

Fencing and Diplomacy

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Fencing and Diplomacy: Navigating the India-Bangladesh Border Conflict

Context

The India-Bangladesh border has been a long-standing source of disputes, largely due to its **porous nature**, diverse geographical features, and frequent incidents involving **illegal activities** like smuggling, human trafficking, and unauthorized crossings. Recent tensions escalated when Bangladesh expressed concerns about alleged violations by India's Border Security Force (BSF).

These tensions highlight the complex challenges of managing border security while maintaining bilateral agreements and ensuring the well-being of border residents.

Key Developments and Disputes

Recent Diplomatic Actions

1. India's Summon:

- India summoned Bangladesh's Acting High Commissioner to discuss border security and fencing issues.
- This followed Bangladesh's earlier summon of India's High Commissioner in Dhaka over alleged BSF violations.

2. Border Construction Issues:

- **Malda's Kaliachak Block Incident:**
 - The BSF and Central Road Works Department constructed a **single-row fence** near Bangladesh's Shibganj area in Rajshahi district.
 - The **Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB)** objected but later allowed construction to continue.
- **Mekhliganj Fencing Dispute:**
 - Villagers began fencing the Bangladeshi enclave Dahagram-Angarpota to prevent cattle grazing.
 - Tensions escalated when BGB intervened.

India-Bangladesh Border (IBB): Overview

1. Length and Spread:

- The border is **India's longest**, stretching **4,096.7 km**, and passes through five states:
 - **West Bengal:** 2,216.7 km
 - **Assam:** 263 km
 - **Meghalaya:** 443 km
 - **Tripura:** 856 km
 - **Mizoram:** 318 km

2. Geographical Features:

- Includes **plains, hills, rivers, and forests**, with few natural barriers.
- Over **900 km of riverine border**, making fencing difficult.

3. Challenges:

- **Illegal Activities:**
 - The border is a **hotspot** for illegal immigration, cattle smuggling, and human trafficking.
- **Villager Resistance:**
 - Objections to fencing arise from residents whose livelihoods are affected.
- **Land Acquisition Delays:**
 - Non-cooperation from local governments, particularly in West Bengal.

Status of Fencing

Overall Progress

- **3,141 km out of 4,096.7 km** of the border has been fenced.
- Most of the unfenced areas are **riverine stretches** or zones requiring negotiation.

Specific Challenges

- 1. Villager Protests:**
 - Some patches remain unfenced due to **objections from local residents**.
- 2. Geographical Complexity:**
 - Riverine areas are secured by BSF's **water wing**.
- 3. Exceptions to Fencing Rules:**
 - Villages within **20 yards** of the boundary are not relocated. Instead, fencing is adjusted closer to the **zero line**.

The 1975 Border Guidelines

1. Key Provisions:

- Prohibit construction of **defense structures** within **150 yards** of the international

- boundary.
2. **India's Position:**
 - India considers **single-row fencing (SRF)** non-defensive, intended to curb illegal activities.
 3. **Bangladesh's Concerns:**
 - Objects to SRF and **smart fencing**, claiming they breach the guidelines and enable territorial monitoring.
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Reasons for the Dispute

1. **Violation of Agreements:**
 - Bangladesh argues fencing breaches the **1975 India-Bangladesh guidelines**.
 2. **Impact on Border Residents:**
 - **Fencing restricts movement** and daily activities, causing inconvenience to residents.
 3. **Trans-Border Crimes:**
 - Nearly **60% of illegal activities** occur in unfenced areas. India insists fencing would reduce these incidents.
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Conclusion

The **India-Bangladesh border remains a sensitive zone**, with disputes rooted in **historical agreements**, geographical challenges, and socio-economic factors. While fencing is critical for addressing security concerns, it must be balanced with the rights and needs of local populations and bilateral relations.

Ongoing diplomatic discussions and enhanced cooperation are essential to finding a resolution that respects both nations' sovereignty while ensuring the security and welfare of border residents.

