS had a dedicated Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC) parking lot, but it was small and inadequate. The inadequacy of parking space forced the drivers to park their trucks along the narrow road, leading to congestion and traffic jams.[16]

Also, the parking lot did not have warehouses. Its perimeter was also not secured by walls or fences and, with trucks parked haphazardly, security was a real concern. In fact, there had been many cases of theft of products from the parking lot.[17] To make matters worse, trucks coming from Kolkata had to be mandatorily parked at Bongaon before was allowed to cross the border after getting customs clearance.

The paper work for customs clearance was cumbersome, tedious, and time consuming. Traders had to pay the clearance agents as well as the customs officials for clearing their consignments speedily. The non-transparent customs clearance system has given rise to rent seeking activities by the officials at various steps of a transaction.[18]

The Absence of Quarantine and Testing Facilities

Trading in livestock and livestock products infected with known and unknown transmissible diseases can have adverse socio-economic and

human/animal health consequences. More often than not, imported livestock and livestock products do not show overt signs of disease. Therefore, it is essential that plant and animal quarantine facilities are available at the LCS where the livestock can be inspected for any diseases under the Livestock Importation (Amendment) Act, 2001 as well as the regulations orders and Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) standards before their release in the country.[19]

Unfortunately, such facilities of quarantine and laboratory are not available in most of the major LCSs. At the Petrapole LCS, while quarantine facility was available, there was no testing facility. Samples had to be sent to Kolkata for testing and, till such time the test results arrived, trucks carrying the products remained stranded at the LCS. This resulted not only in delays but also raised quality control issues for perishable consignments. The absence of plant and animal quarantine as well as laboratories does not allow India and its neighbours from fully realising their potential for trade in agricultural commodities, livestock, as well as aquatic and marine products.[20]

Given these infrastructural and procedural non-tariff barriers to trade, the transaction costs of trading in South Asia remain one of the highest in the world.[21] Consequently, trade in the region remains below potential. In their paper published in 2006, Das and Pohit attempted to quantify the impact of non-tariff barriers to trade along the India-Bangladesh border. According to them,

> [T]he aggregate delay (loss of time) pertaining to all the three phases of exports turns out to be around 99 hours on an average (approximately 4 days) for a single shipment. The data suggests that the aggregate delay could be as high as 192 hours (8 days) … the average financial implication of the loss of time in customs clearance and transportation, including parking and queue at [the] border, turns out to be 5.73 percent of value of shipment. The survey results indicate that the maximum perceived loss is 18 percent. Similarly, the financial implications of bribes and [the] delay in obtaining export remittances are 2.50 percent and 2.15 percent of the shipment value, respectively …[22]

There is, of course, the potential to reduce the cost of non-tariff barriers provided India and its neighbours resolve to reform their trading system, both procedural and in terms of transportation, and attempt to match international standards. A study by CUTS International in 2012 argued that if India and Bangladesh reform their cross-border trading system, then India can save 24.36 per cent of its current import bills, translating to US\$ 141.10 million. The corresponding figures for Bangladesh will be 24.36 per cent, and US\$ 829.72 million. The combined cost reduction for both the countries would be US\$ 970 million.[23]

The Genesis of the Integrated Check Posts

The Indian government has been aware of the infrastructural and institutional inadequacies which are not only detrimental to the country's security but also a hindrance for the efficient cross-border trade at existing border crossing points. To remedy the situation, it decided to upgrade some of the important LCSs into ICPs. In a background paper for the Land Port Authority of India Bill, the MHA stated,

> The infrastructure available with the Customs, Immigration and other regulatory authorities at the existing border crossing points on our land borders are generally inadequate. The supporting non-sovereign facilities are also either inadequate or absent, and all regulatory and support functions are generally not available in one premise. Even where the facilities are located in close proximity, there is no single agency responsible for coordinated [the] functioning of various government agencies/service providers.[24]

To overcome such bottlenecks at such border crossing points, and with a view to facilitating legitimate cross-border trade and travel, it was proposed to develop ICPs. These ICPs are envisaged to provide the required facilities for such movements in a coordinated manner to enable better administration of sovereign and non-sovereign functions.[25]

The idea of establishing ICPs was first mooted in the meeting of a Committee of Secretaries (CoS) in October 2003, which was convened to discuss a paper prepared by the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) on the abysmal conditions of the four LCSs along the India-Nepal border.[26] The article stated that the four LCSs-Jogbani and Raxaul (in Bihar), and Sunauli and Rupaidiha/ Nepalganj Road (in Uttar Pradesh), which accounted for 87 per cent of Nepal's bilateral trade with India and 50 per cent of its third-country trade did not have adequate infrastructure and equipment essential for the efficient discharge of service.

The towns around the LCS lacked basic infrastructure and civic amenities, and the approach roads to the check posts were dilapidated and congested.[27] The NSCS paper had recommended the establishment of integrated complexes at border check points, which would house all the regulatory and support services in a single complex, besides upgrading infrastructure in the associated townships, and improving road and rail connectivity. It also recommended that the ICPs should be established under the Department of Border Management, MHA.

In its meeting of January 2004, the CoS also discussed the necessity of setting up of an autonomous agency to oversee the construction, management and maintenance of the ICPs. An Inter-Ministerial Working Group (IMWG) – comprising representatives from MEA, Customs, the Ministry of Commerce, the Intelligence Bureau, the NSCS, the SSB, and the governments of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar – was, accordingly, set up to recommend the nature and structure of the autonomous body. The IMWG recommended the setting up of a statutory body called the Land Ports Authority of India (LPAI) and bringing all ICPs under its purview.[28] The recommendations of the IMWG were approved by the MHA in December 2004 and the CoS in April 2005. Till now, the proposal was to upgrade the four LCSs situated at the India-Nepal border into ICPs.[29]

However, during an inter-ministerial meeting in June 2006, it was argued that the infrastructure at all the LCSs along the country's border is dismal and requires an immediate upgrade. It was suggested that similar ICPs should be constructed at major trading points along all the borders. A proposal was made to construct seven

ICPs along the India-Bangladesh border (Hili, Chandrabangha, Petrapole, Sutarkhandi, Dawki, Akhaura and Kawarpuchiah), three ICPs along the India-Myanmar border (Moreh, Pangshu Pass and Zokhawthar); four ICPs along the India-Nepal border (at Jogbani, Raxaul, Sunauli and Nepalganj Road), and one ICP along the India-Pakistan border (Attari) on a priority basis.[30]

The CoS gave 'in-principal' approval for the construction of 13 ICPs along India's international borders as well as the establishment of the LPAI to oversee the construction and management of the ICP. The location of the ICPs was based on considerations such as the volume of trade, traffic, revenue generation and strategic importance. In November 2006, the CCS approved in principle the setting up of ICPs and the establishment of LPAI for which a Bill was introduced in the parliament. Till the LPAI was established, an Empowered Steering Committee (ESC) was set up in the interim in December 2006 for taking all administrative and financial decisions necessary for setting up of the LPAI and for constructing the ICPs.[31]

Finally, in November 2008, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved the construction of 4 ICPs at Attari, Raxaul, Petrapole, and Moreh on the land borders of the country with Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, at an estimated cost of Rs. 635 crore.[32] It was decided that the construction of the ICPs would take place in two phases. In Phase I, seven of the 13 ICPs would be constructed (see Table 3), and in Phase II, six ICPs would be built.[33]

Table 3: Location of ICPs under Phase I

Sl. No.	Location	State	Border
1.	Petrapole	West Bengal	India-Bangladesh
2	Moreh	Manipur	India-Myanmar
3.	Raxaul	Bihar	India-Nepal
4.	Attari	Punjab	India-Pakistan
5.	Dawki	Meghalaya	India-Bangladesh
6.	Akhaura	Tripura	India-Bangladesh
7.	Jogbani	Bihar	India-Nepal

Source: Annual Report 2009–10, Ministry of Home Affairs.

The ICPs and the LPAI

The ICPs are envisaged to 'provide all the facilities required for the discharge of sovereign and non-sovereign functions to enable [the] smooth cross-border movement of individuals, vehicles and goods under an integrated complex.'[34] Typically, an ICP houses all the regulatory agencies such as customs, immigration, and border guarding forces as well as support services such as plant and animal quarantine, foreign exchange bureau, banking, parking, etc. in a single complex.

It is also equipped with a state of-the-art scanning and detection devices such as metal detectors, X-ray machines, and scanners, besides having a passenger facilitation area and a cargo area for processing imports and exports within the complex.[35] The LPAI was set up as a statutory authority on March 1, 2012 under the Land Ports Authority of India Act, 2010.

The LPAI functions as an autonomous agency under the Department of Border Management with representation from the MEA, the Ministry of Commerce, the Department of Revenue and other stakeholders. It also associates with the state governments and border guarding forces concerned in its work. The LPAI is a lean oversight body, aimed at providing better administration and cohesive management for cross-border movement of people and goods at major entry points on the land borders by setting up ICPs in the place of existing LCSs.[36] The construction of the ICPs in Phase I started in 2010 with the laying of the foundation stones for the Attari, Raxaul, and Jogbani ICPs. A year later, in 2011, the construction of Petrapole and Agartala ICPs also started. The construction of Moreh started only in 2013, while the construction of the ICP at Dawki started in the second quarter of 2016.[37]

The construction of the ICPs, however, has been excruciatingly slow and fraught with many hurdles. One of the main factors obstructing the timely construction of the ICPs is delay in land acquisition by state governments. More often than not, state governments, especially in densely populated states, find it extremely difficult to earmark land for the construction of public goods such as roads, fences, ICPs, etc. Procuring forest, environment, and other

clearances from the ministries concerned contributes in slowing down the process.

Local protests because of 'inadequate compensation' as well as reservations and protests by neighbouring countries have also stalled the construction of the ICPs. For example, in the case of Moreh ICP, the CCEA had approved the development of ICP at Moreh in November 2008 and, by 2010, the land for the ICP was acquired.[38] Even after the acquisition of the land, the construction of the ICP could commence only in April 2013 after the required clearances from various ministries were procured. Unfortunately, the construction had to be suspended in June 2013 as Myanmar objected to the construction, claiming that the land on which the ICP was being built is disputed.[39]

It demanded that the work between border pillar (BP) 77 and 78 be stopped as BP 78 is not designated by the survey teams of India and Myanmar.[40] While work resumed in August 2014 after the project site was relocated and various clearance were obtained, the progress of the work was severely hampered because of the law and order problem in Manipur, frequents bandhs, and imposition of prolonged economic blockades. Similarly, work for ICP Raxual was stopped for approximately six months (between April and November 2012) by the local people as they had grievances against the compensation given to them for their land.[41]

Be that as it may, by January 2020, six of the seven ICPs were constructed and operationalised. The first ICP to be operationalised was the ICP Attari on April 13, 2012. Next, the Agartala ICP was operationalised but in a phased manner, which meant that while the passenger complex of the ICP was operationalised in November 2013, the cargo complex was inaugurated on December 6, 2014. The two ICPs along the India-Nepal border namely Raxual and Jogbani, were commissioned two years later.

The cargo terminal at Raxual was operationalised in June 2016, and that of Jogbani in November 2016. The ICPs along the India-Bangladesh and India-Myanmar border, even though operationalised, are not fully functional. The ICP at Petrapole was jointly inaugurated on July 21, 2016 by the Prime Ministers

of India and Bangladesh; but only the cargo complex at the ICP is operational. Similarly, operations at ICP Moreh have commenced with the passenger terminal on January 4, 2019; but the construction of the cargo complex is still underway.

Performances of the ICPs

The establishment of ICPs at important land routes along India's international borders have contributed significantly in efficiently regulating the movement of people and goods across the borders. The stationing of all regulatory agencies and allied services under one roof has not only helped in better coordination among agencies but also resulted in the streamlining of procedures for the clearance of passengers and cargoes in a timely and hassle free manner.

The efficient handling and customs clearance of cargo at the ICPs has also boosted cross border trade. For instance, the volume of trade at ICP Attari in 2012-13 was Rs. 4,800 crore as against Rs. 2,340 crore in 2011-12, registering an increase of over 100 per cent. The customs officials at Attari also claimed that compared to 2011-12, imports and exports in 2012-13 registered an increase of 81.66 per cent and 121.96 per cent respectively, in terms of Cost, Insurance, and Freight (CIF) value. They also claim that the revenue of their department increased by 80.72 per cent in 2012-13.[42]

In fact, such is the efficiency of cargo clearance that many big industries such as the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) have shifted to the ICP for the export of their high-value goods, which otherwise were transported by the sea route. Similarly, the number of passengers, both incoming and outgoing, at the ICP Attari recorded an increase from 85,455 in 2013-14 to 105,772 in 2014-15.[43] The success story is also repeated in other ICPs, which are being operationalised along India's borders with Bangladesh.

The ICP at Petrapole registered an increase in cross-border trade from Rs. 16341.1 crore to Rs. 18501.69 crore between 2015-16 and 2016-17. The revenue generated from the ICP also increased from Rs. 0.21 crore to Rs. 2.21 crore in the said period.[44] Similarly, the number of passengers handled at the ICP Agartala increased from 90,455 to 99,101 between 2015-16 and 2016-17.[45]

Constraints in the Performances of ICPs

The inauguration of the ICPs at the land borders have no doubt resulted in the efficient handing of the cargo and passengers, thereby encouraging cross-border trade and travel while at the same time maintaining the desired levels of security. However, a number of factors have put constraints on the ICPs to realise their full potential. Some of these constraints are: the absence of matching infrastructure on the other side of the border; the partial opening of the terminals-passenger or cargo at the ICPs; the lack of well-developed roads and other infrastructure in the hinterland; etc.

To cite some examples, the ICP at Petrapole is the busiest and largest land port in India in terms of cargo handling; it is spread over 100 acres. It has a total capacity of accommodating 1500 export trucks and 200 foreign (Bangladesh) trucks.[46] However, the infrastructural facilities across the border are poor. The Benapole land custom station, which is the counterpart of ICP Petrapole, has a facility to park only 500-700 trucks. As a result, the cargo complex at ICP Petrapole is able to clear only 370 trucks per day. This clearance constraint results in a waiting period of 15-20 days for the trucks. It is reported that, on a given day, close to 3,500 trucks await clearance to cross the border into Bangladesh.

However, because of underutilisation of the cargo complex at Petrapole, 2,000 trucks have to wait for almost 10 days before getting parking at Petrapole. The truck drivers have no choice but to wait at Bongaon, shelling out enormous parking fees.[47] Long detentions of the trucks results in the pilferage and damaged goods as security in the parking bays is lax. All these problems have an adverse impact on the export of some items to Bangladesh. For example, cotton exports to Bangladesh through ICP Petrapole reportedly fell about 20 per cent in the first nine months of the Financial Year 2018; iron and steel fell by 57 per cent, and motor vehicles fell by 10 per cent because of these constraints.[48]

Similarly, the Raxaul and Jogbani ICPs along the India-Nepal border were inaugurated in 2016; but the absence of similar facilities on the Nepalese side made it difficult for these two ICPs to function

optimally. It was only in April 2018 that the ICP at Birgunj, which is the counterpart of ICP Raxaul, was operationalised.[49] While operationalisation of the Birgunj ICP has resulted in an increase in cargo handling across the border, the services are still not optimised because of inadequate infrastructure. The warehouse at ICP Birgunj is small and can store only 30 truckloads of cargo. The parking lot at the ICP is similarly small and the access road which connects the ICP is narrow, resulting in congestion.

The Nepal Intermodal Transport Development Board (NITDB), which looks after the ICP operation, has decided to invest Nepalese Rs. 250 million for building related infrastructure, such as a warehouse, check-in counter, parking yard, quarantine check, dormitory unit, security check, and other logistics rooms to improve facilities at the ICP.[50] On the other hand, the Biratnagar ICP, which is the counterpart of the Jogbani ICP, is still not operationalised. Work for Biratnagar started only in 2017, after delays in the tendering process. The ICP, which was expected to be completed by December 2018,[51] was finally inaugurated on January 21, 2020.[52] Till ICP Biratnagar was operationalised, the ICP at Jogbani was of little use as a land port since it could not function in isolation.

Furthermore, while the ICPs were inaugurated with much fanfare and pronouncements that they will ease trade and travel across the international borders, in reality the ICPs struggle to provide optimum services as most of them do not have full spectrum facilities. For instance, Petrapole handles the majority of the US$ 7.5 billion bilateral trade as well as the 13 lakh Bangladeshis who arrive in India every year.[53] The Government of India has built a state-of-art cargo terminal for quick clearance of cargo at Petrapole; but the ICP is yet to have a modern passenger terminal and an immigration facility. The plan to build a modern passenger terminal, an additional parking space and accommodation for security forces was given approval by the MHA only in 2019, but the construction of the ICP has not started.

The Attari ICP handles cargo and passengers travelling only by road, and not by the railways. After the opening of ICP Attari,

all importers had shifted to the road port; but exporters could not because of Pakistan's restrictive import policy at the road port. Consequently, exporters were compelled to export through the rail port. The clearance of rail cargo at Attari continues to be done in the old fashioned way – that is, the rail cargo is handled manually, and at two places – at the border and at the Amritsar railway station. This results in delays and increasing transaction costs.[54] The ICP at Moreh was inaugurated on January 4, 2019. However, the new ICP will have little impact on formal bilateral trade as India and Myanmar are yet to sign an agreement for ICP-based trade. Moreover, there is no matching facility on the Myanmarese side of the border.[55]

Besides, clearance procedures continue to be cumbersome and time consuming in the ICPs. According to a CUTS study, at the Attari ICP

> [T]he whole process of import from Pakistan to India takes 3-5 days; starting from entry of import laden truck to clearance of cargo to the importer on the Indian side. There are 14 procedural activities performed at the Attari ICP.[56]

At Agartala, prior to the setting up of the ICP, goods were transferred from one truck to another. But, after the ICP came up, procedures were changed involving unloading the cargo, storing it, and again loading it. This has 'doubled loading/unloading costs, and altogether, the import costs for a single truck has increased by more than INR 1,500.'[57] Likewise, at ICP Petrapole, '[M]undane regulatory procedures and documentation-related work create many hassles in the clearance of consignment.'[58] In total, 16 documents are required for both export and import processes. Procuring so many documents eats away precious time and raises transaction costs for exporters and importers.

All ICPs suffer from 'design flaws' as none of them have the space to accommodate security forces, be it the state police or border guarding forces. In the absence of any living space, the personnel are reportedly compelled to live in cargo sheds

or other such makeshift facilities.[59] In some ICPs, such as the Agartala ICP, the present infrastructure available is almost saturated, and there is very limited scope for future expansion, giving rise to the demand for the construction of additional ICPs in the state.[60]

Even today, there is a tremendous pressure for proper parking place and other related infrastructure such as a congestion free access road to the ICP, testing laboratories, restrooms, and drinking water facilities. Last but not least, the involvement of several government ministries and departments such as the Home Affairs, Finance, Customs, Immigration, Railways, etc., creates coordination problems, thereby hampering the smooth functioning of the ICPs.

Many a times, turf wars among ministries concerned inhibit the construction of the required facilities in the ICPs. For instance, the LPAI had proposed to build accommodation for security forces on unused Customs land at Attari, but it is unable to do so as the Customs is unwilling to part with the land due to 'sentimental' reasons.

These procedural and infrastructural hurdles at the ICPs hamper the efficient functioning and act as an impediment to the growth of intra-regional trade and economic integration. Given that the ICPs are established to facilitate trade and travel across the borders and are referred to as windows to India's growing economic prowess, the mitigation of these hurdles is a must.

ICPs in Phase II

Despite the problems faced by the ICPs and the LPAI in providing proper services for the smooth and efficient movement of passengers and cargo across the border, the establishment of the ICPs have, no doubt, boosted trade and travel manifold. Buoyed by the success of the ICPs constructed in Phase I, the Government of India has decided to upgrade 13 more LCSs into ICPs along the India-Bangladesh, India-Nepal and India-Bhutan borders in Phase II (see Table 4). These 13 ICPs also include the six ICPs which were designated under Phase II earlier (see Map 3).

Map 3: Integrated Check Posts
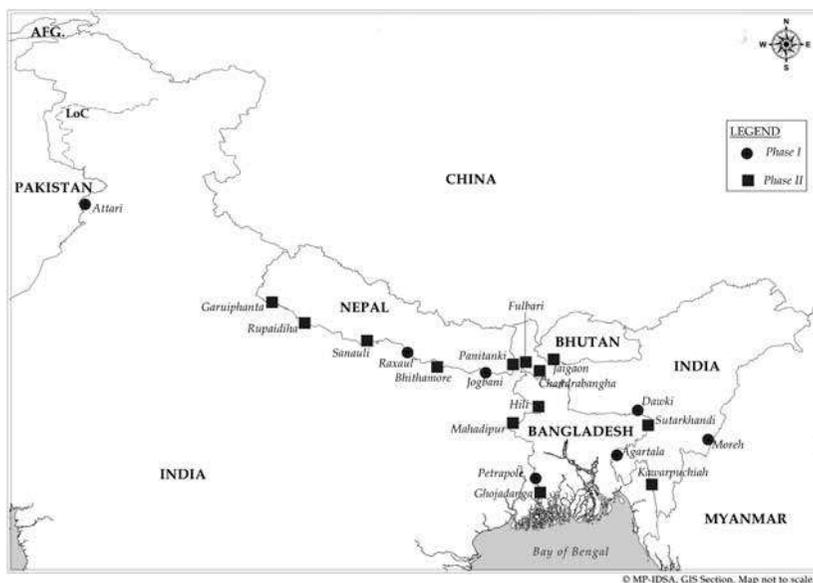
Table 4: Location of ICPs under Phase II

Sl. No.	Location	State	Border
1.	Hili	West Bengal	India-Bangladesh
2	Chandrabangha	West Bengal	India-Bangladesh
3.	Ghojadanga	West Bengal	India-Bangladesh
4.	Fulbari	West Bengal	India-Bangladesh
5.	Mahadipur	West Bengal	India-Bangladesh
6.	Sutarkhandi	Assam	India-Bangladesh
7.	Kawarpuchiah	Mizoram	India-Bangladesh
8.	Sunauli	Uttar Pradesh	India-Nepal
9.	Rupaidiha/Nepalganj	Uttar Pradesh	India-Nepal
10.	Garuiphanta	Uttar Pradesh	India-Nepal
11.	Bhithamore	Bihar	India-Nepal
12.	Panitanki	West Bengal	India-Nepal
13.	Jaigaon	West Bengal	India-Bhutan

Source: Annual Report 2016–17, Ministry of Home Affairs.

The Government of India had also decided that the construction of the ICPs will not be undertaken in a phased manner, but would

be prioritised depending upon volume of trade, traffic, immediate and foreseeable potential, other strategic interests, and availability of land.[61]

Land Customs Stations

Besides the above mentioned 19 LCSs that are being upgraded to ICPs, there are 64 functional LCS along various international borders of the country. These LCSs are operated by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC); but there is no single authority to manage them. The development of trading facilities in the LCSs is the responsibility of the respective state governments. Earlier, the Union government provided financial assistance to state governments in their endeavours through various schemes. One such scheme was the Assistance to States for Infrastructure Development of Exports (ASIDE), which was started by the Department of Commerce in 2002-03. Its aim was to provide financial assistance to states and union territories for creating the appropriate infrastructure for the development and growth of exports.

The outlay of the scheme had two components: 80 per cent of the funds were earmarked for the states; and 20 per cent were retained for the Union government component. The funds under the Union government component were utilised for meeting the requirements of inter-state projects, capital outlays of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and any activity considered important by the Union government from the regional or the national perspective.[62] The funds under the state component were allocated to the states were based on their export performance.

The Union government's financial support component of the ASIDE scheme was, however, withdrawn in 2015-16 as union tax devolution to the states was enhanced from 32 to 42 per cent following the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission.[63] Consequently, all state governments were requested to complete ongoing projects by allocating funds from the enhanced receipt of union taxes.

As for the ongoing central components of the projects, only a limited amount of Rs. 50.00 crore in 2015-16 and Rs. 65.00 crore

in 2016-17 was provided. No funds were provided to the states from 2017-18 onwards.[64] However, the state governments have not been successful in building basic infrastructure in the LCSs because of financial constraints as well as general apathy.

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7. Border Area Development Programme

Being at the periphery and proximate to the neighbouring country, border areas face difficulties that are normally not experienced in the hinterland. Issues of security and accessibility are two of the most prominent problems experienced by people living along the borders, albeit the magnitude of these problems differ from one border area to another.

The security of border areas has always been contingent on the kind of relations that a country shares with its neighbours. More often than not, actions of hostile neighbours have shattered the peace and security of border areas, instilling a sense of fear and anxiety among the populace. For instance, in the case of the India-Pakistan border, infiltration by terrorist groups and subsequent attacks, cross-border shelling and firing by Pakistani army, and activities of traffickers and criminal networks have jeopardised the safety and security of the people residing in these areas.

Relatively peaceful borders with friendly neighbours also grapple with their own sets of problems. Remoteness from the hinterland, coupled with a difficult terrain and weather conditions further aggravate the security of the border areas. Inaccessibility places these areas beyond the reach of civil administration. As a result, border people are mostly deprived of basic amenities such as health, education, sanitation, potable water, roads, etc.

Abysmal levels of transportation and communication infrastructure as well as a poor economic base fail to attract investment, making these areas unindustrialised, economically

depressed, and underdeveloped. With no legitimate means of livelihood opportunities, most border residents are forced to indulge in illegal activities, mostly acting as couriers for big mafias involved in the trafficking of drugs, arms, and persons. The absence of law enforcement personnel further contributes to transforming border areas into hubs for illegal activities.

In some places, especially, along the India-Bangladesh border, border areas have witnessed large scale illegal migration of people from Bangladesh. This has dramatically altered the demographic composition of the population, with foreigners outnumbering the bona fide citizens in some blocks of Assam, Tripura, and West Bengal. To make matters worse, these illegal migrants have bought land and have entered local politics, causing lots of socio-economic and political tensions.

In addition, the theft of livestock (cows) by cattle smugglers and the forcible harvesting of paddy by Bangladeshi goons have created a sense of insecurity among the Indian citizens living along this international border. Thus, border areas of the country have remained in the perpetual grip of underdevelopment, depressed economic opportunities and lawlessness, each feeding into another and creating a sense of neglect and insecurity among the border people.

The Government of India has been aware of the difficulties and problems of the borders areas, and their adverse impact on the security, economic growth, and psycho-social wellbeing of the people. However, it did not make much effort to ameliorate the conditions of these areas for years. One of the main reasons for the inadequate government intervention was the unstated policy of benign neglect of border areas to make them buffers against invasion from neighbouring countries.

The logic behind this policy was that if border areas are left underdeveloped and bereft of roads and communication networks as well as human settlements, the difficult terrain and dearth of local logistics and intelligence will impede the quick advance of the invading army/ies into the country's hinterland. Another reason for the insufficient attention paid to border areas is the fact that land is

a state subject and, therefore, the development of the border areas is the responsibility of respective states governments.

Unfortunately, state governments did not focus on these areas as their priorities lay in developing the rest of the state rather than the sparsely populated border areas which, in any case, did not generate enough demand or put sufficient political pressure on the state governments to redirect their developmental schemes to these poorly developed areas. State governments also wrongly believed that border areas are under the domain of the Army or the border guarding forces, both of which function under the Union government and are, therefore, not their responsibility.[1]

The Union government's inertia was finally broken when Sikh militancy erupted in the state of Punjab in the early 1980s and its repercussions were felt along the whole of the India-Pakistan border. The militants aided by Pakistan used to cross the international border into Punjab and launch attacks, especially targeting border districts. Innocent villagers were either killed or kidnapped and their property looted.

The militants would also coerce the border villagers into providing them with food and shelter, and any resistance to their demands were met with torture and instant death. As militant attacks increased, anxieties among the border population rose; people started moving out, investments in agriculture dwindled impacting farming output, and a sense of insecurity and depressed economic growth gradually enveloped these border areas.[2] In view of the distressing situation along the western border, the Union government realised that these areas required special government intervention for their overall development so that the people are relieved from their daily predicaments and encourage in them a sense of belonging.

Keeping this in mind, the Union government proposed developing the border areas through a new initiative under its Special Areas Programme (SAP). The philosophy behind SAP is the understanding that even though planning and economic development is the responsibility of the state concerned, certain regions across and within states require the focused attention of the Union government

for development because of various 'historical and geographical disadvantages'.[3]

As for border areas, it was concluded that a special scheme should be introduced to 'bring about over all development of these areas which encounter peculiar problems because of inaccessibility, remoteness, and a sense of insecurity in the people because of external aggression or cross-border terrorism and unlawful activities.'[4] In a meeting in November 1985, the Committee of Secretaries endorsed the idea of a special programme that would supplement the state government's efforts to cater to the developmental needs of the border areas.

Accordingly, in the last quarter of 1986, a new programme called the Border Area Development Programme (BADP) was approved by the National Development Council (NDC) as a cent percent centrally funded scheme, with a provision of Rs. 200 crore to be initiated during the Seventh Five Year Plan.[5] These funds were released by the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance, on the basis of the recommendations of the Planning Commission in two instalments – in June and February of every financial year.[6]

The BADP

The BADP was launched in 1986 as a centrally sponsored scheme along the India-Pakistan international border with the twin objectives of 'the balanced development of the sensitive border area in the western region through [the] adequate provision of infrastructure facility[ies] and [the] promotion of a sense of security amongst the local population.'[7] The programme was launched in Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. J&K was included subsequently.[8]

Since ensuring security was the predominant requirement in the light of rampant militancy in Punjab, the initial thrust of the programme was to develop suitable infrastructure in the border areas to facilitate the deployment of the BSF. These would include the development of power and roads, along with other administrative support like rest houses, etc., the provision of drinking water facilities as well as health and educational facilities. Further, countering hostile propaganda from across the border and encouraging a sense

of belonging among people in these areas was also deemed essential.

For this, programmes about national unity, country's culture, etc. were beamed through community television sets installed in the border villages. The provision of identity cards issued to all border residents along the India-Pakistan border was also made under the programme. To implement these schemes, a sum of Rs. 40 crore were allotted for the year 1986-87 to be executed by the MHA.[9]

Incidentally, during the course of the implementation of the programme, a series of policy decisions were taken which introduced major changes in the focus of the BADP. To begin with, in November 1986, the Government decided that the programme, instead of security, would focus on developing human resources in the border areas through education.

Initially, the focus was on strengthening the infrastructure for primary education only; but subsequently, in May 1987, it was decided that other levels and kinds of education systems such as middle schools, community polytechnics, vocational training centres for youths, etc. should also be incorporated under the programme. Accordingly, the Department of Education was brought in to implement the schemes relating to education.[10]

Similarly, provision for drinking water was made another major focus area under the BADP for which the Union government brought the Rajasthan Canal Project – hitherto, implemented as a state project by the Rajasthan government – under the purview of the BADP in 1987-88. The project was renamed as the Indira Gandhi Nahar Prijyojana (INP) and Rs. 15 crore were allocated to the Ministry of Water Resources to administer the project.[11] Besides, a scheme to conduct research on the socio-economic development of the border areas in the four states concerned by the Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID) Chandigarh was also approved.[12]

Thus, by the end of 1987, the BADP entailed four major schemes: education, INP, photo identity cards for border residents and research studies of the border areas (see Table 5). These schemes, except the photo identity card scheme, were implemented by the respective ministries with the overall coordination by the Planning

Commission. The scheme for the issuance of the photo identity card to border people remained pending in view of the absence of suitable legislation to implement it.

Table 5: Programmes under BADP in the Seventh Five Year Plan

(Rs. in crore)

Programme	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Department of Education (Ministry of Human Resource Development)	0	25	45.5	50	49.5	55	31
Indira Gandhi Nahar Project (Ministry of Water Resources)	0	15	21	28.75	28.6	27.8	52
Photo identity (Ministry of Home Affairs)	40*	1.1	0	0.17	1.91	0.88	2
Research Studies (Planning Commission)	0.40	0.11	0.12	0.08	0.02	0.11	0
Total	40.04	41.21	66.62	79.00	80.03	83.79	85

Source: *Report of the Working Group on Border Area Development Programme for the Formulation of the Tenth Five Year Plan*, New Delhi: Planning Commission, 2001, p. 4.

Note: *Includes all the programmes of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The BADP, however, did not remain confined to these four programmes or to the western borders of the country only. Periodic reviews of the programme reinforced the argument that areas proximate to international borders face peculiar problems by virtue of their location and, therefore, require special intervention from the Union government for their overall development in addition to state development plans. The reviews emphasized the need to adjust the guidelines for the implementation of the programme keeping in mind the special requirements of border people. Accordingly, the Government of India decided to revamp the BADP, and implemented it with its focus and scope suitably modified to cover all border areas of the country.

The Evolution of the BADP

In 1993-94, with the advent of the Eighth Five Year Plan, the BADP was extended to the eastern region of the country bordering the India-Bangladesh international border. The states included were: West Bengal, Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, and Mizoram. While the aim of the programme remained the same, that is, bringing 'balanced development of remote, inaccessible areas situated near the border in order to ensure their effective administration',[13] a number of modifications were introduced to make it more effective.

First, the scheme-wise orientation of the programme, with emphasis on education was changed to state level programmes with an emphasis on all round development of border areas. States were requested to conduct 'need assessment' surveys before implementing schemes that address the 'felt needs' of the people, or bridge gaps in critical physical and social infrastructure in the border areas.

Revised guidelines for the programme stipulated that the allocation of funds was to be decided according to the length of the international border, the population of border blocks (as per 1981 Census), and the area of border blocks, with each category given equal weightage. The border block was made the spatial unit in which all the schemes under the programme were to be implemented.[14] The INP, which were originally part of the BADP was allowed to continue.

Second, the guidelines stated that all sectors should receive uniform funds. Security related schemes should get only 7.5 per cent of the funds, and state governments could earmark 15 per cent of the total funds for the maintenance of the infrastructure created under the programme.

Third, an Empowered Committee headed by the Secretary, Planning Commission at the Centre, was established to decide on the scope of the programme, its extension to newer areas, the allocation of funds, etc., and a Screening Committee chaired by the Chief Secretary was set up at the state level to determine the kinds of projects to be undertaken under the BADP.[15]

Fourth, a system of periodic monitoring of the programme was also introduced under which funds were mandated to be released

only after the receipt of a satisfactory progress report. Last but not least, the financial outlay for the BADP under the Plan period was increased to Rs. 640 crore.[16]

The BADP witnessed another overhaul during the Ninth Five Year Plan. One of the major changes introduced to the programme was its extension to cover all the land borders of the country. In 1997-98, the programme was extended to the states bordering Myanmar and, in the following year, that is, 1998-99, it was extended to the states sharing border with China. In 1999-2000, it was further extended to states along the India-Nepal and India-Bhutan borders.

The BADP covers 16 states and 2 union territories having international borders, namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal and union territories of J&K and Ladakh. It is interesting to note that the decision to extend the BADP to all the border areas was taken in response to the demands of the state governments and the MHA.[17]

One of the reasons for such demands by the state governments could be that they saw the funds sanctioned under the BADP as another source of revenue generation. In fact, most states asserted that the implementation of the BADP has enabled them to undertake developmental projects in the remote border areas, which otherwise would not have been possible, given paucity of funds. They also claimed that the programmes have been successful in removing poverty and the feeling of alienation from the minds of the people living in remote areas.[18]

Meanwhile, a series of events during the course of the Ninth Five Year Plan had a widespread impact on the objectives and schemes of the BADP. The Kargil Conflict of 1999 was the first such event. In January/early February 1999, Pakistan executed an intrusion across the Line of Control (LoC) resulting in a brief war. Once the war was over, the Government set up the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) to 'review the events leading up to the Pakistani aggression in the Kargil district of Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir' under the Chairmanship

of K. Subrahmanyam in July 1999.[19] The KRC was also tasked 'to recommend such measures as are considered necessary to safeguard national security against such armed intrusions.'[20]

The Committee's Report – which was tabled in Parliament in February 23, 2000 – brought out grave shortcomings in India's security management. Commenting on border management, the Report recommended that a comprehensive study of the threats and challenges to requirements of the country's borders to be conducted in order to ensure improved border management.[21]

In response, in April 2000, the Union government set up a Task Force on Border Management under the Chairmanship of Madhav Godbole as part of the Group of Ministers (GoM) constituted to review the national security system.[22] The Task Force, which submitted its Report in August 2000 contained a section on the BADP. The main recommendations of the Report for the BADP were:[23]

- Like the Tribal Sub-Plan and Scheduled Castes Component Plan, a Component Plan should also be prepared for border areas so that the border population can partake of their share of development resources.
- The outlay of the BADP should be enhanced to at least Rs. 300 crore for 2001-2002, and to Rs. 2000 crore for the Tenth Five-Year Plan.
- A perspective plan for integrated infrastructure development of border blocks should be prepared with a 10-year time span. The plan should be implemented by pooling resources available under the BADP, the various schemes of the Ministry of Rural Development and State Plan Schemes, including the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund.
- The Ministry of Rural Development should earmark a portion of their funds available under various schemes of normal development for border blocks.
- It is necessary to involve the Gram Sabhas and the Block Panchayats in a participatory mode in prioritising the investment of resources available under the programme.

These recommendations were subsequently incorporated as revised guidelines for the BADP released in August 2000. One of the important modifications that was introduced to the programme was the emphasis on peoples' participation in the selection of schemes through grass-root level institutions, such as Gram Panchayats, District Councils, and traditional councils. The state governments were mandated to draw up appropriate modalities to ensure the greater participation of local people in the programme.[24]

Emphasis was also laid on selecting schemes which would result in income generation, promote production activities and create social infrastructure. The argument forwarded was that such a process would give a stake to the people in the success of these schemes and enhance their sense of belonging.[25]

The programme could be implemented through designated five agencies: (i) the State Government; (ii) the Central Government; (iii) the Central Para-Military Organisation located in the State; (iv) the Panchayati Raj Institutions/District Councils/Traditional Councils; and (v) Voluntary Agencies.[26] As far as funding was concerned, the Union government funded the entire programme, with the states concerned receiving the funds as special assistance on a 100 per cent grant basis, in addition to normal central assistance.

In the run up to the formulation of the Tenth Five Year Plan, the Planning Commission constituted a Task Force to assess the performance of the BADP in the Ninth Five Year Plan, and to develop a framework for the programme in the Tenth Five Year Plan so that a long-term integrated development of the areas under the programme could be achieved.[27] The remit of the Task Force was also to suggest operational and organisational measures at the national and state levels to better implement the programme. The Task Force submitted its Report in November 2001.

The execution of the recommendations of the Task Force had a wide ranging impact on the programme. The most significant impact was the transfer of the BADP from the Planning Commission to the MHA in April 2004 after the Department of Border Management was constituted. Second, the state governments were asked to

'prepare a long term perspective plan for each border block, keeping in view [the] overall balanced development of the region.'[28]

Fifteen per cent weightage was given to the hilly, desert and Rann of Kutch areas. Third, the expenditure on security related schemes, such as construction of BOPs, links roads to the BOPs, and building infrastructure for drinking water, sanitation, electricity, etc. for the BOPs, was increased from 7.5 per cent to 10 per cent of allocation in a year.

Fourth, the amount and the time for the release of funds for various schemes under the BADP were modified. The first instalment of the funds – comprising two-thirds of the allocated yearly amount – was to be released by the month of April, after the receipt of the list of schemes duly approved by the Screening Committee as well as the utilisation certificate.

The second instalment of the remaining one third of the amount was to be released after the month of October.[29] Lastly, state governments were required to have a separate budget head for the BADP, and install display boards featuring the funds allocated for the programme. The periodic review of the programme was to be carried out by the Department of Border Management.[30]

By the mid-2000s, the necessity for developing far flung border areas was increasingly recognised by policymakers. The 109th Standing Committee on Demand for Grants for the Ministry of Home Affairs stressed a holistic approach while implementing development schemes in border areas, and recommended a substantial increase in the funds for the BADP.[31] The then Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, also emphasized the need for a plan to develop the sensitive border areas. In his Independence Day address, on August 15, 2005, he stated:

> In this new phase of development, we are acutely aware that all regions of the country should develop at the same pace. It is unacceptable for us to see any region of the country left behind other regions in this quest for development. In every scheme of the Government, we will be making all efforts to ensure that backward regions are adequately taken care of. This has been ensured in the Food for Work Programme and the National Rural

Health Mission. We will also focus on the development of our border areas. We will ensure that these regions are provided basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and telephone connectivity in the next 3–4 years.[32]

Accordingly, in October 2005, a Task Force was set up for the reorientation of the BADP with the mandate to assess the design, planning, and implementation of the programme and suggest modifications.[33] The Task Force, which submitted its Report in July 2007, observed,

[W]hile the Border Area Development Programme has helped in building up some infrastructure in [the] border areas and addressing some of the livelihood and other concerns of the border areas, the allocation under the programme has been relatively too small to invite the focused attention of the State Governments. A much larger effort is, therefore, required to develop these areas not only in terms of funds for infrastructure but also have a re-look at policies which distort the development process, and increase the sense of alienation of the border population.[34]

The Report further stated that while a number of developmental schemes of the state governments as well as flag ship schemes of the Union government, such as Bharat Nirman, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC), the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), etc., focusing on building assets and improving the socio-economic situation are being implemented in the states; these schemes do not benefit the border areas because of the sparse population, the absence of a political voice of the border people and the withdrawal of funds for schemes in border areas by the state governments.[35]

The Report averred that border management practices should serve the best interest of the country, and border areas 'should have high standard of living to serve as a demographic buffer.'[36] Against these significant observations, the Report recommended that the

allocation under the BADP should be increased to at least Rs. 1000 crore per annum to bridge the critical gaps in physical and social infrastructure and to provide livelihood opportunities.[37]

All centrally sponsored schemes being implemented in the border areas should be converged with the BADP and decentralised planning based on local needs and local participation should be emphasized upon. Administrative capacity in the border areas should be built up by attracting talent through suitable incentive programmes, and the monitoring of the BADP should be institutionalised. It also suggested the extensive use of Information Technology (IT) to introduce transparency in the programme and to disseminate relevant information about the schemes under the BADP.[38]

Based on the recommendations of the Task Force, the focus of the BADP in the Eleventh Five Year Plan was revised. Emphasis was laid on a bottoms up approach to comprehensively develop the border areas. All the centrally funded schemes as well as state government schemes which are being implemented in these areas were converged to augment resources and upgrade the infrastructure and socio-economic services.[39]

State governments were instructed to give priority to villages located near the international borders (within 0-10 km), and once such villages were provided with adequate social and physical infrastructure, the development of other villages situated deeper inside (0-15 km, 0-20 km) could be taken up. Similarly, villages dislocated because of the construction of fences and rural areas were to be given top priority.[40]

State governments were also asked to prepare a comprehensive perspective and annual plans for border villages and blocks as a part of the District Plans with active local participation on the basis of guidelines contained in the Report of the Expert Group on the Planning at the Grassroots Level.[41]

Significantly, the funding of smaller schemes benefitting only the border villages were jettisoned in favour of bigger schemes that addressed the problems of gaps in social infrastructure, road networks, income generation, etc. The release of funds were made contingent upon the formulation of Annual Action Plans based on

baseline surveys and an expenditure plan specifying the fund share of the Union and state governments' schemes.

It was stipulated that while 90 per cent of the funds would be released in the first instalment after receiving the utilisation certificate of the entire sum in the previous years, except the preceding year; the remaining funds will be released only after receiving the utilisation certificate of 50 per cent of the funds released in the preceding years as well as quarterly progress reports.[42]

Besides monitoring and reporting by high level officials, emphasis was laid on the inspection of the schemes by officials of the Union government as well as third party inspectors for the qualitative implementation of the schemes. The state governments were required to earmark 1.5 per cent not exceeding Rs. 40 lakh of the funds under BADP for the purposes of monitoring, the training of staff at the block level and the evaluation of the BADP.[43] A nodal department/cell was required to be established in the states for the smooth and effective implementation of the BADP.[44]

It was hoped that the implementation of the abovementioned measures would contribute towards creating better living conditions for people living in the border areas. However, the Report of the Working Group on BADP for the Twelfth Five-Year Plan revealed that the meagre allocations under BADP do not permit undertaking of infrastructure projects. Further, the fragmentation of the programme, the difficulties in converging various Union and state governments schemes, and weak administration in the border areas added to the ineffectiveness of the BADP in fulfilling the socio-economic needs of the border residents.[45]

To address these problems, new guidelines were drawn up in the Twelfth Five-Year Plan and communicated to the state government. The guidelines reiterated the imperative to give first priority to the villages near the international boundary. It stipulated that the border guarding forces should draw up a list of 'strategically prioritised villages' in their respective areas of responsibilities and the selected villages should be first saturated with developmental activities.[46]

While the state governments have been advised since 2005-06 to comprehensively develop one village as a model village,[47] it was only in 2015 that the guidelines were revised to include the development

of a smart/model village as a part of a special area scheme.[48] The scheme stipulates that a village with a sizeable population with a cluster of villages near the border should be compositely developed so that it becomes the centre of socio-economic activities in the due course of time, which will help in preventing the out migration of population from the border areas to the hinterland. The idea is that if people stay near the border, then the difficulties of informal surveillance of the border areas as well as logistics would be easy to surmount, and help the forces secure the border better.

The guidelines further stipulate that a District Level Committee, comprising the District Magistrate, the District Forest Officer, the Superintendent of Police, and the Commandant of the Border Guarding Force, should be established to formulate plans and monitor the implementation of the plans.[49] As for funds, an amount of Rs. 7,230 crore were allocated for the BADP in the Twelfth Five-Year Plan.[50]

The BADP, however, ceased to be a cent percent centrally funded programme from the financial year 2017-18. Under the funding pattern, for the eight north-eastern states and the Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand and the union territories of J&K and Ladakh, the Union government will bear 90 per cent of the expenditure, and the states and union territories will bear 10 per cent.

For the remaining six states, the ratio of expenditure is 60 per cent for the Union government and 40 per cent for the state governments.[51] Furthermore, the budget allocation is divided into two components: (a) 40 per cent of the allocation was earmarked for the eight north-eastern states, and (b) the remaining 60 per cent for other states.[52] Thus, for the first time focused attention was paid to the development of the north-eastern states under the BADP.

The Impact of the BADP

Presently, the BADP is being implemented in 396 border blocks in 111 border districts of 16 states and 2 union territories located along the international land border.[53] It has become an integral programme of the Government of India for the balanced and

sustainable development of border areas. Successive evaluation studies of the BADP[54] have highlighted the positive but limited impact the programme has had on the creation of basic social and economic infrastructure in the border areas. Schemes taken up under the BADP in various sectors such as education, health, agriculture and allied activities, employment generation, connectivity, etc., in general, have created a conducive atmosphere for undertaking economic activities as well as potentially improving the quality of life of people residing in these far-flung and remote areas.[55]

However, the overall performance of the BADP has been unsatisfactory as its intended goals have not been achieved. The findings of successive evaluation studies on the BADP conducted since 1999 to assess the impact of the programme on the border areas have reinforced this fact. For instance, the Evaluation Study of 2015 revealed that 80 per cent inhabitants of the states covered under the study did not feel satisfied with the BADP.[56] The level of satisfaction was lowest among the north-eastern states. According to the Report, '32% of the people of Manipur, 54% people of Mizoram, 40% people of Nagaland and 54% people of Tripura settled in these remote areas are not satisfied with BADP.'[57]

The BADP also failed to address the issue of insecurity experienced by people living in these strategically sensitive areas. The feeling of insecurity among the border population was the highest in Tripura (82 per cent), Sikkim (78 per cent), Manipur (50 per cent) and West Bengal.[58] Similarly, a large proportion of people residing in these areas complained of inadequate infrastructure.

A number of factors, such as financial, systemic and organisational have been responsible for the sub-optimal performance of the programme. One of the major constraints that the BADP faces is meagre financial resources allocated to it. Even though funds sanctioned under the programme have been witnessing steady increase over the successive Five Year Plans, the amount is only sufficient for undertaking small schemes, and not large developmental projects capable of bringing about a perceptible and meaningful economic transformation of the border areas.[59]

Moreover, the basket of schemes specified under the BADP has a wide spectrum of activities ranging from small agricultural activity to building roads in the border areas. Such a wide variety of activities does not contribute to focused development of the border areas; instead it dissipates the Union government's efforts. Besides, the funds allocated under the BADP are meant to supplement the developmental efforts of the state governments in the borders; but most states either divert the amount to finance schemes in areas other than the borders, or reduce the share of funds under normal developmental plans meant for the border areas.[60]

Often, allocated funds under the programme are not released to the state governments in their entirety or on time; this hampers the timely implementation of many schemes.[61] Poor feedback from the states, the wrong coverage of schemes, and the late submission of the list of approved schemes by the state governments are primary reasons for the delay in the release of the funds by the Union government.[62]

Such delays are not limited at the centre-state levels; even the state governments do not release available funds to the districts on time. As mentioned earlier, most of the state officials consider funds available under BADP as another source for financing other activities not directly related to the goals of the programme. Consequently, there is a duplication of capital intensive infrastructure, which does not benefit the border people.[63]

Yet another reason for the sub-optimal performance of BADP is the vague criteria set for the implementation of the BADP. One of these is that the villages located nearest to the international boundary should be developed first, and once those are saturated, the villages located further inside should be developed. The problem with this guideline is that areas leading up to the border villages do not have road networks and other infrastructure to haul construction materials, making it extremely difficult to undertake any developmental activity in these remotely located villages. Thus, instead of developing the border villages in the first phase, emphasis has to be given on developing areas that lead to these villages. Also, there is no clear criterion to decide when a village is saturated. The

decision is left to the discretion of the district magistrate. Even the MHA has stated that there are no well-defined criteria to determine the saturation level.[64]

Moreover, schemes taken up under various sectors such as education, health, agriculture, social, and infrastructure receive uneven attention. In fact, it is observed that emphasis on connectivity in recent years has resulted in substantial expenditure incurred on the construction of roads, bridges, etc. while other sectors, such as health, education, and skills development remain neglected.[65] Presently, 50 per cent of the works completed under BADP are in the infrastructure sector.[66]

Most importantly, the local people for whose benefit the entire programme is envisioned, hardly participate in the formulation, implementation, or the monitoring of the schemes under the BADP. Most of them are unaware of the programme as they are kept ignorant about various schemes as decisions are taken at higher levels.[67] In most instances, development funds lie unused due to the lack of any plans. The absence of local participation in any decision making process has robbed the programme from devising schemes beneficial for the people residing in these areas. It also encouraged opaqueness in financial dealings as the funds meant for the development of the border areas are either siphoned off by corrupt bureaucrats and politicians or utilised in schemes outside the border areas, thus perpetuating the developmental gap between the border areas and the hinterland.

Popular perception among the border people is that bigger villages having political clout are successful in attracting developmental activities in their areas. Arbitrariness in the selection and rejection of schemes under the BADP further deprive small villages of the benefits of the programme.[68] Almost 40 per cent of the states covered under the BADP, therefore, have recommended reduction of political influence in various BADP schemes.[69]

There is also hardly any effort by the state governments to inspect the work done under the BADP. In fact, nearly 40 per cent of the states do not have a proper system for inspection and monitoring of BADP work. Grass-root level organisations, block

level Panchayat Samities, border guarding forces, etc., are not involved in the monitoring of the BADP work. There is no clear-cut policy or indicators of monitoring the progress of the work in any of the blocks.[70]

This process is further hampered by the shortage of manpower. District administrations do not have adequate number of staff to implement and monitor the BADP. Even where the staff is available, they do not possess suitable qualifications and skills required to smoothly implement various schemes. Moreover, all the states who have created social infrastructure such as schools, colleges, dispensaries, hospitals, etc., complain of difficulties in obtaining teachers, doctors, nurses, etc., to operationalise them.

In sum, the BADP is a well-intended scheme to meet developmental aspirations of the border population and is one of the elements of border management. However, the fact remains that the programme has not be able to achieve its intended objectives primarily because of inadequate funds, apathy of the state governments, non-participation of the local communities, corruption, and unimaginative plans. The Union government has to address these shortcomings not only for the efficient functioning of the programme but also to secure the well-being as well as the goodwill of the border inhabitants.

Notes

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55. See note 45.

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67. Author's interviews with villagers in the border areas along China, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Pakistan in 2006, 2007, 2012, and 2014.

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8. Connectivity in Border Areas: A Case of the Northeast

Road and railway networks are vital for the economic development and national integration. They provide connectivity to remote areas, accessibility to markets, schools, hospitals, and other amenities, and open up backward regions to trade and investment. Roads and railways not only help bind the peripheral regions with the Centre and promote inclusiveness but also propel growth and reduce spatial inequalities, especially in the border regions. The benefits of transportation networks was succinctly summed up by Adam Smith more than two centuries ago when he wrote,

> Good roads, canals, and navigable rivers, by diminishing the expense of carriage, put the remote parts of the country more nearly upon a level with those of the neighbourhood of the town. They are upon that, the greatest of all improvements.[1]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, India's border areas are characterised by low levels of economic development and tenuous links with the Indian mainstream. Poor road networks linking villages with urban centres in the states and beyond have been responsible for their relative isolation, and prevented border inhabitants from fully participating in the development of the region. While all the border regions of India are deficient in proper road and railway connectivity, the situation has been particularly bad in the case of India's northeast region.

The strategically important Northeast region – which shares 98 per cent of its borders with India's four neighbours and only 2 per

cent with the Indian mainland – has lagged behind economically from rest of country. The trauma of Partition and the consequent severance of connectivity from the rest of region has been the single most important constraint to the accelerated and inclusive economic development of the Northeast.[2]

During colonial times, the British had access to the region through Bengal and, as a result, all transportation lines were routed through that province. Thus, the Garo, Khasi and Lushai Hills, Tripura, and Assam were connected with Bengal. As the British administration penetrated further into the frontier areas, the Naga Hills and the North East Frontier Tracts were also connected by roads that ran through the Brahmaputra Valley.[3] However, most roads were built only up to the foothills, and the higher reaches were left undisturbed as constructing roads in those areas was deemed economically unviable.

The far eastern side of the Northeast was connected to Myanmar by a road running from Assam, and through Imphal to Tamu. This colonial pattern of transportation and the socio-economic integrity of the Northeast was disrupted with the partition of the Indian-subcontinent. The severance of East Bengal cut off the access routes of the Northeast to the Indian mainland, thus isolating the region as well as placing hurdles for its future economic progress.

By sealing both land and sea routes for commerce and trade, Partition also disrupted the region's access to traditional markets and the gateway to East and South-East Asia.[4] Faced with the twin challenges of integrating this region and assuring its economic growth, independent India accorded top priority to the construction of roads in the Northeast to restore severed communication links as well as develop newer lines of communication with the mainland.[5]

Intra-Region Connectivity in the Northeast: Pre-1990s

Roadways

In the immediate aftermath of Independence, there was a need to establish severed linkages between the Northeast and the rest of the country. In later years, a number of compelling factors, such as the emergence of new political entities in the Northeast,

multiple insurgencies and pervasive under-development led to a change in the focus towards developing intra-region connectivity. The first important step that was undertaken by the government was to connect Assam with the rest of India. For this purpose, the existing National Highway (NH-31) was realigned by laying a road from Bihar to Assam via Siliguri, avoiding the East Pakistani territory.[6]

The second step involved connecting Tripura and the Khasi and Garo Hills with the Assam road system, and then with the rest of India. To connect Tripura, a 209.2 km road from Agartala to Churaibari on the Tripura-Assam border was built, which was then connected with the existing Badarpur road in Assam. Similarly, a road was built from Jowai in the Khasi Hills to connect it with the Badarpur road. Another road from Shillong via Haflong and Silchar to Tripura was also built.[7] Thus, road connectivity between Assam and the rest of India as well as between Tripura and the Khasi and Garo Hills was established by the late 1950s.

Various other projects were also initiated to enhance intra-region connectivity in the Northeast. These connectivity projects also served diverse objectives from suppressing anti-state ideological movements to carrying out humanitarian efforts in the region. For example, on the NH-39, which connects Dimapur with Imphal, a diversion between Litan and Ukhrul was constructed primarily 'to combat the communist activity amongst the Ukhrul Nagas'.[8] Likewise, the Udaipur-Sabroom, the Bagafa-Belonia, and the Khowai-Teliamura roads were constructed 'to serve the displaced persons in Tripura'.[9] Gradually, other areas of the Northeast were also brought within the road network (see Table 6).

Table 6: Road Connectivity 1949-1965

Area	Road Connectivity
Lushai Hills (Mizoram)	Silchar-Aizawl road *(connected to Assam)*
Manipur	Silchar-Imphal road *(connected to Assam)* Pallel-Moreh-Tamu road *(connected to Myanmar)*

Naga Hills (Nagaland)	Tamenglong-Dimapur-Imphal road *(connected to Manipur)* Amguri-Mokokchung road *(connected to Assam)* Kohima-Phek-Pakungiri road *(intra state connectivity)*
North East Frontier Agency (NEFA)	Charduar-Bhalukpong road *(connected to Assam)* Harmutty-Barapani-Doimukh road *(connected to Assam)* Tuensang-Mokokchung road *(intra-agency connectivity)* Seijosa-Pigeray bridle road *(intra-agency connectivity)*

Source: *Annual Reports (1949–1965)*, Ministry of Transport, Government of India.

In addition to these roads, many mule and porter tracks were also built in remote areas, especially in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Thus, by the end of 1958, Nagaland had 486 km of new roads, 1,081 km of improved roads and 274 km of mule tracks. In NEFA, 320 km of roads, 181 km of mule tracks and 542 km of porter tracks had been laid, and 200 km of roads and 584 km of mule tracks were improved (see Table 7).[10]

Table 7: Roads in NEFA

Area	Road Connectivity
North East Frontier Agency (NEFA)	Margherita-Khonsa road *(connected to Assam)* Along-Likhabali road *(intra-agency connectivity)* Stilwell road up to Jairampur *(connected to Assam)* Pashighat to Yagrug road *(intra-agency connectivity)* Tezu-Hayuliang road *(intra-agency connectivity)* Bomdila-Dirong road *(intra-agency connectivity)* Daporijo-Ziro road *(intra-agency connectivity)*

Source: *Annual Reports (1962-65)*, Ministry of Transport.

The creation of seven new states with 30 districts in 1972 (under the State Reorganisation (Northeast) Act of 1971) also created demands for new connectivity as the newly created states did not have proper transportation networks, leaving many areas within the states remote and inaccessible. The immediate requirement,

therefore, was to connect the state capital with district headquarters so that state governments could extend their administration as well as developmental schemes to the far flung areas within the states. In the subsequent decade, these state capitals were also linked to Assam, and Assam's link with rest of the country was further improved.[11]

Raging insurgencies in the region also necessitated the development of roadways in the Northeast. Inhospitable terrain, the absence of roads and areas away from the centre of state powers favour insurgency by facilitating the rebels to escape from the security forces and hide in shelters built in the inaccessible areas. These factors also acted as impediments in conducting counterinsurgency operations, surveillance and power projection for the state. Acting upon the understanding that roads are the biggest enemy of the insurgents, the Union government sanctioned funds for new roads, which were constructed with considerable difficulty as the insurgents were determined to prevent the laying of these roads in the areas where they had a stronghold.

One such example is the construction of the NH-150 in Manipur, wherein the government had to deploy security forces for the safety of the contractor and labourers to complete the project. Interestingly, once the insurgents gave up the gun, road building gathered momentum as one of the principal demands of the former rebels was economic development through better connectivity. Thus, the various peace accords signed between the Indian government and the former rebels in the Northeast contained seeds for the further spread of road networks in the region. For instance, the Assam Accord of 1985, among other issues, focused on the improvement of infrastructure in the state. In fact, the Union government had constituted a committee (under the chairmanship of L.C. Jain, then Planning Commission Member, in February 1990) to look into the question of the development of Assam under Clause 7 of the Assam Accord.

By the beginning of the 1990s, the road network in the Northeast had vastly improved. However, the road length per 100 km still remained lower at 51.38, in comparison to the national average, which was 62.8. The pattern of road development in the region was

also highly uneven. While Tripura and Assam had very high road density with 124.1 and 87.8, respectively, the hilly states – such as Arunachal Pradesh at 11.9 and Mizoram at 17.6 – continued to suffer from poor road infrastructure.[12] To make matter worse, the road networks were characterised by unsurfaced roads, insufficient coverage, weak pavements, poor geometry, low motorable quality, submersible stretches, and weak, dilapidated and semi-permanent bridges.[13]

Railways

Unlike road building projects that started almost immediately after Independence, the development of railways in the Northeast was rather slow. The British had constructed a few meter gauge and narrow gauge rail lines in the Northeast, mainly in Assam, to extract and transport timber, tea, petroleum, coal, and other raw materials to Kolkata and Chittagong ports via East Bengal. Some of these lines were: the Dibrugarhghat-Makum-Lekhapani; the Tinsukia-Silchar-Chittagong, with branch lines to Silchar and Laksham as well as the Guwahati-Pandu-Jamunamukh; and the Parbatipur-Golokganj-Dhubri-Amingaon-Balipara meter gauge lines.[14]

Following India's partition, railway links connecting Siliguri in North Bengal to Kolkata and Assam to Chittagong were severed. Links with places presently in Bangladesh such as Akhaura with Belonia and Mahisashan in Tripura and Assam respectively – were also snapped. The whole Assam Railway, which carried almost all the freight traffic from the Northeast, was cut off from the rest of the Indian railway system.[15] Given the precarious situation, the Government of India launched the Assam Rail Link Project in November 1947 to establish a direct rail connection between the Northeast and the Indian mainland. The project envisaged linking up Kishengunj on the Avadh-Tirhut Railway with Amingaon in Assam through the Dooars in West Bengal. Work on the 142 miles long metre gauge rail link commenced in January 1948 and, in less than two years, the rail connection was completed. It was opened to goods traffic on December 9, 1949, and to passenger traffic on January 26, 1950.[16]

The rail line established a direct link with Assam; but at the same time, it was not commercially viable as it increased the distance between Amingaon and Kolkata by 230 km over the corresponding distance of the former rail-route – that is, via Parbatipur in East Pakistan.[17] In 1958, a new railway zone, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) with its headquarters at Malegaon (Guwahati) was established by carving out from the North Eastern Railway.

Apart from the establishment of a direct link between the Indian mainland and Assam, not much work on the development of railways in the Northeast took place in subsequent years. This was primarily because the NFR could not provide a good rail access to Kolkata, which was the nearest seaport for the Brahmaputra valley. Because of multiple transhipments, which raised cost and created hassles, there was not much traffic of passengers and goods from the region to the mainland by the railways. The second reason was the exorbitant cost of laying rail tracts as well as their maintenance in the hilly and heavily forested terrain of the region.

More often than not, the government did not have adequate resources to invest in railways. In fact, overall investments in the railways in India had fallen drastically from the fourth plan onwards – from 15.4 per cent (Third Five-Year Plan) to 5.97 per cent (Fourth Five-Year Plan) and, since then, investments in the railways has ranged between 5 and 7 per cent of the GDP.[18] Moreover, transportation by road in the difficult terrain was considered more efficient and cost effective.

It was only during the border skirmishes with China in 1959 and after that the Government of India in its overall efforts to improve connectivity in the region started developing railways in the Northeast. The first project was the construction of the Saraighat Rail-cum-Road Bridge, connecting the two banks of the Brahmaputra in Guwahati that commenced in 1959, completed in September 1962, and opened to traffic on June 7, 1963.[19] Furthermore, the metre gauge line from Rangapara North was extended to Murkongselek in 1962 to enable the swift movement of troops to the India-China border in Arunachal Pradesh.[20] The line was completed in two years, and the first passenger train chugged on the tracks in July 1965.

Meanwhile, Tripura was brought on the railway map in 1964 when the 31 km Kalkalighat-Dharmanagar meter gauge line was opened for traffic.[21] The New Jalpaiguri to Jogighopa via New Bongaigaon line was also converted into broad gauge and opened to traffic by June 1965 to reduce the strain on the Assam Link line.[22] Although, the newly constructed broad-gauge line has reduced the length of New Bongaigaon-Howrah rail route by 447 km, it was rendered practically useless as it involved ferry transhipment. To overcome the problem, it was proposed that the line to Guwahati had to be upgraded to broad gauge. However, the track conversion to Guwahati from Bongaigaon took 20 more years, as it was only in 1984 that meter gauge in Guwahati was converted to broad gauge.

The proposal to extend the broad gauge from Guwahati to Lumding was submitted in 1981-1982, and even though the project was accepted and a survey conducted in 1984-85, the upgrade of the line was delayed as the cost involved in gauge conversion was exorbitant.[23] As a result, it took another 10 years to upgrade the Guwahati-Lumding section and, in 1993-94, the Guwahati-Lumding tract conversion to broad gauge was completed.[24] The Kalkalighat to Dharmanagar line was extended to Kumarghat – a distance of 32 km – in 1990.

One of the major hurdles in the swift development of railway connectivity, especially in Assam, is building road-cum-rail bridges across the mighty Brahmaputra, which bisects the state. Building these bridges not only requires enormous technical expertise and time, but also exorbitant amounts of money. Despite these constraints, the Government of India constructed a number of bridges over the Brahmaputra. Besides the Saraighat Bridge, a second bridge over the Brahmaputra (called the *Kolia Bhomora Setu*) was built and inaugurated in 1987. The 3015 m bridge connects Sonitpur and Nagaon districts of Assam.[25]

Apart from these, a number of projects for building bridges, upgrading as well as building new broad gauge lines were suggested by the Jain committee in 1990. Some of these were: a Rail-cum-Road Bridge at Bogibeel; the upgrade of railway lines from meter gauge to broad gauge (Guwahati to Dibrugarh); and a new broad gauge line from Jhalukbari to Panikheti and from Lanka to Silchar.[26]

Connectivity in the Region Post-1990s

Roadways

Meanwhile, India's constructive engagements, especially with Myanmar and Bangladesh opened up new avenues of cooperation and heralded a new chapter for the Northeast. The signing of a MoU to restore border trade with Myanmar in 1994, and the Ganges Water treaty with Bangladesh in 1996, unlocked prospects for the possible restoration of erstwhile transit routes and markets to the Northeast and vice versa. The development of an efficient road system both in the Northeast and across its border has also become necessary to realise the potential of India's goal of economically linking up with East and Southeast Asia through the Look East Policy (LEP).[27]

In fact, LEP fostered many other regional cooperative initiatives such as Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC), the Bay of Bengal Multi Sectoral Technology and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Regional Economic Forum (BCIM), and the Asia Land Transport and Infrastructure Development (ALTID) programme for the development of the entire region. Proposals for the construction of a Trans-Asian Highway and Asian Railway were revived. Talks of newer configurations for regional development – such as the South Asia Development Triangle, including eastern and north-eastern India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Southwest China; and the Bay of Bengal Triangle, with Calcutta and Chittagong at the apex of a vast hinterland stretching down to Sri Lanka and Singapore – started to take shape.[28]

Amidst all these developments, the realisation that the Northeast is crucial – as it provides the Indian mainland with a 'land bridge' to Myanmar as well as a gateway to Southeast Asia – started dawning on Indian policy makers. However, for the region to emerge as a bridge to the booming economies of the Southeast and East Asia, it was essential to connect the region with the rest of the country with high speed, high capacity highways, and also to improve the intra-region and across border connectivity.

As a result, since the mid-1990s, the Northeast received special attention as a part of the 'Prime Minister's New Initiative for the North Eastern Region'. Under this initiative, successive Prime Ministers have announced schemes for the all-round development of the region with a special focus on the improvement of connectivity.

The initiative started with the then Prime Minister, H.D. Deve Gowda, announcing a Rs. 6100 crore economic package for specific projects in the Northeast in October 1996. He also introduced the North-East sub-plans wherein at least 10 per cent of the budgets of the Union ministries and departments were earmarked for the development of the north-eastern states.[29]

Further, in November 1996, the Planning Commission constituted a High Level Commission (under the chairmanship of S.P. Shukla) to critically examine the backlog in respect of Basic Minimum Services; gaps in important sectors of infrastructure development, especially in power communication, railways, roads, education, agriculture, etc., in the Northeast; suggest policies, programmes, and the requirement of funds to bridge the gaps; and to assess the investment required to create infrastructure for the Northeast.[30]

The committee, which submitted its Report in 1997, stated that '[T]he Northeast requires a massive development thrust to make up for lost time and put it on a fast track'.[31] It recommended that the region would require funds to the tune of Rs. 13,637 crore and Rs. 6128 crore for the development of road and railway networks, respectively.[32] Some of the road and railway projects suggested by the commission were:

- the 290 km Daboka-Lanka-Lumding-Haflong-Udarband-Silchar highway in Assam;
- the 241 km Kohima-Mokokchung-Amguri highway providing an alternative connection between Assam and Nagaland;
- the 210 km Sairang-Manu highway linking Aizawl to Agartala;
- the 135 km Agartala-Udaipur-Sabroom highway in Tripura; and,
- the expeditious completion of the Bogibeel bridge.

The Report further suggested that there is need for a revised regional perspective plan for road development in the Northeast with international linkages, 'for which the NEC's proposal for a road all along the Indo-Myanmar border from Champhai in Mizoram to Vijoynagar in Tirap, Arunachal Pradesh', should be considered.

It also recommended the development of cross-border road and railways networks with Bangladesh and Myanmar such as a road connection from Agartala to Akhaura and Lunglei-Tlabung (Demagiri) in Mizoram to Chittagong as well as extension of rail lines to the Manipur and Mizoram borders to form a part of the Trans-Asian Railway via the Yangon-Mandalay rail system.[33] For the development of rail networks, the Report recommended building the Diphu-Karang and Bairabi-Saireng lines and overnight trains between Dimapur and Guwahati.[34] Most of these recommendations were made part of the Ninth Five Year Plan.[35]

Subsequently, in 1997, Prime Minister I.K. Gujral reaffirmed the Centre's commitment to the 1996 package, and added a few more crores to make it Rs. 7000 crore and, a year later, a new package of Rs. 10,217 crore was announced by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. In the next few years, some of the major road and rail schemes undertaken as well as completed include:[36]

- the extension of NH-52A from Itanagar to Gohpur and widening of the road to 2-lane;
- the Damra to Baghmara road in Assam and Meghalaya was upgraded and was declared NH-62;
- the widening of NH-53 to two lanes in the Badarpur-Silchar-Jiribam-Imphal sector;
- a new alignment of the Shillong bypass road was sanctioned. The widening of NH 51 was also taken up;
- the widening of 192 km long NH-54 to two lanes in the Silchar-Aizawl sector was undertaken;
- the widening of NH-39 to four lanes in Nagaland was initiated. Also, the construction of the Dimapur bypass on NH-39 was sanctioned;
- the Agartala-Sabroom road in Agartala was upgraded as NH-44 in February 1998;

- the road connecting Aizawl in Mizoram to Tipaimukh, Churanchandpur, Imphal, Ukhrul, Jessami in Manipur and terminating in Nagaland was declared NH-150 on January 1, 1999, and its development was undertaken;
- the construction of a fourth rail-cum-road bridge on the Brahmaputra at Bogibeel;
- Tract conversion to broad gauge between Lumding and Dibrugarh was completed in 1997;
- The extension of a broad gauge track from Lanka to Silchar was sanctioned in 1997; and
- the Jogighopa Road-cum Rail Bridge was inaugurated in April 1998.

Apart from the upgrade of the above mentioned national highways, other roads were also sanctioned under the Prime Minister's Initiative to ensure greater intra-regional connectivity. Some of the road projects in the region that were announced by Prime Minister Vajpayee on January 22, 2000, are in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Roads Sanctioned under Prime Minister's Initiative in 2000

Road	Connectivity
Baithalangsu-Raha (48 km)	Intra-Assam
Naharkatia-Khonsa (57 km)	Assam to Arunachal Pradesh
Panchgram-Hailakandi (58 km)	Intra-Assam
Margherita-Changlang (43 km)	Assam to Arunachal Pradesh
Zamuang-Durlavcherra (79 km)	Intra-Tripura
Jotte-Balijan (58 km)	Assam to Arunachal Pradesh
Fatikroy-Kailashwar (98 km)	Intra-Tripura
Kumchai-Marabhum	Intra-Arunachal Pradesh

Source: The North East Council.

Despite such special attention paid for the development of transportation networks, the funds promised could not be utilised as the state governments failed to submit specific project proposals for the Union government's approval. Resultantly, road connectivity

in the region continued to remain dismal. For example, out of a road network of 82,000 km in 2005, only around 25,000 km were paved. The rest were unpaved and, thus, unsuitable for heavy traffic.

As far as National Highways are concerned, of 6880 km, 3725 km were less than 2-lane. State capitals like Agartala and Aizawl were not even connected by a 2-lane National Highway. Some 62 district headquarters were not connected by even a 2 lane road. Border areas and other remote and backward areas of the Northeast fared even worse. And, connectivity to neighbouring countries had been minimal.[37]

Nevertheless, the Union government remained committed to building and improving transportation infrastructure in the Northeast. So, in September 2005, the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) initiated a mega road development programme in Northeast called the 'Special Accelerated Road Development Programme in the Northeast (SARDP-NE)'.[38] The objective of the programme is to:

- Upgrade National Highways connecting State Capitals to 2/4 lane.
- Improve roads of strategic importance in border area.
- Improve connectivity with neighbouring countries.

The programme covers 10,141 km of roads in two phases (Phase 'A' and Phase 'B') as well as the Arunachal Pradesh Package of Roads and Highways (Arunachal Package). Phase 'A' involves the improvement/construction of 4,099 km of roads (2,041 km NH and 2058 km state and other roads) at an estimated cost of Rs. 21,769 crore. As on March 2019, 3,333 km of length was awarded, and 2,101 km of road have been completed.[39]

Two NHs connecting the international border of neighbouring countries, and aggregating to about 156 km have been improved/being improved to 2-lane standards. These projects include the 2-laning of NH-153 from Lekhapani to Pangsu pass (Myanmar border), with a total length of about 56 km in the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, and the construction of a new highway (NH-502A) of about 100 km from near Lawgtlai on NH-54 to river Zocha on the India-Myanmar border in Mizoram.[40] The SARDP-

NE Phase 'A' is expected to be completed by March 2023-24.[41]

Phase 'B' would include the construction of 3,723 km of roads for which the government has approved the preparation of the Detail Project Report. Phase 'B' would commence after the completion of Phase A. Under the Arunachal Package, a total of 2,319 km of road is being built, of which 2,205 km will comprise a national highway connecting all the districts with an estimated cost of Rs. 11,703 crore.[42] Till March 2019, projects of 2,047 km length have been awarded, and 928 km of road has been completed. The entire Arunachal Pradesh package is targeted for completion by 2023-24.[43]

Besides SARDP-NE, a 4-lane East-West Corridor, measuring 672 km, is being constructed under the National Highway Development Programme Phase II (NHDP-II), at an investment of Rs. 6000 crore. This corridor starts from Srirampur on the Assam-West Bengal border to Silchar in Assam via Guwahati, Nagoan, and Doboka. The work on this stretch began in September 2004 and, after much delay, is expected to be completed soon.

In addition, NHDP Phase III has been initiated in 2007 to connect state capitals of the region by a 4-lane national highway stretching over 1051 km. The government had sanctioned a 105 km length of NH 44 during 2015-16 under this Phase at a cost of Rs. 479.20 crore.[44] In all, the Union government has committed Rs. 40,000 crore for the development of road infrastructure for the Northeast.[45]

Railways

Similarly, for improving and widening rail connectivity in the Northeast, the Ministry of Railways has announced as well as implemented a number of projects in the past two decades. Most of the projects – which include laying new railway lines and the conversion of gauge – have been taken up keeping in mind the distinct features of the railway system in the region. One of the features is that the Northeast was served primarily by a metre gauge railway system with its attendant inadequacies of low speeds, low throughput, transhipments, etc.[46] All these problems resulted in the slow and difficult movement of cargo and passenger between the region and rest of the country, resulting in depressed economic

growth. The need of the hour, therefore, was to augment the capacity of the railway system in the region by converting the meter gauge lines into broad gauge to facilitate the seamless and rapid movement of cargo and passenger.

Towards this purposes, the Government of India implemented the 'uni-gauge' policy in the Northeast, and announced three major projects for gauge conversion.[47] These were: the Lumding-Silchar-Jiribam and Badarpur-Kumarghat; the Rangia-Murkongselek, along with linked fingers; and the Katakhal-Bhairabigauge conversion projects (for details, see Table 9).

Table 9: Gauge Conversion Projects

Project	State	Length (in km)	Remarks
Lumding-Silchar-Jiribam & Badarpur-Kumarghat	Assam, Tripura, Manipur	483	National Project
Rangia-Murkongselek alongwith linked fingers	Assam, Arunachal Pradesh	510	National Project
Katakhal-Bhairabi	Assam, Mizoram	84	

Source: Final Report of Working Group on Improvement and Development of Transport Infrastructure in the North East for the NTDPC. *Annual Performance Report 2015–16*, North East Frontier Railways, p. 68.

Another distinct feature of the railway system in the region was that, besides Assam and Tripura, none of the Northeastern state's capital were covered by the railway network. To address this major gap, the Government of India sanctioned a number of projects and tasked the Indian Railways with providing connectivity to eight states of the Northeast by 2020 (see Table 10).

Table 10: Status of Connectivity to Capital Cities in the Northeast

State	Capital	Name of The project	Length/Year of sanction	Status
Assam	Guwahati (Dispur)	-		Connected

Tripura	Agartala	Kumarghat-Agartala	119 km/1996	Connected (Meter gauge in 2008, Broad Gauge in 2016),
Arunachal Pradesh	Itanagar	Harmuti-Nahalagun	21.75 km/1996 –97	Connected (2014)
Manipur	Imphal	Jiribam-Tupul-Imphal (National Project)	110.625 km/2003–04	Jiribam to Vangaichungpao (Completed) Vangaichungpao to Kaimai (March 2019) Kaimai to Tupul (To be completed by 2020)
Nagaland	Kohima	Dimapur-Zubza-Kohima	88 km/ 2006–07	Work started in 2017 (To be completed by 2022)
Mizoram	Aizawl	Bhairabhi-Sairang (National Project)	51.38 km/2008–09	Work in progress (To be completed by December 2022)
Meghalaya	Shillong	Tetelia-Byrnihat in lieu of Azra-Byrnihat (National Project)	108.40 km/2010–11	No progress in Land acquisition since November 2010 due to agitation by Khasi Student Union.
Sikkim	Gangtok	Sivok-Rangpo (National Project)	44.96 Km/2008–09	Protests by environmentalists but cleared by the Supreme Court. Work likely to start soon.

Sources: Final Report of Working Group on Improvement and Development of Transport Infrastructure in the North East for the NTDPC. *Annual Performance Report 2015-16*, North East Frontier Railways, pp. 71-92.

Besides these projects, a few other projects focusing on bringing newer areas under the railway system, such as the Murkongselek-Pasighat, the Dudhnoi-Mendipathar and the Agartala-Sabroom rail lines are also being implemented. While the Dudhnoi-Mendipathar and the Agartala-Sabroom lines have been operationalised in November 2014 and October 2019, respectively[48], the Murkongselek-Pasighat line remains stalled because of land acquisition and compensation issues.[49] Of these abovementioned projects, 11 projects were declared as 'National Projects' (see Map 4).

Map 4: Railway Network – Northeast
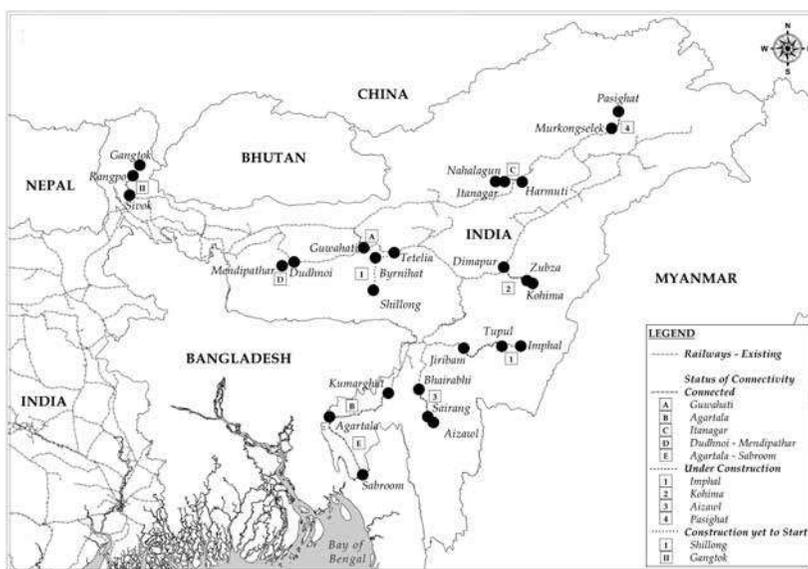
© MP-IDSA, GIS Section. Map not to scale.

National projects are the projects implemented in the Northeast and J&K, and are considered important from a strategic point of view or which result in the greater integration of these regions with the rest of India.[50] For the implementation of these National Projects, 75 per cent of the funds were provided by the Finance Ministry and 25 per cent by the Railways through Gross Budgetary Support (GBS).[51]

All these road and rail projects would no doubt improve both intra region and cross-border connectivity of India's Northeast.

Improved connectivity, in turn, is expected to result in greater trade, and bring prosperity to the region. However, there are a few hurdles that impede as well as delay the development of the road and railway network in the region.

Hurdles in the Development of Road Network

Delays in Acquisition of Land

Inordinate delays in the acquisition of land is a major reason behind the slow progress of the road and rail construction projects. Elaborate procedural formalities and litigations lead to the holding up of land acquisition. Since the entire region is ecologically fragile, the Departments of Environment and Forests, both at the union and at the state levels, take a long time to clear road projects. In fact, Section 4.4 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, stipulates, "if a construction project requires [the] utilisation of forest as well as non-forest land, work should not be started even on the non-forest land till the receipt of approval of [the] Central Government for the release of the forest land".[52]

Second, land is a state subject and stringent state Land Acts coupled with community ownership of land in the region also make acquisition of land extremely difficult. Non cooperative attitudes of various state departments further add to the woes.[53] Besides government departments, protests and litigations by the environmentalists and the local people against the road or rail projects to save national forests or zoological parks either delay or stall these projects. For example, the alignment of the Dhansiri-Sukhobi-Zubza rail track had to be altered following protests by the people of Nagaland. Work on the rail project, which was sanctioned in 2007, could start only in September 2015, after a delay of 8 years because of the protests.

Difficulties still persist in the acquisition of land because a special provision [under Article 371(A) with regard to all land-related issues within the state], gives constitutional rights to the Nagas to overrides any Act on land.[54] Moreover, the acquisition of land is also stalled because of exorbitant compensation demanded by the

affected people such as in the case of the Pasighat to Murkongselek rail project.[55] Other reasons for delays are the length of time taken to shift existing utilities, like electric, lines, sewer lines, water pipelines, etc., and clear the land for road and rail construction.

Inefficient Management

The inefficient management of resources, both at the union and state government levels, has resulted in the lopsided development of road and railway networks in the Northeast. The lack of funds, the faulty design and planning of the projects, the poor performance of contractors, etc., are results of inefficient management that act as impediments for the development of road and rail networks. The paucity of funds as well as the failure to disburse them in a timely manner has resulted not only in the postponement of many projects but also in their spilling over from one plan to the next.

As a consequence, the monetary loss and resultant financial burden on the government is immense. For example, even though the Bogibeel Bridge, the Kumarghat-Agartala, the Lumding-Silchar, and the Rangiya-Murkongselek rail projects were declared as 'National Projects', the allotment of funds was not commensurate with the requirement of the projects and, as a result, the timely completion of these projects have been hindered.[56] In another example, while assessing the progress of four roads under the SARDP-NE in Nagaland, the CAG Report of 2016 stated,

> The DPRs, prepared for four roads, were not based on adequate surveys, and [the] investigation [revealed] a large deviation in the implementation of the works from the approved DPRs. A proportionate amount of Rs. 36.44 crores paid to the Consultant for [the] preparation of DPRs for four roads was a waste. As a consequence, not a single kilometre in any of the four roads was completed as per the objectives of the scheme, despite an expenditure of Rs. 602.34 crores on execution of work so far. No further progress of work has been achieved on any of the four roads since August 2012.[57]

Yet another factor that has adversely affected the balanced development of the transportation system in the Northeast is the fact that while a number of roads have been sanctioned with huge outlays, adequate attention has not been paid to the proper planning of the road and rail lines, the maintenance of the existing road and rail networks, the creation of human capital, augmenting machinery, and process improvement. These have resulted in serious time and cost overruns.[58]

Lack of Local Expertise

Road and rail building in the region are also constrained by the unavailability of experienced contractors. On the one hand, contractors with the knowhow from outside the region are reluctant to work in the Northeast because of insurgency (violence and extortion) and low returns on their investments. On the other hand, local contractors lack the expertise, resources, as well as experience to effectively implement these projects. Moreover, most of the construction agencies are owned by local politicians who put pressure on the government to grant projects to them, especially road projects, to make easy money.

This results in an unholy nexus between local politicians, bureaucrats, and contractors. They then indulge in corrupt practices such as using sub-standard materials and not adhering to norms stipulated for building roads are quite common. The non-availability of construction materials, such as bitumen, stones, machinery, etc., at the project sites further contributes to slow progress in road and railway building.

Adverse Terrain and Climatic Conditions

Given the terrain and climatic conditions of the Northeast, the building and maintenance of transportation networks, especially roads, is extremely difficult. The region is mostly mountainous, with moderate to steep gradient. These mountains are made of loose soil, held tightly by the roots of trees and shrubs growing on it. Once the vegetation is removed during the construction of roads, the mountains become destabilised. The situation is made worse by heavy rainfall, leading to

landslides and floods, which not only makes building roads difficult but also damages the existing road networks considerably. Coupled with this, the requirement to build bridges on numerous streams that criss-cross the entire region slows down the progress.

Political Decisions

The pattern of road networks in the region reflects, among other things, political decisions to construct roads in a particular area. These decisions, in turn, are influenced by various factors, like vested interests, electoral compulsions, faulty policies, resource constraints, etc. For instance, the decision of not building roads along the borders due to security considerations is a result of the defensive mind-set of policymakers. Thus, today, the region bordering the India-China and India-Myanmar are devoid of any road and railway networks. The state governments' decision against building road in the hills in Assam and Manipur has resulted in the underdevelopment of road networks in the North Cachar and Manipur hills.

Another factor that influences decisions to develop roads is cost-benefit calculations. Governments are reluctant to build roads in sparsely populated areas, arguing that the cost to build roads in these areas would far exceed the benefits that would accrue. This is one of the reasons for the lack of an extensive road network in Arunachal Pradesh.[59] Similarly, the lack of development of railways in the Northeast can be attributed to the understanding that huge investments in laying rail tracks and other infrastructure would not result in profitable returns.

Criminal-Terrorist Nexus

There is no doubt that insurgency in the Northeast has degenerated into a criminal syndicate. This growing criminal-terrorist nexus has emerged as a major hindrance not only to road construction but also to the overall development of the region. Potential investors shy away from this region because of insurgency. And, the contractors and labourers who undertake these projects are deterred by extortion, kidnappings and murder carried out by the rebels in the project sites.[60]

For example, on May 15, 2008, fearing attacks from rebels, more than 4,000 workers hired by 15 construction firms decided to withdraw from construction sites in Assam.[61] Thus, road building is adversely affected in insurgency affected states. Hence, the condition of roads in the insurgency affected Manipur, when compared to Mizoram or Tripura where peace has reigned for some time, is pathetic.[62]

Similarly, the construction of the Jiribam-Tupul rail project has been delayed because of militant activities in the state. As many as 14 cases of shootings, kidnapping for ransom, and violence targeting supervisors and engineers working on the rail project were reported in the 2017-2018.[63]

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that there has been no long-term comprehension that drove the development of roads in the Northeast. Every one of the factors identified above has been a knee-jerk response to the internal and external developments. This is a consequence of a lack of understanding not only of the strategic importance of the Northeast as a bridge that connects the rest of India with the East and Southeast Asian neighbours, but also of the fact that it shares borders with China, borders which are contested with China laying claims on Arunachal Pradesh.

In addition, given several problems such as insurgency, underdevelopment, hilly terrain, etc., what is needed is a long-term proactive approach to the defence and development of the region. And road communication is one of the means for securing defence and ensuring economic development. It is true that road building is not an easy task in the remote and hilly terrain of the Northeast, a task made more complicated by other impediments like insurgency, vested interests, and bureaucratic procedures. However, some measures could be undertaken to overcome some of these impediments. For instance, the government's decision should be more influenced by the issue of social justice rather than cost-benefit factors. Its endeavour should be to provide adequate roads to the people residing in remote areas guided by the objective of balanced development of the region.

Given that the region is ecologically fragile, care should be taken for selecting the alignment of the proposed roads and proper scientific procedures should be applied while constructing roads. In addition, proper surveys and detail project reports should be meticulously prepared by involving all the concerned departments. To accelerate road-building activities in the region, a public-private partnership model should be adopted. For this, an attempt at attracting the private sector along with foreign financial institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for investing in the Northeast must be made.

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9.   Cross-border Connectivity

Despite geographical continuity, South Asia is one of the least integrated regions in the world, and this lack of integration is one of the major impediments for the optimal realisation of the economic potential of the region. Improving regional connectivity is, therefore, increasingly being considered as a key element in ensuring security and development in the countries of the region.

The reorientation of India's foreign policy towards the East and positive engagements with Bangladesh and Myanmar in the 1990s has propelled India to discuss and plan the development of road and railway networks in the border areas, especially in the Northeast. However, it was only in the 2000s when the country experienced substantial economic growth that a qualitative shift in the country's attitude towards the border areas was heralded.

Faster economic growth has meant a huge increase in trade and investment flows. It has also forced India to look upon countries in its immediate and extended neighbourhoods as economic partners. As India began seeking economic integration at the regional and global levels, borders were increasingly seen as avenues for the easy circulation of goods and people instead of being perceived as physical obstructions. This idea was captured by the then Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, in his speech in the 2005 South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit at Dhaka:

> If SAARC as a region has to recapture its role as a crossroads of culture and commerce, how much more necessary is it for us to remove the barriers to the free flow of goods, of peoples and ideas within our own region. We cannot be the crossroads of Asia but remain disconnected within our own region … If we wish the

next twenty years of SAARC to be different, we should take the first decision to reconnect the countries of the Subcontinent on the one hand, and then reconnect the subcontinent to the larger Asian neighbourhood on the other. We need to recharge and regenerate the arteries of transport and communication that bind us together and, in turn, link our region to the rest of Asia to reclaim the prosperity that is undoubtedly our due.[1]

Exhorting to view borders as connectors, the then Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran said in 2006,

If borders are 'connectors', then border regions become extremely important as the points of mutual interaction with neighbours. They become the bridges linking countries, and could be leveraged for [the] development of border regions and their economic well-being. A new vision of South Asia demands a new mindset.[2]

Changing attitudes towards the border and increasing the volume of trade with neighbours has strengthened India's efforts for the accelerated, integrated and sustainable development of its border regions. It is believed that the robust lines of transportation and communication emanating out of India will ensure enhanced bilateral and regional trade and result in the creation of growth impulses which will spread far and wide, and help India build a web of 'dense interdependencies' with its neighbours.

As a first step towards enhancing integration in South Asia, India and its neighbours agreed to develop and/or restore severed lines of transportation and communication in the border areas because poorly developed road and rail connectivity, requiring multiple trans-shipments, have resulted in the high cost of trade and impaired people to people contact. Thus, the restoration of the pre-1965 road and rail links with Pakistan and Bangladesh, as well as building new road and rail networks – especially in Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan, etc. – were taken up expeditiously.

In the following paragraphs various cross-border connectivity projects that India has initiated with its neighbours are discussed.

Pakistan

Cross-border connectivity between India and Pakistan received a fillip in 2003 after both countries agreed to engage positively and productively after decades of acrimonious relations. As part of the efforts to normalise relations, India and Pakistan started the Composite Dialogue on the side-lines of the SAARC Summit in 2004. During the talks, both countries proposed a series of initiatives to promote people to people contact as well as implement cross-border and cross- LoC trade and travel measures.[3]

In this regard, the first move was to resume the Delhi-Lahore bus service, which was inaugurated in 1999 but was stopped in the wake of the Parliament attack of 2001. The bus service was resumed in July 2003. India's proposal to increase the capacity of this bus service by running extra coaches was, however, not agreed to by Pakistan.[4] Instead, proposals for starting two more bus services – from Amritsar to Lahore and Nankana Saheb in Pakistan – were agreed upon, and the services were inaugurated in 2006.

Meanwhile, the confidence building measures (CBM) on facilitating people to people contact across LoC was implemented with the inauguration of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad and the Poonch-Rawalakote bus services on April 7, 2005 and June 20, 2006, respectively. Another significant measure involved the opening up of the road route through the Attari-Wagah border for the exchange of limited commodities in 2005, 58 years after its closure during Partition.[5] In 2007, Indian and Pakistani trucks were allowed to unload in each other's territory.

Besides road transportation, rail connections were also revived. Similar to the bus service, the biweekly Samjhauta Express connecting Attari in India with Lahore in Pakistan, which had resumed in 1976 following the India-Pakistan rapprochement but suspended following the attack on Parliament in December 2001, was again restarted in January 2004.[6]

The rail link between Munabao (Rajasthan) and Khokhrapar (Sindh), which linked Jodhpur with Karachi and was discontinued following the 1965 war, was also revived. The weekly Thar Link Express was restarted in July 2006, with the train on the Indian side

running from Jodhpur to Munabao, and the connecting train on the Pakistan side running from Karachi to Khokhrapar to Munabao.

Be that as it may, the restoration of old road and railway connections and the creation of new ones between India and Pakistan has been fraught with hurdles since they have always operated under the shadow of cross-border terrorism and strained relations. A series of terror attacks on India involving Pakistan could have potentially derailed the peace talks, but for the serious commitment of the Indian leaders to stay on course. The Mumbai train blasts of July 2006, which took place just two years after the bilateral talks started, is a case in point. At that time, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had warned that the peace process could not move forward 'if terror aided and abetted by outside continued to take the lives of innocent citizens'.[7] The situation was salvaged after a meeting between the two leaders on the side-lines of the Non-Alignment (NAM) Summit in September 2006.

The second case was the bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul in July 2008. Despite incontrovertible evidence that Pakistan was behind the bomb blast, New Delhi remained committed to the peace process. The continuance of the talks was facilitated by the summit meetings of the two Prime Ministers on the side-lines of the SAARC in Colombo and United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York in September 2008. The peace process, however, could not survive the Mumbai terror attacks of November 26, 2008.

Sentiments in India turned decisively against Pakistan after the attack, and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh ruled out the normalisation of bilateral relations until Pakistan ensured that its soil was not used for terrorist activities against India.[8] Consequently, a number of connectivity proposals – such as the bus service between Kargil and Skardu, and Jammu and Sialkot; the reopening of Ferozpur-Kasur rail link via Hussainiwala for trade and transit, etc. – have remained unaccomplished till this date.

Furthermore, in December 2014, following a suicide bomb attack at Wagah (about 300 metres from the zero line on the Pakistan side), Pakistan had restricted the bus service from India till Wagah only, and not to the designated bus station in Lahore city.[9] At present,

however, all bus and train service between India and Pakistan are halted after Pakistan decided to suspend these service following Indian government's decision to revoke Article 370, stripping J&K of its special status.[10]

Bangladesh

Like Pakistan, uneasy bilateral relations prevented the development of cross-border connectivity with Bangladesh for a long time. In fact, a number of passenger trains and freight trains – which were operational between Indian and Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) before 1965 – remained discontinued for decades. The only connectivity project, which was re-established shortly after the liberation of Bangladesh was the inland water ways. A Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (IWTT) was signed between India and Bangladesh on November 1, 1972, which allowed the use of their waterways for trade purposes.[11]

Following this agreement, cargo services between the two countries were inaugurated on November 19, 1972. By March 1973, 16,000 tonnes of coal and 2,700 tonnes of general cargo was transported between Kolkata and Dhaka as well as 1300 tonnes of timber was moved from Assam to Dhaka.[12]

Efforts to revive the severed road and rail links as well as bottlenecks to trade were made in subsequent years. One such effort was the signing of the trade agreement in 1980 wherein it was agreed that

> [M]utually beneficial arrangements for the use of their waterways, roadways and railways for commerce between the two countries and for passage of goods between two places in one country through the territory of the other.[13]

Another initiative was the setting up of a Joint Economic Commission (JEC) in October 1982, which was also mandated 'to review the existing transport and communication links between the two countries, and to promote further cooperation in this regard.'[14] Despite these agreements, Bangladesh continued to stonewall India's

proposals to enhance connectivity between the two countries because of intense anti-India sentiments among its ruling elite.

It was only after a friendly dispensation came to power in Dhaka in 1996 that positive steps towards developing cross-border connectivity took place. In 1997, both sides agreed to open the Petrapole-Benapole rail link to restore the Bongaon-Petrapole-Benpole-Jessore route. India and Bangladesh discussed the possibility of cross-border train services. The two sides also agreed to examine the possibility of operating the Agartala-Akhura and Barsora-Sansar land routes.[15] Issues relating to vehicular movement between the two countries were also discussed.

In April 1999, India and Bangladesh discussed the operation of a bus service between Dhaka and Kolkata, and signed an agreement on the regulation of motor vehicle passenger traffic on June 17, 1999. Subsequently, the first passenger bus service between Kolkata and Dhaka was flagged off in June 1999. The bus service covers a distance of 360 km, and has been in continuous operation twice daily (except on Sundays) from either side since its inauguration.[16]

In May 2000, India and Bangladesh agreed to open more bus services between the two countries such as between Agartala and Dhaka, and Sylhet and Shillong. While the bus service between Agartala and Dhaka was inaugurated in 2003, it took another 12 years to operationalise the bus service between Shillong and Sylhet.[17]

One of the first rail links that was reopened between India and Bangladesh was the Petrapole-Benapole international rail link with the ceremonial flagging off of the first freight train to Bangladesh – the Sonar Bangla Special – on January 21, 2001.[18] This rail link was closed in 1965 following the India-Pakistan war and was reintroduced in 1972. But in 1976, the rail link was closed once again for want of adequate traffic. The Agreement for the reopening of the rail route between the two countries was signed in July 2000.[19]

The first passenger train between India and Bangladesh resumed after 43 years, when the Kolkata-Dhaka Moitree Express was flagged off on April 14, 2008.[20] Also known as the 'Friendship Express', the train takes 9 hours to cover a distance of 375 km and runs six days a week (except on Sundays). At the time of Partition, there were three

train services from Sealdah to various destinations in East Pakistan. These trains – the East Bengal Mail, the East Bengal Express, the Barishal Express – were operational till 1965.[21]

Yet another major impetus to cross-border connectivity was provided in 2010 during the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister to India. The joint communique stated,

> the two Prime Ministers agreed to put in place a comprehensive framework of cooperation for development between the two countries, encapsulating their mutually shared vision for the future, which would include cooperation in water resources, power, transportation and connectivity, tourism and education.[22]

In the subsequent years, a number of road and rail connectivity projects as well as inland transhipment were inaugurated. To begin with, on June 6, 2015, the Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh flagged off two bus services. The first one was the Agartala-Dhaka-Kolkata bus service. This service helped to bring down travel distance between Kolkata and Agartala from 1550 km along the traditional Siliguri-Guwahati-Silchar route, to just 640 km along the new route. The second bus service was between Dhaka and Guwahati. The bus service starts from Dhaka and travels to Shillong via Sylhet, and stops at Guwahati.[23]

Two years later, the Kolkata-Khulna-Dhaka bus service was flagged off from Kolkata on April 8, 2017. In the 409 km long bus route from Kolkata via Khulna to Dhaka, two buses run three days a week from both sides.[24] In the same year on November 9, a new train service called Bandhan Express, connecting Kolkata and Bangladesh's southwestern industrial city of Khulna, was inaugurated.[25] Travelling for a distance of 196 km, the train recreates the former Barishal Express route, and passes through the Petrapole-Benapole border crossing.

Furthermore, the 'first official transit' of Indian goods from Kolkata to Tripura took place on June 18, 2016. Earlier, Bangladesh had ensured the smooth passage of heavy project equipment and turbines to Agartala through its territory by road and waterways

from Haldia port in West Bengal for the Palatana power project.[26] Earlier in August 2014, Bangladesh had allowed India to tranship 10,000 tonnes of rice from Kakinada port to Tripura via its Ashuganj river port.[27] Bangladeshi trucks carrying food grain from Ashuganj port were also allowed to directly enter Agartala to prevent a second trans-shipment at the Akhaura international border.[28]

Here it is important to highlight that even though these cross-border connectivity projects are undertaken to promote prosperity and better people to people contact, in reality inadequate infrastructure, excessive documentation and complicated procedures makes these services unattractive for the intended consumers. For example, there are few takers for either the Agartala-Dhaka-Kolkata bus service or the Ashuganj port transhipment facility. This is because immigration and custom clearance procedures for transiting passengers and cargo, at the moment, are cumbersome and time consuming.

As regards the bus service, it is reported that the buses never carry more than 5 or 6 passengers because the passengers require a multiple entry visa to transit through Bangladesh, and the entire process of immigration clearance takes 4-5 hours to complete. Similar is the case with transiting cargo. While India and Bangladesh have agreed to reduce customs and immigration documents required for transit purposes and have built custom stations at (or near) the points of entry and exit in each country, not much progress has been made in this regard.

Inefficient border clearance not only raises transaction costs and travel time, but also jeopardises the security of the country if it fails to detect a dangerous passenger or cargo. Moreover, the conditions of the roads connecting India and Bangladesh are pretty bad, especially the Ashuganj-Akhaura highway.[29] It is hoped that both the governments will urgently put in place proper border clearance systems that would reduce transaction costs and guarantee hassle free and secure travel.

Nevertheless, India and Bangladesh have planned and implemented several cross-border road and rail connectivity projects (see Table 11).

Table 11: Rail-Road Connectivity between
India and Bangladesh

Crossing points	Modes
Petrapole/Benapole (BD)	Road; Rail (Freight Only)
Gede/Darshana (BD)	Rail Broad Gauge (Maitree and Freight)
Singhebad/Rohanpur (BD)	Rail Broad Gauge
Radhikapur/ Birol (BD)	Rail Meter Gauge
Mahishasan/Shabbajpur (BD)	Rail Meter Gauge
Phulbari/Banglbandha (BD)	Road
Haldibari/Chilhati (BD)	Rail
Changra bandha/Burimari (BD)	Road
Balurghat/Hilli (IND-BD Border)	Road
Dawki/Tamabil (BD)	Road
Karimganj/Zakiganj (BD)	Road
Agartala/Akhaura (BD)	Rail/Road

Source: India-Bangladesh Connectivity: Possibilities and Challenges, Part I, ORF, Kolkata, 2015.

In addition, India and Bangladesh are working on a 45 km rail link between Agartala and Akhaura. The new line is expected to be functional by 2021 and once operational, the journey to and from Agartala to Kolkata will take only 10 hours instead of 31 hours.[30] The line will be opened first for the movement of freight from Chittagong port to the Northeastern states. The Indian portion of the project, from Agartala to the Bangladesh border, is being funded by the Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region (MDoNER) at an estimated cost of approximately Rs. 580 crore, while the Bangladeshi portion of the rail link is being funded by the MEA as grant assistance.[31] There are also proposals to revive the Belonia-Comilla and the Sabroom-Chittagong rail links.

Besides the above mentioned projects, a number of other connectivity projects are in the pipeline. The first among them is an agreement to include several more places as Ports of Call on the inland water protocol route. These include an agreement to consider the inclusion of the Rupnarayan River (National Waterway (NW)-86 from Geonkhali to Kolaghat in West Bengal, and declare Kolaghat and Chilmari in Bangladesh as new Ports of Call. Further, both sides

agreed to declare Badarpur on river Barak (NW-16) as an Extended Port of Call in Karimganj in Assam and Ghorasal in Ashuganj in Bangladesh, on a reciprocal basis. India also proposed the extension of the protocol routes from Kolkata to Silchar in Assam.

India and Bangladesh also finalised a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the movement of passengers and cruise vessels on the inland water protocol route to facilitate river cruise services that are likely to commence between Kolkata and Dhaka as well as Guwahati and Jorhat, and back.[32] Further, both sides agreed to develop Jogighopa as a hub/trans-shipment terminal for the movement of cargo to Northeast states and Bhutan, and notifying Munsiganj River terminal by Bangladesh Customs for routing third party Exim cargo through the Kolkata Port.[33]

Nepal

India and Nepal have shared traditional socio-economic and cultural ties, which were recognised and further facilitated by the Treaty of Peace and Friendship signed between the two countries in 1950. By giving the citizens of both the countries equal rights in matters of residence, the acquisition of property, employment, and movement in each other's territory, this treaty provides for an open border between India and Nepal.[34]

While an open border has facilitated the easy and considerable cross-border movement of people and cargoes between the two countries without restrictions, the transport network in Nepal as well as between India and Nepal has been in a poor state. To improve the connectivity between the two countries, India had not only provided financial and technical assistance to Nepal, it had even entered into a Tripartite Road Agreement with Nepal and the United States in the late 1950s 'for [the] construction of about 900 miles of roads in Nepal' to help develop its economy.[35] The agreement hoped to construct eight roads connecting Indian border towns with those of Nepal, but the agreement was terminated in 1963 because of coordination issues among the countries concerned and the lack of local technical expertise.[36]

India, however, remained committed to the development of road networks with Nepal. In August 1964, it agreed to construct

the Sonauli-Pokhara road, linking Uttar Pradesh with west-central Nepal.[37] The 210 km road – built at a cost of about Rs. 15 crore – was inaugurated on September 14, 1971.[38] A proposal for a broad-gauge railway line from Raxaul to Hetauda in Nepal was also agreed and the engineering-cum-traffic survey had commenced.[39] In 1978, both the countries signed an agreement to establish a railway link between Dhulabari to New Jalpaiguri to evacuate cement from the Udaypur Cement plant to the Kolkata region.[40]

A further boost to improving connectivity between India and Nepal was received with the ushering in of multiparty democracy in Nepal in 1991. Following a visit by the Nepalese Prime Minister to India in December 1991, the Indo-Nepal High Level Task Force (HLTF) was set up to ensure the successful completion of Indian aid projects as well as explore new projects.

In its first meeting, the HLTF considered new cross-border connectivity projects, such as the broad gauging of the Jaynagar-Janakpur rail line as well as a rail line from Raxaul to Sirsiya in Nepal.[41] In February 1996, India and Nepal signed the Mahakali Treaty, which provided for a cross-border link road between Tanakpur and Mahendranagar.[42] India also granted Nepal an alternate transit route to Bangladesh through the Phulbari corridor, which links Kakarvitta in Nepal to Banglabandha in Bangladesh.

It is interesting to note that while the open border between India and Nepal facilitates the easy movement of people, it took decades for both countries to start direct bus services. In fact, it was only in November 2014, when the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Nepal, that the India-Nepal Bilateral Motor Vehicle Agreement for Passenger Traffic was signed. This paved the way for seamless travel across the border. Following the signing of the agreement, a number of bus services between India and Nepal were launched.

The first bus service – called the 'Pashupatinath Express' between Delhi and Kathmandu – was inaugurated on November 25, 2014. Driving through the New Delhi-Lucknow-Gorakhpur-Sunauli-Bhairahawa-Kathmandu route, the bus service covers a distance of 1, 250 km between the two cities in about 30 hours.[43]

A few months later, in March 2015, a second bus service between Varanasi and Kathmandu – known as the 'Bharat-Nepal Maitri Bus Seva' (India-Nepal Friendship Bus Service) – was launched. The bus covers a distance of 600 km and reaches Kathmandu via Azamgarh, Gorakhpur and Sonauli.[44]

In 2016, two more bus services were inaugurated. The first bus service was between New Delhi and Mahendragarh, which was inaugurated in January 2016;[45] and the second one was between Ghaziabad and Pokhara, which was flagged off in July 2016.[46] Two years later on May 11, 2018, during the state visit to Nepal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his counterpart flagged off the Janakpur-Ayodhya bus service.[47] Two more bus services – between Bodh Gaya and Kathmandu, and Patna and Janakpur – were launched on September 12, 2018.[48] All these bus services are intended to strengthen people-to-people contact as well as promote tourism in both countries. Proposals for plying buses on more routes – such as Nepalganj-Delhi, Siliguri-Kathmandu, etc. – are being considered by the two countries.

Further impetus to improve connectivity and regional integration was provided when India, Bangladesh, and Nepal signed the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicle Agreement in June 2015. Under the Agreement, these four countries have agreed on the text of the operating procedures for passenger vehicle movement in the sub-region and to conduct more trial runs for cargo vehicles along scheduled routes from April 2018 onwards before finalising the protocol for cargo vehicular movement. Trial runs for cargo vehicles under the MVA were conducted along the Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala and Delhi-Kolkata-Dhaka routes in the past.[49]

In addition, work on the upgrade of the Kakarbhitta (Nepal)-Panaitanki (India) and the Phulbari (India)-Banglabandha (Bangladesh) regional road corridor under the South Asia Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Road Connectivity Project, which is aided by the Asian Development Bank, have also commenced. The aim is to improve road infrastructure in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal in order to improve the regional connectivity among the BBIN nations. For this purpose, India is

developing and improving road connectivity of an approximate aggregate length of 10,000 km, including the international trade corridor in the Northeast; and 500 km of roads in the north Bengal and northeastern region of India.[50]

As far as rail connectivity between India and Nepal is concerned, both the countries had agreed to upgrade existing lines and create new cross border railway links in a phased manner. Under Phase I, three projects were taken up. These were: the Raxaul-Sirsiya (Birganj), the Jaynagar-Kurtha (Janakpur)-Baridas, and the Jogbani-Biratnagar Custom Yards railway links.[51] The Raxaul-Sirsiya rail link, which was agreed upon in 1996, was upgraded and operationalised in 2005. The 5.3 km line connects the Inland Clearance Depot (ICD) in Sirsiya to the Kolkata and Haldia ports via Raxual, and is used exclusively by freight trains operated by the Indian Railways.[52]

The Jaynagar-Janakpur-Baridas rail project, built at an estimated cost of Rs. 5.5 million, is divided into three phases. The first includes the construction of a 34-km segment between Jaynagar and Kurtha; the second comprises the construction of an 18-km segment from Kurtha to Bhangaha in Mahottari district; and the third comprises the construction of a 17-km segment from Bhangaha to Bardibas.[53]

The Jaynagar-Kurtha link was completed in 2018, but not yet operationalised.[54] The Jogbani-Biratnagar rail link is also nearing completion and is expected to be operationalised soon. Under Phase II of the India-Nepal cross border rail link projects, both the countries have agreed to implement the remaining three links: the New Jalpaiguri-Kakarbhitta, the Nautanwa-Bhairahawa, and the Nepalgunj Road-Nepalgunj railway links.[55] The two countries have also agreed to consider a rail link between Kathmandu and Raxual.[56]

While these projects for improving cross-border connectivity were agreed upon by India and Nepal, their implementation and completion took an enormously long time. One of the main reasons for the delay was the prolonged political turmoil in Nepal. Nepal had been in the grip of the Maoist movement for ten years between 1996 and 2006, which had plunged the country in a state of civil war, causing enormous disruption to political and socio-economic life.

Even though the movement came to an end with the signing of a peace deal in November 2006, political instability continues to plague Nepal as political parties jostled for power. Weak governance, together with palpable anti-India feelings among the ruling elite in Kathmandu, also create hurdles in the conceptualisation of these projects. Besides delays in the completion of DPRs, financial constraints, litigations for higher compensation, and problems of land acquisition by Nepal further delayed their implementation.[57]

Bhutan

Bhutan, like Nepal, in a landlocked country and depends on India for its surface connectivity with rest of the world. However, Bhutan has traditionally followed a policy of isolationism and not encouraged close links with its neighbours. It was only in September 1958, when the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited Bhutan and emphasized the need for road development not only between India and Bhutan and but also inside Bhutan, that the Bhutanese King decided to open up his country and invite Indian assistance for its economic development.[58]

However, it was in 1961 when its First Five-Year Plan with financial assistance from India was launched that modern road construction began in Bhutan. It is important to note that in addition to the grant in aid under the Plan, India had also spent Rs. 300 million in constructing roads in Bhutan. By the end of Second Five-Year Plan (1967-1971), India had built four north-south roads from the Indian border to central Bhutan.

The first paved road was the 175 km long road linking Thimpu and Phuentsholing with Jaigaon in India, which was completed in 1962.[59] The three other were: the Samdrup-Jongkar-Trashigang Road; the Hatisar-Tongsa Road; and the Sarbhang-Chirang-Wangdu Phodrang Road. A road connecting Trashigang with Tawang in Arunachal was also built.

In the subsequent decades, India continued to assist Bhutan in upgrading these road links. These efforts were provided further impetus in 2001 with the formation of the SASEC, of which Bhutan is a founding member. SASEC has been promoting greater regional

connectivity for increasing trade and people-to-people contact among the SAARC member countries. Under the SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport Study (SRMTS), Bhutan has four regional corridors:[60]

- Thimpu-Phuentsholing-Jaigaon-Hashimara-Kolkata/Haldia
- Samdrup Jongkhar-Guwahati-Shillong-Shilhet (Sylhet)-Dhaka-Kolkata
- Thimpu-Phuentsholing-Jaigaon-Hashimara-Changrabandha-Burimari-Mongla/Chittagong (for trade with Bangladesh)
- Thimpu/Paro-Phuentsholing-Jaigaon-Hashimara-Phulbari-Panitanki-Kakarvita (trade with Nepal)

As far as rail links are concerned, India and Bhutan do not have any rail connectivity at present. However, efforts have been made to build railway lines connecting the Himalayan kingdom with its southern neighbour since long. The first step towards this was taken in January 2005, when an MoU was signed between India and Bhutan for conducting a feasibility study for the extension of Indian railway network in West Bengal and Assam to the nearest border towns in Bhutan. The following links were proposed:[61]

- Hasimara (West Bengal)-Phuentsholing (17.52 km) and bifurcation to Pasakha;
- Kokrajhar (Assam)-Gelephu (57.70 km);
- Pathsala (Assam)-Nanglam (51.15 km);
- Rangia (Assam)-Samdrup Jongkhar via Darranga (48.04 km); and
- Banarhat (West Bengal)-Samtse (approx. 23.15).

Another step towards the establishing rail connectivity was taken in 2008, when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced the construction of the first ever rail link between India and Bhutan, connecting Hashimara to Phuentsholing. The line was named as the 'Golden Jubilee Rail Line' to commemorate Jawaharlal Nehru's first visit to Bhutan 50 years ago.[62] Subsequently in December 2009, the two countries signed an MoU to implement the project.[63]

However, no progress has been made on ground till date despite the feasibility reports on the five rail links were completed by the NFR and submitted to the MEA on May 10, 2018.[64] Bhutan is yet to respond to these studies and is reported to be reluctant to take loans for the projects. In response, the MEA agreed to finance the entire project with the aim to expedite its implementation. Bhutan is also reportedly facing tremendous pressure from China to go slow on these connectivity projects.[65]

Myanmar

In the last decade and more, India has signed several bilateral and regional trade agreements in the form of FTAs, comprehensive economic cooperation agreements (CECAs), and comprehensive economic partnership agreements (CEPAs) with the ASEAN for strengthening economic relations. One of the important requirements for unlocking the huge trade potential between India and the ASEAN countries is to improve cross-border connectivity. It is premised on the belief that once connectivity between India and the Southeast Asian countries is established, it would reduce the travel time across borders and boost people-to-people contact. It is hoped that better connectivity would also open up numerous cross-border opportunities for trade and investment by reducing production cost and improving the supply chain. Industrial clusters located along the connectivity corridor could emerge as economic nodes resulting in the economic transformation of the hitherto, underdeveloped region of the Northeast as well as Myanmar.[66]

India's regional connectivity with Southeast Asia is, however, based on enhanced physical connectivity through Myanmar, given that Myanmar is the bridgehead between India and the Southeast Asia.

The corridors to link India's Northeast with Southeast Asia are as follows:

The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral (IMT) Highway

This is a flagship connectivity project through which India plans to connect the Northeast region with Thailand through a 1360

km highway. The highway will link Moreh in India with Maesot in Thailand through Bagan in Myanmar. The construction of the highway has already begun with India committing to implement two projects on the IMT Highway – the construction of 69 bridges on 150 km Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa section, and the upgrade of 120 km road on the Kalewa-Yargi section in Myanmar.[67]

Myanmar agreed to upgrade the Yargyi-Monywa stretch, but has not been able to do so. Consequently, India decided to upgrade the road from Moreh to Monywa.[68] Separately, India had taken initiatives to prepare a DPR for the construction of Chaungma-Yinmabin section (30 km) and the upgrade from single lane to double lane of the Yinmabin-Pale-Lingadaw section (50 km).[69] India has also expressed support for the proposal to extend the IMT highway and the construction of new highways linking it to Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Vietnam.[70]

However, before the transport corridor can be turned into an economic corridor, it would require common regulations such as a Motor Vehicle Agreement that would allow vehicles from the three countries to ply on the highway seamlessly. But a major impediment in realising the objective is Myanmar's reluctance to sign the proposed India-Myanmar-Thailand Motor Vehicle Agreement. The Myanmarese government has argued that it will assess the outcome and experiences of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Cross Border Transport Facilitation Agreement (CBTA), to which it is a party, before signing the agreement with Thailand and India.[71]

The absence of motor vehicle agreement between the two countries will cause hardship for passengers travelling between the two countries. India and Myanmar had agreed in 2018 to start a bus service between Imphal and Mandalay. At the same time, it was decided that the buses will not be allowed a direct run into Myanmar. The passengers coming from Imphal will have to de-board at the India-Myanmar border and board a bus for further journey to Mandalay. The formalities for starting the bus services has reportedly been completed and the service was due to start from April 2020, but was stalled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.[72]

The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMTT) Project

The KMTT was jointly identified by India and Myanmar to create a multi-modal transport for providing alternative connectivity to the Northeast region (Mizoram) with the Haldia/Kolkata ports through the Kaladan River in Myanmar. The project involves the upgrade of the Sittwe port and the waterways in the Kaladan River, and the construction of a 62 km of road from Paletwa to the India-Myanmar border in Zorinpui (Mizoram).

The Cabinet approved the project at a cost of Rs. 535.91 crore in March 2008. The cost was revised upwards to Rs. 2904.04 crore in October 2015.[73] Progress on the KMTT has been slow and, till 2017, works on the Sittwe Port and the Paletwa Inland Water Transport Terminal have been completed. The 109-km road construction project from Paletwa to Zorinpui began only in April 2018. The road from Zorinpui to the nearest National Highway also needs to be upgraded.[74]

The Asian Highway (AH)

The AH-1 network starts from Tokyo in Japan and connects South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran to the border between Turkey and Bulgaria, west of Istanbul, where it joins with the European route E80. It has a total length of 141,000 km and covers 32 Asian countries. Of the various routes of this Highway, route number A1 starts at Moreh from Tamu in Myanmar and, after passing four states in the Northeast, connects with Bangladesh through Dawki in Meghalaya.[75]

The Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo Road

This 160 km road – also known as the 'Friendship road' – from Tamu to Kalemyo in Myanmar's Sagaing Region forms a part of the IMT Highway and AH-1. This road was completed in 2001 and handed over to Myanmar.[76] In 2012, India agreed to repave the existing highway, which it completed by 2017. India also agreed to upgrade all 71 bridges on the highway.

The Rhi-Tiddim-Falam Road

The cross-border road would improve connectivity between Champai in Mizoram and Rih in Myanmar. It has two road components: Rih-Tiddim (80 km), and Rih-Falam (151 km). India's IRCON International has been asked to develop the Rih-Tiddim road. Work on the road commenced in 2012, but no time frame has been specified for the completion of this project.

In addition to these projects, there are several other proposed projects such as: the Mekong India Economic Corridor, which proposes to connect Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam) with Dawei (Myanmar) via Bangkok (Thailand) and Phnom Penh (Cambodia), and linking it further to Chennai (India); the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor, connecting Kolkata to Kunming via Dhaka, Imphal, Mandalay, Lashio, and Muse (2490 km); the 1033 km long Stilwell Road, connecting Assam (through Pangsau pass) to Kunming (China) through Myitkyina (Myanmar); the India-Myanmar-Lao PDR-Vietnam-Cambodia Corridor, running through Moreh and Kolkata with Hanoi and Da Nang in Vietnam; and the Delhi-Hanoi Railway Link.[77]

India, in the recent years, has been enthusiastically pursuing a policy of enhancing cross-border connectivity with its neighbours. In the process, it has generously provided its neighbours with financial aids and grants as well as technical and construction expertise to construct new transportation links and upgrade existing ones. While its goal of enhanced cross-border connectivity is gradually coming to fruition, there are several hurdles such as financial constraints, strained bilateral relations, ecological costs, etc., which have derailed India's efforts. Needless to say that India has to address these shortcomings and effectively implement various connectivity projects to achieve the dream of an integrated South Asia.

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10. Border Trade[1]

Border trade is officially defined as over-land trade by way of the exchange of commodities from a bi-laterally agreed list by people living along both sides of the international border.[2] In other words, it is a trade in local products of limited value by the people residing along the border areas. The rationale for border trade arises from two factors. The first factor is the remoteness of the border areas, which does not allow the local people access to commercial centres to sell their products and buy items of daily necessity within the national borders.

The second factor is the traditional socio-cultural ties and economic complementarity that these people share across the border, and which provide them with a natural milieu for greater economic interactions. Keeping these factors in mind, border trade is allowed by governments so that the residents can trade their surplus produce in exchange for essential commodities from across the international borders.

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

Trends and Significance of Border Trade

India has allowed its border residents to conduct trade with their

counterparts. Starting with China, India conducts border trade with all its neighbours, albeit, with some local variations.

India-China Border

India re-started border trade first with China. The seed for resuming border trade was sown during the 'historic' visit of the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, to China in December 1988. Since the visit was aimed at normalising relations with China by deepening bilateral engagements in all fields, the two countries agreed to establish a Joint Working Group (JWG) to seek a 'fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution' to the boundary issue, and a Joint Economic Group (JEG) to expand bilateral economic cooperation.[3]

The JWG and the JEG deliberated on instituting various CBMs that would prevent frictions, and ensure peace and stability along the LAC. Allowing the movement of goods and people across the LAC by reviving border trade between the two countries was one such CBM. To implement the CBM, India and China signed a MoU on the Resumption of Border Trade on December 13, 1991,[4] and the Protocol on Entry and Exit Procedures for Border Trade on July 1, 1992.

These agreements paved the way for restarting border trade between the two countries. Gunji in Pithoragrah district and Pulan in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) were designated as trading markets, and Lipulekh as the mountain pass through which border trade would to be carried out.

Thus, after a gap of three decades, border trade with China formally resumed through Lipulekh on July 14, 1992. The successful conduct of border trade through Lipulekh incentivised the two countries and they agreed to open another route for border trade.[5] Thus, a year later, on September 7, 1993, the two countries signed a protocol for the extension of border trade. It specified Namgaya in Kinnaur district and Juiba in Zada country (TAR) as trading markets, and designated Shipki La in Himachal Pradesh as the second mountain pass for the entry and exit of persons, commodities, and vehicles engaged in border trade.[6] Both these routes were selected as they fall in the middle sector, the least contentious part of the India-China boundary.[7]

During the same time, India had proposed opening a trade route through Sikkim as well; but China's reluctance to agree to it came in the way.[8] This proposal was revived a decade later during Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to China and, upon reaching an agreement, the two countries signed the MoU on expanding border trade on June 23, 2003. In this memorandum, both the countries agreed to establish trading marts at Changgu in India and Reqinggang in TAR, and designated Nathu La in Sikkim as the third mountain pass for conducting border trade.[9] Border trade through Nathu La started on July 6, 2006, after a hiatus of 44 years. The resumption of border trade through Nathu La gave an impetus to border trade with China and, at present, it accounts for 80 per cent of the total India-China border trade volume.[10]

Presently, border trade along the India-China border takes place through the following trading posts.

- Gunji (Uttarakhand)-Pulan (TAR)
- Namgaya Shipki La (Himachal Pradesh)-Jiuba (Zada county, Ngari Prefecture)
- Sherathang (Sikkim)-Renqinggang

The border trade in these three trading posts is conducted through the barter system and no customs duties are levied on these commodities. Traders are authorised to trade without acquiring the Import Export Code number (IEC), provided the value of each transaction does not exceed Rs. 25, 000. Any trade occurring for more than Rs. 25, 000 per consignment would require the traders to acquire an IEC. In the case of Nathu La, the exemption limit was Rs. 100,000 from the year 2007-2008. In May 2015, the transaction amount was raised to Rs. 100,000 for Gunji and Shipki La, and Rs. 200,000 for Nathu La.[11]

However, a permit fee of Rs. 50 is levied on every vehicle entering Sikkim from China, and Yuan 5 (Rs. 25) on every vehicle exiting Sikkim and entering China.[12] Unlike in other borders, border trade along the India-China border is restricted to the summer months only, as the trading routes, which traverse 14,000 ft. to 17, 000 ft. high terrain, remain closed during the winter seasons due to heavy

snowfall. The trading season usually starts from May and ends in November every year, and trade is conducted for four days in a week (Mondays to Thursdays).[13]

Trading takes place according to the mutually agreed list of items. Initially, the official trading list contained 44 items: 29 items for export and 15 items for import. The items allowed for export from India comprise primary as well as secondary products, such as spices, flour, cycles, utensils, agricultural implements, shoes, etc.; and the items allowed for import were mainly animal and animal products such as goat, sheep, horses, goat and sheep skins, and yak hair and tail. Following demands for the expansion of the trade basket, 5 new items for import and 7 new items for export were added to the trading list in May 2012. Handicraft and handloom products, and readymade garments are some of the items that could be exported from India, and quilts, blankets, and shoes are some of the items that could be imported from China.[14]

The resumption of border trade between India and China generated a lot of enthusiasm among the residents of the border villages as evidenced from the number of persons who went across the border for trading. A total of 299 Indian traders crossed the border into Pulan when the route was first opened through Lipulekh in 1992.[15] Similarly, the reopening of the Shipki La route in 1994 witnessed about 90 Indian traders visiting the Tibetan mart in Jiuba.[16]

However, after the initial euphoria, the numbers of traders crossing over to TAR for trade dwindled considerably. In the subsequent years, approximately 35-45 traders each from Pithoragarh and Kinnaur made trips to the corresponding border trade marts in TAR. Representation from the Tibetan side, on the other hand, has always been poor. While in 1992, only three traders came from Tibet through Lipulekh,[17] not a single Tibetan trader has crossed through Shipki La since the recommencement of trade through this pass.[18]

The 'unsuitable' location of trading marts is generally cited as one of the main reasons for poor Tibetan representation. For example, Gunji has not seen a single Tibetan trader since 2000

because Tibetan nomads and the traditional trading partners of Indian traders find it difficult to visit Gunji with their livestock as the distances to the trading mart is enormous and arduous.[19] The relatively poor economic condition of the Tibetan nomads and traders is yet another reason for the disinterest shown by them towards border trade.

As a result the volume of India-China border trade through Lipulekh and Shipki La has been low and has displayed erratic trends. In the first year of trading, the total value of trade transacted was Rs. 16.5 lakh at Lipulekh,[20] and Rs. 25 lakh at Shipki La.[21] In the subsequent years, the total value at Gunji increased from Rs. 4.9 crore in 2001 to Rs. 15.26 crore in 2004.[22] Incidentally, the balance of trade was always in favour of China as high value items such as raw silk and livestock were the major items of imports.

However, trade volume fell to Rs. 1.6 crore in 2005 and, since then, it showed a declining trend till 2012.[23] The main reason behind the downslide was the simultaneous ban on the import of raw silk and livestock by India in 2005. However, once the ban on the import of raw silk was revoked in 2012, trade in these two trading posts picked up.[24] In contrast, trade at Nathu La has shown an increasing trend since its re-inauguration.

The total value of export increased from Rs. 8.87 lakh in 2006 to Rs. 3.75 crore in 2018, while total imports increased by 10.83 lakh to 2.77 crore.[25] While tobacco, mishri and jaggery were the main items exported from India, wool, silk, blankets, and readymade garments were chief items imported from China.

One of the significant impacts of the resumption of border trade along the India-China border is the implicit recognition of Sikkim as an Indian state by China.[26] Since the signing of the MoU on border trade in 2003, China had stopped showing Sikkim as an independent state in its official maps.[27] The border trade agreement also provided a legal basis to the boundary in the middle sector, which is disputed. Above all, border trade has been successful in de-escalating tensions along the border where trading has commenced, resulting in peace and tranquillity. At the local level, while the low quantum of border trade across the India-China border has not

permitted substantial economic benefits to the border people, it did bring about incremental improvements in the local economy.

For instance, villagers near Lipulekh could afford small things to make their lives easier such as install solar lights from the money earned through trade.[28] The carpet weaving industry in Pithoragarh, which is dependent on wool from Tibet, has also been revived.[29] The tourism industry of Sikkim also grew as Nathu La became a major tourist attraction, a fact corroborated from the increased revenue generated from tourist permit and environmental fees since 2006.[30] The construction of infrastructure, such as roads, trade marts, LCSs, etc., in the border areas have generated employment for the local people, besides making these far flung areas accessible.

India-Myanmar Border

India's desire to expand its relations with Myanmar after a long period of an uneasy relationship was manifested by its efforts to increase bilateral politico-economic engagements. The need for developing better relations with Myanmar emerged after India's decision to deepen its economic engagements with the Southeast Asian countries following the announcement of the LEP. Given that Myanmar is the land bridge to Southeast Asia, the country also became vital for the implementation India's LEP.

The process of developing a better working relationship with the Myanmar government started in August 1992 with the visit of the Myanmar's delegation to India, led by the Director General of the Myanmar Foreign Office.[31] During the meeting, emphasis was placed on improving the security situation along their mutual border through the promotion of border trade, the prevention of drugs trafficking, and the facilitation of greater contact between civilians and military authorities in the border region.[32]

The visit was reciprocated in March 1993, when the Indian delegation led by the Foreign Secretary visited Myanmar. During the visit, the Agreement on the Prevention of Drug Abuse was signed. Discussions were also held on the modalities of a Border Trade Agreement as well as a MoU on cooperation between civilian and border authorities of the two countries.[33] Subsequently, on January

21, 1994, the border trade agreement and the MoU on cooperation between civilian border authorities were signed during the visit of the Deputy Foreign Minister of Myanmar.

According to the border trade agreement, two corresponding trading posts were agreed upon along the international border. These were:[34]

- Moreh (Manipur)-Tamu (Chin)
- Champhai (Mizoram)-Hri (Chin)

Moreh was operationalised on April 12, 1995 and Zokhawthar near Champhai was inaugurated a decade later, on January 30, 2004. At present, border trade with Myanmar takes place through the Zokhawthar LCS only. Border trade at Moreh was upgraded to normal trade in December 2015.[35]

Border trade along the India-Myanmar border is carried out in two ways. The first is the 'Traditional/Free Exchange Mechanism', and the second is the 'Barter Mechanism'. Under the Traditional/ Free Exchange Mechanism, trade is allowed according to the 'customary practice' through simple customs documentation. In other words, indigenous people residing within 16 km on either side of the international border are allowed to exchange locally produced commodities in small quantities – that is, whatever could be carried as a head load.

Each transaction is limited to less than US$ 1000, and the export and import of items is required to be balanced by the import and export of items of equivalent value within one or two days. No customs duties are imposed on these tradable items, and no customs formalities are required to be completed.[36]

As far as the Barter Mechanism is concerned, ICE is issued to a select number of exporters residing within the stipulated limits of the border. These ICE holders are then allowed to export officially approved items. Importers are, however, exempted from obtaining an ICE provided their total transaction value does not exceed Rs. 25,000. Traders are also allowed to stay in each other's country for three days, but within 16 km on either side of the border. As is obvious there is no monetary exchange in this type of transaction, but the traders are required to invoice their goods in US dollars.

The imports from Myanmar have to precede export from India and they have to be balanced by the export of goods of equivalent value by the individual traders within six months. Concessional customs duty and other cesses amounting to 5 per cent are levied on these transactions and the traders are also required to complete customs formalities as per international trade norms.[37] Incidentally, barter as a form of border trade was stopped by the Myanmar Government in 1997 with all its neighbouring countries, including India, through all border trading points. Since then, trade with India has been conducted on a normal foreign exchange basis.[38]

Map 5: Border Trading Points/Haats
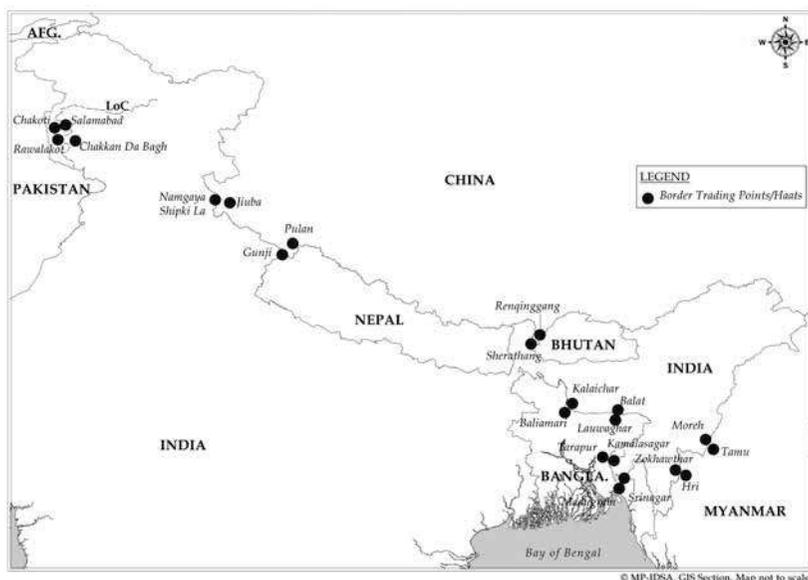
The 1994 border trade agreement had approved only 22 items to be traded under the barter system. Some of these items were bamboo, betel nuts and leaves, chillies, mustard/rape seed, pulse and beans, fresh vegetables and fruits, onions, chillies, spices, ginger, minor forest produce excluding teak, reed broom, tobacco, and sunflower seeds.

In subsequent years, the officially approved list of tradable items was expanded twice: once in November 2008, when 18 new items

(including agarbatti, bicycle's spare parts, cosmetics, fertilisers, etc.) were added to the list; and again in November 2012, when 22 new commodities were added to the list (which included agricultural machinery/implement, bicycle, three wheelers and cars below 1000 cc, coal, semi-precious stones, plastic items, rice, wheat, etc.).[39]

The periodic expansion of the trading list was because of two factors: (a) falling trade volume; and (b) the widespread smuggling of essential commodities not included in the list. It was hoped that the inclusion of more items in the trading least would not only legalise the smuggling of these commodities but also result in an increase in trade volume.

The volume of border trade along the India-Myanmar border at Moreh showed tremendous growth in the initial years. The total trade volume increased from Rs. 15 crore in 1995-96 to Rs. 46.49 crore in 1996-97, and to Rs. 62.39 crore in 1997-98.[40] It, however, witnessed a sharp decline in 1998-99 and, since then, the total trade has shown a declining trend. The inclusion of 18 additional items in 2008 also failed to provide any boost to the trade.

This is evidenced from the fact that the quantum of trade fell from Rs. 8.82 crore in 2006-07 to Rs. 3.37 crore in 2011-12.[41] The border trade picked up in volume again in 2012-13 from US$ 13 million to peak at US$ 24 million in 2014-15. This was probably due to the expansion of the list of tradable items to 62 in November 2012.[42] However, once India increased import duties on betel nuts – from 4 per cent to 40 per cent in January 2017 – trade figures plummeted to US$ 0.2 million.[43]

A number of factors have also contributed to adversely affecting the border trade in Manipur. Some of these are: the Myanmar government's demand that imports from Myanmar should precede exports from India; the limited choice of commodities for the traders; the ban imposed on the export and import of certain commodities by both the governments; frequent *bandhs* and blockades called by various groups in Manipur; the imposition of illegal taxes by insurgent groups; multiple check-posts of the Assam Rifles and the state police along Imphal-Moreh highway; and poor infrastructure.[44]

Similarly, border trade at Zokhawthar presented a very dismal picture with total trade volume remaining extremely low. The trend has also been very erratic. For example, in 2009-10, the total trade was valued at only Rs. 1.2 lakh, which decreased to Rs. 1.85 lakh in 2012-13, but increased to Rs. 1.24 crore in 2013-14.[45] The increase in trade volume has been because of the import of large quantities of betel nuts from Myanmar.

As far as the export and import of items are concerned, only two items – betel nuts and reed brooms – have been imported from Myanmar and only soyabari has been exported to Myanmar. There was not a single item exported from Mizoram in the years 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2013-14. Total trade has also declined tremendously since then. The lack of demand for Indian goods due to poverty, absence of good roads and other infrastructure have been the main factors for low border trade in Mizoram.[46]

While formal barter trade at Moreh (till 2015) and Zokhawthar continues to remain unimpressive, traditional barter trade through head-load which takes place through Gate no. 2 at the Namphalong market in Myanmar has been flourishing. The trade figures of this traditional mechanism, however, do not get reflected in the overall border trade of the Moreh LCS as no Guaranteed Receipt (GR) formalities are required for this kind of trade.

Since there are no restrictions on the kind of goods that can be exchanged under this mechanism, items such as Chinese/Korean made blankets, readymade garments from Thailand, Chinese made electronic goods, household items such as crockery and appliances, precious stones, etc., are freely imported from this market. Similarly, items such as pharmaceuticals, wood furniture, etc., are exported from India through the same route, with the full knowledge of the customs officials.[47]

The security personnel stationed at the gate check the head loads only for contraband such as weapons, narcotics, etc. and let other commodities pass through the border. The Customs personnel do not even bother to check anything.[48] Moreover, because of the FMR there are no restrictions on the movement of people across the border and no baggage limitations are imposed. A single person

can make numerous trips across the border and carry back goods as headloads.

Zero duties, no requirement to balance exports with imports, minimum documentation and no restrictions on tradable commodities are powerful incentives that have lured even big businessmen to trade through Gate no. 2. Despite the fact that trading through Gate no. 2 is leading to the flooding of the Indian markets with cheap Chinese and Southeast Asian goods as well as revenue loss to the Government of India, no steps have been taken to curtail or regulate it.

Be that as it may, border trade has had a positive impact on the bilateral relations as well as on the local population. The trade has led to greater interactions between the customs and immigration officials as well as the security personnel of India and Myanmar, which, in turn, have resulted in better understanding of each other. The inauguration of border trade has also formalised hitherto informal trade in many items such as fertilisers, wheat flour, machinery parts, etc. At the local level, border trade has generated employment for petty traders, porters, transporters, etc. Most importantly, it has helped meet the daily needs of the residents of the Northeast which is away from the industrial and commercial centres of the country.

Beside the official trade through the LCSs in Moreh and Zokhawthar, traditional trade is also carried out in Nampong in Arunachal Pradesh, which is 12 km from the Pangsau Pass. This trade, which is in the form of a border *haat* (traditional market), is permitted essentially to allow local inhabitants to continue with their old practice of exchanging commodities with people residing across the border. These border haats are put up during weekly fairs.

Under the present system, local Myanmarese traders are allowed to sell their products in Nampong once a week (every Friday);[49] and Indian traders are permitted to visit Pangsu town in Myanmar twice a month (15th and 30th) where fairs or markets are organised under the supervision of the district administration and the para-military forces.[50] It is estimated that nearly 150-200 Myanmarese and 60-100 Indian traders cross the borders to trade on the designated days.[51]

These border haats were quite common along the borders as they fulfilled the needs of the local rural economy and strengthened ethnic and cultural bonds. Realising that border haats cater more meaningfully in fulfilling the day to day needs of the border people, India and Myanmar agreed to open more such border haats. In an MoU on establishing border haats (signed May 28, 2012), India and Myanmar agreed to formalise the border haat at Pangsau Pass (Nampong) corresponding to Pangsu in the Sagaing region of Myanmar.[52] They also agreed to establish more haats along the border. The location of the haats would be decided based on the past history of trade, accessibility and the availability of haat sites, and the degree of interdependence of the border population of either side.[53] A Border Haats Committee, at the Joint Secretary level, was established in 2012 which has met three times till 2018 to discuss the mode of preparations of the border haats.[54]

The Cross-LoC Trade (India-Pakistan)

The cross-LoC trade or intra-Kashmir trade, as the border trade is generally referred to, is essentially one of the CBMs in which India and Pakistan had undertaken to address the trust deficit between them.[55] The border trade forms a part of the objective of the two governments to facilitate economic development as well as people to people contact between the divided parts of J&K.

The decision to start cross-LoC trade was first taken in a meeting between Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf in April 2005, in which both the leaders 'agreed to pursue further measures to enhance interaction and cooperation across the LoC, including agreed meeting points for divided families, trade, pilgrimages, and cultural interaction'.[56]

The step towards the implementation of this decision was initiated in May 2006 when both the countries agreed to start the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad truck services in the first half of July 2006 and exchanged indicative lists of tradable goods between the two countries. The proposal for border trade received further impetus when the Working Group on Strengthening of Relation across the LoC, constituted in 2006 under the aegis of the Round

Table Conference on Jammu and Kashmir, also recommended the commencement of cross-LoC trade.[57]

In June 2006, the then state government decided to establish LCS [later designated as trade facilitation centre (TFC)] at Salamabad for Uri-Muzaffarabad trade, and at Chakkan-da-Bagh for Poonch-Rawalakot trade.[58] Meanwhile, the CBM on facilitating people to people contact was implemented with the inauguration of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad and the Poonch-Rawalakot bus services on April 7, 2005 and June 20, 2006, respectively.[59] However, cross-LoC trade did not start as a few issues required further deliberations.[60]

After the modalities for intra-Kashmir trade and truck services, among other things, were completed on September 22, 2008, the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari met in September 2008 in New York and agreed to start the cross-LoC trade on October 21, 2008.[61] Finally, cross-LoC trade commenced from Salamabad and Chakkan-Da-Bagh TFCs on the stipulated date. Thirteen trucks carrying goods from Salamabad crossed over to Chakoti and 14 trucks came from Chakoti. Similarly, three trucks from Chakkan-Da-Bagh and four trucks from Rawalakot crossed the LoC from either side.

Cross-LoC trade is similar to the border trade practised along India's other international borders. The trade is barter in nature and no duties are levied on the items traded. There is no qualitative restriction either. The trade takes place on 21 locally produced items agreed upon by both governments. Also, only local traders are allowed to engage in the trade. However, given the security situation along the LoC, trade is carried out according to the mutually agreed upon SOP.

According to the SOP, only registered drivers from the both sides are permitted to cross the LoC with their trucks. These trucks are, however, are not allowed to travel beyond the TFCs where their cargo is offloaded; and, they are required to return on the same day. The trucks are allowed to carry a consignment of 1-1.5 tonnes, which are verified by trade facilitation officers (TFOs). The trucks are also sealed before they are sent across the LoC.[62]

Unlike in other borders, local traders are not allowed to travel to Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK) for meeting their counterparts

and placing orders.[63] Initially, border trade across the LoC was restricted to two days in a week (Tuesdays and Wednesdays); but from November 15, 2011, the number of trading days were increased to four days a week (Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays).[64]

The opening of cross-LoC trade was greeted with much enthusiasm and around 800 to 1000 traders participated.[65] However, since then, the number of traders have been declining steadily. Presently, only 60 traders on the Indian side are engaged in trade. A limited trading list, the lack of communication and banking facilities, the absence of trade related dispute redressal mechanism, etc. are often cited as reasons for the poor response of traders.[66]

Despite these constraints, trade volumes have been growing at an impressive rate over the years with both imports and exports showing an upward trend. For example, between October 2008 and November 2012, goods worth Pakistani Rs. 1592.28 crore were imported from POK; and goods worth Rs. 1084.3 were exported from J&K. The volume of trade in 2013 also remained encouraging with export worth Rs. 244.80 crore and import worth Pakistani Rs. 377.35 crore being traded across the LoC.[67]

While dry fruits, agricultural and horticultural products and herbs were the main items imported; fresh fruits and vegetables, dry fruits, rajmah, mixed spices, shawls, and stoles, papier-mâché, and kangdi were the prominent items exported.[68] The number of trucks engaged in cross-LoC trade has also been substantial, suggesting a booming trade. According to the MHA, between October 2008 and March 2019, a total of 72,511 trucks had crossed over to POK, and 43,582 trucks had crossed over to India through the Salamabad and Chakkan Da Bagh routes.[69]

The trade started showing declining trend in 2018-2019 when goods worth only Rs. 217.06 crore were imported as against Rs. 320.28 crore in 2017-18.[70] The cross-LoC trade was, however, suspended in April 2019 by India after investigations revealed that the trade routes were misused by anti-national elements to smuggle in narcotics and weapons.[71] In its report, the MHA stated that the trade will be reopened only after a 'stricter regime is put in place

to ensure that only bonafide trade takes place for the benefit of the people of J&K'.[72]

The initiation of cross-LoC trade has been welcomed by all sections of the society in Kashmir as it has generated economic benefits for the people of divided Kashmir and created a positive psychological and emotional impact on them. The resumption of trade has invigorated the local economy by drawing in a number of allied services to cater to the requirements of the traders. The traders – especially those trading in horticultural goods – got access to additional markets for their products.

They also benefited significantly from the duty free trade on various commodities. The trade has also been beneficial to people living along the LoC as it has generated employment opportunities for the locals as labourers, drivers, contractors, and so forth.[73] The opening of trade has also had a positive psychological impact on the Kashmiris in general as it has provided an alternate route to the Jammu-Srinagar route, which remains the only link connecting Kashmir to rest of India.

Importantly, cross-LoC trade has helped the Kashmiri communities separated by the artificial line to rebuild their severed socio-economic and cultural relationships.[74] The fact that approximately 60 per cent of the traders involved in the border trade belong to divided families and trade with their relatives from across the LoC[75] indicates that border trade has facilitated greater economic interactions and emotional bonding among such families. However, restrictions placed on the cross-LoC movement of traders have impeded the reunion of these divided families.

Cross-LoC trade has also resulted in building cross-border peace constituencies. The formation of the Federation of Jammu and Kashmir Joint Chamber of Commerce (Joint Chamber) in October 2008 is the first formal cross-LoC institution,[76] which 'uniquely connects Kashmiri civil society and traders to governmental apparatuses on both sides.'[77] Moreover, this trade has given many former Kashmiri militants settled in POK an opportunity to lead a settled life, thereby making them stakeholders in maintaining a peaceful and stable border.[78]

The India-Bangladesh Border

Following Independence, India and Pakistan had agreed to allow
trade between the border inhabitants of East Pakistan and the states
of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. The objective was to help
border residents to obtain daily necessities by trading on a small
scale. Article VIII of the India-Pakistan Trade Agreement of 1957
stipulated that people residing within a belt of 10 miles would be
allowed to trade in commodities specified in Schedule 'D' of the
Agreement.[79] Since the nature of the commodities varied from place
to place, the Agreement also identified sectors along the border, the
inhabitants of which can trade with each other. These sectors were:[80]

- The Lushai Hills: Chittagong Hill Tracts
- Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills: Sylhet-Mymensingh Cachar-Sylhet
- Tripura: East Bengal
- Rangpur (East Pakistan): Assam (bordering district of Rangpur)/
  Cooch Behar/Jalpaiguri (West Bengal)
- The rest of East Pakistan: the rest of West Bengal

While border trade formally started in 1957, it soon came to
a complete halt because of the restrictive measures taken by the
Pakistan government. Pakistan not only restricted visas to traders and
harassed them but, towards the end of 1957, it launched 'Operation
Close Door', ostensibly to prevent smuggling taking place in the
guise of border trade.[81] The sealing of the border with Tripura and
the imposition of Martial Law dealt a severe blow to border trade.
While the Government of East Pakistan appeared eager to resume
border trade, the Pakistan Government in Karachi did not show any
keenness to discuss the issue at all.[82]

The liberation of East Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh
as a newly independent country in 1971 paved the way for India and
Bangladesh to develop a friendly relationship. It was in this spirit
that an attempt to restart border trade between the two countries
was made in March 1972. Article IV of the Trade Agreement of
1972 provided that people living in rural areas within a 16 km belt
on either side of the border to trade in commodities, which were
mutually agreed upon.[83]

However, before the border trade could be operationalised, Bangladesh raised apprehensions that the free exchange of commodities would result in large scale smuggling and, therefore, border trade between India and Bangladesh should not be allowed. Consequently, in October 1972, the provision of border trade between the two countries in the Trade Agreement was discarded by mutual consent.[84]

Decades later, a fresh attempt to reopen border trade in the form of border haats was made during the state visit of Sheikh Hasina to India in January 2010.[85] Subsequently, an MoU to establish border haats between India and Bangladesh was signed on October 23, 2010. The stated aim was to promote the wellbeing of border people by setting up traditional markets for their local produce.[86] Accordingly, two border haats were established along the India-Bangladesh border.

The first haat was inaugurated at Kalaichar in the West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya corresponding to Baliamari in the Kurigram District of Bangladesh on July 23, 2011; and the second haat was operationalised at Balat in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya corresponding to Lauwaghar in the Sunamganj District of Bangladesh on May 1, 2012. After a gap of three years, a border haat was opened at Srinagar in Tripura, opposite East Madugram and Middle Place of the Sagaria (Feni District in Bangladesh) on January 13, 2015;[87] and, another border haat was operationalised at Kamalasagar in Tripura, opposite Tarapur in the Brahmanbaria district in Bangladesh on June 11, 2015.[88] India and Bangladesh also agreed to set up six more border haats in 2017.

The border haats along the India-Bangladesh border are enclosures measuring 75×75 metres, constructed on the zero line and opened once a week (for example, Wednesdays for Kalaichar and Tuesdays for Balat) from 10 am to 3 pm. The commodities sold in these haats are exempted from customs duties. Purchases equivalent to US$ 200 per person are allowed and transactions can be conducted in local currencies or through barter.[89] People residing within the radius of 9-10 km are allowed to trade in these haats, although the stipulated distance is only 5 km.

Around 50 traders from each country are given trading permits valid for one year, and are required to carry photo identity cards. To ensure public order, only 150 persons are allowed inside the haats at a given time.[90] During trading days, customs officials, local police and BSF personnel are present in the haat to prevent the infringement of laws as well as ensure the smooth conduct of trade. Commodities sold in the Indian stalls include prayer mats, cumin seeds, bed covers, quilts and blankets (imported from China/Korea through Moreh), cosmetics and toiletries, bay leaves, and betel nuts. Items sold in the Bangladesh stalls comprise vegetables, plastic and melamine products, and readymade garments. Traders are allowed to carry their goods as head loads or on hand carts.[91]

The restarting of the border haats has been welcomed by the people living in the remote areas. The popularity of the border haats can be assessed by the fact that trade volumes have increased tremendously, a fact that is corroborated by the increase in the number of hand carts in these haats. Easy cross-border communication has also allowed traders on either side to place orders for the required products beforehand, which are picked up once the haat opens. This practice has led to trading in products that are not manufactured locally but brought from interiors.

For example, cumin seeds and prayer mats sold in haats are sourced from Gujarat and Rajasthan. Similarly, melamine and plastic products are brought from Dhaka. Officials lament that these border haats have become trading centres for big businessmen residing in big cities instead of being traditional markets to exchange locally produced goods.[92] Local people are, however, happy to get their essential items from across the border, which otherwise would have been difficult to procure given that major markets in their areas are quite far away. The availability of essential goods have also reduced the incidents of the smuggling of these items and, in turn, have reduced tensions between the BSF and the local people as well as between the BSF and the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB).[93]

The resumption of border trade with neighbouring countries has resulted in significant tangible as well as intangible gains, both in the bilateral relations as well as to people residing along various borders.

The successful conduct of the trade, and the positive changes that it has brought about in the lives of the people, have induced a number of border communities as well as state governments to demand/ request the reopening of additional trade routes. For example, in Ladakh, there has been a recurring demand for opening the Kargil-Skardu and the Khaplu-Ladakh routes. Proponents for opening these routes argue that these will not only facilitate the reunion of divided families from Baltistan but also bring prosperity to the local communities.[94]

There is also a strong demand for opening the Jammu-Sialkot route for trade and travel as part of the CBMs between India and Pakistan.[95] The state governments in the Northeast have been equally eager to resume border trade with the neighbouring countries. For instance, Arunachal Pradesh is keen on reopening border trade with China and Myanmar. It has proposed a number of trading posts, such as Kenzamane, Bumla, Gelling, Kibithoo, Mechuka, Monigong, and Taksing along the India-China border; Pangsau Pass along the India-Myanmar border; and Bleting, Dongshengmang and Bongkhar along India-Bhutan border.[96]

Manipur has suggested that border haats be opened at Kongkan Thana, New Somtal and Behiang. Similarly, Mizoram and Nagaland have proposed eight locations for border haats.[97] Tripura and Meghalaya have also demanded that additional border haats be opened along their borders with Bangladesh to allow local people to trade in essential items.[98]

Impediments to Border Trade

While opening the border for greater economic exchanges and the smooth conduct of such interactions largely depend on the political will of the central governments, impediments such as reluctance of neighbouring countries to open their borders, poor connectivity, absence of infrastructural facilities, limited trading basket, restricted trading season, and smuggling create hurdles in border trade.

The Reluctance of Neighbouring Countries

Opening up the borders for trade and travel is a political decision taken by governments, keeping in mind the political benefits as well

as security concerns. If the political and security cost of opening up the border is high, governments will be reluctant to allow greater cross border socio-economic and cultural interactions. The reluctance shown by China to open additional trading routes through Sikkim during the 1990s is one such example. China had feared that allowing trade through the India-China border at Sikkim would be interpreted as its implicit recognition of Sikkim as part of India, thereby inviting domestic protests.[99]

Bangladesh too, as discussed above, did not allow border trade with India for a long time fearing it will not only lead to increased smuggling but also inundate the country with Indian goods. It warmed up to the proposal of establishing border haats only in 2010; however, despite local demands, only four haats have been made operational till date. Bangladesh's continued apprehension is evidenced from its delaying tactics to sanction land for a border haat corresponding to Kamalasagar in Tripura for a long time.[100]

Myanmar's disinclination towards opening its borders to border trade can be observed from the fact that it has not improved transportation and communication links to the border trading posts. It has also remained non-committal towards building infrastructure required for operationalising the newly agreed trading posts.[101] In fact, citing reasons such as insufficient basic requirements and poor trade potential, the Myanmar government said that it will not set up trading haats along its border with India.[102]

Similarly, Pakistan has been indifferent towards the opening of an additional route through Ladakh to start cross-LoC trade. India is also cool towards the domestic demand of opening newer routes for border trade in Arunachal Pradesh. Given China's claim on the state and given the dismal state of road connectivity in the border areas, India's security concerns remain the prime driver in thwarting local demands for opening up the border for trade.

Poor Connectivity

Poor connectivity in terms of transportation and communication links in the border regions is the main hurdle in conducting border trade. Almost all the trading posts along the borders are

characterised by poor domestic as well as cross border road links. Along the India-China border, the mountainous terrain and severe weather conditions not only impede the construction of roads, but also damage the existing ones. Recurrent landslides destroy road links to the passes and beyond leading to frequent delays and, at times, the suspension of border trade.

For instance, in 2013, trading through Lipulekh was delayed because the link road to Gunji was destroyed by heavy rain.[103] Trading through Nathu La has been often affected by landslides. The 54 km road from Gangtok to Nathu La is marred by potholes and landslide.[104] Border trade along the Indo-Myanmar border is equally affected because of poor road conditions. The 110 km stretch of road connecting Imphal to Moreh has a number of potholes and badly maintained.

Likewise, the road from Champhai to Zokhawthar is severely affected by landslides, and large stretches of the road do not have metalled surfaces.[105] Further, the poor condition of the Rih-Tiddim-Falam link road across the border in Myanmar is another impediment to trade in this sector. The access route to the Balat border haat along the India-Bangladesh border is also in poor condition. The road is not only narrow but is poorly maintained. As a result, travel time to the haat increases manifold.[106]

Similarly, communication infrastructure in border regions is extremely poor. A combination of factors, such as difficult terrain, low population threshold and security concerns, make it difficult and less lucrative for the service providers to operationalise telecommunication services along border areas. For instance, in Nathu La, despite efforts by the government to provide telephone facilities, no mobile towers or telephone exchanges have been installed.[107]

Along the India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh borders, communication across the border has been barred because of security reasons. While Pakistani traders are allowed to contact Indian traders along the LoC, Indian traders are not permitted to make any cross-border calls.[108] Mobile phone services are, similarly, not available in Balat and Kalaichar.[109]

The Absence of Infrastructural Facilities

The absence of basic facilities in the trading posts is another major hurdle to border trade. The lack of banks in the trading posts prevents traders engaged in border trade to exchange or transfer money. Other facilities such as screening and detection machines, warehouses and storage, parking, trade dispute redressal mechanism, etc., have all contributed towards stymieing border trade.

Further, the absence of food testing as well as plant and animal quarantine facilities in most of the trading posts has led to delays in clearance of the cargo, as in Moreh and Zokhawthar. Since most of the items traded under border trade are agricultural products, food testing laboratories are deemed essential to screen the items in order to prevent the importation of diseases. Imphal has a food testing laboratory at Lamphelpat, which was established as late as July 2012.[110]

Earlier, all consumable items were sent to a Guwahati based laboratory, which took 40 days of processing time. In Mizoram, there was no food testing laboratory till September 2018 and items were send to Imphal for testing, which takes substantial time to process.[111] The import of livestock from Tibet has been banned in Gunji and Shipki La by India as there are no animal quarantine facilities in these trading points, resulting in a huge dip in trade.[112]

Here, it is important to mention that, given the understanding that goods that are imported through border trade are meant for consumption within a few kilometre from the international border only, the mandatory testing of plants and animals defies logic. Such testing should be carried out for products meant to be transported in the interior of the country rather than items consumed in the border areas because the ecological environment along both sides of the border is same.

Limited Trading Basket

The list of commodities officially approved for trading has been extremely limited. For instance, only 44 items were allowed to be exchanged along the India-China border; 62 items along India-Myanmar border; and 21 items along India-Pakistan border, most of

which are primary products. The problem is most of the commodities in the trading list are easily available across the border and therefore do have any demand.

For instance, items such as cigarettes, watches, canned food, blankets, shoes, and tea, which are allowed to be exported from India across the India-China border are available in large quantities – and at cheaper rates – in Tibet. On the other hand, the demand for commodities such as plant and plant products (timber) from Myanmar, and Indian industrial products in Myanmar is quite high; but these items are not allowed to be traded.[113]

Many of the items have also been rendered obsolete by changes in technology, lifestyle and the availability of mechanised alternatives. The situation is further aggravated by the repeated violation of trade agreements by the governments by banning export and import of certain items. The 21 items that were allowed to be traded across the LoC in 2008 was reduced to only 14 items[114] in 2011, and to only four in 2014, because a number of items have been banned by both India and Pakistan under some pretext or the other.[115] Similarly, Myanmar had banned the import of garlic, onions, rice, and ground nut from India, and India had banned the export of wheat flour to Myanmar in the past.[116]

Restricted Trading Season/Time

The trading period along the borders gets restricted because of inclement weather, political unrests, and strikes, etc. Along the India-China border, trade is confined to the summer months only as severe cold weather conditions freeze the passes. The trading season becomes further restricted when roads get damaged because of heavy rain and landslides, a problem which is common to all the borders. Political unrests, both domestic and in the neighbouring countries, also adversely affect cross-border trade.

For instance, in 2008, China stopped border trade because of large scale protests in Tibet in the run up to the Olympic Games. The intra-Kashmir trade is highly susceptible to the situation along the LoC and the international border (IB). Trade gets suspended whenever the security situation at the borders deteriorates, as it

happened in 2012 and 2013 when the ceasefire agreement was violated and the heads of five Indian soldiers were decapitated by Pakistani soldiers.[117]

Trade at Nathu La in 2017 dropped by 90 per cent because of the standoff between India and China over the Doklam issue.[118] Furthermore, disputes between traders and customs officials over the abolition of duties on commodities and strikes over the demand for an expansion of the trading list and for better facilities have resulted in frequent suspension of cross-LoC trade. In fact, trade through the LoC between 2008 and 2017 took place only for 1150 days out of 3285 days.[119] Trade along the Indo-Myanmar is frequently affected in Manipur because of insurgency, and the frequent bandhs and blockades imposed by various groups in the state.[120]

Smuggling

The opening of routes for trade have also resulted in the large scale smuggling of contrabands through the trading posts. For instance, in the Zokhawthar LCS, between 2009 and 2013, a total of 106 cases of smuggling amounting to Rs. 2.1 crore were detected.[121] Readymade garments, foreign liquor, foot-wear, electronic items, toys, zarda, and khaini are the items smuggled the most. The enormity of the volume of the smuggled items can be ascertained from the fact that, in Aizawl, a number of retail shops selling these smuggled items have sprung up and are doing brisk business.[122]

Similarly, reports of the smuggling of commodities are reported at the trading posts along the India-China border. For example, in 2012 at Namgaya (Shipki La), the police reportedly seized a consignment of high value pashmina wool worth Rs. 9 crore. In 2010, police reportedly seized two truckloads of red sanders close to the border, which were to be smuggled to Tibet.[123]

Moreh and Zokhawthar are infamous for being routes for the smuggling of narcotics and precursor chemicals from India to Myanmar.[124] In January 2014, the J&K police seized a truck carrying 114 packets of narcotics worth Rs. 100 crore in the international market. The truck that was seized at Chakkan-da-Bagh was carrying the consignment for a Kashmiri trader in Bandipora.[125]

Even though border trade constitutes a miniscule part of India's over all international trade with its neighbours and affects a small population residing in the peripheral areas, it has played a significant role in India's neighbourhood policy. India has successfully employed the instrument of border trade to constructively engage with its neighbours and bring a semblance of normalcy to its disputed borders. The resumption of border trade with China gave recognition to the LAC in the middle sector as well as elicited an acknowledgement from China that Sikkim is a part of India.

Cross-LoC trade has facilitated increased socio-cultural and economic interactions between the divided families of Kashmir and acted as a major CBM between India and Pakistan. Border trade with Myanmar has not only been the first stepping stone towards deepening India's bilateral relation but also an instrument to better manage their mutual borders by legalising the informal trade.

Border trade has also been an instrument for bringing economic prosperity to the underdeveloped border regions. It has generated employment opportunities, provided alternate routes as well as markets for local products, revived local industries, and had an overall positive impact on the local economy as well as on the psychology of the border people.

Border trade, however, has not achieved its full potential as its growth is marred by various structural and institutional inadequacies. Given that border trade has been beneficial both at the bilateral and local levels, the government should endeavour to strengthen and expand it by addressing inadequacies such as poor connectivity, lack of infrastructure and an under developed border economy and, at the same time, bring about a balance between security concerns and the economic necessities of the border inhabitants.

Notes

1. This chapter is an updated version of the Occasional Paper, "Status of India's Border Trade: Strategic and Economic Significance", published in 2014.
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5. *Annual Report 1992–1993*, New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 1993, p. 35.

6. *Protocol between India and China for Extension of Border Trade across Shipki La Pass*, September 7, 1993 at http://mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/CHB1206.pdf, accessed on June 2, 2014.

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8. Ibid.

9. *Annual Report 2003–2004*, New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 2004, p. 16.

10. "14th edition of Sino-Indian border trade opens at Nathu La", *Business Standard*, Gangtok, May 1, 2018 at https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/14th-edition-of-sino-indian-border-trade-opens-at-nathu-la-119050100666_1.html, accessed on December 26, 2019.

11. "Indo-China Border Trade, Public Notice No.7 /2015-2020", Directorate of Foreign Trade, New Delhi, May 1, 2015, at https://dgft.gov.in/sites/default/files/pn0715.pdf, accessed on December 26, 2019.

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15. S.L. Kaushik and Rama Pattanaik, *Modern Governments and Political Systems*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1995, p. 264.

16. Gaurav Bisht, "Cross-border trade through Shipki La touches new records", *The Hindustan Times*, Shimla, November 29, 2013 at https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/cross-border-trade-through-shipki-la-touches-new-record/story-YPZbibe7FGJHw0uXBzFbpN.html, accessed on December 27, 2019.

17. Kaushik and Pattanaik, note 15.

18. Sudha Vasan, "Indo-Tibetan Border Trade in Himachal Pradesh", *China Report*, 42 (1), 2006, p. 52. Also see, Rafal Beszterda, "Current Analyses on Shipki-La Trade, Kinnaur, 2017", *Ethnologia Polona*, Vol. 37, 2016, 2017, pp. 33-34.

19. Bhawan Singh Rawat, *Travails of Border Trade*, Munsayri: MallaJohr Vikas Samiti, 2009 at http://www.archieve.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded_pics/Travails_of_Border_Trade.pdf, accessed on December 27, 2019.

20. The trade is barter in nature, and the value figures are based on valuation figures provided by the traders. For details, see, Kaushik and Pattanaik, note 15.

21. Gaurav Bisht, note 16.

22. Bhawan Singh Rawat, note 19.

23. The ban on raw silk was imposed to protect the indigenous silk industries, whereas the absence of animal quarantine facility at Gunji was the reason behind the ban on livestock. See also, Deepti Saxena, "India-Tibet barter trade awaits nod from India, China", rediff.com, May 25, 2009 at https://www.rediff.com/money/report/india-tibet-barter-trade-awaits-nod-from-india-china/20090525.htm, accessed on December 27, 2019.

24. Gaurav Bisht, note 16.

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31. *Annual Report 1992–1993*, note 5, p. 18.

32. Ibid., p. 18.

33. *Annual Report 1993–1994*, New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 1993, p. 4.

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11. Bilateral Institutional Mechanisms

The fact that borders cannot be secured without the active cooperation of neighbours is well known. As Brunet Jailly states,

> the nature of borders is to be porous, which is a problem for the makers of security policy. It shows that when, for economic, cultural, or political reasons, human activities increase across a border and borderland, then governments need to increase their cooperation, collaboration, and co-production of security policies, if only to avoid implementing mismatched security policies.[1]

Security threats and challenges faced by countries along their mutual borders are similar and, therefore, cooperation and coordination between countries are essential for their effective management. Such cooperation and coordination enable countries to establish institutional interactions to raise, discuss, and resolve disputes. These institutional conflict resolution mechanisms also help in jointly addressing security challenges by pooling resources and developing common border management strategies.

Such cooperation also contributes in allaying distrust, building confidence and developing a spirit of coordination and cooperation between neighbours and their national agencies. India and its neighbours have established several bilateral institutional mechanisms to address border disputes as well as manage threats and challenges that make their border vulnerable.

Pakistan

Disputes over the alignment of their mutually shared border was one of the most difficult problems that India and Pakistan

confronted right after their inauguration as independent countries. The Radcliffe Award that partitioned Punjab and Bengal was a boundary line hastily drawn without adequate ground knowledge, proper definitions (for river boundaries), or correct maps and, as a result, there were several discrepancies.[2] These discrepancies resulted in differing interpretations of the Award, leading to disputes between the India and Pakistan even before the border could be demarcated.

Four border disputes – two between West Bengal and East Bengal (boundary between Murshidabad-Rajshahi and Nawabganj-Shibganj, and the boundary as defined by the Mathabhanga River between the thanas of Daulatpur and Karimpur), and two between Assam and East Bengal (the Patharia Hill Reserve Forest and the course of the Kusiyara river) – were registered almost immediately after Independence.[3]

Differing interpretations of the Radcliffe's Award also generated border disputes along the Punjab border. In all, there were four areas of dispute: (1) Chak Ladheke, (2) Theh Sarja, (3) Hussainiwala and (4) Suleimanke Headworks.[4] The Kutch-Sindh border was also disputed. Besides, the accession of Cooch Behar to India in December 1949 brought with it the problem of enclaves, which created problems and made the demarcation of the international border difficult.

These disputes raised tensions on the ground as the border guarding forces of India and Pakistan tried to settle the disputes by force and resorting to firing and, more often than not, by trying to encroach upon or forcibly occupy the disputed land. Such incidents not only strained bilateral relations but also inflicted untold miseries on the border residents whose kith and kin were either killed or arrested. To further compound their deplorable condition, border residents had to endure cross border raids in which criminal gangs perpetrated heinous crimes such as cattle lifting, kidnapping, murder, dacoity, etc.

Despite sharing an antagonistic relation, India and Pakistan recognised the need to resolve border problems urgently. At the Inter-Dominion Conference in December 1948, they agreed

to cooperate, and set up institutional mechanisms for conflict resolution. Consequently, an Arbitral Tribunal called the 'Indo-Pakistan Boundary Dispute Tribunal' was set up in November 1949 for the adjudication and final settlement of the disputes pertaining to India's eastern border (West Bengal and Assam) with Pakistan as well as its subsequent demarcation.

The Tribunal, comprising one representative each from India and Pakistan and a mutually agreed chairman, deliberated upon the disputes in two sittings in December 1949 and in January 1950, and pronounced its final judgement on January 26, 1950.[5] Following the Tribunal's decision, the demarcation of the international boundary between West Bengal and East Bengal commenced and, by September 1951, 104 miles of the 1350 mile boundary was demarcated.[6]

India and Pakistan also agreed to set up institutional interactions in the form of border meetings of district magistrates and police officers to prevent border incidences.[7] It was agreed that the district magistrates should resolve all border incidences and take steps to prevent their re-occurrences. In case some incidents were deemed grave, then district magistrates from either side should meet to discuss the issues and conduct joint enquiries, if necessary. In event of any disagreements between the district magistrates, the matter should be referred to higher authorities.[8]

While the district magistrates were empowered and made responsible for the settlement of all border incidents along the border with East Bengal, it was the Inspector General of Police (IGP) who was empowered to resolve problems along the Punjab border. The IGP of East and West Punjab were required to meet once a month to review the situation arising out of the border incidents, conduct joint enquiries and take steps to prevent reoccurrences of the incidences.

They were also required to discuss the progress of their work in the monthly conference and submit monthly reports to the government.[9] Parleys between the higher echelons of the respective governments of the two countries such as Home Ministers, Foreign Secretaries, Chief Secretaries, etc. also took place periodically with

the aim to discuss and resolve problems arising out of the newly created international border.

While these institutions for conflict resolution were able to resolve some of the disputes and lay down procedures to prevent border incidences, they were, unfortunately, only partially effective. For example, the dispute regarding the Kusiyara River could not be resolved as India raised objections against the Tribunal's interpretation of the Award.[10] Consequently, the Assam-East Bengal border remained disputed and un-demarcated. Similarly, cross-border incidents of firing, killings, raids, dacoity, kidnapping, etc., continued unabated.

In fact, an Indian official communication to Pakistan accused Pakistan's border police of perpetrating these criminal acts as well as sheltering and abetting raiding gangs,[11] and rued that the procedure agreed upon by the two countries to prevent border incidents 'has degenerated more into that of satisfying the letter of the agreement rather than its spirit.'[12] Nevertheless, efforts to resolve border disputes and border incidents continued.

One such effort was made during the Indo-Pakistan Secretary level conference in August 1958, when both the countries agreed to establish two Working Committees: one to deal with disputes on the Western border, and the other to deal with the Eastern border.[13] These two Working Committees deliberated on the disputes for several months, and were able to evolve a framework to end disputes and incidents along the border.

Under the framework for the Western border, India and Pakistan gave up claims on Theh Marja and Chak Ledheke, respectively, and agreed to make adjustments in the district boundaries of Ferozpur-Lahore and Montgomery (Sahiwal). As regards the Eastern border, the Kusiyara and Patharia Reserve Forest dispute were resolved in the spirit of accommodation. India and Pakistan also agreed to exchange adverse possessions, and expedite the demarcation of the international boundary, besides laying down Ground Rules for the border guarding forces[14] to prevent border incidents.

They also agreed to continue with the established institutional interactions between administrative officials and security personnel

and the setting up of 'Impartial Tribunals' to settle border disputes. Both countries agreed to collect further data in respect of the disputes regarding the Kutch-Sind and Tripura-East Pakistan boundary and discuss the issue later.[15] Agreements to this effect were signed on September 10, 1958 and October 23, 1959 for the Eastern borders, and on January 11, 1960 for the Western border. Consequent to the agreements, Government of India enacted the 9th Constitutional Amendment Act 1960, paving the way for their implementation.

In the western sector, adverse possessions in Punjab were exchanged in January 1961 and the boundary was demarcated. New Ground Rules for border guarding forces in the Punjab sector were also formulated.[16] In contrast, in the eastern sector, the Nehru-Noon Agreement of 1958 on the exchange of enclaves could not be implemented in its entirety due to its vehement opposition by the local people. Furthermore, the Kutch-Sind border dispute flared up after some years, resulting in the 'outbreak of hostilities' between India and Pakistan in April 1965.

Once the hostilities were brought to an end through international mediation, both countries agreed to refer the dispute to an impartial international Tribunal in June 1965. The Lagergren Tribunal[17] (constituted in December 1965 to arbitrate the dispute) announced its Award on February 19, 1968.[18] Prior to the final Award, India and Pakistan entered into an Agreement on the procedure to demarcate the boundary on July 13, 1967 and, by July 1969, completed the task of demarcating the Sind-Kutch boundary.[19]

While border disputes and accompanied border incidents were sources of tension between India and Pakistan in the first two decades after Independence, a variety of non-traditional security threats, such as cross-border terrorism, infiltration of militants (Sikh and Kashmiri), drug trafficking, and the smuggling of arms and explosives, emerged as major causes of concern in the decade of 1980s and afterwards. Other border problems, like the straying of cattle, smuggling of petty household items, the unauthorised movement of nationals of either country across the border, border crimes, etc., continued to persist.

Recognising that most of the threats to the country were emanating from Pakistani territory, the Indian government decided to reach out and engage Pakistan in a meaningful dialogue so that solutions could be worked out through cooperation based on mutual trust. One of the substantial steps in this respect was taken when the Home Secretaries of the two countries met in Lahore in December 1986. During the meeting, both sides recognised the need for evolving a common approach and set up bilateral mechanisms to deal with immediate threats of drug trafficking and cross-border terrorism.[20]

They also agreed to reformulate the Ground Rules of 1960-61 for the conduct of the border guarding forces. It must be noted that India had declared the Ground Rules of 1960-61 outdated and invalid following the 1971 war. India was particularly not in favour of retaining the military components of the Ground Rules as they prevented it from fortifying its defences along its western border.[21] Pakistan, on the contrary, maintained that the Ground Rules were functioning satisfactorily, but it expressed its willingness to consider amendments to it on the insistence of India. In fact, throughout the 1970s, Pakistan protested against the violation of the Ground Rules by India.[22]

Be that as it may, subsequent to the Home Secretaries meeting, two Committees: (a) the Committee for Combating Drug Trafficking and Smuggling, and (b) the Committee on Border Ground Rules were established in 1987. The Committee for Combating Drug Trafficking and Smuggling held its first meeting on March 26-27, 1987 in New Delhi.[23] In the meeting, both sides agreed to devise strategies to combat drug trafficking and smuggling by exchanging operational information and intelligence between the nodal agencies of both the countries. This information/intelligence was about drug traffickers and smugglers operating on either side of the border as well as routes, new methods and means used for smuggling/drug trafficking, and emerging trends in the field.

The Committee on Border Ground Rules, which comprised representatives of the Ministries of External/Foreign Affairs and Home Affairs/Interior, and the Directors General BSF and Pakistan

Rangers, met to study the draft proposals of the Ground Rules that were exchanged in 1981-82, and draft new ground rules for the consideration of the two governments.[24] The Committee held its first and only meeting in Lahore on September 8-10, 1987.[25]

Further consultations could not take place till date because of India's refusal and Pakistan's insistence to include military components in the new Ground Rules. However, to address the problems along the international border, both the countries decided to strengthen cooperation between their border guarding forces and agreed to some interim measures. These included regular monthly meetings at the Wing Commander-Battalion Commander and the Post Company Commander levels. The purpose was to share information and intelligence and to ensure coordination to effectively check the movement of terrorists, drug traffickers, and arms smugglers as well as to ensure the eradication of trans-border crimes, illegal border crossings, etc.[26]

In addition to these measures, India and Pakistan also agreed to organise coordinated border patrolling in selected sensitive areas of the Punjab sector, which would include both coordinated patrolling and laying down ambushes to prevent the infiltration of militants and drug traffickers besides extending mutual assistance in criminal investigations in matters relating to drug trafficking and smuggling.[27]

While both the countries expressed satisfaction with the exchange of information related to drug trafficking between the nodal agencies and cooperation between the border guarding forces. They also realised that the overall situation on the ground had not improved much, and there was a need to enhance bilateral cooperation. During the third meeting of the Home Secretaries in May 1989, India and Pakistan agreed that it was imperative to review, twice a year, the implementation of the agreed measures at the highest levels of border guarding forces.

Both the countries also agreed to a slew of measures such as undertaking simultaneous coordinated patrolling, the exchange of comprehensive information/intelligence regarding drug trafficking and smuggling, and harmonising laws relating to drug trafficking. They also agreed to designating Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)

of Pakistan and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) of India as nodal agencies in their respective countries for locating and tracing fugitives from the law and handing them over to their counterpart without going through cumbersome laws and procedures.[28] In 1994, the scope of the BSF-Pakistan Rangers meeting at the Commandant, DIG, and IG levels was enhanced, and officials from the Narcotics Bureau (NCB) of India and the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) of Pakistan were also included.

However, Pakistan's continued support to Kashmiri militancy and sponsorship of terrorists belonging to the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) in Jammu and Kashmir further strained already difficult bilateral relations. India accused Pakistan of actively fomenting terrorism and violence in India.[29] Meanwhile, a change in the political dispensation in New Delhi brought with it a desire to resume dialogue with Pakistan to address all issues of mutual concern.[30]

Accordingly, the Foreign Secretaries of the two countries met on June 23, 1997 and listed eight items as outstanding issues of mutual concern to be discussed as part of the Composite and Integrated Dialogue between India and Pakistan on June 23, 1997. These issues were: (a) peace and security, including CBMs; (b) Jammu and Kashmir; (c) Siachen; (d) the Wullar Barrage Project/Tulbul Navigation Project; (e) Sir Creek; (f) terrorism and drug-trafficking; (g) economic and commercial cooperation; and (h) the promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields.[31] Subsequently, in November 1998, the Home/Interior Secretaries of the two countries held parleys on terrorism and drug trafficking.

However, not much progress could be made as tensions between the two countries mounted over Pakistan's encouragement to cross-border terrorism, especially in Jammu and Kashmir. India-Pakistan relations plunged to a new low in the subsequent years, as there were several distressing incidents perpetrated by Pakistan and the terrorist groups supported by it.

These include intrusions by Pakistani regulars in Kargil and the subsequent war in May-July 1999; the hijacking of the Indian Airlines flight IC-814 to Kandahar in December 1999; and terrorist

attacks on the J&K Assembly, the Indian Parliament in December 2001 and the Kaluchak Army camp in May 2002. All these forced New Delhi to take a series of diplomatic and military measures against Islamabad, including the mobilisation of the military along its border with Pakistan.[32]

Tensions between the two countries ebbed subsequently, leading to the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement in November 2003. However, a meaningful engagement with Pakistan was possible only after President Musharraf reassured Prime Minister Vajpayee – when the two leaders met on the side-lines of SAARC in Islamabad in January 2004 – that 'he will not permit any territory under Pakistan's control to be used to support terrorism in any manner.'[33]

The Composite Dialogue Process covering the eight issues of mutual concern was revived in June 2004 and four rounds of serious discussions took place between India and Pakistan till November 2008 when the peace process was once again suspended following terrorist attacks in Mumbai.[34] In July 2011, talks between the two countries started again; but instead of a Composite Dialogue, it was termed a 'Resumed Dialogue' and included counter terrorism including the Mumbai attack trials as well as humanitarian issues.[35] The talks were again called off in 2012 after the incident of firing and the beheading of Indian soldiers along the India-Pakistan border.

Despite difficult bilateral relations and periodic suspension of negotiations, India and Pakistan have managed to establish bilateral institutional mechanisms for conflict resolution and achieve some tangible gains in managing their mutual borders better. Besides security issues, both countries also cooperated on matters cross-border trade and travel. Much of the bilateral cooperation on these issues was also necessitated by the two countries fulfilling their international and regional commitments to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the South Asian Free Trade Areas (SAFTA), the World Customs Organisation (WCO), etc.

Accordingly, a number of working groups have been set up to explore mutual cooperation in trade facilitation and the cross-border movement of people through border checkpoints. These include a working group to address sector-specific barriers; a joint

technical group to oversee progress in the development of physical infrastructure at the Attari-Wagah LCS (the inauguration of the ICP, opening of a dedicated trade gate at Attari-Wagah); a customs liaison border committee; a joint working group on economic cooperation; a subgroup on customs cooperation; a group of experts on trade in electricity; and a subgroup/group of experts on trade in petroleum products.[36]

These bilateral mechanisms between India and Pakistan have helped in improving – albeit, to a limited extent – the management practices along their common border. For instance, many minor issues, such as inadvertent crossings by people, which have the potential of flaring up, are now resolved at the local level through the meeting of area commanders. India's NCB and its Pakistani counterpart the ANF have been sharing information as well as 'actionable intelligence on drug trafficking and ha[ve] agreed to adopt a coordinated strategy to prevent cross-border drug trafficking'.[37]

Similarly, in May 2012, both countries agreed to provide 'special permits' for customs officials to work within the 400-metre radius at the Attari-Wagah checkpoint. This step was taken to facilitate better coordination between the customs officials of the two countries to carry out proper scrutiny, inspection and the early clearance of goods coming through on trucks.[38]

However, given Pakistan's hostile attitude towards India, these conflict resolution mechanisms remain partially effective. In fact, most of the threats, such as cross-border terrorism, sniping and shelling, drug trafficking, etc. that India faces along its border with Pakistan are manifestations of Pakistan's policy of destabilising India. Moreover, Pakistan's reluctance to deepen socio-economic relations with India is demonstrated by its unwillingness to develop infrastructure along its border check posts.

While India has built an Integrated Check Post (ICP) with modern facilities at Attari, the LCS in Wagah remains small and outdated. The infrastructural facilities – like scanners and warehouses at Wagah – are not adequate to handle the increased passenger and cargo movement. Thus, while the ICP at Attari can clear 120-180 trucks a day, the LCS at Wagah is able to clear only 50.

Similarly, the rail coaches of the Thar Express that originates in Pakistan are old and dilapidated, and apprehensions have been raised by Indian customs officials that passengers travelling in these coaches can easily throw contraband from the train into Indian territory, which could be later picked up by smugglers and other anti-national elements. Railway officials also complain that, if the train is delayed, their Pakistani counterparts neither provide prior information nor respond to their calls.[39]

In sum, while India has been partially successful in soliciting the cooperation of Pakistan in border management, the hostilities that characterise the relationship between the two countries have hampered sustained bilateral engagements.

Bangladesh

The liberation of Bangladesh in December 1971 gave India the hope that it would be able to resolve all problematic issues left over from the Pakistan days, whether relating to borders, waters, or other matters with the newly liberated country. Given India's assistance in the Liberation War, India believed that the two countries will be able to forge a friendly and cooperative relationship. It was in this spirit that India and Bangladesh had a euphoric start to their relationship, paving the way for the signing of a number of bilateral agreements.

Prominent among them was the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace between India and Bangladesh, which was signed in 1972. The Agreement aimed 'to maintain fraternal and good-neighbourly relations and transform their border into a border of eternal peace and friendship.'[40] For this dream to come true, the demarcation of the entire border by resolving all outstanding border issues was a prerequisite. Towards this end, India and Bangladesh signed the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) on May 16, 1974.

Under the Agreement, it was agreed that both countries would exchange enclaves, surrender adverse possessions and demarcate the border expeditiously. It was also agreed that the southern half of South Berubari Union No. 12 and the adjacent enclaves that were agreed to be transferred to East Pakistan under the Nehru-Noon Agreement of 1958 would be retained by India and, in exchange,

Bangladesh would retain the enclaves of Dahagram and Angarpota. Additionally, India would lease in perpetuity to Bangladesh an area of 178 x 85 metres near 'Tin Bigha' to connect Dahagram with Panbari Mauza of Bangladesh.[41]

To address the problems of infiltration, inadvertent crossings, smuggling, cattle lifting, kidnapping, etc., the Joint India-Bangladesh Guidelines for the Border Authorities of the two countries was signed in 1975.[42] This agreement further strengthened the existing institutions for bilateral interactions and procedures for conflict resolution which were established following the 'Agreement on Procedures to End Disputes and Incidents along the Indo-East Pakistan Border Areas' in 1959. The guidelines made the provision for on-the-spot joint inquiries, meetings of district magistrates and border guarding forces at different levels, setting up joint check posts on river banks, establishing communication between Director Generals of the border guarding forces of both the countries, flag meetings, etc.

Unfortunately, after the euphoria of the initial years, relations between India and Bangladesh declined steadily, especially after the military coup in 1975. Bangladesh started demonstrating palpable hostility, accusing India of being a hegemon trying to undermine its sovereignty. Even the 1972 Treaty of Friendship, which was signed on the behest of the Bangladesh Prime Minister was termed a 'document of slavery' by the new military junta. One of the casualties of the deteriorating relations was the implementation of the LBA, which was held up as India did not ratify it citing 'legal difficulties'.

As a result, the demarcation of the India-Bangladesh border slowed down substantially. On the issue of enclaves, India insisted that before the enclaves are exchanged, a joint census should be carried out in the enclaves to ascertain the number of people residing in them. This, according to the Indian government, was a precautionary measure to ensure that legitimate people are incorporated into India once exchange of enclaves takes place.[43] Bangladesh denied consent to conduct any such census in the enclaves, arguing that such a provision was not included in the Agreement of 1974.

Similarly, the Agreement for the leasing of the Tin Bigha to Bangladesh in perpetuity was also signed only on October 7, 1982, eight years after the signing of the LBA.[44] However, the agreement could not be implemented as the lease was challenged in the Supreme Court of India. Meanwhile, the India-Bangladesh border remained tense as several incidents of cross-border firings, illegal migration, movement of Chakma refugees, cattle smuggling, kidnappings, etc. kept re-occurring, reflecting a difficult bilateral relationship.

The restoration of democracy in Bangladesh in 1990 and the inauguration of two newly elected governments in India and Bangladesh in 1991, ushered in the hope that the spirit of friendship and cooperation will be restored in their relations. As a positive step, India finally transferred the Tin Bigha to Bangladesh on June 26, 1992 after the Supreme Court gave its verdict in favour of an early transfer of the Tin Bigha to Bangladesh.[45] In 1994, a three-tier bilateral institutional mechanism was set up between India and Bangladesh to resolve security and border management issues.

The first level talks take place between the Home Secretaries of both the countries. The second is a Joint Working Group (JWG) at the level of Joint Secretaries; and the third is the talk at the DG (BSF) and DG (Bangladesh Rifles-BDR, later BGB) level.[46] The JWG constituted by both governments aimed to 'identify, study and recommend resolution of various outstanding issues', such as: (a) security related issues; (b) cross border movement; (c) the updating of the existing visa regime; (d) the Chakma question, (e) smuggling along India-Bangladesh border; and, (e) other matters.[47]

The JWG held its first meeting on March 29-31, 1994, in which both sides agreed, *inter alia*, to cooperate in curbing the growing menace of insurgency and terrorism related activities, revive the 1991 ground arrangements between the BSF and the BDR for the acceptance of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, and discuss further the nature, trend, and direction of cross-border smuggling.[48]

In the second meeting of the JWG in April 1995, the nodal officers for the exchange of information related to the activities of insurgents/terrorists/militants were identified, besides each side sensitising the other about their issues and concerns. In sum,

not much could be achieved in the JWG meetings since bilateral relations continued to be difficult as Bangladesh encouraged Islamic fundamentalism, allowed the presence of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) on its territory, provided shelter to Indian insurgent groups, and internationalised bilateral issues.

Resultantly, other conflict resolution mechanisms such as the meetings between BSF-BDR officials, meetings between District Magistrates or bilateral political level meetings also did not yield desirable results on the issues of cross-border firings, shelter to Indian insurgents, illegal migration, cattle smuggling, etc.[49]

The change of government in Bangladesh in 1996 and the coming of the Hasina government to power did ease bilateral relationship somewhat, resulting in the resolution of issues such as the sharing of the Ganga River waters and Chakma refugee repatriation. In 1997, a mutually reconciled list of enclaves was prepared and accepted by both countries. The process of demarcation of the border also picked up pace and border pillars were erected. By the year 2000, only three stretches of the international border (measuring a total of 6.1 km)[50] was left un-demarcated, along with the issues of enclaves and adverse possessions.[51]

Meanwhile, the situation along the India-Bangladesh border continued to be fraught with tension. In fact, firing by the border guarding forces of the two countries along the disputed stretches became a regular feature. Illegal migration and smuggling continued unabated, often resulting in fatal casualties. The tense situation brewing along the border came to a head in April 2001, when a border clash snowballed into a major conflict, resulting in the death of 16 BSF personnel.[52]

This incident propelled both the countries to seriously discuss the issue of the unresolved border dispute which was vitiating bilateral relations for a long time. Accordingly, during the meeting of the Foreign Secretaries of both countries in June 2001, a decision was taken to constitute two Joint Boundary Working Groups (JBWG) to develop a framework to implement the LBA of 1974.[53] The first group – that is, the India-Bangladesh Joint Boundary Working Group on Border Demarcation (JBWG-I) – would deal with the

completion of the 6.1 km of the un-demarcated stretch; and, the second group – that is, the India-Bangladesh Joint Boundary Working Group (JBWG-II) would deal with all the modalities relating to the exchange of 162 enclaves and approximately 6000 acres of adverse possessions between the two countries as well as the erection of boundary pillars.[54]

Unfortunately, the two JBWGs were constituted towards the fag-end of Sheikh Hasina's term as Prime Minister, and therefore not much headway could be made before her term ended. Only two meetings of the JBWG took place – one in July 2001, and the second in March 2002. As relations became uneasy once again with the return of Khaleda Zia as Prime Minister, the JBWGs did not meet.

The change in the political dispensation in Bangladesh, first with the installation of the caretaker government and, later, with the return to power of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government, bilateral relations returned to an even keel. This created a conducive atmosphere for resolving outstanding border disputes as well as for formulating cooperative border management practices. Both governments revived the JBWGs (I & II) and the third meeting of the two groups took place in July 2006. During this meeting, it was agreed to conduct a survey to determine the number of people residing in the enclaves.[55]

Consequently, a joint census in the enclaves was carried in May 2007. While political uncertainty in Bangladesh prevented speedier progress on the issue, the meetings between the BSF and the BDR in April 2007 were successful because, for the first time, the BDR acknowledged the existence of Indian insurgent camps inside Bangladesh and assured their Indian counterparts that effective action would be taken against them.[56]

The return to power of Sheikh Hasina paved the way for the permanent resolution of the boundary issues. During Prime Minister Hasina's visit to India in January 2010, the two countries reiterated their commitment to exchange enclaves and surrender adverse possessions, and agreed to hasten the process.[57] It is against this backdrop that the fourth meeting of the JBWGs was held in November 2010. The modalities for the surrender of adverse

possessions and the alignment of the un-demarcated stretches were carried out, and the entire boundary was delineated on strip maps.

In September 2011, during the state visit of Indian Prime Minister to Bangladesh, an additional protocol to the LBA concerning the demarcation of the land boundary between India and Bangladesh was signed.[58] During the visit, the 'Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development' was also signed wherein both countries agreed to enhance, deepen, and widen the scope of cooperation through economic integration and better connectivity.

They also agreed to establish a Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) for the effective and smooth implementation of the Agreement.[59] The JCC held its first meeting in May 2012 in Delhi, and it was during the second meeting of the JCC in Dhaka in February 2013 that the strip maps of the boundary were exchanged.[60] Unfortunately, all efforts to arrive at a final resolution of the boundary dispute came to naught as India failed to ratify the LBA.

Meanwhile, it was decided that, in addition to the three tier bilateral mechanism, talks at the level of Home Ministers of India and Bangladesh would also be held once a year. The first Home Minister level talks in this series were held in Dhaka, during which the Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) was signed between the BSF and the BGB on July 30, 2011.[61] The aim of this plan is to 'enhance [the] quality of border management as well as ensure cross-border security' by addressing challenges to the peace and sanctity of the border posed by human and drug trafficking, gun running, and cross border crimes.

Under the Plan, India and Bangladesh agreed to conduct coordinated patrols in areas susceptible to trafficking and other crimes based on shared intelligence inputs.[62] They also appointed nodal officers for the effective implementation of the CBMP. Incidentally, such coordinated patrols by the border guarding forces of the two countries were being conducted in select areas along predetermined routes along the international border and had resulted in improved coordination between them.[63]

One recurrent issue was the BSF personnel's firing upon, and the resultant deaths of, Bangladeshi citizens transgressing the border.

While the Bangladeshi side argued that BSF personnel were killing innocent people, the BSF asserted that its personnel were firing at smugglers and hostile illegal migrants in self defence. After much discussion and deliberation, a common ground was found in the form of the BSF agreeing to use non-lethal weapons to warn potential illegal migrants or smugglers twice before resorting to the use of firearms. Accordingly, in March 2011, the Agreement on the non-use of lethal weapons by the BSF and BGB was signed. The implementation of this agreement has reportedly reduced the number of people killed along the border.[64]

In 2015, India finally ratified the LBA of 1974 and it's Protocol of 2011, facilitating the exchange of enclaves between India and Bangladesh. The process of exchange of 51 erstwhile Bangladeshi enclaves (with a total area of 7,110.02 acres) in India, and 111 erstwhile Indian enclaves (with a total area of 17,160.63 acres) in Bangladesh began from the midnight of July 2015, after letters on the modalities to implement the LBA of 1974 and Protocol of 2011 were exchanged between the Foreign Secretaries of the two countries on June 6, 2015.[65]

A joint survey, had determined that 989 persons out of total 38,521 residents from erstwhile Indian enclaves in Bangladesh have opted to retain their original nationality, while all 14,863 residents of the Bangladesh enclaves in India have opted for Indian nationality.[66] Moreover, the adjustments made in the transfer of the adverse possessions meant that India received 2777.038 acres of land and transferred 2267.682 acres of land to Bangladesh.[67] With the resolution of the 6.1 km of the disputed border, the exchange of enclaves and the transfer of adverse possession, the India-Bangladesh border has been completely settled.

However, threats and challenges, such as the trafficking of drugs and persons, the smuggling of cattle as well as of fake Indian currency notes (FICN), illegal migration, the movement of terrorists, etc. continue and dealing with these issues in a cooperative manner has always been India's endeavour. In this respect, as already discussed, a number of bilateral institutional interactions have been constituted. To further deepen these interactions and provide focused attention

to particular problems, India and Bangladesh have also constituted Task Forces.

For example, for the prevention of human trafficking, a Task Force of India and Bangladesh was constituted in 2009 to take coordinated action against individuals/touts/agents involved in human trafficking as well as the repatriation of the victims of trafficking. A SOP was agreed upon by both the countries for the repatriation process.[68] The Task Force held regular meetings to review progress on the decisions taken in earlier meetings and discuss new strategies to combat human trafficking.

In June 2015, India and Bangladesh further deepened their cooperation for the prevention of human trafficking by signing a MoU wherein they agreed to work in 'close cooperation to uncover [the] domestic and cross-border trafficking of children and women [and] ensure the speedy investigation and prosecution of traffickers and organised crime syndicates in either country,' as well as the speedy repatriation and rehabilitation of the victims.[69] The Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation, and Integration (RRRI) Task Forces were also set up by both the countries to monitor and review the implementation of the MoU and suggest ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation.

Similarly, a Joint Task Force with Bangladesh was constituted to prevent the smuggling and circulation of FICN. It held its first meeting in January 2014 in New Delhi. A MoU was also signed in 2015 between the two countries 'to promote bilateral cooperation in the field of preventing and combating, [the] production, smuggling and circulation of fake currency notes, taking into account the applicable laws and legal provisions of the two countries'.[70] An SOP to enhance bilateral cooperation through intelligence sharing, maintaining databases on all dimensions of FICN smuggling, enhancing mutual collaboration between forensic experts and organising joint training and seminars was also mutually adopted.[71]

While such regular interactions through bilateral institutional mechanisms have been successful in resolving all outstanding problems between the two countries, there are many other issues whose resolution is bedeviled by differing perceptions as well as

outright denials. One such issue is the assaults on BSF personnel by cattle smugglers. The use of rubber bullets and pump action guns have, no doubt, reduced the number of deaths along the border, but at the same, it has emboldened cattle smugglers to attack BSF personnel knowing fully well that even if fired at, they will escape serious injury.

This issue has been raised by the BSF with their Bangladeshi counterparts during various interactions and have requested that the BGB rein in the cattle smugglers. However, the response of the BGB has not been encouraging, primarily because, unlike the BSF who see them as criminals, the BGB treats them as legitimate cattle traders since cattle trade is legal in Bangladesh.

Similarly, the issue of illegal migration, which has been plaguing India since Independence with disastrous political and security implications, does not seem to lend itself to resolution any time soon. This is because of Bangladesh's unwillingness to acknowledge that it is the source of illegal migrants. Bangladesh has persistently denied that its citizens have been surreptitiously entering India for various reasons. It argues that since Bangladesh's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is growing at a higher rate than India's, there is no reason for Bangladeshis to sneak into India to seek a better life.

Bangladesh does admit that economic migration is taking place from its territory, but asserts that such migration takes place to European and Gulf countries rather than to India's 'impoverished' Northeast. Given such differing perceptions and denials, it will be quite a while before these views can be reconciled and an amicable solution found. Nevertheless, endeavours should be consistently made by India and Bangladesh to engage in dialogue and deliberations to iron out problems that sour bilateral relations.

Nepal

India's border with Nepal was defined by the Treaty of Segowlie in 1815,[72] and the restoration of Naya Muluk[73] to Nepal in 1860. While the entire India-Nepal border was delineated, disputes along the border did occur and persisted. One of the major reasons for the border disputes is the ever shifting course of the turbulent Himalayan

Rivers, which define the international boundary between the two countries in many areas. These rivers keep changing their courses every now and then, thereby throwing up new land and submerging the old.

Although the riverine boundary is determined on the principle of a fixed boundary, the shifting course of the rivers results in adverse possessions. In other words, because the river submerges old land and throws up new one, the new land is 'illegally' occupied by people beyond the border. Thus, what was once Nepalese territory is occupied by Indians and vice versa. This process creates confusion and tension among people residing in these ever changing border landscapes. The problem is compounded by the submergence, destruction and removal of border pillars.

One such dispute is about an area of approximately 15 sq. miles from the tri-junction of Gorakhpur (UP), Champaran (Bihar), and Nepal, along the Gandak to Triveni, which is disputed since 1884-85. To resolve border disputes, British-India and Nepal had constituted a Joint Boundary Commission in 1929. The Commission – comprising representatives from Bihar and Nepal – held meetings in 1937, 1947, 1952 and 1953;[74] but the border disputes could not be resolved.

Interestingly, during the 1960s, whenever Nepal raised claims on the Narsahi Forest and subtly indicated that the India-Nepal border dispute required to be resolved, the Indian government stated that the India-Nepal border was not disputed because the entire border is completely delineated on the map and demarcated on the ground. The only matters of concern were the missing and damaged boundary pillars and the encroachments, which were being settled through annual joint inspections of the boundary as well as periodic meetings and discussions between the district border officials of both the countries.[75]

Denials by the Indian government did not put an end to the border disputes, which were not only creating tensions at the local levels but were also straining bilateral relations. Realising the need to engage with the issue, India and Nepal agreed to establish a Joint Survey Team to 'relocate' the boundary in the Susta region during

the Foreign Secretaries talks in May 1969.[76] Unfortunately, not much progress could be made in this regard and the disputes continued to fester.

After a gap of more than ten years, India and Nepal again decided to establish a Committee to address the issue of border tensions. Accordingly, in 1981, a Joint Technical Level Boundary Committee (JTLBC), comprising Surveyors General and other officials concerned was constituted with the mandate to 'over-see and coordinate the continuing work relating to [the] verification and [the] restoration of [the] missing/damaged pillars and clearance of encroachments along the Indo-Nepal border.'[77]

In other words, the Committee had to reconfirm the coordinates of the boundary pillars and re-demarcate the alignment of the boundary through joint field verification. In its first meeting, held in November 1981 in New Delhi, the JTLBC noted that 'the entire boundary was already well defined and demarcated', and agreed that five field teams would be constituted for joint field inspections of the border in order to restore the damaged and missing border pillars.[78]

After functioning for more than a decade, the JTLBC realised that there are a number of issues that cannot be settled solely through technical consultation but require a comprehensive understanding of the problem. Thus, during its 17th meeting in August 1994, the Committee decided to constitute a Joint Working Group (JWG) comprising representatives from Ministries of External and Home Affairs, Surveyors, and other concerned local officials. The JWG was mandated to conduct detailed studies, including field investigations to sort out the differences, if any, and suggest remedial measures to the JTLBC.[79]

The JWG held its first meeting on May 25, 1995 in Jhapa (Nepal). In June 1997, during the visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Nepal, the mandate of the JWG was further widened to include examining the 'relevant facts relating to the demarcation of the boundary alignment in the western sector, including the Kalapani area and to propose, if necessary, further measures in this regard.'[80]

After almost 26 years of painstaking surveys, deliberations, and extensions, the JTLBC delineated 98 per cent of the India-Nepal

boundary on 182 strip maps. These maps were initialled by experts from both the countries and submitted for ratification in 2007. The remaining 2 per cent of the border involved the Kalapani and the Susta disputes, which are yet to be resolved. Unfortunately, neither country ratified the maps.

Nepal maintained that it cannot ratify the maps without the resolution of the outstanding boundary disputes. India, on the other hand, awaited Nepal's ratification while at the same time urging it to endorse the maps as a confidence building measure for solving the Kalapani and Susta disputes. In the absence of a ratification, the process of demarcating the India-Nepal boundary could not be undertaken.

A new beginning was made in July 2014 during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Nepal, when both the countries agreed to set up a Boundary Working Group (BWG) to address all pending border related issues. The mandate of the BWG was to the construct, restore and repair boundary pillars, including clearing the 'no man's land.'[81] The BWG, comprising Surveyors General of India and Nepal, held its first meeting between September 17th and 19th, 2014.

During the meeting, two subordinate bodies – the Survey Officials' Committee and the Field Survey Team – were established and their Terms of Reference (ToR) were finalised. The main tasks of the Committee include the construction and restoration of new and damaged boundary pillars, their Global Position System (GPS) observation, developing procedures for resolving encroachments as well as crossholdings along the boundary, and providing technical inputs to the Foreign Secretaries of India and Nepal for resolving outstanding boundary issues.[82]

As a first step, the survey teams are locating and identifying the missing pillars along the border as well as constructing new pillars. According to the Nepalese government estimates, of the 8000 boundary pillars along the border, 1,240 pillars are missing; 2,500 require restoration; and 400 more need to be constructed. The team conducted surveys of the border pillars based on the strip maps prepared by the JTLBC.[83]

The construction of border pillars has resulted in resolving the issue of encroachment and cross border occupation along the border. It is reported that, in Kailali, after the border pillars were erected, some 16 bighas of land encroached by Indians were restored to Nepal. Similarly, in Kusumghat, land used by Nepali citizens has come under the jurisdiction of India.[84]

Besides border disputes, several security-related problems emanating across their mutual border have been sources of concern for both India and Nepal. While the Foreign Secretaries of both countries had been holding talks to address issues of bilateral concerns, it was during the visit of Prime Minister I.K. Gujral to Nepal in June 1997 that both the countries decided to constitute a series of bilateral institutional mechanisms to pay focussed attention to matters related to security.[85]

These mechanisms include Home Secretary Level Talks, meetings of the Joint Working Group on Border Management (JWG-BM), a Bilateral Consultative Group (BCG) on Security Issues, and DG level talks on Customs cooperation; all to be held annually. The issues covered in these meetings are: smuggling of arms, ammunition, drug and narcotics, and fake Indian currency notes; human trafficking; immigration issues; the misuse of sim cards; the sharing of information and intelligence; the establishment of border infrastructure and Integrated Check Posts; and capacity building of Nepalese security agencies.[86]

In addition, periodic meetings of the Border Districts Coordination Committee (BDCC) headed by the District Magistrate and Coordination Meetings between SSB and the Armed Police Force of Nepal (APFN) take place regularly for the exchange of real-time information/intelligence on trans-border crime and criminal activities to effectively deal with border management issues.[87]

These forums have been instrumental in resolving issues of mutual concern through the useful exchange of views on the modalities for an effective management and regulation of the India-Nepal border. These forums allow both the countries to sensitise each other of their security needs and arrive at mutually agreed decisions through

cooperation and understanding. For example, during the Home Secretary Level Talks in January 2012, a decision was taken to hold annual meetings of the DG (SSB) and the IG (APFN) for the effective coordination of border guarding forces on the ground. The first meeting between them was held in New Delhi in December 2012.[88]

Likewise, during the 19th India-Nepal DG Level talks on Customs, both countries decided to set up a hotline to ensure effective coordination between them to check smuggling.[89] Like with other neighbours, the India-Nepal bilateral mechanisms for effective border management have been able to make each other aware of their security concerns. However, these mechanisms have also been held hostage to the palpable anti-India sentiments among the political elites in Kathmandu.

In fact, India-Nepal relations have always swung from being friendly to being hostile in matters of years. Hostility and the lack of mutual trust have marred meaningful engagements between the two countries to the detriment of both. Another reason for the suboptimal performance of these mechanisms is the continued uncertain domestic political situation in Nepal, especially after 1996. As a result, the Nepalese policymakers remained preoccupied with their internal problems and could spare little attention to the problems afflicting its borders with India.

Myanmar

India and Myanmar face similar problems along its borders: insurgency, trafficking of narcotics and drugs, gun-running, and smuggling of wildlife and essential products. This convergence of security interests between the two countries provides India and Myanmar an opportunity to cooperate with each other. In the decades following Independence, the eruption of Naga insurgency in India also caused concerns to Myanmar as it also has a substantial Naga population within its territory.

In order to prevent a trans-border Naga insurgency, Myanmar cooperated with India by trying to stop the Naga insurgents from crossing over to its side of the border.[90] Such actions against the Indian rebels were carried out by the Myanmar government in the

subsequent decades as well, albeit, the frequency and intensity of such operations decreased as relations between the two countries gradually soured.[91]

In the early 1990s, as the situation along the border got progressively worse with the increased illegal inflow of drugs, weapons and other contraband, India reached out to Myanmar once again, and sought its cooperation to improve security along their shared border. Consequently, in January 1994, both countries signed an agreement for the maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the border, and a MoU on cooperation between civilian and border authorities as well as a border trade agreement.[92]

These agreements paved the way for establishing several bilateral institutional interactions at various levels such as meetings between government officials – that is, Home Secretary (National Level Talks) and Joint Secretary (Sectoral Level Talks), Border Liaison Officer (Local Level Talks at Moreh/Tamu and Zokhwathar/Rhi and Changlang/Pangsu), Surveyors, and Anti-Narcotics officials of both the countries.

In the meetings, various issues relating to security, the activities of insurgent groups along the international border, arms smuggling, the exchange of intelligence/information, cooperation in the prevention of drug trafficking, smuggling of wildlife articles, border management related issues, capacity building programmes, etc. are discussed. In particular, India has been seeking the cooperation of Myanmar for not allowing anti-India activities of Indian insurgent groups from its territory and dismantling their camps. Myanmar has been gradually showing sensitivity to India's concerns.[93]

The National Level Meeting (NLM) at the Home Secretary/Deputy Home Minister-level is the main forum to discuss security cooperation, consular issues, drug trafficking matters, and liaison between the agencies. The 22nd meeting of this forum was held on October 25-26, 2018 in New Delhi. Counter insurgency and border security issues are discussed in the Regional Border Committee Meeting (RBCs), the 15th meeting of which was held in Imphal on December 10, 2019.[94] India and Myanmar have also constituted a

Joint Boundary Working Group (JBWG) led by the Joint Secretary (Border Management) in the MEA. The 3rd JBWG meeting was held on August 26-27, 2018 in Yangon.[95]

India's constructive engagement with Myanmar resulted in the latter conducting military operations against the Indian insurgents since the mid-1990s; but they were not effective in significantly reducing the levels of insurgency-related violence in the Northeast.[96] However, the imperative to deal with insurgency in the Northeast compelled India to reach out to Myanmar and deepen bilateral security cooperation. Towards this end, India started providing weapons to Myanmar since 2002, for carrying out counter-insurgency operations.[97]

Both the countries have also been reiterating that their territories will not be allowed 'to be used for training, sanctuary, and other operations by terrorist and insurgent organisations, and their operatives.'[98] In a significant development, on May 8, 2014, India and Myanmar signed a MoU on Border Cooperation under which both sides agreed to establish close cooperation and mechanisms for the exchange of information regarding the movement of insurgents and the flow of drugs and arms between their security forces.

They also agreed to conduct coordinated patrolling along the border to fight insurgency, drug trafficking and the illegal flow of weapons.[99] Realising that the development of the border region is a must for the security of the border, both the countries expressed their commitment to it in a MoU on border area development signed in May 2012 in which they agreed to set up several border haats.[100] They also constituted Joint Working Groups (JWGs) to discuss cooperation on border trade and border haats.

Despite these positive developments, India's efforts have achieved mixed results largely because of Myanmar's ambivalent attitude towards the Indian insurgents. This is apparent from the fact that while Myanmar has acted against the Northeast insurgents operating from its territory, it also has been tolerant towards these insurgent camps. This reinforces the argument that the Myanmar army is 'both unable and unwilling' to drive the Indian insurgents from its territory.[101]

It is true that being poorly equipped and thinly stretched, the Myanmar army is unable to effectively control the border areas, and therefore, is incapable to act against the Indian insurgent groups. It is equally true that Myanmar had been following a policy of providing support to the Indian insurgent groups to use them as a bargaining tool vis-à-vis India.[102] Additionally, at the local level, the Myanmar army officers have been accepting bribes and other offers from Indian insurgents in exchange for safe havens and information to compensate for their poor living conditions.[103]

This ambivalent attitude of Myanmar towards Indian insurgents has changed in the last year or so. This is evidenced from the fact that the Myanmar Army acted against the NSCN K rebels in January 2019 and occupied their HQs in Taga in the Sagaing Division. Subsequently, it launched three coordinated military operations with the Indian Army codenamed *Operation Sunrise* in the months of February-March and May-June 2019,[104] and March 2020.[105] In these operations, several rebels were either killed or arrested and training camps belonging to Assamese, Naga and Meitei rebels were dismantled, forcing many of them to cross back into India and surrender.

However, Myanmar has not been quite forthcoming on deepening economic cooperation. As mentioned earlier, Myanmar does not appear to be warm towards opening up additional trading points for border trade. Its reluctance can be observed from the fact that it has not improved transportation and communication links to the existing border trading posts. It has also remained non-committal towards building infrastructure required for operationalising the newly agreed trading posts.[106]

Bhutan

India's border with Bhutan being open and porous, is vulnerable to a number of threats and challenges. One of the major threats is the exploitation of the open border by Indian insurgent groups to cross over to Bhutan with ease and establish safe havens. During the 1990s, insurgent groups such as the ULFA, the NDFB, and the KLO had set up camps in Bhutan to hide from the Indian security forces.

India had expressed its concerns with Bhutan regarding the existence of these camps and had sought active intervention of the Royal Government of the Bhutanese (RGoB) to close them. On its part, the RGoB first tried to resolve the issue peacefully through dialogue; but the insurgent groups refused to cooperate.[107] Finally, on December 15, 2003 the Royal Bhutanese Army launched a military offensive called 'Operation All Clear' against the Indian insurgent groups and demolished their camps, besides killing scores of them.[108]

Following the operation, both the countries realised the imperative of strengthening cooperation in better managing their borders. Accordingly, they established the India-Bhutan Group on Security and Border Management in 2004. The Group held its first two rounds of meetings in March and September 2004 wherein talks between the two countries were held at the level of Secretary.[109] In February 2019, the 13th meeting of the Group was held in Thimpu.[110]

Besides meetings at the national level, a number of meetings are also held between the officials concerned at the local level. These are organised through the Border District Coordination Meeting (BDCM) mechanism between the bordering Indian states and the RGoB to facilitate coordination. In this series, the 23rd BDCM between RGoB and West Bengal was held from October 24-25, 2017 in Thimphu, and the 10th BDCM between RGoB and Assam was held from January 28-29, 2015 in Bongaigaon, Assam.[111]

A number of issues are discussed in these forums such as the smuggling of arms, ammunition, drug, narcotics and FICN, the sharing of information and intelligence, curbing the activities of insurgent groups, immigration, and capacity building of Bhutan in the security area.[112] This mechanism has proved to be very useful in assessing threat perceptions of the two countries from the groups attempting to take advantage of the open border as well as discussing ways of improving the security environment along the border areas.

Notes

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3. Nafis Ahmad, "The Indo-Pakistan Boundary Tribunal, 1949–1950", *Geographical Review*, 43(3), July 1953. Also see, "Inter-Dominion Conference Report of the Committee for Boundary Disputes and Border Incidents Between East-West Bengal, Between East Bengal-Assam and Between East Punjab-West Punjab", in *Agreements Between India and Pakistan Reached at Inter-Dominion Conferences Held at New Delhi in December 1948, Calcutta in April 1948, and Karachi in May 1948, and Some Related Documents*, pp. 33-34 at https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.35519/page/n41, accessed on May 8, 2019.

4. "Report of the India-Pakistan Sub-Committee on Western Borders, Karachi, August 31, 1958", in Avtar Singh Bhasin (ed.), *India-Pakistan Relations 1947-2007, A Documentary Study, Vol-VIII*, New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2012, pp. 7104-7112.

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6. Nafis Ahmad, note 3, p. 330.

7. Willem van Schendel, note 2, p. 101.

8. "Inter-Dominion Conference Report of the Committee for Boundary Disputes and Border Incidents Between East-West Bengal, Between East Bengal-Assam, and Between East Punjab-West Punjab", Nafis Ahmad, note 3.

9. Ibid., p. 36.

10. "Statement by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in the Rajya Sabha on Border Incidents on the India-East Pakistan border, New Delhi, August 18, 1958", see note 4, pp. 6736-6738.

11. For details see, "AIDE MEMOIRE delivered by the Ministry of External Affairs to Pakistan High Commissioner in India M. R. Arshad on 4th February 1955", see note 4, pp. 6996-7000.

12. Ibid., p. 6996.

13. "Minutes of the Indo-Pakistan Secretary level conference on border problems, Karachi, August 30, 1958", see note 4, pp. 7101-7102.

14. *Inter Alia*, the Ground Rules stipulated that the *de facto* boundary should be respected; patrols should be of small size, carry small arms and flags, and inform the other side; forward posts within 150 yards of the border should be setup after mutual agreement; no defensive structure within 150 yards will be allowed; persons who inadvertently crossed the border should be returned immediately, immediate enquiry should be held to resolve disputes; and flags should be used for communication

between posts. For details see, "ANNEXURE-II GROUND RULES FOR BORDER GUARDS", "Agreement between Governments of India and Pakistan regarding procedures to end disputes and incidents along the Indo-West Pakistan Border Areas, New Delhi, January 11, 1960", see note 4, pp. 7132-7133. For the East Pakistan border see, *Agreement between Governments of India and Pakistan Regarding Procedures to End Disputes and Incidents along the Indo-East Pakistan Border Areas*, New Delhi, October 23, 1959 at https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6179/Agreement+regarding+Procedures+to+End+Border+Disputes+E+Pakistan, accessed on May 15, 2019.

15. Ibid.

16. "Joint Communiqué issued at the end of the India-Pakistan Conference to Review on the Ground Rules for patrolling the Punjab India-West Pakistan Border, New Delhi, August 26, 1961", see note 4, p. 7154.

17. "Letter from UN Secretary General U. Thant to the Government of India informing it of the nomination of the Chairman of the Kutch Tribunal, as requested by both India and Pakistan and sent through India's Permanent Representative at the UN, G. Parathsarathy, who forwarded it to Foreign Secretary C. S. Jha, New York, 16/17 December 1965", in Avtar Singh Bhasin (ed.), *India-Pakistan Relations 1947–2007, A Documentary Study, Vol. VII*, New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2012, pp. 5561-5563.

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The Next Steps

India's approach to border management has evolved in response to the cross-border threats, challenges and opportunities that the country faced over the decades. In the initial years post-Independence, political leaders in New Delhi were largely unaware of the nature and location of the country's borders. Much of their understanding of India's international borders were also influenced by the British frontier policies as well as the conviction that friendly relations with neighbours guarantee a peaceful and secure borders.

Despite the war with Pakistan in 1947-48 and the Chinese takeover of Xinjiang and Tibet in 1949-50 with potential security ramifications for India, not much efforts were made by the Government of India to clearly define the country's international borders and secure them. At the most it stationed the armed forces in J&K to defend the state against any potential invasion by Pakistan and along India-China border, the government tried to bring the frontier areas under its administrative control by building transportation lines. Resource and technology constraints as well as preoccupation with other internal matters also restricted government's attention and efforts in this respect.

Besides these conventional threats, India was also facing non-conventional threats such as raids, kidnappings, trespassing, smuggling, etc. from across its borders. Even though these threats were widespread and common, they were perceived as law and order problems falling under the purview of the respective state governments. And therefore, the responsibility of guarding the international borders were entrusted to the respective border states. The state governments deployed the armed police to secure the borders, who were assisted by small units of the CRPF.

It was only after India faced its first set of threats in the form of large scale armed intrusion from China in 1962 and later from Pakistan in 1965, which culminated in wars with these two countries, that policymakers woke up to the necessity of implementing effective measures for guarding the country's borders. These two wars revealed that state police assisted by the CRPF were incapable of thwarting intrusions by armed adversaries along the borders and therefore there was an urgent need to raise well-trained and well equipped border guarding forces with proper mandates, roles and duties to act as the first line of defence. Accordingly, the ITBP and the BSF were raised in 1962 and 1965 to guard the India-China and India-Pakistan borders respectively.

Consequent to the wars, borders with China and Pakistan became hard and highly regulated borders. At the same time, imperatives of open borders with Nepal and Bhutan and a semi-regulated border with Myanmar necessitated that these borders be kept soft and lightly guarded to facilitate easy cross-border movements of border inhabitants.

The second major reform in the country's border security arrangement was effected in the 1980s when India faced a second set of threats in the form of Sikh militancy and largescale drug smuggling in Punjab. Sikh militants demanding an independent Khalistan found a willing ally in Pakistan, who not only hosted, trained and provided them with arms and explosives but also facilitated their infiltration into Punjab.

Availability of safe havens in Pakistan and the ability to cross the border with arms and explosives as well as a fearful border population allowed the Sikh militants to sustained their movement and carry out terror activities with impunity. One way to tackle the insurgency was to cut off access of the Sikh militants to the training camps and weapons in Pakistan. This was achieved by comprehensively securing the borders by constructing fences all along the Punjab border and strengthening the border guarding forces with manpower as well as sophisticated weapons and equipment for surveillance and interception.

By 1993, the entire border of Punjab with Pakistan was fenced off and the strength of the BSF was raised to 149 battalion. Alongside, schemes such as BADP for the development of infrastructure along the border were also initiated not only to facilitate the deployment of border guarding forces but also to provide basic facilities to the border residents. These measures were aimed at instilling a sense of security in the border people against militancy as well as hostile propaganda of Pakistan.

Besides cross border movement of militants, Punjab border also witnessed increasing trend of drug smuggling. Since these threats were emanating from Pakistani territory, India solicited the cooperation of Pakistan in finding a solution through institutional engagements based on mutual trust. These engagements paved the way for cooperation between border guarding forces as well as narcotics control agencies of both the countries, especially in the field of information sharing regarding smugglers and traffickers. The measures to secure and develop Punjab's international borders and establishment of bilateral institutional mechanisms served as a template for border management to be replicated in rest of India's international borders in subsequent years.

A more comprehensive overhaul of India's border management practices was brought about in the wake of the Kargil war of 1999. The war yet again brought to the fore huge gaps in India's efforts in securing its borders against armed intrusions and other threats. Following the war, the government set up a Task Force on Border Management, which suggested sweeping reforms in the management of Indian's borders.

Based on the recommendations, the government undertook a slew of measures to address the shortcomings in border security arrangement. To begin with, a single border guarding force was assigned to a single border under the 'one border one force' principle. The aim was to ensure accountability by ending the problems of coordination among various border guarding forces deployed along a single border.

The SSB, which was raised in 1962 was renamed, restructured and designated as border guarding forces to be deployed along

India-Nepal and India Bhutan borders. The AR was also designated as a border guarding force and given the responsibility of guarding the India-Myanmar border. The government also sanctioned funds to fence and floodlit the entire India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh borders as well as to construct more BOPs to improve patrolling and surveillance of the borders.

Border guarding forces were provided with an array of electronic devices for remote surveillance to enhance their detection and interception capabilities. Infrastructural and basic facilities available to the border guarding forces were also improved. In addition, steps were taken for a balanced and integrated development of the border areas with emphasis on peoples' participation. For this purposes, the guidelines of the BADP were periodically revised and funding for the schemes were increased. Most importantly, the Government of India established the Department of Border management under the Ministry of Home Affairs to focus exclusively on border security issues.

As is evident, almost all the measures that were hitherto taken to secure the borders were in response to the threats that India faced from across its international borders. Consequently, India's border management approach was predominantly security centric with emphasis on hardening the borders to cross-border trade and travel and keeping the border areas underdeveloped to act as a buffer against external conventional threats. This approach was further reinforced by insular and restrictive economic policies which gradually reduced India's trade with the neighbours, making South Asia the least integrated regions in the world.

Hostile and uncooperative attitude of the neighbours also compelled India to secure its borders unilaterally. Such a restrictive attitude towards its borders, however, could not persist for long as forces of globalisation and liberalisation in post-Cold War era coupled with an underperforming economy and balance of payment crisis forced India to open up for greater international trade. India's efforts to integrate with the Southeast Asian economies through the Look East Policy was one such initiative.

Trade liberalisation and lifting of restrictions allowed greater foreign investments in the country as well as freed the Indian

private sectors from state controls allowing them to compete and outperform state run public sector undertakings. The inflow of investments together with a booming private sector contributed to high levels of economic growth.

By the turn of the century, increased trade with the world ushered in prosperity in the country and a growing realisation that economic integration at the regional and global level is the key to growth and reducing poverty. But for that to happen, the borders had to be perceived as bridges between India and its neighbours rather than barriers. Such attitudinal change towards the country's border areas was gradually brought about as the Indian economy grew and the country gained more confidence and resources.

Now, greater emphasis was being laid on the development of border areas and restoring severed lines of communication with its neighbours through increased investments in building transportation networks both within the border as well as beyond. Notably, a number of road and railway projects were launched under the Prime Ministers' Initiative schemes, especially in the Northeast which borders Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, Bhutan and Nepal. In addition, infrastructural development such as ICPs, LCSs, banks, utilities, etc. at major entry/exit points along the international border points for smoothening movement of passenger and cargo has also been initiated.

India also simplified visa rules and regulations to promote trade and tourism. Most importantly, India invited its neighbours to share its prosperity and become partners in the growth and development of the region. The establishment of a tariff free trade regime among the South Asian neighbours with the implementation of SAPTA and SAFTA was one such step towards cooperative development of the region. Change in the political dispensation in the neighbouring countries together with India's constructive engagements with them further created conducive environment for deepening bilateral relations and smooth implementation of variously cross-border infrastructural projects effectively.

Improved relations also provided avenues for India and its neighbours to reactivate and reinvigorate institutionalised bilateral

interactions to discuss and resolve various border disputes. The ratification of the LBA in 2015, the delineation of the India-Nepal border on strip maps and the start of the process of demarcation of the border marked the resolution of long pending border disputes that India had with two of its important neighbours.

Regular interactions between the border guarding forces as well as regulatory and law enforcement agencies of India and their counterparts at various levels have also succeeded, to a large extent, in sensitising to each other about their security concerns paving the way for evolving a cooperative mechanism, both at the local as well as that national levels. The implementation of the coordinated border management plan and SOP for repatriation of victims of human trafficking between India and Bangladesh as well as the formalisation of FMR and the facilitation of movement of people through the land border with Myanmar are some of the positive outcomes of the processes of institutionalised engagements. In addition, initiation of border trade acted as a robust confidence building measure between India and its neighbours besides bringing prosperity and a sense of well-being for the inhabitants of the remote areas.

While implementation of a comprehensive mechanism for border management has improved security and efficiency of India's international borders, persistence of various cross-border threats, especially infiltration by terrorists and trafficking of narcotics, etc., indicate that India has to continuously balance between softening its borders to enable legitimate trade and travel and hardening them as a barrier against cross-border terrorism and crime.

In fact, the terror attacks on military stations in Pathankot and Uri are grim reminders that unless borders are not properly secured, the country's security will continue to remain vulnerable. The quest for improving border security propelled the Indian government to explore new systems involving greater use of high technologies. The CIBMS, which is being tested in three stretches along the international borders is presented as a robust and integrated system which would address the gaps in the present system of border security by seamlessly integrating human resources, weapons, and surveillance equipment.

The CIBMS aims to improve the 'situational awareness' of border areas by replacing manual surveillance with high tech equipment as well as reaction capabilities of the border guarding forces. If the system is successfully implemented then it will a paradigmatic shift in the way India's international borders are guarded. At the same time, India is also focussed on trade and travel facilitation at the border points by improving transparency, using technology, simplifying procedures, and developing infrastructure. The ratification of the TFA in April 2016 and the establishment of NCTF are positive steps towards achieving these goals.

The measures undertaken for improving security and efficiency along the borders are comprehensive and much awaited but will take some time to come to fruition. Meanwhile, the government should focus its attention remedying inadequacies that are undermining the current border management system. To start with, the problem of manpower shortage among various border guarding forces should be addressed and their working and living conditions improved. Concomitantly, the training of the border guarding forces should be customised not only to acquire greater technological skills but also to sensitise them about the local culture and tradition.

This is important because an understanding of the local cultural milieu will facilitate meaningful dialogue between the border guarding personnel and the local people and help them garner local support for their activities. At the same time, the government should undertake sustained community interaction programmes to sensitise the border residents about their strategic location and encourage them to work as 'ears and eyes' for the security agencies. The government should also encourage the local people to participate in their own economic development and develop a stake in keeping the borders peaceful and crime free.

The next issue that the government should focus on is cutting down on delays in land acquisition and environmental clearance for development of infrastructure and improve connectivity in the border areas. While remedial actions are being initiated to address these issues, the one thing that the Union government should do to expedite this process is to impress upon the state governments

about the importance of border management and persuade them to actively participate/cooperate in implementing various measures formulated to improve the security and efficiency of the country's international borders. The state governments should also be adequately incentivised for this purpose.

Furthermore, for ensuring greater coordination and synergies among organisations involved in border management, the government should establish coordination committees at the district and state levels. These committees should include representatives from civil administration, border guarding forces, customs, immigration, narcotics bureau, etc., and should meet regularly to discuss border security and management issues.

International borders are best managed when neighbours cooperate to secure their mutual borders. For such cooperation to materialise, political and diplomatic initiatives require to be carefully crafted. India has been constructively engaging its neighbours so that they remain sensitive to India's security concerns. In fact, military operations undertaken by Myanmar and Bhutan to crack down on Indian insurgent groups as well as handing out leaders of Indian insurgent groups by Bangladesh are successful outcomes of these engagements.

India should maintain this momentum of constructive engagements with its neighbours. It can further deepen such cooperation by assisting its smaller neighbours in strengthening their border guarding capabilities by providing them with training and resources. Development of the shared border areas is yet another area of cooperation that India should explore more vigorously with its neighbours for a secure and peaceful border.

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This book attempts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the circumstances which have shaped India's approach towards its international borders and the framework it has developed to better manage its borders. The book argues that persistence of various cross-border threats and challenges and an absence of robust intra-regional trade among its neighbouring countries forced India to employ a security-centric and unilateral approach to border management with emphasis on hardening the borders to cross-border trade and travel and keeping the border areas underdeveloped to act as a buffer against external conventional threats. However, as India's economy grew and the country gained more confidence and resources, India started perceiving the borders as bridges rather than barriers. Consequently, greater emphasis was being laid on development of border areas and restoring severed lines of communication with its neighbours through increased investments in building transportation networks both within the border as well as beyond. It also started constructively engaging its neighbours to effectively manage its international borders. Besides discussing the threats and challenges that India faces along the borders, the book aims to develop an understanding of India's border management practices by analysing various programmes and initiatives such as the raising of border guarding forces; building of physical and electronic fences; the establishment of modern facilities for smoothening legitimate cross-border travel; the development of the border areas through special programmes; and increasing trade and connectivity as well as other cooperative bilateral mechanisms.

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