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India summons envoy: Why Bangladesh has objected to fencing along the border

No defence structure can be constructed within 150 yards of the India-Bangladesh boundary by either side. But is wire fencing a 'defence structure'? Here is what the disagreement is all about, and what experts have to say.

Written by **Neha Banka**

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7 min read





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Single row fencing on the India-Bangladesh border. (Express photo)

New Delhi on Monday (January 13) [summoned the Bangladesh Acting High Commissioner to India](#), Nural Islam, over “security measures at the border, including on fencing”.

In a statement, the Ministry of External Affairs said it was conveyed that India had observed all agreements between the two governments and between the Border Security Force and Border Guard Bangladesh” with regards to fencing.

This came after Bangladesh summoned India’s High Commissioner in Dhaka, Pranay Verma, to express “deep concern” over “recent activities of the Border Security Force (BSF)”, saying India had violated a bilateral agreement concerning the international border.

Recently, Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) had attempted to obstruct the construction of a barbed wire fence on the international border in [West Bengal’s Malda](#). Video footage of the incident had circulated on social media.

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BSF's attempts to install fencing on the international boundary has been a long-standing bone of contention between India and Bangladesh. A similar incident had occurred in August 2024 in West Bengal's Cooch Behar, days after the fall of the [Sheikh Hasina](#) government in Bangladesh.

India and Bangladesh share 4,096.7 km. of border, the largest land border India shares with any of its neighbours.

What happened in Malda

The central Road Works Department, in collaboration with the Border Security Force (BSF), was building a single row fence (SRF) in Malda's Kaliachak No 3 block on the Indian side, alongside Bangladesh's Shibganj in Rajshahi district, when the BGB intervened. DIG (South Bengal Frontier) and Spokesperson N K Pandey told [The Indian Express](#), "Our counterpart had raised some objection, we replied to them", adding that the construction was on and that the situation was normal.

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Then last week, Bangladesh once again objected to fencing in West Bengal's Mekhliganj in Cooch Behar district. On January 10, villagers in Mekhliganj began

a process facilitated by the BSF. Bangladesh's Border Guard attempted to from erecting the four-foot-high barbed-wire fence. Villagers said the fence to stop cattle straying in from Bangladesh and grazing on their crops.

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India-Bangladesh border guidelines

According to the 1975 Joint India-Bangladesh Guidelines for Border Authorities, no defence structure can be constructed within 150 yards from the zero line or the international boundary by either side.

“India doesn’t consider wire fencing to be defence structures, but Bangladesh and Pakistan do,” said S K Sood (retd), former Additional DG BSF, who served for 38 years in the force and served as frontier commander in north West Bengal as Inspector General for over three years during his service.

Due to the complexity of the international border between India and Bangladesh, a result of the legacy of the Partition, along the approximately 2,217 km long border in West Bengal, several villages fall within the fencing line. Sometimes, villages and houses stand precisely on the international border.

“There are several cases where fences cannot be constructed at 150 yards or beyond from the international border, because the border is marked by villages or rivers. In north Bengal in Jalpaiguri, Dahagram–Angarpota is a Bangladeshi enclave inside India and there are fences on the zero line,” explained Sood.

Wherever villages and houses fall within the fencing line, gates are provided at specific places to facilitate the movement of residents. The timings for the opening and the closure of these gates are determined after discussions with local villagers and the local administration. However, in case of emergencies, there are standing instructions to BSF soldiers to open these gates.



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The BSF says fencing is important to curb trans-border crimes. (Express photo)

“In specific cases where due to reasons of terrain and population, fencing cannot be constructed under the 1975 border guidelines, we inform Bangladesh that we need to build fencing near the border. For example, if there are villages 20 yards from the international boundary and the village cannot be shifted, or there is a water body and we don’t want to go back into our territory, we try to make fencing right on the border,” said Sood.

In cases like these, negotiations are held with the BGB. After the fencing is mutually agreed upon, construction begins by the BSF.

Why the dispute

Bangladesh’s objections to single row fencing are essentially two pronged: the first argument, which is most commonly cited, is the 1975 agreement on no fencing within 150 yards of the international border. The second argument is that fencing causes inconvenience to residents along the international border, said Sood.

“The SRF is erected mainly to stop animal movement and check trans-border crimes. This fencing does not have any defence potential. Structures considered to have defence potential include concrete walls/bunkers/concrete pill boxes, steel towers, ditch cum bandh (also called DCB battle, which is constructed on plain land to create a canal with depth and hidden bunkers on the shore, as it is in the case of the India-Pakistan border) or bunkers where soldiers are stationed. These can be

have been trying to convince them in every high meeting, but they are not amenable,” said Surjeet Singh Guleria, Inspector General (Retd), who served 25 years in the BSF and also served in BSF’s HQs Eastern Command [Kolkata](#), after operations and intelligence.

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According to Guleria, Bangladesh’s BGB also has problems with the installation of what India calls “smart fencing”, a type of border fencing that has CCTV and electronic surveillance gadgets.

“They objected to its presence within 100 yards of the international border, saying it gives India the ability to look into their territory. This fencing was for villages within 150 yards of the border or on the international boundary. It is estimated that about 60 per cent of trans-border crimes take place where there is no fencing and where villages are on the international boundary. So this fencing was expected to curb it. But they didn’t agree to it and it has been an issue under discussion for the past five years,” Guleria said.

Status of fencing

According to India’s Ministry of Home Affairs data, along the India-Bangladesh border, covering all eastern states including West Bengal, 3,141 kilometers have been fenced out of a total of 4,156 km.

In 2023, during the hearing of petitions challenging Section 6A of the Citizenship Act related to grant of Indian citizenship to illegal immigrants in Assam, the Centre had told the Supreme Court that the India-Bangladesh border fencing project had been hindered due to non-cooperation from West Bengal and pending land acquisition in the state. West Bengal shares a 2,216.7 km border with Bangladesh, on which 81.5 per cent fencing had been done as of 2023 at the time of the Supreme Court hearing.



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“There are small patches of unfenced land, which are pending due to objections from villagers, the terrain, or ongoing negotiations with Bangladesh. More than 900 km of the entire border along the five eastern states, including West Bengal, is riverine. Fencing is not possible on water, so these parts are guarded by BSF’s water wing,” Sood explained.

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Sports 28 min ago

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