



Protracted Security Threats at the Bangladesh-Myanmar Border: A Holistic Approach to Peace and Security

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ABSTRACT

The Bangladesh-Myanmar border is one of the unstable regions in South Asia considering its complicated politics and security processes. This border is mixed with the multidimensional issues as well as political instability in Myanmar, including ineffective border controls, the Rohingya refugee crisis, and other unconventional security issues. This paper analyzes the security threats arising out of this porous border and possible solutions.

This study has adopted a qualitative research methodology in which the literatures have been analyzed from the policy documents and respectable media sources. This assists in defining the major forces behind the border security and their effects on the national security of Bangladesh. The results indicate that the Rohingya crisis is now a constant menace that had boosted the illicit drug, arms, and human trafficking, and even a long term political instability in Myanmar and other cross-border crimes along the border. The border instability has also been augmented by the emergence of non-state actors like the Arakan Army in Myanmar's Rakhain State. This paper provides a holistic approach to the border management through the incorporation of proactive diplomacy, improved security coordination, and socio-economic development of border communities. This study is a contribution in the debate that still exists in regard to the border security and policy recommendation by emphasizing on the regional stability. Therefore, the paper aims to transform the Bangladesh-Myanmar border as a zone of instability to a zone of cooperation and stability.

KEYWORDS: National security, cross-border security, Rohingya crisis, drug trafficking, regional cooperation

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INTRODUCTION

The Bangladesh-Myanmar border portrays itself to be a strategic bridge between the South and Southeast Asian region, encompassing 168.7 miles as the river and 129.2 miles as the land border. This quite a short, but porous border has long been known as volatile because of the overlaps of complicated ethnic processes, rugged terrain, and cross-border insurgencies (Chowdhury, 2017). The gains of Bangladesh in the recent years have been commissioned as the second largest economy in the Asian region, according to the Asian development bank's basic strategic series report (Prothom Alo, 2025). However, such gains are still exposed to the security threats originating at its Southeastern frontier.

The present Rohingya crisis is considered to be the immediate security issue emanating from the Rakhain State of Myanmar. The huge stream of refugees has raised the complex issues that include the economic and security as well as humanitarian aspects. The arms trafficking, targeted violence and extortion are some of the activities that have been associated with the Rohingya refugees, together with other armed organizations. In addition to the refugee problem, the permeable border faces the transnational predation – human trafficking, chain of drug trafficking via the Golden Triangle and illegal fishing by the nationals of Myanmar in the maritime territory of Bangladesh. The escalation of military-ethnic violence between the army and ethnic militants in Myanmar, particularly the Arakan Army (AA), enhances the threat to peace and security of the region. These activities destabilize the southeastern part of Bangladesh, especially Chittagong and Cox Bazar, which forms a strategic point of tourism, trade, and commerce.

It is essential that the social, geographical, and economic complexities of the border should be perceived

delicately in order to manage it properly. The historical bilateral relations notwithstanding, Bangladesh has faced with a little collaboration with Myanmar because of the political instability that has existed over the years. The solution to these complex threats will foster an integrated effort that considers the strengthened border security controls and accommodating policy.

The significance of these challenges has attracted a considerable scholarly attention. The Bangladesh-Myanmar border has become a focal point of security debate in South Asia where both the traditional and non-traditional threats are mixed with the humanitarian crisis. The current literatures have explored this border from the perspectives of national security, border management with a special focus on the Rohingya crisis, and the cross-border activities.

One of the major contributions in this regard is the work by Raju et al. (2025) who theorize this specific border as a consistent issue of the national security threat to Bangladesh. The authors found that there were a number of non-traditional security threats based on the border such as the drug trafficking, smuggling arms, and other insurgency related spillovers of the Myanmar Rakhain State. The strong aspect of this study is that the political turmoil in Myanmar has been connected to an armed conflict, which intensifies the border vulnerabilities of Bangladesh. Nonetheless, as detailed in the descriptive analyses, the study is mostly incident-based and does not provide much coverage of the wider border governance systems.

The study by Alam and Uddin (2025) is more multifaceted and systematic on the topic of Bangladesh-Myanmar border insecurity. According to their study, the borderlands have been viewed as the lived spaces when the cross-border crime and weak state presence meet, as opposed to the security based analyses. The authors demonstrate that the failure of the border

governance as a major causal factor of the drug trafficking to irregular migration. Their policy remarks add the viable recommendations of the community involvement to the active diplomacy. This works can be considered as a foundational basis for the present work as well.

A complementary perspective is provided by Ahmed, Chowdhury, and Rahman (2020), as they analyze this border through the geopolitical and economic lenses. Their study focuses on the Myanmar's strategic importance and uncover the geopolitical rivalry with the regional and extra-regional powers, most particularly with China and India. They highlight the geostrategic importance of this border as a hub for South Asia and Southeast Asia. This study's major contribution lies in accumulating the great power politics in the analysis of a border relation.

The above studies demonstrate the increasing need to recognize that the Bangladesh-Myanmar border has become a complex security sphere. This particular border needs more attention and given the literatures it can be seen that it is a less explored border in South Asia. This existing literatures focused on the several issues, such as national security, geopolitical, and diplomatic dimension. But the significant gaps remain, as Bangladesh's border security strategy and security threats are mostly discussed descriptively rather than assessed critically.

Therefore, this paper attempts to combine these dimensions to offer a deeper and more detailed insight on this specific border besides offering a holistic and progressive policy suggestions. The paper also seeks to discuss the border security dynamics at the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, with the major aspects that include the causes that prevent the security and stability in the border region. In addition, the paper aims at evaluating the role of irregular migration, cross-

border tension, drug trafficking, and the Rohingya influx in creating the security related vulnerability. The study has examined the current mechanisms and policy relevant measures to intensify the border security and increase a cooperation by curbing the transnational threats. To achieve these objectives, the study has addressed the following research questions: What are the key border security issues that continue to exist along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border? What can Bangladesh do in order to improve the border management and bilateral cooperation with Myanmar to deal with the cross-border threats?

RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, the qualitative research approach using the secondary sources is employed to analyze the cross-border security as a challenge on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. The scholarly literatures such as the peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, newspaper articles, and government reports have been used to analyze both the traditional and non-traditional security threats. The qualitative approach is suitable for analyzing the complex security dynamics and understanding the cross-border security challenges, which are interconnected in nature.

A descriptive research design is employed based on the document analysis to identify the patterns in the cross-border management challenges, militant activity, cross-border including drug trafficking, arms smuggling as well as maritime insecurity. The Bangladesh-Myanmar border is used as a case study due to its growing strategic significance and security implications intermingled with the Rohingya crisis and transnational crimes. The thematic analysis was employed in order to extract the essential data and trends. The study lays an emphasis on the academic readings and trustworthy media that have been published primarily within

the last 10 years to have reliability and validity of the study.

In addition, the relevant policy documents and reports from the governmental and international organizations were consulted to provide a more holistic understanding of the prolonged cross-border security situation. The collected information was categorized into the themes to assess the causes, nature, and broader implications of the security challenges along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE BANGLADESH-MYANMAR RELATIONS

The Bangladesh-Myanmar border, comprising both land and sea borders, is a place of the strategic interest. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar share a 271 km-long land boundary and a maritime boundary comprising 370.40 km of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and 22.22 km of territorial sea (MoFA, n.d.). The maritime boundary dispute was resolved through the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) ruling in 2012, which led to Bangladesh gaining an additional 111,000 sq km in the Bay of Bengal (Hossain, 2024). The strategic location of this border has made it a critical zone where security, sovereignty, and cross-border interactions increasingly intersect.

The border passes through areas marked by the complex terrain, including hills, forests, plains and rivers, and lies adjacent to the Chittagong Hill Tracts region. These regions are home to the multiple ethnic communities who maintain the historical, linguistic and cultural ties with Myanmar, such as the Rakhine residing in the coastal plains (Khan et al., 2007). The Naf River, despite being the natural boundary separating Cox's Bazar from North Rakhine, has become a corridor for the illegal crossings, smuggling, and other illicit activities.

The geographical complexity of this border poses the significant challenges to

the effective border management and remains a persistent security challenge for Bangladesh. By enhancing the security and surveillance systems, Bangladesh can transform these security challenges into the geographical assets.

The geographical closeness, historical, cultural, political, and economical ties as well as the common colonial background mostly determine the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar. The two countries share the similar colonial backgrounds, and both countries have experienced the military rule, which have largely affected their foreign policies (Uddin & Ahmed, 2011). The formal relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar were established on 13 January 1972 and Myanmar became the sixth country to officially recognize Bangladesh. The two countries thereafter enjoyed a stable relationship that was interrupted by the periodic border tensions (Hossain, 2020). This reflects how early cooperative foundations were gradually undermined by the recurring border insecurities and political instability.

Between 1972 and 1985, several agreements were made, including the General Trade Agreement, Refugee Repatriation Agreement, and Land Boundary Agreement that portrayed the efforts to enhance a cooperation between these two countries. The cross-border relations mainly involved the trade, cultural interaction as well as the labour mobility. The relations changed dramatically with the Rohingya crisis that intensified with the military crackdowns in the Rakhine State of Myanmar in 2017. More than a million Rohingya refugees fled to Bangladesh, creating the multifaceted security, humanitarian, and socioeconomic challenges, which further overlapped with the trafficking and cross-border tensions (Parini et al., 2013). This shift marks a turning point where humanitarian pressures became

inseparable from the broader bilateral security and governance challenges.

Despite these challenges, both countries continue to prioritize the border security and cooperation through their regular meetings between the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and Myanmar border forces, as well as the coordinated efforts to manage other migration, regional connectivity, and security incidents (Hossain, 2014). The historical legacy of Bangladesh-Myanmar border relations thus underscores a combination of shared heritage, common interests, and complex challenges, and these efforts also reflect a mutual interest in maintaining stability in the region.

Despite these cross-border challenges, the trade between Bangladesh and Myanmar remains marginal and underdeveloped, though it has enormous potential. The bilateral trade reached its highest level in 2011-12 at approximately USD 84 million but declined sharply thereafter. It remained in a fluctuating state between USD 33 and 75 million over the following years, which can be seen in Figure 1. The main traded goods include the agricultural goods, seafood, textiles, jute products, processed foods, etc. The Bangladesh imports from Myanmar consist primarily of agricultural products

and consumer goods, leading to a trade balance that substantially favors Myanmar.

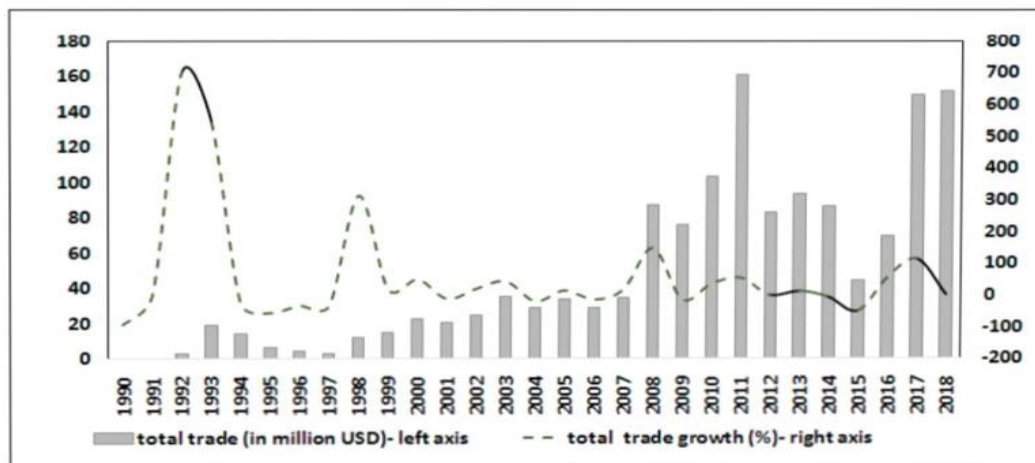
The trade relations of Bangladesh with Myanmar have shown a significant growth over the last 25 years; Bangladesh's exports to Myanmar increased from \$4.02 million in 1995 to \$25 million in 2023 (OEC, 2023). On the other hand, according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) Report (2023), Myanmar's exports to Bangladesh also rose from \$23.6 million in 1995 to \$67.2 million in 2023.

Alongside the formal exchanges, the substantial informal trade between these countries continues across the river and land borders due to a weak border governance system. Though it was assumed that the 2012 maritime boundary resolution would enhance the connectivity between two countries, the absence of agreements on the coastal shipping and prolonged political instability in Rakhin State have hampered progress in the region.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Rohingya influx has transformed into a critical border security challenge for Bangladesh, as its implications extend beyond the humanitarian concerns to the regional instability. The Rohingya

Figure 1
Bangladesh-Myanmar Total Trade (1990-2018)



Source: Created by Roshan Saha, Research Assistant, ORF (Observer Research Foundation)

community is still considered an “illegal immigrant” by the Myanmar military junta, though the historical records contradict this claim. Prior to the military takeover in 1962, the Rohingyas possessed the government-issued identity cards, which indicated their formal recognition as the residents of Myanmar (Chowdhury, 2023). Thus, the issue has evolved into a complex security concern beyond the humanitarian concerns.

Despite the historical evidence, the crisis escalated dramatically in 2017. Myanmar's military's large-scale operation led to several casualties and forced displacement of nearly one million Rohingyas into Bangladesh. On the humanitarian grounds and under the international pressure, Bangladesh opened its border and now hosts around 1.1 million Rohingya refugees along the Bangladesh-Myanmar frontier. Despite the multiple bilateral initiatives, no meaningful repatriation has taken place over the last eight years.

This prolonged refugee crisis has generated the serious concerns in the border districts of Teknaf and Ukhia in Cox's Bazar. There has been a rise in incidents of drug trafficking, cross-border crimes, document forgery, and criminal network involvement in the refugee camps. The link between these illicit activities and the complex border condition due to the political instability in Myanmar has been identified by the security agencies of Bangladesh (Alam, 2018). These developments have also raised several serious concerns over the localized instability along this frontier.

The Rohingya influx has also intensified the environmental and socio-economic pressures in the border areas beyond the conventional security risks. This includes a strain on the water resources, such as a heightened competition between the refugees and the host communities over local resources and a large-scale deforestation for refugee

settlements. Cox's Bazar, which stands as the principal tourist hub in Bangladesh, has faced a declining confidence among the tourists and movement restrictions due to the rising concerns regarding a public safety issue. The local grievances have been further complicated by the rising commodity prices and labor market disruptions.

The Rohingya crisis represents a multifaceted border security challenge rooted in statelessness and forced displacement. Without their durable solutions, the Bangladesh-Myanmar border is likely to remain a persistent threat with the broader regional implications.

The security issues along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border have recently escalated because of the appearance of non-state actors in the Rakhine State of Myanmar. The Arakan Army has been controlling the key areas, including Maungdaw, since November 2023. The area has become largely uncontrollable by the central government. This power vacuum has increased the insurgency elements along the border and has become a major security issue for Bangladesh.

There are multiple accounts of Myanmar military personnel and officials escaping to Bangladesh in large numbers. The reports indicate that around 100 Myanmar officials took refuge in Bangladesh since February 2024 (BDDiGEST, 2025). Such incidents highlight the spillover effects of Myanmar's internal conflicts on the border security of Bangladesh.

A weak border surveillance, as well as the activities of the Arakan Army, may increase the border instability and may put a pressure on the diplomatic relations and regional security. The criminal activities, which include the illegal crossings along this border, are also increasing and remain a source of security problems. The Border Guard Bangladesh arrested 33 Rohingya

individuals on 8 February 2025 when they were attempting to enter Bangladesh illegally (BSS, 2025). These incidents emphasize the necessity for further enhancing the surveillance system and improving the capacities of the Border Guard Bangladesh capacities in the border.

In the meantime, the border-related incidents involving the landmines have been on a steep rise in recent times. This particular issue is not only endangering the lives of the local people but also those of the Rohingya refugees.

The Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) reported 18 injuries between January and June 2025 (Palma, Mridha, & Khan, 2025). Both the Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar military junta have deployed the landmines near the cross-border routes to tighten a control over the border (Human Rights Watch, 2024). This escalating threat highlights the enhanced vulnerabilities of Bangladesh's southeastern frontier and requires an urgent attention.

Bangladesh's geographic location puts it at the intersection of major drug trafficking networks of Asia, including the Golden Triangle comprising Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand and the Golden Crescent comprising Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. This makes the country a key hub despite not producing narcotics domestically (Prothom Alo, 2022). Myanmar's Shan and Rakhine States, in particular, have become the major production centers for methamphetamine tablets known as Yaba and opium, as well as crystal meth, also known as "ice" (Daily Financial Express, 2025). The Arakan Army (AA) reportedly assisted in facilitating the production and smuggling of these drugs into Bangladesh via the land and sea routes, particularly through the Teknaf route (Prothom Alo, 2025). This highlights the structural role of the porous Bangladesh-Myanmar border within the broader transnational narcotics networks in Asia.

Approximately 80% of drugs enter Bangladesh via the sea routes from Myanmar, according to the reports from the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB). Between July and September 2025, over 2.8 million Yaba tablets and 816 grams of ice were seized during the anti-narcotics operations (Prothom Alo, 2025). Crystal meth, which contains methamphetamine, can reach a purity level of 96% compared with only 15% in Yaba, which makes ice far more dangerous. The synthetic drugs such as LSD and DMT have also entered Bangladesh, making the situation more critical (Prothom Alo, 2022). These trends indicate an intensifying drug trafficking crisis with the direct implications for public health in Bangladesh.

The researchers found that around one million people are directly or indirectly involved in the drug trafficking in Bangladesh, exacerbating the public health concerns and instability (Prothom Alo, 2022). The Bangladesh-Myanmar border works as a hub for a regional drug flow as it is exploited as a transit route for trafficking drugs to India as well as Sri Lanka and Nigeria (Daily Financial Express, 2025). The experts argue that this complex situation requires an enhanced surveillance and a regional cooperation to disrupt both production hubs and trafficking routes effectively (Daily Financial Express, 2025). This underscores the need for the coordinated strategies and an institutional capacity to disrupt these transnational drug trafficking networks.

The illegal arms smuggling has increased along the Bangladesh-Myanmar frontier, driven by the armed conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State. The recent reports show that the weapons are being smuggled into Bangladesh through around the seven routes along the border, primarily entering the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar (The Financial Post, 2025). The law enforcement agencies and Border Guard Police sources confirm that the Naf

River and Teknaf-Ukhia corridors are being exploited by the smuggling groups to transport both the foreign military-grade and locally made weapons (*The Financial Post*, 2025). This trend demonstrates the growing spillover of Myanmar's armed conflict into Bangladesh's borderland security, driven by the circulation of illicit arms.

The militant groups based in the Rohingya camps play a central role in this arms smuggling. The armed factions such as the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) are mostly linked to the arms trafficking from Myanmar to Bangladesh (*Dhaka Tribune*, 2024). The intelligence reports posit that the international smuggling networks and the local collaborators are complicit in the movement of weapons. The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) operations have recovered the numerous grenades, G3 rifles, and large quantities of ammunition from the camps in Ukhia in recent years (*Dhaka Tribune*, 2024). In December 2025, the Bangladeshi authorities arrested three individuals who were smuggling 1,600 firearms across the Naikongchhari border to deliver them to the Arakan Army (*The Business Standard*, 2025). These incidents reveal the bidirectional nature of arms trafficking across the border.

The availability of weapons has increased a violence within the Rohingya camps, leading to extortion, killings, and

rivalry among the armed factions while jeopardizing Bangladesh's internal security and border stability. Despite the increased seizures and operations to capture the illegal arms, this border is becoming a persistent route for trafficking due to the spillover of Myanmar's internal conflict into Bangladesh's borderlands.

Such human trafficking has become one of the most entrenched cross-border security challenges along the Bangladesh-Myanmar frontier. This area works as a maritime trafficking corridor where the Rohingya refugees as well as the Bangladeshis are systematically trafficked by sea to Southeast Asia, mostly to Malaysia and Indonesia. This trafficking is mostly driven by the deceptive promises of employment and safe migration (Hasnine, 2025). The traffickers recruit the victims by exploiting the prolonged Rohingya displacement within the camps and weak surveillance. These victims are later subjected to the sexual exploitation, debt bondage, or forced labor.

The trafficking networks have expanded beyond the maritime routes into the conflict-prone areas of Myanmar, where the Bangladeshi victims are confined in the guarded compounds and forced to engage in the online scam operations in the insurgent-controlled regions near the Thailand-Myanmar border (Islam, 2024). The survivors report the systematic violence and confinement, which shows how these organized

Figure 2

Recovery of Illegal Arms (2019-2023)

Year	No. of Rifles	No. of Revolvers	No. of Pistols	Guns (All Types)	SSBL	Ammo (All Types)	No. of Magazines
2019	-	-	01	30	-	56	01
2020	-	-	01	56	05	215	01
2021	-	01	01	14	-	03	-
2022	05	-	05	38	-	16	-
2023	-	-	03	03	-	45	-
Total	05	01	11	141	05	335	02

Source: Alam, M. M., & Uddin, H. (2025)

trafficking networks have been growing over time.

The dynamics of these activities also illustrates that this particular border is becoming a transnational security threat amid limited state control (Hasnine, 2025; Islam, 2024). This reflects how the cross-border trafficking networks are increasingly embedded within the weakened governance structures in the region.

The illegal fishing has also become a persistent non-traditional threat along the Bangladesh-Myanmar maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal. The waters near Saint Martin's Island and the Naf River estuary are increasingly contested by the armed actors, particularly the Arakan Army (AA).

This area is exposing the Bangladeshi fishermen to the physical, psychological, and economic risks (Uddin, 2025; Rahman, 2025). Between August and December 2025, at least 176 fishermen and 30 boats were detained. The detainees reported the harsh conditions, forced labor, and abuse (Rahman, 2025). The Arakan Army (AA) has reportedly seized the fishing trawlers, equipment, and detained fishermen while operating near the disputed waters. In the peak season, hundreds of trawlers in Teknaf remain idle, causing the income losses and local fish shortages.

While the Arakan Army (AA) claims to prevent such illegal fishing, the repeated seizures reveal the motive of territorial control and resource extraction. Bangladesh's maritime authorities' inconsistent protection has led to the repeated harassment and violence against the fishermen (Rahman, 2025). The unlawful fishing along this border points to the complex security dynamics where the maritime sovereignty, livelihood safety, and human security intersect. These issues highlight an urgent need for the well-established maritime governance system.

The border between Bangladesh and Myanmar has long been a hub for the cross-border crime and other activities such as drug trafficking and human and arms smuggling. These activities have been partly ignited by the Rohingya community (Khan, 2022). The reports show that dire living conditions and marginalization of Rohingya refugees have contributed to their involvement in the illicit activities, including theft, forgery of national ID cards, and drug smuggling (Haque et al., 2021; Banarjee, 2020). These activities have the wider implications for destabilizing not only the local communities but also for increasing the social tension and insecurity in Cox's Bazar and adjacent areas (Hossain, 2024). The prolonged ethnic insurgencies in Myanmar further complicate the security situation. In February 2024, the cross-border clashes in Myanmar resulted in the mortar fire and stray bullets reaching Bangladesh's territory. This incident forced the temporary closure of local schools and suspended the civilian activities (Yasmin, 2017). This shows a cumulative impact of socio-economic vulnerability in sustaining the cross-border criminal activities along the Bangladesh-Myanmar frontier.

The Rohingya militant groups, including the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), have conducted several operations that included the targeted killings of security personnel and recruitment from refugee camps in Bangladesh. These incidents raised several concerns over the potential spread of insurgent activities into the Bangladeshi territory (Haque et al., 2021). This ongoing contestation among these groups highlights a consistent risk of armed confrontation, exacerbating crime, and human security risks (Banarjee, 2020). This underscores the persistent threat of militant infiltration and its implications for internal security and border governance in Bangladesh.

Myanmar's political instability and prolonged authoritarian rule have created many challenges for Bangladesh and along their shared border. Myanmar has a history of decades of military dominance, and the 2021 military coup ended the democratic process and the formation of shadow governments (Maizlan, 2022). This also led to the rise of armed groups, including the Arakan Army (AA), National Liberation Army, and Kachin Independence Army, which are collectively destabilizing Rakhine State along the Bangladesh border.

The ongoing conflict has a spillover effect on Bangladesh. The cross-border artillery fire, frequent mortar fire, and fleeing Myanmar Border Guard Personnel have created a security dilemma in the border districts (Tayeh, 2024). The absence of democratic authority and law enforcement mechanisms in Myanmar has further heightened these risks, as the government has no effective control over this border area.

Myanmar saw a quasi-democratic period from 2011 to 2021, only for a short period. Since 2021, the internal political turmoil has intensified and affected the bilateral relations with Bangladesh as well. These security risks are transcending the borders and affecting the overall regional stability.

The Bangladesh-Myanmar maritime boundary remains a critical area of border security in the Bay of Bengal. It has the wider implications for sovereignty, livelihoods, and resource management. Myanmar's overlapping claims for an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the concerns over St. Martin's Island created a tension in earlier years (Faruque, 2013). The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), a Hamburg-based organization, delivered its landmark judgment on 14 March 2012, which largely favored Bangladesh on its sovereignty over St. Martins Island and the delimitations of the maritime

boundary. However, the judgement drew criticism from Justice Zhiguo Gao, as the tribunal did not permit Bangladesh to use the island as a central reference for the EEZ (Watson, 2015). This maritime dispute continues to shape the strategic sensitivity of the Bangladesh-Myanmar maritime frontier despite the legal resolution.

Myanmar has intermittently misrepresented the status of St. Martins Island in its official maps in 2018 and 2019, despite the ITLOS ruling, and falsely depicted it as part of Myanmar's territory. Though such actions were diplomatically addressed by Bangladesh, these incidents highlight the potential for a maritime dispute to fuel the geopolitical tension (*European Scientific Journal*, 2020). Such recurring cartographic contestations reflect the maritime instability between the two states.

St. Martins Island supports over 10,000 residents who are primarily dependent on fishing and tourism. The area has become vulnerable due to the illegal cross-border fishing and inadequate enforcement, which threatens the safety of the local communities. Bangladesh's border security strategy should ensure the protection of the coastal inhabitants and the effective enforcement of maritime law.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Bangladesh-Myanmar border is a highly complex frontier, where the humanitarian crises, historical grievances, and non-traditional security issues threaten the national security of Bangladesh and the regional stability. The political situation in Myanmar is complex and disrupts the process of friendly relations. Most importantly, the Rohingya refugee crisis has been the most acute security issue, creating the socio-economic costs and contributing to the cross-border crimes. This border, with a length of 271 km, has turned into a hub for drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and cross-border criminal networks that expose

Bangladesh to the internal and external vulnerabilities.

Bangladesh should proceed with its bilateral and multilateral relations, as it is necessary to counter these threats through the use of global organizations like the UN and EU, and regional organizations such as ASEAN, SAARC, and BIMSTEC. Concomitantly, there is a need to strengthen the defense and security mechanisms to counter these threats.

Moreover, the socio-economic growth of the border areas, especially Ukhia and Teknaf, which have a strategic geopolitical position due to their proximity to the Bay of Bengal, maritime trade, and connectivity with Myanmar and Southeast Asia, is essential. Its greater effectiveness in managing the borders can be achieved through the targeted development initiatives.

Bangladesh should seek the strategic partnerships with the regional powers such as India and China and maintain the selective engagement with the Arakan Army (AA) and other non-state actors along the border in a discreet manner. The special programs should also be expanded to combat the illegal trafficking and strengthen the border security.

Conclusively, there are both challenges and opportunities on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. Lasting peace and stability can be achieved through a proactive diplomacy and regional collaboration, using a holistic approach. Bangladesh needs to act strategically so that it can transform this border from an area of persistent security threat into an area of connectivity and cooperation. Bangladesh must take a decisive action in a timely manner to help restore the border into a stable and peaceful state.

The nature of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border is complex and requires a multi-layered and realistic strategy that brings peace and security in the region. Therefore, this paper has recommended

the following suggestions to address the issues related to the cross-border of Bangladesh and Myanmar:

First, the border security policy of Bangladesh should be built on enhancing the bilateral and regional security cooperation. A coordination between the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and the Border Guard Police (BGP) of Myanmar on a regular basis plays a crucial role in preventing the cross-border crime and controlling security threats. At the bilateral level, trust will be enhanced through a number of institutionalized mechanisms, including the frequent joint meetings, sharing of intelligence, and joint patrols along the border. At the regional level, the activities of Bangladesh within the organizations like BIMSTEC and ASEAN forums need to be more integrated with the efforts to address the trafficking and extremist activities along the border as the common regional problems.

Secondly, Bangladesh should implement an active diplomatic policy with Myanmar, given that Myanmar is involved in an internal conflict and the armed formations are active along its borders. Since Bangladesh might not become the main intermediary, it might be useful to engage India and China to facilitate the localized ceasefires. The diplomatic intervention by China in early 2025, which mediated a ceasefire, is an indication that diplomacy can be more comprehensive. Bangladesh requires the issue-based diplomacy that will provide a more realistic method of reducing the cross-border instability.

Thirdly, combating drug trafficking must be regarded as a matter of national security. The entry of Yaba and other narcotics should be monitored with a caution. At the domestic level, the manpower and institutional weakness of the Department of Narcotics Control must be addressed properly. In coordination with the BGB and police, an expanded and specialized narcotics control force can

help strengthen Bangladesh's ability to combat the transnational drug networks.

Fourthly, ensuring the security issues in the Rohingya camps is essential for both humanitarian governance and national security. Bangladesh should work on strengthening the camp security with an international support. The peaceful civil society initiatives within the camps can help isolate the extremist elements and contribute to a more stable environment for a peaceful repatriation process.

Fifthly, Bangladesh should initiate a cautious political engagement with de facto power holders in Myanmar's border region and with Myanmar's government on a regular basis. Given the present realities, a complete disengagement may lead to more unpredictable risks for Bangladesh. Such engagement, if it occurs, must remain discreet, conditional, and issue-based to prevent the cross-border violence and ensure safety. Bangladesh must also strongly prevent the activities of the Rohingya militant organizations in order to uphold sovereignty and regional trust.

Sixthly, the Rohingya crisis should be a top priority, with a sustained diplomatic engagement at both the bilateral and regional levels. Bangladesh should continue to emphasize the repatriation process through the multilateral talks and mobilize an international pressure on Myanmar. Without such dignified repatriation, the border management challenges will remain persistent and difficult to control.

Seventhly, without addressing the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of border communities, a long-term border security cannot be achieved. The socioeconomic issues such as underdevelopment, unemployment, and weak governance create a ground for the unauthorized activities. Bangladesh should implement the targeted development initiatives, focusing on the skill training and employment generation along the border

areas. An active involvement of the local governments can play an effective role in this regard.

Lastly, Bangladesh needs to develop a national border security system that can strengthen a collaboration between the security agencies, civil authorities, and law enforcement. Strengthening the border management through the incorporation of development initiatives would enable Bangladesh to turn this zone of discord into a zone of connectivity and coordination. As Myanmar has the potential to provide the connectivity routes to the Southeast Asian region via the land routes, these initiatives must be carefully regulated to prevent further security challenges.

Through a balanced diplomacy, inclusive development, and strong border governance mechanisms, Bangladesh will be able to mitigate the border security challenges effectively while facilitating a broader regional stability.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest and that this manuscript is not published or even under consideration of being published elsewhere.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

I stamp the fact that this piece of writing is my own work.

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The author is showing her highest respect and deep homage to those innocent people who have died in the Bangladesh-Myanmar border as a result of cross-border violence and landmine blasts. These innocent lives could be taken as a constant reminder of the human price of border insecurity.

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