

# Emerging Security Threats and Strategic Countermeasures Along India's International Borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar

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## **Abstract:**

India's borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar are intricate and shaped by various geopolitical elements, resulting in considerable security issues that impact regional stability. These challenges include unauthorized immigration, arms, narcotics, drug and human trafficking, insurgency, and various forms of illicit trade. The porous nature of these borders, coupled with rugged terrain, enables unauthorized crossings and illegal activities. This article highlights the emerging threats in these border areas and underscores the pressing need for comprehensive countermeasures. Recommendations focus on enhancing border infrastructure, deploying advanced technological solutions, and fostering both bilateral and multilateral cooperation with neighbouring nations. The findings strongly support an integrated strategy that combines security measures with regional collaboration, promotes a stable domestic environment that fosters social, racial, and communal harmony, and engages in humanitarian and diplomatic efforts. Such a robust framework is crucial for ensuring border safety, protecting national interests, and promoting lasting peace in the region.

**Keywords:** Border Security, Security Threat, Cross-border Terrorism, Rohingya Refugees, Illegal Migration, Arms Trafficking, Narcotics Smuggling, Regional Cooperation, Counter-Terrorism, Domestic Stability, Communal Harmony, Social Cohesion.

## **1. Introduction:**

India shares a 4,096-kilometer border with Bangladesh and a 1,643-kilometer boundary with Myanmar. These borders carry profound strategic and historical significance, serving as vital conduits for trade, cultural exchanges, and diplomatic relations. However, they also pose considerable security challenges that impact national cohesion and regional stability. This paper explores the principal emerging threats and delves into effective strategies for addressing them. Key concerns include illegal immigration, transnational crime, insurgency, and smuggling, all of which complicate the security landscape. The dangers associated with these borders are multifaceted and extensive. To address these vulnerabilities, it is imperative to bolster surveillance capabilities while simultaneously promoting enhanced cooperation among law enforcement agencies across states.



Additionally, fostering social, racial, and communal harmony, alongside engaging local communities, is crucial. Through these efforts, the nation can fortify its borders while spurring economic development and nurturing cultural exchanges through regional collaboration and comprehensive security measures. Achieving a harmonious balance between security and openness is vital for preserving border integrity in an increasingly interconnected global environment.

## 2. Evolving Security Threats along India's Borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar:

The borders between India and Bangladesh, as well as India and Myanmar, present various emerging security threats driven by a mix of geopolitical, socio-economic, and internal factors. These issues manifest in

several ways, including cross-border terrorism and insurgency, illegal migration, and drug trafficking. The porous nature of the India-Bangladesh border allows insurgent groups to operate and seek refuge, leading to potential security challenges. Similarly, the ongoing conflicts in Myanmar, particularly involving the Rohingya and other ethnic groups pose risks through cross-border movements that can destabilize India's north-eastern states.

Illegal migration presents a major challenge, mainly attributed to the reportedly constant influx of migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar, which is said to result in demographic changes and social pressures in India. The ongoing political turmoil in Myanmar has intensified the arrival of refugees. While local communities are currently managing their resources, a surge in refugee numbers would likely result in resource shortages, particularly since armed groups could potentially infiltrate the country under the guise of being refugees. Furthermore, drug trafficking originating from the Golden Triangle exacerbates organized crime, complicating law enforcement efforts and further destabilizing vulnerable border regions.

Furthermore, issues such as ethnic and sectarian tensions, exacerbated by ongoing military conflicts in Myanmar, create a volatile environment that spills over into India. Climate change and resource conflicts, driven by flooding and rising sea levels, also pose significant challenges to regional stability. Ultimately, China's growing impact in Myanmar is demonstrated through projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, adds another dimension to the

security dilemma for India. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires comprehensive border management, enhanced regional cooperation, domestic social and communal cohesion, and effective engagement with neighbouring countries to tackle the root causes of instability.

### **3. Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration at India's Borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar:**

The borders of India with Bangladesh and Myanmar are critical zones for human trafficking and unauthorized migration, primarily fuelled by socio-economic inequalities, political turmoil, and weak border security. Along the border with Bangladesh, a notable influx consists of Rohingya refugees escaping persecution in Myanmar, frequently navigating through dense forests and isolated regions. Traffickers exploit this situation, often subjecting these migrants to forced labour and sexual exploitation, among other abuses. On the Myanmar border, the trafficking issue extends beyond human beings, involving the smuggling of various items, from counterfeit goods to endangered species. These areas facilitate intricate and highly illicit networks that take advantage of challenging landscapes and minimal surveillance, complicating the efforts to monitor and control illegal movements effectively.

In response to the escalating issues of human trafficking and unlawful immigration, India has implemented a range of strategic initiatives. Recent enhancements in border security have increased the deployment of Border Security Force (BSF) personnel equipped with advanced surveillance technologies, such as drones, infrared cameras, and biometric systems, aimed at detecting and preventing unauthorized crossings. Stringent anti-trafficking legislation has been enacted, and the victim protection framework has been bolstered to provide assistance and rehabilitation for survivors. Bilateral cooperation is crucial, with India engaging in discussions and agreements with Bangladesh and Myanmar to improve border management and share intelligence regarding trafficking operations. Additionally, community outreach and public awareness campaigns are being launched to inform vulnerable populations about the dangers of trafficking and to mitigate the demand for exploited labour and services.

Despite these initiatives, significant obstacles persist in combating human trafficking and illegal migration along India's eastern borders. The extensive and rugged geography, coupled with insufficient infrastructure in remote locations, hampers effective surveillance and rapid response efforts. Corruption and a lack of coordination between various law enforcement agencies further undermine enforcement activities. Continued political unrest and humanitarian crises in neighbouring areas contribute to the ongoing issues of illegal migration and trafficking. To address these challenges, India must focus on substantial investments in comprehensive border infrastructure. Enhancing interagency collaboration and providing sufficient training for border security personnel are essential steps. Furthermore, regional development initiatives aimed at addressing the underlying causes of migration - such as creating new economic opportunities and supporting conflict resolution in neighbouring countries - will be vital for long-term solutions. A multifaceted approach that integrates security measures, legal reforms, and socio-economic strategies will enable India to tackle the threats of human trafficking and unauthorized migration along its borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar more efficiently.

### **4. Effects of the Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh on India:**

The Rohingya crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh has significant security implications for India, especially concerning its north-eastern states. The influx of refugees into Bangladesh risks spilling over into Indian territory, exacerbating issues related to illegal migration, human trafficking, and the

smuggling of arms and drugs. Additionally, extremist groups may exploit the situation for recruitment, which could increase insurgency in border areas, heightening the region's vulnerability.

This crisis has also highlighted India's humanitarian role within the region. With Bangladesh hosting over a million Rohingya refugees, the pressure on its resources - such as food, healthcare, and shelter - has become substantial. India's assistance, including aid and infrastructure support in refugee camps, demonstrates its commitment to regional stability. However, a prolonged crisis could overwhelm India's own resources, particularly if illegal migration intensifies or demands for intervention escalate.

The situation further complicates India's geopolitical relationships with Bangladesh and Myanmar. Balancing its strategic ties with Myanmar while supporting Bangladesh in addressing the refugee crisis poses a considerable challenge. India's efforts to facilitate the safe and voluntary repatriation of Rohingyas underscore its commitment to regional peace, but ongoing instability could adversely impact its Act East Policy, various economic initiatives, and the overall security landscape of the region.

### **5. Impact of Alleged Religious Discord in India on Bangladesh's Political Instability:**

The purported increase in religious conflict and communal strife in India has reportedly had a considerable impact on the political scene in Bangladesh, a nation with strong cultural and historical connections to its neighbour. As social and communal unrest escalates in India, it has fostered anti-Indian sentiments among many Bangladeshis, further complicating an already fragile relationship and obstructing diplomatic interactions between the two countries.

The former Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, encountered criticism due to her alleged pro-India policies. Opposition parties, such as the BNP and various Islamist groups, capitalized on public dissatisfaction to accuse her of prioritizing Indian interests over national ones. This environment weakened her popular support and exacerbated existing communal tensions, challenging her commitment to the secular values that underpinned her government. In Bangladesh, there was widespread public outrage over several contentious matters related to India, including the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), rising communal strife affecting minority communities, and numerous border-related disputes. This escalating discontent fostered a conducive atmosphere for the Islamist groups aligned with the BNP, enhancing their influence. Consequently, the increasing opposition to the government's policies and actions ultimately resulted in a significant decline in support for her administration, leading to her eventual political downfall.

The evolving political situation in Bangladesh holds profound consequences for the stability of the entire region and possesses the potential to obstruct collaborative efforts aimed at addressing the pressing issue of terrorism. Disruptions stemming from these political changes may have a detrimental effect on the economic ties that have been established between Bangladesh and India. In addition, should tensions between India and Bangladesh intensify, there is a risk that this might, somewhat unintentionally, reinforce the strategic interests and operations of Pakistan and China within the region.

The shifting political dynamics in Bangladesh do not merely impact the national security of India; they also reverberate through India's internal political climate and have significant implications for the bilateral relationship shared between India and Bangladesh. As a consequence, fluctuations in the political landscape of Bangladesh could lead to substantial repercussions that extend beyond just the immediate neighbouring countries, influencing the broader geopolitical dynamics characteristic of the entire region. The interconnectedness of these elements underscores the importance of monitoring the political developments in Bangladesh closely along with maintaining social and communal harmony in

India, as they may ultimately shape the future of regional cooperation, security, and economic collaboration.

## **6. Challenges in Fencing the Indo-Myanmar and Indo-Bangladesh Border:**

The Indo-Myanmar border presents significant challenges when it comes to fencing. Spanning an extensive 1,643 kilometre. The geographical features of the terrain, along with the social and political dynamics, render the task of fencing the extensive Indo-Myanmar border particularly challenging and intimidating. The landscape is highly intricate, characterized by jungles, hills, and riverine areas that complicate both the construction and upkeep of fences. Additionally, the frequent and heavy monsoon rains often lead to flooding, which further compromises the fencing infrastructure. The construction and ongoing maintenance in such areas pose considerable difficulties, especially under the prevailing climatic conditions.

In addition to physical barriers, issues such as smuggling, illegal migration, and insurgent activities intensify security concerns, highlighting the need for a holistic strategy beyond just fencing. The task of securing these borders is made even more complex by the often-contentious collaboration needed with neighbouring countries, which can be hindered by political sensitivities.

The openness of this border facilitates movement; however, it has also been exploited by insurgents, traffickers, and smugglers. Attempts to erect fences are often met with resistance from local communities, which have deep cultural and economic ties on both sides. Many indigenous tribes oppose fencing as it disrupts their traditional connections and economic activities.

Numerous border villages exist, and NGOs contend that fencing disrupts the daily lives and economies of local communities, as cross-border movement is a common practice. The absence of distinct ethnic or cultural boundaries, coupled with strong familial connections that span the borders, complicates enforcement efforts significantly.

Additionally, the border is plagued by demarcation disputes with Myanmar, further complicated by a lack of accurate maps and border markers. The remote nature of the region and insufficient infrastructure impede effective monitoring and patrolling of the border.

Building a fence requires substantial resources, time, and technological investment. Security concerns must not overshadow humanitarian considerations, particularly regarding the rights and needs of border communities.

Effective border management will involve collaboration with Myanmar, investing in infrastructure enhancements, fostering relationships with local populations, and employing advanced surveillance technology. These efforts should be balanced with targeted fencing in high-risk areas, ensuring that local livelihoods are preserved while addressing security needs.

Therefore, it is wise to begin fencing the Indo-Myanmar border only after thoroughly assessing the situation on the ground and understanding the sentiments of the local populace, starting with areas that are undisputed and uninhabited. Making a unilateral decision to proceed with fencing without considering local opinions may alienate the communities residing on both sides of the border from the government.

Efforts to construct fences must carefully balance the need for security with the interests of local ecosystems and communities, underscoring the importance of an integrated and cooperative approach.

The fencing along the entire 4,096-kilometer Indo-Bangladesh border has been successfully completed, covering approximately 80% of the total border length. This initiative is aimed at enhancing control over

illegal immigration, smuggling, and infiltration of miscreants and insurgents in the border areas. It reflects the government's commitment to bolstering security and maintaining order along this vital boundary.

Despite the considerable progress, 20% of the border remains unfenced. This is primarily due to challenging terrains, densely populated areas, riverine pockets, and unresolved border disputes. The government is concentrating its efforts on securing the most vulnerable locations while also addressing these difficult circumstances.

To monitor the unfenced sections, the government is leveraging an upgraded surveillance system that includes drones and cameras. Ongoing efforts are in place to finalize the boundaries of these open areas; however, progress is sometimes hindered by logistical issues and diplomatic complexities that need to be navigated.

### **7. Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Arms and Narcotics Measures by India along its Border with Bangladesh and Myanmar:**

India's borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar are critical from both counter-terrorism and anti-narcotics perspectives, due to their significant geographical, socio-political, and economic implications. The porous nature of these borders, coupled with dense forests and hilly terrain, facilitates the movement of insurgents, smugglers, and traffickers. This region serves as a transit point for arms and narcotics from Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle into India. To combat these challenges, India has prioritized enhancing security infrastructure and fostering bilateral cooperation with both neighbours.

In response to the threat of cross-border terrorism, India has implemented various initiatives, such as bolstering surveillance through modern technologies like drones, thermal cameras, and radars. The government has deployed additional personnel from the Border Security Force (BSF) along the Bangladesh border and the Assam Rifles along the Myanmar border to strengthen its defensive posture. Counter-terrorism efforts emphasize precise intelligence gathering, collaboration with state law enforcement, and the exchange of actionable intelligence with both Bangladesh and Myanmar, which greatly weakens regional insurgent organizations like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). The issue of illegal arms trafficking from Myanmar remains a concern for India. Increased patrols and sophisticated detection mechanisms, including X-ray scanners and night-vision devices, have been introduced along the borders. Joint operations with Myanmar, such as Operation Sunrise, aim to disrupt arms supply routes used by insurgents. Collaborating closely with Bangladesh under the Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) has also helped limit arms smuggling, promoting regional stability.

The proximity of India to the Golden Triangle, a major opium and heroin producer, makes it susceptible to narcotics trafficking. India's Narcotics Control Bureau works in conjunction with local agencies and international partners to intercept smuggled consignments and dismantle trafficking networks. Moreover, Yaba tablets, a form of methamphetamine, present a growing challenge on the Bangladesh border. Strengthened bilateral cooperation, intelligence sharing, and community mobilization campaigns are underway to address this issue.

While India has made progress in curbing border-related threats, challenges persist due to difficult terrain and socio-economic issues in border regions. To mitigate these challenges, India must invest in infrastructure, community engagement, and technology-driven solutions. Strengthening regional ties and securing international support will be vital for ensuring enduring peace and security along these critical

borders. A comprehensive approach integrating economic development, counter-insurgency measures, and rigorous enforcement measures is necessary to address these complex issues effectively.

### **8. Strategies to Address Issues along the Bangladesh and Myanmar Borders:**

India has undertaken several countermeasures to address the persistent challenges along its borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar, aiming to bolster security and mitigate threats like cross-border terrorism, arms trafficking, and narcotics smuggling. One of the key initiatives is the construction of border fencing, which serves as a physical barrier to restrict unauthorized movement. Complementing this are advanced border surveillance systems, including CCTV cameras, drones, and radar technologies, which enhance real-time monitoring and detection capabilities. These measures aim to curb infiltration and improve border management efficiency.

India has also strengthened its border security apparatus by augmenting the capabilities of forces like the Border Security Force (BSF) and Assam Rifles. Their increased presence and enhanced patrolling along the borders play a vital role in deterring illegal activities. Intelligence-sharing arrangements with Bangladesh and Myanmar have been pivotal in identifying and neutralizing security threats, particularly insurgent activities and trafficking networks. Diplomatic engagements with both neighbours have further facilitated dialogue on border disputes and strengthened cooperation to address shared security concerns, showcasing a commitment to regional stability.

While these measures have significantly enhanced India's border security, the challenges remain dynamic and multifaceted. Porous terrains, socio-political complexities, and the involvement of transnational networks necessitate continuous vigilance and adaptability in counter-strategies. Ongoing investments in technology, infrastructure, and bilateral collaboration, alongside socio-economic development in border areas, are crucial for long-term solutions. By adopting a holistic and proactive approach, India can better address these challenges and safeguard its national interests effectively.

Use of modern technology would mainly be improving the efficiency and effectiveness of managing border security. High surveillance technology, drones, automated checkpoints, and biometric verification would majorly help in monitoring across borders, therefore reducing the risks of illegal migration, trafficking, and terrorism. With real-time data from such technologies, swift decision making is enabled, thus granting the security forces the capability to respond before serious threats materialize. The secured communications networks will thus ensure smooth coordination between the border agencies of both countries and bring about a seamless system of security whereby the challenges are dealt with effectively.

### **9. Literature Review:**

India shares extensive international borders with Bangladesh (4,096 km) and Myanmar (1,643 km), which are characterized by their long and porous nature, creating distinct security challenges rooted in socio-economic factors. Major concerns include illegal migration, cross-border insurgency, and trafficking in drugs, arms, and humans (Das, 2020). Efficient management of these borders is crucial for national security, warranting strategic and customized solutions.

The varied geography of these borders - featuring riverine areas along the Indo-Bangladesh frontier and hilly landscapes on the Indo-Myanmar border - poses significant operational hurdles for security forces. As Dasgupta (2018) points out, insurgents take advantage of the challenging terrain and dense forests

that are often lacking in effective physical barriers. Furthermore, the cultural ties among border communities complicate the enforcement of laws.

The Indo-Myanmar border is home to insurgent factions such as NSCN and ULFA, while the Indo-Bangladesh border sees threats from groups like Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). Singh (2019) emphasizes that cross-border networks enhance the logistical and recruitment capabilities of these groups, highlighting the necessity for coordinated efforts like Operation Sunrise.

Both borders are afflicted by smuggling and trafficking of narcotics, arms, and human beings. Chakraborty and Mishra (2021) note that the proximity to the Golden Triangle exacerbates drug smuggling along the Indo-Myanmar border, whereas cattle smuggling remains prevalent on the Indo-Bangladesh border. These illegal operations not only finance insurgent groups but also contribute to corruption and undermine border governance.

Illegal migration from Bangladesh has historically put a strain on resources and has fostered social unrest in border states like Assam and West Bengal (Baruah, 2020). Additionally, the crisis involving Rohingya refugees has further complicated security dynamics along the Indo-Myanmar border, increasing the challenges related to border management.

Despite advancements in Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) and Border Outposts (BOPs), significant technological gaps continue to exist. Dutta (2022) highlights the inadequate deployment of advanced technologies such as drones, radars, and thermal imaging, which limits the capability of security forces to react effectively to emerging threats.

For effective border management, bilateral cooperation is crucial. Initiatives such as the Coordinated Border Management Plan with Bangladesh and joint military operations with Myanmar have shown promise, including the successful neutralization of militant bases during Operation Sunrise. Nevertheless, Sharma (2021) points out that political sensitivities frequently delay counter-insurgency measures.

Building a fence along the Indo-Bangladesh border has proven somewhat effective in reducing illegal activities; however, infrastructural gaps and enclaves hinder its overall effectiveness (Chakraborty, 2018). Moreover, the absence of a clearly defined border on the Indo-Myanmar side poses significant challenges (Mehta, 2019).

Strategies focused on community involvement are increasingly recognized as fundamental to securing borders. Gupta (2021) advocates for the inclusion of border communities in intelligence gathering and initiatives aimed at building mutual trust. By addressing the socio-economic vulnerabilities of these communities, reliance on criminal networks can be diminished.

An effective strategy for border management must integrate advanced technology, foster bilateral cooperation, and promote socio-economic development. Strengthening institutional frameworks, enhancing inter-agency coordination, and investing in community resilience will be essential in tackling the ongoing challenges along India's borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar.

The Bangladesh-Myanmar border hosts increased tensions in terms of environmental degradation, especially from illegal logging, forest clearance, and encroachment into protected areas. In many cases, illegal activities take advantage of the ecologically sensitive zones on both sides, wherein Chittagong Hill Tracts and Rakhine State are concerned; not only does it cause physical devastation to the environment but also increases social conflicts within local communities and between the armed groups. Therefore, security in the borders is heavily reliant on environmental security. Alam, for example, comments that "if regional cooperation enhances in natural resources management, some of the potential



conflicts would be more easily answered through environmental concerns management" (Alam, 2020). Also, the issue surrounding waterways, for example, the sharing of Naf River waterways can create more tension and, therefore, fair resource management becomes a pressing diplomatic issue on its own merit (Siddiqui, 2021).

Mechanisms for border security are very important for Bangladesh and Myanmar. Khan states that Border Guard Bangladesh is an integral force to safeguard areas such as Chittagong Hill Tracts, which have been struck by insurgency and cross border terrorism. It monitors illegal crossing, trafficking, and insurgent activities that at times happen to be challenging jobs due to adverse topography and resources. Likewise, Myanmar's Border Guard Police shares copious challenges with border demarcation alongside turbulence within the country. According to Hossain (2020), the two nations should share intelligence with one another to enhance cooperation as well as optimize their border control initiatives efficaciously. The Rohingya refugee crisis, which manifested through violence within Myanmar, has thereby also opened up an opportunity for human trafficking and undocumented immigration. Over a million Rohingyas have entered Bangladesh, exposing the porous border to traffickers targeting these vulnerable individuals (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2020). Both the refugees and the host country are severely at risk due to human trafficking, which is now used to engage people in the sex industry and forced labour. For example, economic instability has led people of both countries across borders in the hope of better opportunities. Such crimes can be addressed through increasing security measures at borders to reduce the socio-economic burdens that fall on those affected communities (Mishra, 2021).

#### **10. Role of Regional Organizations: SAARC and BIMSTEC:**

Organizations like SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) tackle border security issues in South Asia. The SAARC Secretariat emphasizes that regional collaboration is essential for tackling military, socioeconomic, and environmental threats. BIMSTEC has been instrumental in promoting collaboration on counterterrorism efforts and strengthening economic relationships among India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and other regional participants. These regional organizations serve as forums for dialogue, allowing member countries to negotiate shared security concerns and adopt a cohesive approach to border management.

#### **11. Conclusion:**

From India's perspective, effectively addressing the growing security challenges along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border requires a comprehensive and collaborative strategy. The region's complex landscape, characterized by ethnic tensions, political instability, and economic struggles, demands thoughtful responses that tackle the root causes of insecurity. India should prioritize long-term initiatives aimed at combating insurgency, illegal immigration, human trafficking, and drug trafficking, while fostering cooperation among local communities, state governments, and international partners. Strengthening diplomatic ties with Bangladesh and Myanmar, as well as maintaining social and communal cohesion domestically, will be vital for regional stability. By combining development, dialogue, and diplomacy with robust security measures, India can contribute to a secure and prosperous regional environment, aligning with its broader strategic goals and commitment to peace and cooperation.

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