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VULNERABLE BODIES AND DARK NETWORKS OF TRAFFICKING: TRADE IN HUMANS AT THE BANGLADESH - INDIA BORDER

Abstract

Globally, trafficking is now a thriving and multi-billion dollar business run by organised criminal networks. An estimated 8,00,000 women and children are trafficked each year across international borders, 80 percent ending in forced sex work. Although awareness is increasing, human trafficking still lack a global understanding of the subject, what United Nations Office on Drug and Crime identifies as 'a knowledge crisis about a crime that shames us all'. Bangladesh is predominantly an origin country for victims of trafficking while India is an origin, transit and destination country for this organised crime. In this context, Bangladesh-India border, the fifth longest land border of the world, is intensively used for women and girls trafficking in South Asia. The traffickers capitalise on complex political landscape of the border and borderland, poor border control mechanisms and lack of joint efforts to stop human trafficking. This paper contributes to the efforts to prevent human trafficking along this border. The main thrust of this article is to address the routes and networks of trafficking at the Bangladesh-India border, which is poorly addressed in academic writing. Here, this paper highlights on the aspects of human trafficking along this border and prioritises on joint initiatives by the border guards to reduce the magnitude of human trafficking significantly.

1. Introduction

In our globalised world, trafficking of women and children has become an alarming concern for the countries across the globe. International community identifies human trafficking as a form of modern slavery by recruiting, harbouring, transporting, or obtaining a person for compelled labour or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, and coercion. An estimated 8,00,000 women and children are trafficked each year across international borders, 80 percent ending in forced sex work.¹ Some estimates suggest that every year 1 to 2 million women, men and children are trafficked worldwide; around 2,25,000 of them are from South Asia (India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Maldives, and Bhutan). Other estimates show that over the last 30 years, trafficking for sexual exploitation alone has victimised some 30 million Asian women and children.²

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¹ C. Joffres, E. Mills, M. Joffres, T. Khanna, H. Walia, and D. Grund, "Sexual Slavery without Borders: Trafficking for Commercial Sexual Exploitation in India", *International Journal for Equity in Health*, Vol. 7, 2008, p. 22.

² S. Huda, "Sex Trafficking in South Asia", *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*, Vol. 94, 2006, pp. 374-381.

Globally, trafficking is now a thriving and multi-billion dollar business run by organised criminal networks. According to the US State Department's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report for 2012, it is estimated that 27 million men, women and children around the globe are victims of trafficking.³ Worldwide, one in five victims of trafficking is child and women make two-thirds of the world's trafficking victims.⁴ The purposes of trafficking include prostitution, domestic and slave labourers, camel jockeys and sex slaves. Recent studies have shown that armed conflict and war have catalytic impact on trafficking as such traffickers often follow routes through countries those are conflict prone and border controls are not strictly maintained.⁵ Although awareness is increasing on human trafficking, it is still lack a global understanding of the subject, what United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) identifies as 'a knowledge crisis about a crime that shames us all'.⁶

In relation to human trafficking, most countries of the world are categorised as origin of the victim countries, destination countries, transit countries or two of them or all.⁷ Bangladesh is predominantly an origin country for victims of trafficking while India is an origin, transit and destination country for this organised crime. Human rights groups in Bangladesh estimate that between 10,000 and 20,000 women and girls are trafficked annually to India, Pakistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates.⁸ In this context, Bangladesh-India border is intensively used for women and girls trafficking; however, the trafficking of women and girls across this border is a less-focused but vital issue. This border is studied mostly from the perspectives of insurgency and terrorism⁹, securitisation¹⁰, refugee and (il)legal immigration¹¹,

³ "Trafficking in Persons Report", Department of State, United States, June 2012, available at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2012/, accessed on 25 December 2012.

⁴ For detail, see <http://www.unodc.org/toe/en/crimes/human-trafficking.html>, accessed on 13 December 2012.

⁵ N. Heyzer, "Combating Trafficking in Women and Children: A Gender and Human Rights Framework", Plenary Address, The Human Rights Challenge of Globalisation: Asia-Pacific-US; The trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Honolulu, Hawaii, 13-15 November, 2002.

⁶ "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons", UNODC, February 2009.

⁷ "Trafficking in Persons: Global Patterns", United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2006, UNODC, Geneva.

⁸ S. Huda, *op. cit.*

⁹ TM Sanderson, "Transnational Terror and Organised Crime: Blurring the Line", SAIS Review, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2004, pp. 49-61; R Rahman, "Bangladesh's Fight against Terror: Lessons Learnt and Future Perspective", paper presented at the Royal United Services, Institute for Defense and Security Studies, London, UK, 24 July, 2006; S Bhaumik, *Insurgent Crossfire North-East India*, New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1996; BG Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgents: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, Development*, New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1996.

¹⁰ K Krishan, "Policing the Indo-Bangladesh Border", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XXV, No. 5, 2001; NS Jamwal, "Border Management: Dilemma of Guarding the India-Bangladesh Border", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2004, pp. 5-36; MS Islam, "Combating Terrorism in South Asia: Challenges and Prospects", Documents, Institute of Foreign Affairs, 2005, available at: <http://www.ifa.org.np/document/saarcpapers/shamsul.pdf>, accessed on 25 June, 2007; AS Chowdhury, "Bangladesh-India Border Issues and Management", *NDC Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2003, pp. 57-71; S. Bhardwaj, "India and Bangladesh: Border Issue and Security Perceptions", in F Sobhan (ed.), *Bangladesh-India Dialogue: Vision of Young Leaders*, Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2006; M. Ahmar, "South Asian Response to War on Terrorism", *Journal of Political Studies*, 2007.

¹¹ G. Kudaisya, "Divided Landscapes, Fragmented Identities: East Bengal Refugees and their Rehabilitation in India, 1947-1979", *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1996, pp. 24-39; SA Mantoo,

informal economy and cross-border social movements¹². This fifth longest land border of the world is also a significant route for human trafficking in South Asia. The traffickers capitalise on complex political landscape of the border and borderland, poor border control mechanisms, and lack of joint efforts to stop human trafficking.

This paper attempts to contribute to the efforts to prevent human trafficking along the Bangladesh-India border. In order to do this, the main thrust of this paper is to address the routes and networks of trafficking at the Bangladesh-India border which is poorly addressed in academic writing. This paper highlights on the aspects of human trafficking along this border and prioritises on joint initiatives by the border guards to reduce the magnitude of human trafficking significantly. For Bangladeshi women and girls, India is the destination as well as transit point en route to the Middle East and Pakistan.¹³ In fact, the necessity of addressing the human trafficking matters as part of border control mechanisms is generally overshadowed in academic writing and state initiatives by the concerns of terrorist movements and securitisation demands. Because of the limited scope and unavailability of data on men trafficking across Bangladesh-India border, this paper highlights on the women and child trafficking. However, there are further opportunities to do research on men trafficking exclusively. This paper leaves aside any specific analysis on protection, prosecution, prevention and rehabilitation to consider trafficking. Instead, this paper focuses on the role(s) this border plays in relation to trafficking and how the border control mechanisms with particular focus on trafficking can contribute fighting the trafficking of women and girls.

Methodologically, this paper is based on secondary sources; such as empirical research reports, journal articles, booklets and newspaper clippings. To understand the forms and magnitude, and to map the routes of trafficking, this paper relies on various organisations research reports including International Organisation for Migration, International Labour Organisation, United States Agency for International Development, Centre for Health and Population Research, Action Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association, Centre for Women and Children Studies, Integrated Community and Industrial Development initiatives, and United Development Initiatives for Action.

"Bangladesh Illegal Immigration: Effects and Consequences", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2012, pp. 38-53.

¹² WV Schendel, "Working through Partition: Making a Living in the Bengal Borderlands", *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 46, 2001, pp. 393-421; WV Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*, Anthem Press, 2005.

¹³ A K M M Ali, "Treading along a Treacherous Trail: Research on Trafficking in Persons in South Asia", *International Migration*, Vol. 43, 2005, pp. 141-164.

2. Definition and Legal Procedures to Combat Trafficking

A clear distinction of definition among trafficking, smuggling and other forms of population movements is not available.¹⁴ Until the early 1990s, trafficking was mainly considered as a category of human smuggling and a type of illegal immigration.¹⁵ The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/25 of 15 November 2000, is the key international instrument in the fight against transnational organised crime. It opened for signature by Member States at a High-level Political Conference convened in Palermo, Italy, on 12-15 December 2000 and entered into force on 29 September 2003. The Convention is further supplemented by three Protocols, which target specific areas and manifestations of organised crime: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air; and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition.¹⁶ Countries must become parties to the Convention itself before they can become parties to any of the Protocols.

Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, clearly defines trafficking:

“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”¹⁷

Although this provides a precise definition of trafficking, the range of actions and transnational process of trafficking makes it difficult to accurately identify and measure trafficking in persons. Besides, this protocol does not define sexual exploitation and forced labour in the context of trafficking¹⁸, which is crucial to

¹⁴ R. Skeldon, “Trafficking: A Perspective from Asia”, *International Migration*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2000, pp. 7-30.

¹⁵ F. Laczko and M.A. Gramegna, “Developing Better Indicators of Human Trafficking”, *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. X, No. 1, 2003, pp. 179-194.

¹⁶ “United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto”, available at <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/index.html>, accessed on 30 October 2012.

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ “Trafficking in Persons: Global Pattern”, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2006, available at: www.unodc.org/pdf/traffickinginpersons_report_2006-04.pdf, accessed on 20 November 2012.

measure the number of trafficking cases and to prosecute the trafficker and to rehabilitate the trafficked people. The process and methods of trafficking are far from being homogenous and involve several countries from the origin, transition and destination of trafficking. The purposes of this protocol are to prevent and combat trafficking; and to protect and assist the victims of such trafficking. To meet the above mentioned objectives, this protocol prioritises cooperation amongst the state parties. However, such cooperation is difficult to materialise since many countries are not part of this protocol; such as Bangladesh is not a party to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol and India signed the protocol in 2011. This protocol also falls short in compelling the member states to take binding measures in the context of the protection of trafficked persons.¹⁹ In addition, the transnational nature of the crime resulting legislative differences between the countries of origin, transit and destination can cause complicity to comply with the definition of trafficking. All these factors make it difficult to measure human trafficking as well as taking effective actions against this form of crime.

2.1 SAARC and Human Trafficking

Considering human trafficking as a regional problem in South Asia, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) placed significant concern on the alarming rise of women and children trafficking through illicit inter- and intra-regional collaboration. In view of that, trafficking was listed at the top of the agenda for the ninth SAARC Summit of the heads of governments of participating countries, held in the Maldives in 1997. Since the 11th SAARC summit, held in 2002, terrorism and human trafficking have been receiving the highest priority as a regional security concern. Considering the shocking trend of trafficking, SAARC members signed the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating the Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution in 2002. In 2004, SAARC members anonymously adopted five points for further action on urgent imperatives.²⁰ Despite the dramatic shift of their pen and paper based focus to regional security, SAARC has even failed to implement any rigorous initiative to deter human trafficking in South Asia. Other than the integrated regional effort, different security concerns have emerged bilaterally within the neighbouring countries over their contiguous borders. For instance, human trafficking, arms proliferation, informal trade and drug trafficking were considered as major security problems on the Bangladesh-India border in different bilateral discussions, either at ministry level meetings or in the annual discussions concerning border security forces. However, any bilateral initiatives on joint effort to address trafficking issues are yet to be taken.

¹⁹ A Gallagher, "Human Rights and the New Protocols on Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling: A Preliminary Analysis", *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2001, pp. 975-1004.

²⁰ S. Huda, *op. cit.*

The Prevention of Repression against Women and Children Act 2000 only deals with the prostitution and 'other immoral purposes' in Bangladesh. However, the government of Bangladesh established action plans for the protection of children including the trafficking in children: the National Plan of Action for Children 2004-2009 and the National Plan of Action Plan for Combating Human Trafficking 2012.²¹ However, this action plan excludes border and border guards from the trafficking preventive activities. In India, the Immoral Traffic in Girls Act was amended in 1978 and renamed the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act which was amended in 2006. In addition, each state has its legislative power and policies in place to combat trafficking. In light of the above discussion, it is comprehensible that human trafficking matters have received enormous attentions under the umbrella of the UN, SAARC or individual country initiatives. Significantly however, these attentions are not practically executed to combat trafficking in India and Bangladesh. In addition, there are no functioning bilateral or regional measures to fight human trafficking across the Bangladesh-India border.

3. Factors, Forms and Scale of Trafficking across the Bangladesh-India Border

South Asia is one of the vulnerable regions for trafficking because of very large population, huge rural-urban migration; chronic poverty, cross-border and historical-cultural connections and recurrent natural disasters. Poverty, gender based discrimination and violence, forced marriage and unemployment are root causes for trafficking across the Bangladesh-India border.²² Conflicts, crises and natural calamities have led to a rise in unsafe mobility and in trafficking, but the reasons for such increase of trafficking are complex. Bangladeshi women and children are victims of trafficking mainly for the purpose of sexual exploitation, forced labour, camel jockeying, bonded labour, domestic servitude and sale of organs.²³ According to the government of Bangladesh, more and more women are leaving countries like Nepal and Bangladesh to find a better way of life and many ultimately are abused in the highly lucrative sex industry. Natural calamity, for example, flood is also a vital factor in the increase in trafficking. Although the countries have taken some measures to combat trafficking, they have failed to resolve the root causes. There is an estimate that about 35 percent of the total number of girls and women trafficked to India have been abducted under the pretext of false marriage or good job.²⁴ The unwitting women and girls become victims of trafficking. In 1995, Association for Community Development (ACD), Rajshahi, Bangladesh, conducted a research named *International Migration of Women – A Study*

²¹ "National Action Plan for Combating Human Trafficking 2012-2014", Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, January, 2012.

²² "Human Trafficking and HIV: Exploring Vulnerabilities and Responses in South Asia", United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Regional Centre in Colombo, 2007, available at: http://www.undp.org/hiv/docs/alldocs/human_traffick_hiv_undp2007.pdf, accessed on 30 January 2008.

²³ A K M M Ali, op.cit.; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2006, op.cit.

²⁴ "Lives in Motion: Mobility, Smuggling and Trafficking along the Indo-Bangladesh Border", Group Development, 2006, available at http://www.childtrafficking.com/Docs/lives_in_motion_bangladesh.pdf, accessed on 03 January 2013.

on *Causes and Consequences*. The findings revealed that teenagers and young girls migrated to India through marriage and most of these marriages had no witnesses and in most cases victims' family members perform as agents of trafficking.

Although human trafficking is receiving concern since the 1990s, regrettably, the number of trafficked persons has been increasing in the whole of South Asia. One study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimated that 300,000 to 450,000 people are trafficked within Asia in each year, of which more than half take place in South Asia.²⁵ Gray Lewis, Representative (South Asia) of UNODC explains, 'Human trafficking is world's third largest profit-making illicit industry and South Asia has emerged as the home to the second largest numbers of internationally trafficked persons (after Southeast Asia)'.²⁶ Similarly, United Nations Children's Fund warned that the trade in women and children for sex is spiralling out of control in South Asia.²⁷

As mentioned, Bangladesh is considered as a source and transit country while India is a source, transit and destination in terms of trafficking. An estimated 9,000 girls are trafficked annually within South Asia from Nepal to India and from Bangladesh to Pakistan.²⁸ The UNICEF reports that 40,000 children from Bangladesh are involved in sex work in Pakistan.²⁹ Existing reports suggest that trafficking of children is increasing at an alarming rate.³⁰ Around 10,000 human trafficking victims, mostly women and young girls, are rescued annually from traffickers in India.³¹ Therefore, the reports suggest that the rate of trafficking is increasing over time. According to a study by Integrated Community and Industrial Development Initiative in Bangladesh (INCIDIN), on an average 13 percent of households in the study areas have had at least one incident of missing children within the last five years and only half of the missing children were found again.³²

3.1 Scale of Trafficking across Bangladesh-India Border

Since 2001, the US State Department has been publishing a Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, which places the countries into three tiers. In the report, Bangladesh has been classified to Tier 2 from 2001-2012, with the exception of being in Tier 3 for the year 2004. Placement in Tier 2 means that the government of the country does not fully comply with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act at minimum

²⁵ United Nations Development Programme, 2007, *op.cit.*

²⁶ N. Thakuria, "Combating Human Trafficking in South Asia", *Burma Digest*, 27 October 2007, available at <http://burmadigest.info/2007/10/27/combating-human-trafficking-in-south-asia/>, accessed on 25 April 2009.

²⁷ S. Huda, *op. cit.*

²⁸ Asian Development Bank, *Combating Trafficking of Women and Children in South Asia: Country Paper for Bangladesh, India, Nepal*, 2003.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Integrated Community and Industrial Development Initiatives (INCIDIN), "Rapid Assessment on Trafficking in Children for Exploitative Employment in Bangladesh", ILO_IPEC, February 2002.

³¹ "Preventing Trafficking of Women", *The New Nation*, Dhaka, 28 October 2007.

³² INCIDIN, 2002, *op.cit.*

standards, but they are trying to make significant efforts. India is continuously facing significant internal and international trafficking problem. From 2001-2003 India was placed in Tier 2 in the annual TPR, but it has been downgraded to the Tier 2 Watch List from 2004 to 2010 which means that India has failed to show evidence of increasing efforts to address trafficking in persons. India lacks a national law enforcement response to any form of trafficking, but took some preliminary measures to create a central law enforcement unit to do so. The US has warned India to act swiftly on what it called the ‘world’s largest human trafficking problem’ involving hundreds and thousands of victims of sexual exploitation and millions of bonded labourers, or face sanctions.³³ Overall, the Indian government’s anti-trafficking efforts have stagnated, although there was progress in the area of building public awareness and prevention. Recently, India has improved its enforcement of law regarding human trafficking and rehabilitation efforts; the country is upgraded to Tier 2 from 2011 in the TIP report 2012.

Table 1: Scale of Trafficking across Bangladesh-India Border
24,000-48000 young women and children are smuggled every year from Bangladesh into Pakistan. ³⁴
Total estimates of Bangladeshi persons trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) into India varies between 200,000 -300,000. ³⁵
500 women and children are trafficked daily to Pakistan (via India). ³⁶
Trafficked children by gender and age from January 1990-December 1999 reveals that about 3397 children were trafficked. ³⁷
The Home Ministry officials, Bangladesh suspect the trafficking figure could range between 100,000 to 200,500 every year. ³⁸
A little over half of all sex workers in India are from Nepal or Bangladesh. ³⁹
US Agency for International Development (USAID) estimates that 10,000 to 20,000 Bangladeshi women and children are trafficked per year. ⁴⁰

Estimates cannot easily be tested though, because of the clandestine nature of trafficking. The actual figure of trafficking is probably higher than the figures presented in Table-1, because many cases go unreported. Specifically, missing children and women are not generally counted when trafficking estimations are made; some missing children and women might have been trafficked. The limitation of these statistics is that these are ‘estimations’ of sample surveys or some newspaper reports. ⁴¹ These are anecdotal conclusion while there is no concrete statistics on the

³³ *The Hindustan Times*, 13 June 2007.

³⁴ Integrated Community and Industrial Development Initiatives, “Status Report on: Women and Child Trafficking Situation in Bangladesh”, INCIDIN Bangladesh, Dhaka: ILO-IPEC 2000; Integrated Community and Industrial Development Initiatives, “Rapid Assessment on Trafficking in Children for Exploitative Employment in Bangladesh”, INCIDIN Bangladesh, Dhaka: ILO-IPEC, 2002.

³⁵ Joffres et al, 2008, *op. cit.*

³⁶ Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association, “Survey in the Area of Child and Women Trafficking”, BNWLA, Save the Children and UNICEF, Denmark, Dhaka, 1997.

³⁷ IOM, Mapping of Missing, Kidnapped, and Trafficked Children and Women: Bangladesh Perspective, 2001.

³⁸ “Bangladeshi Girls Trafficked under Honeymoon Cover: BGB”, Deccan Herald, 19 May 2012, available at <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/250720/bangladeshi-girls-trafficked-honeymoon-cover.html>, accessed on 15 January 2013.

magnitude of the problem. However, most of the reports of the USAID, Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC), Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), and the INCIDIN inform of a significant increase in the number of Bangladeshi children and women in recent years, being trafficked into India and other countries. Although the full scale of trafficking is unknown, the available data suggest a grim and alarming picture.

4. Mapping the Trafficking Routes

Asian trafficking routes are fluid as the borders are porous. New routes replace old ones as traffickers seek to avoid detention. Their networks are numerous, crossing borders. Such factor makes it difficult to maintain strict vigilance; however, several reports have also appeared in the media that law and order officials/personnel, particularly in the *upazilas* (sub-districts) on the border, have been involved directly or indirectly in facilitating trafficking of women and children.⁴² Lack of strict action against them has only reflected the absence of political will. One should not blame only the countries of origin for the increase of trafficking, because globalisation and the lucrative business of the sex industry at the receiving end are some basic reasons for such increase. It is also an element of the larger problem of organised crime and the illicit global economy. Thus, human traffickers are often highly successful because of their links with other transnational groups and porous borders.

Bangladesh has more than 4000 km of land border with India, and 28 of the 64 districts of Bangladesh have borders with India. Geographically, India has boundaries with all the South Asian countries and it is the destination and transit for all trafficked women and children of this region. Therefore, all Bangladeshi and Nepali women and children are trafficked through the Bangladesh-India and India-Nepal borders (Table-2). Because of the vast and porous land border between India and Bangladesh, Bangladeshi women and children are trafficked to India or transit through India en route to Pakistan and the Middle East for purposes of sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and forced labour.⁴³ Again, Bangladeshi children are also trafficked to Dubai via India. Table-2 explains all the activities of trafficking from Bangladesh to anywhere else using India as a transit point. A large number of Bangladeshi women are involved in the sex trade in India, mostly in the brothels of Kolkata, Mumbai and Delhi.⁴⁴ There are large networks of traffickers working at the national level and across borders. Normally, a group of traffickers collects victims from Bangladesh and hands them over to their

³⁹ Asian Development Bank, 2003, *op.cit.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ A K M M Ali, *op. cit.*

⁴² UNDP, 2007, *op. cit.*; M. Zamir, "My Christmas Wish: Stop Trafficking in Persons", *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 25 December 2004.

⁴³ Huda, *op. cit.*; ICDDR,B, 2001, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ ICDDR,B, 2001, *op. cit.*

counterparts in India. This vast border makes it difficult for authorities to monitor movements, and this allows traffickers to have a variety of routes through the land border (Map 1). There are as many as 15 major routes in the Bangladesh-India border for the traffickers to continue their activities (Map 1). Therefore, for entering India through Kolkata, the two most common routes are the Benapol borders at Jessore, from whence almost 50 percent of the trafficking takes place.⁴⁵

Table 2: Pattern of Trafficking in South Asia

Source	Intermediate	Destination
Nepal		→ India
Nepal	→ India	→ Middle East
India		→ Middle East
Bangladesh		→ India
	→ India	→ Pakistan
	→ India	→ Middle East
	→ India	→ Pakistan
Pakistan		→ Middle East

Source: International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR) has prepared this table with the help of Matt Friedman, USAID, Bangladesh who has extensively researched trafficking in the region

The findings of the study by Shamim and Kabir indicate that the Northern region is the most vulnerable area for trafficking, with a large number of *upazilas* and districts having common borders with India.⁴⁶ Rajshahi and Dinajpur are the most vulnerable among the whole border districts. Since there is no agreement between the countries to tighten the borders, it unfortunately permits traffickers to traffic women and children effectively and freely. On the other hand, police also has little power and does not have the authorisation to work with border related issues. In reality, as Wong Robert, US Department of State Chief Political Officer, argues in an interview that it would be more beneficial for the country, and the problem as a whole, if the local police would work with the Bangladeshi people to deal with female-trafficking related issues. During the ninth SAARC Summit, the Heads of State or Government pledged to coordinate their efforts and take effective measures to address this problem, although the Border Guard of Bangladesh (BGB) and the Border Security Force (BSF) of India do not have any joint action programme to prevent trafficking.

⁴⁵ Policy Research for Development Alternatives, "Fact-Finding Missions on Trafficking in Women and Children from Bangladesh to India and Pakistan". Dhaka: Narigrantha Prabartana, 1999.

⁴⁶ Shamim and F Kabir, *Ibid.*

4.1 Trafficking Routes and Some Issues



Source: Compiled from various sources

Almost all the empirical study reports confirm the common impression that Satkhira district is the most commonly used route for crossing the border, due to its proximity to Kolkata. There is no fixed time for trafficking rather it takes place both in day and night. The Benapole border in Jessore is the southwest transit point, which

acts as a crossing route from Bangladesh to India. Traffickers can easily reach Kolkata as it is well connected by bus and train.⁴⁷ A remarkable percentage of women and girls from various regions of Bangladesh such as Dhaka, Barisal, Gabtali, Jessore, Benapole, Satkhira and Dinajpur uses many other routes to reach the red-light areas of Kolkata. Bangladesh Jatiya Mahila Ainjibi Samity did a study in 300 villages of Bangladesh, revealing that 25,495 women and children had been trafficked in the past few years from specific regions. Among these, 15,497 were children (of which 9,098 were girls) and 9,998 women. They were procured from 19 regions (Lalmanirhat, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jamalpur, Rajshahi, Tangail, Mymensingh, Kishoreganj, Narsingdi, Comilla, Chandpur, Jessore, Satkhira, Jhalkathi, Pirajpur, Noakhali, Chittagong, Coxbazar and Tecnaf) and trafficked through 17 border areas to India and Pakistan.⁴⁸ Jessore, Satkhira, Mymensingh and Dhaka have been identified as major source areas.

5. Border Security and Detering Human Trafficking

Cross-border trafficking cannot be controlled by the effort of any single country.⁴⁹ Recently, India and Bangladesh signed three bilateral agreements (i) for mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, (ii) agreement for combating terrorism, transnational organised crimes and illegal drugs trafficking, and (iii) agreement for transfer of the sentenced persons.⁵⁰ Although the first two agreements can passively take actions against cross-border trafficking, there are no specific arrangement/bilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) between these two countries to address cross-border trafficking. Generally, efforts to counter trafficking have so far been uncoordinated and inefficient. In this context, India and Bangladesh can follow the Thailand-Cambodia policy to counter trafficking. Both the countries signed a MoU for mutual cooperation in the area and there are internal MoUs within different government agencies for synchronised and coordinated efforts to control the problem.⁵¹ This can be an effective method to seek to block gaps and leaks in border control mechanisms in the Bangladesh-India border while the traffickers invent new ways and methods for circumventing them.

Trafficking is a process rather than a single offence. Currently, there are only a few border checkpoints available to monitor the flow of trafficked persons.⁵² The hidden nature of the crime and strong network(s) of the trafficking agents in origin, transit and destination countries make it a tough mission for any single country taking successful actions against traffickers. In order to prevent, suppress and punish

⁴⁷ Group Development 2006, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ "Camel Jockeys: Another Trafficking Evil", *Telegraph*, Issue 920, 30 November 1997.

⁴⁹ "Combating Trafficking of Women and Children: Bangladesh Perspective and Developing Partnership for a Better Future", Asian Development Bank, Regional Workshop, 27-29 May 2002.

⁵⁰ National Action Plan for Combating Human Trafficking 2012-2014, January, 2012, *op.cit.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² A K M M Ali, *op. cit.*

human trafficking, bilateral agreements between the origin of victim countries and destination countries are crucial because their cooperation involves cross-border activities such as repatriation of victims, extradition of criminals, and information sharing. It is already evident from various newspaper reports that repatriation of the trafficked victims takes quite long time due to the unavailability of any bilateral methods of repatriation. Extradition of trafficking agents and pimps is also difficult because of the complicated bureaucratic processes. An easy and fast course of action involving both the border guards and non-government organisations (NGOs) working on trafficking can make the above mentioned procedures less complicated.

5.1 Considering Some Initiatives

Training the border guards as part of anti-trafficking measures is vital to eliminate trafficking. The very first training session on anti-trafficking across Bangladesh-India border was organised by the UNODC in collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India and the Border Security Force in Silliguri, India. The DG BSF prioritised the importance of such training by mentioning, 'border guards are the first point of contact in cases of cross-border trafficking'.⁵³ Such training of the border guards, preferably joint training workshops including the Indian and Bangladeshi border guards cannot only train them to effectively handle pre-rescue, during rescue and post rescue operations but also enhance cooperation between both the border guards.

The previous section highlighted some major points and routes of trafficking across the Bangladesh-India border. Similarly, the UNODC workshop identifies three major routes for trafficking, such as Benapole, Chapainawabganj, Akhauwra as Poladanga entry points into India.⁵⁴ Anti-trafficking measures need to be planned considering these flagged up zones or points with special border control policy. In this context, a coordinated effort in those segments of border with the relevant NGOs can be effective to prevent trafficking. 'Human trafficking border interception' programme organised by Free For Life International and their partners has already proved as a very successful initiative to rescue and rehabilitate the trafficked victims and to capture the traffickers across Nepal-India and Nepal-Tibet borders.⁵⁵ They rescued 30 girls from Nepal-Tibet border between March-November, 2012.⁵⁶ Similar initiatives across the Bangladesh-India border can prevent many trafficking attempts, which is not only useful to rescue victims but also effective in catching the traffickers.

⁵³ UNODC, *India: Border Guards- Critical Stakeholders in Combating Human Trafficking*, 7 June 2012, available at <http://www.unodc.org/southasia/frontpage/2012/june/border-guards---critical-stakeholders-in-combating-human-trafficking.html>, accessed on 10 December, 2012.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Available at <http://www.freeforlifeintl.org/>, accessed on 10 December 2012.

⁵⁶ "Human Trafficking Border Interception Programmes Greatly Exceed Expectations", *Christian Newswire*, 17 December 2012, available at <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/914071112.html>, accessed on 20 January 2013.

One of the biggest gaps in understanding human trafficking remains in the area of statistics and data collection.⁵⁷ Patchy statistics mask the severity of the problem. To collect helpful data, cross-border securitisation measures can maintain a database on anti-trafficking actions and number of cases of trafficking and so on. Collection, consolidation and analysis of data are vital to fight against trafficking. Different types of trafficking such as trafficking for prostitution, forced labour, slavery and so on also need to be clearly identified. A proper and systematic co-ordinated database based on the border guards and NGO reports can bring more representative data on human trafficking. This can portray a clear and accurate picture of the magnitude, trend and routes of trafficking; thus enable one to develop a better indicator of trafficking. Sharing of information between the border guards of the origin and destination/transit countries can significantly contribute towards developing effective anti-trafficking measures. All information on trafficking can be centralised under the home ministry authority, which should be accessible to the organisations working on different aspects of trafficking.

Coordinated efforts require collective information systems. The lack of systematic reporting by authorities is the real problem in the context of Bangladesh-India border. A common understanding of human trafficking and the establishment of common and joint measures to fight trafficking can raise awareness about the need for better data. Promoting better use of the existing statistics and encouraging and funding more evidence based research or policy initiatives on anti-trafficking can also help the legislative, institutional and criminal justice responses to this evil network.

6. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted on the magnitude and routes of trafficking at the Bangladesh-India border and recommended some policy initiatives to prevent this evil network by prioritising cross-border initiatives. The paper has shown an alarming picture of the women and girls trafficking and major routes across the Bangladesh-India border. Limited information and lack of adequate grounded research on trafficking of women and girls often mask the magnitude of the problem. As mentioned in the previous sections that most of the data on trafficking are collected by the human rights organisations or development agencies. More extensive and accurate data is needed to fight against trafficking and a systematic collection and coordination of data between different agencies including the border guards can bring accurate database on human trafficking. This paper has argued that human trafficking follows transnational network(s) and anti-trafficking measures cannot be fully successful without cooperation and co-ordination between the origin-transit-destination countries.

⁵⁷ F Laczko and MA Cramegna 2003, *op. cit.*

This paper does argue that cross-border initiatives are the single remedy of this problem rather makes an in-depth analysis on one component of anti-trafficking policies i.e. the prevention of human trafficking through border control mechanisms. This paper echoes Ronald Skeldon's argument that 'the elimination of trafficking is unlikely to be realistically achieved through legislation declarations of intend but by improvements in the socio-economic status of the population'.⁵⁸ It is important to acknowledge that 'understanding trafficking plays a role in combating efforts' as 'trafficking is the symptom and cannot be combated without addressing the root causes' if the conditions those foster trafficking continue to exist, traffickers will merely have to change their strategies and forms of exploitation to stay a step ahead of law enforcement'.⁵⁹ There is no denying of the fact that 'if the structural roots of vulnerability to trafficking are not addressed, are the trafficked individuals truly rescued?'⁶⁰ It is important to more carefully consider anti-trafficking measures as well as the root causes of trafficking.

⁵⁸ R. Skeldon, 2000, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ N Ray, "Looking at Trafficking through a Different Lens", *Cardozo Journal of Law & Gender*, Vol. 12, 2006, pp. 909-927.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*