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Challenges for the police investigating border crime in Bangladesh: An exploratory study on the Bangladesh Police

Wyzwania związane z policyjnymi dochodzeniami w sprawie przestępstw granicznych w Bangladeszu. Badanie eksploracyjne dotyczące policji Bangladeszu

Abstract: Border crime in the north-western region of Bangladesh is severe, as illegal activities such as illegal trade, drug trafficking and unauthorised border crossings occur on a regular basis. This study explores the challenges faced by the Bangladesh Police in investigating border crime and examines the nature and causes of these offences. The research uses a qualitative approach, collecting primary data through in-depth interviews with investigation officers from police stations located in border areas. The data were coded, and later revealed several themes and subthemes. The findings of this study indicate that open borders, a lack of supervision and corruption among agencies are the primary causes. These offences are often committed by powerful individuals who exploit young and economically vulnerable populations to carry out such activities. Investigative challenges include insufficient evidence, excessive caseloads, personnel shortages, limited access to information, inadequate financial support, political pressures, misleading sources, hostile environments and poor communication systems in border areas. The study suggests that increasing resources, depoliticising law enforcement, providing support to secure evidence, enhancing inter-agency collaboration and improving access to information can help reduce these investigative challenges.

Keywords: border crime investigation, investigation challenges, nature of border crime, causes of border crime, multi-agency collaboration

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Abstrakt: Przestępstwa graniczne w północno-zachodnim regionie Bangladeszu są poważnym problemem, ponieważ nielegalne działania, takie jak nielegalny handel, obrót narkotykami i przekraczanie granicy wbrew przepisom, mają miejsce regularnie. Niniejsze badanie poświęcone jest analizie wyzwań w zakresie policyjnych dochodzeń w sprawie przestępstw granicznych w Bangladeszu, a także analizie charakteru i przyczyn tych przestępstw. W badaniu zastosowano podejście jakościowe. Zgromadzono dane pierwotne w postaci pogłębionych wywiadów z funkcjonariuszami z pionu dochodzeniowego w posterunkach policji zlokalizowanych na obszarach przygranicznych. Zebrane dane zostały zakodowane, co pozwoliło na wyodrębnienie kilku tematów i podtematów. Wyniki badania wskazują, że głównymi przyczynami są otwarte granice, brak nadzoru i korupcja w służbach. Przestępstwa te są często popełniane przez wpływowe osoby, które wykorzystują młode i znajdujące się w trudnej sytuacji ekonomicznej grupy społeczne do prowadzenia takiej działalności. Wyzwania związane z dochodzeniami obejmują niewystarczające dowody, nadmierne obciążenie sprawami, niedobór kadr, ograniczony dostęp do informacji, niewystarczające wsparcie finansowe, presję polityczną, niewiarygodne źródła informacji, nieprzyjazne środowisko i słabe systemy komunikacyjne na obszarach przygranicznych. Badanie sugeruje, że zwiększenie zasobów, odpolitycznienie organów ścigania, zapewnienie wsparcia w zakresie zabezpieczania dowodów, zacieśnienie współpracy pomiędzy służbami oraz poprawa dostępu do informacji mogą pomóc w zmniejszeniu wyzwań związanych z tymi dochodzeniami.

Słowa kluczowe: dochodzenia w sprawach przestępstw granicznych, wyzwania związane z dochodzeniami, charakter przestępstw granicznych, przyczyny przestępstw granicznych, współpraca między służbami

Introduction

Border crime is a critical concern in the global security dialogue. This category includes human trafficking, drug smuggling, arms trading and trans-border terrorism. These crimes are also known as "transnational crime", "trans-border crimes" and "cross-border crimes", being among the most dangerous crimes in the contemporary world. These kinds of crimes exploit vulnerabilities at national borders and pose significant threats to state sovereignty, economic stability and public safety (UNODC 2024). Border crime takes several forms depending on the geographical and political context. Human trafficking, the smuggling of migrants, trade in narcotics, arms trafficking, wildlife trafficking and cross-border terrorism are the most prevalent types, and they are increasing globally (Shelley 2014). In Bangladesh, the most pressing border crimes are drug smuggling, human trafficking and small arms trafficking (Husain 2024a). The India–Bangladesh border is especially active in the smuggling of phensedyl, a codeine-based cough syrup banned in Bangladesh but easily available across the border. Also, trafficking in persons happens at the border regularly, especially targeting women and children trafficked for forced labour and sexual exploitation (IOM 2019).

Law enforcement agencies encounter significant challenges in combating these crimes, as they are transnational in nature, making them difficult to detect,

investigate and prosecute. Border crime is on the rise in Nigeria, Indonesia, the Philippines, Kosovo, Turkey, the USA, Mexico, Colombia and other African and Asian countries (Laan 2017). Bangladesh is not immune to border crime, either. Bangladesh has a high prevalence of border crime due to its geographical location. Bangladesh is located in the centre of the Golden Triangle, the Golden Crescent and the Golden Wedge. Due to this geographical condition, several countries – such as Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Nepal – use Bangladesh as their transit route to traffic drugs into European and American countries (Hassan 2022; Tayeb 2022). Following the revolution known as the "July Uprising" in Bangladesh, border control has become more vulnerable due to political instability (Ullah 2025). All these factors have collectively worsened the status of border crime in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Police are tasked with investigating and responding to border crime, but they often face numerous challenges in performing their duties effectively, due to political and situational causes (Bajpaee, Schröder 2024). The Bangladesh Police recorded 9,634 recoveries, including arms, explosives, drugs and smuggled goods. Of these, 9,069 cases were related to drug seizure alone, averaging approximately 27 cases per day. Approximately 55% of all cases handled by the Bangladesh Police involved the seizure of goods smuggled from neighbouring countries at the border (Bangladesh Police 2019). Thorough investigations are crucial to uncovering the underlying causes of border crime. However, inadequate funding, resources, technology and manpower make it challenging to investigate these crimes (Beyene 2011; Makokha 2020). The authorities often prioritise domestic offences that receive media coverage and public attention, but it is important to address border crime effectively as well (Casino et al. 2022).

Sometimes, several border crimes go unreported and undiscovered; this gives the criminal the chance to commit further offences, which is a major problem. While investigating border crime, the Bangladesh Police face a number of cultural, linguistic, technical and moral challenges. When these investigative challenges are not properly addressed, it is impossible to uncover the facts related to border crime. Assessing how law enforcement agencies are responding to border crime is crucial. The responses of the Bangladesh Police are typically entirely reactive in nature. When a crime has been successfully carried out and a victim gets hurt, the only option is to repair the damage. There are also other challenges that limit the Bangladesh Police from taking proactive measures to stop border crime. Due to their transnational nature, these crimes are more difficult and challenging to investigate and respond to than other forms of crime. The investigative challenges in border crime faced by law enforcement personnel need to be addressed to properly respond to combat border crime. The prevention of cross-border crimes can be possible to some extent through addressing the investigative challenges, as it would create a deterrence effect.

Existing studies on human trafficking, drug trafficking and illegal goods smuggling have been conducted independently in various countries. However, these studies offer limited insight into the overall challenges of investigating border

crime. Addressing the investigative challenges in a comprehensive way can help elucidate the challenges from a unique perspective. The main objective of this study is to explore the investigative challenges faced by the Bangladesh Police during the investigation of border crime. To further explain them, the nature and cause of border crimes in Bangladesh are explored. Moreover, this study jointly focusses on the nature, causes and challenges of border crime in Bangladesh.

Exploring the challenges that the Bangladesh Police face in investigating border crime may lead to measures that strengthen the collaboration between Bangladesh and its neighbouring countries to combat border crime. This study can also contribute to the body of academic research on law enforcement, which can be useful for researchers and policymakers working in this area. Overall, this study addresses the critical investigative challenges of border crimes, improvement in law enforcement and enhancement in cross-border cooperation, and contributes to academic research.

1. Literature review

Any crime that undermines public safety or security because of proximity to the border, such as crimes involving weapons, drugs, human trafficking or other exploitation, financial crimes, money laundering, criminal enterprises and gangs engaging in activities such as kidnapping, extortion, murder, etc. can be called a border crime (Beyene 2011; Ering 2011). Controlling borders can be difficult due to the several incompatible goals that border officers must balance. Borders must be closed off enough to keep out unwanted elements such as terrorist organisations and international organised crime, while remaining open enough to facilitate smooth trade and relations with neighbouring nations (Gituanja 2013).

Border security has become a serious concern around the world since the scale and frequency of criminal activity have both increased, particularly since the rise of globalisation. The development of telecommunications, transportation and innovation in general has made it simple for cross-border crimes to be committed (Afolayan 2000). The world has become a global village, with its challenges and issues. Criminals can now move freely across the borders of countries and even carry out illicit activity anonymously. This has impacted the safety of people and property, as well as social development (Adepoju 2005). For the interests of governmental and socioeconomic activities, regulation of cross-border crimes is crucial because these are required to incorporate the national economy and to guarantee safety and stability management (Addo 2006).

1.1. Causes of border crimes

Border crimes such as smuggling people, narcotics or weapons can be caused by a complex mix of social, economic and political factors. One major driver is economic profit and demand: illegal markets for drugs, weapons and contraband goods offer high financial rewards (Shelley 2014). For example, Carlos Alvarez and Jascha Wagner (2024) have shown that along the USA–Mexico border, human smuggling and drug trafficking form "high degrees of spatial concentrations", which indicates profitable market opportunities. In the US context, the market for smuggling humans into the country was estimated at about USD 500 million annually (Andreas 2009), and 90% of US cocaine flows from Mexico (DEA 2021). These are clear indicators of strong pull factors for criminal networks. Pockets of endemic poverty and a lack of legal opportunities in origin regions also act as push factors (Lee 1966). Idrees Gana et al. (2023) applied push and pull theory to Nigeria and found poverty, conflict and weak borders push individuals into smuggling networks. On the other hand, market demand (e.g. for fuel or contraband) pulls illegal activity across borders. As in Malaysia, "profit factors and simple marketing" were identified as the main causes of cigarette smuggling (Ering 2011).

Onuk Ojem et al. (2021) identified some causes of cross-border crimes, which include the roughness of borders, insufficient personnel, a lack of logistical backup at the border, weakly defended borders, a lack of essential necessities, financial crises and sociopolitical instability in neighbouring nations, among other factors. However, Rajesh Khakurel (2015) described the benefits of open borders, including freedom of obligation, sociocultural connections and employment possibilities. Due to the porous nature of Bangladesh's border, several other countries exploit it for trafficking routes. The geographic position of Bangladesh makes the country highly vulnerable to illicit drug trafficking. Bangladesh is situated between the two major opium and synthetic drug production hubs in the world, which are the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent (Hassan 2022). The Golden Triangle is located to the east of Bangladesh, which comprises the border areas of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand. Myanmar shares a direct border with Bangladesh and is a significant source of methamphetamine, mainly "Yaba" and "crystal meth", which flood into Bangladesh (Tayeb 2022; Alam, Uddin 2025). To the west of Bangladesh lies the Golden Crescent of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. This region is a primary source of opiates such as heroin, which find their way into Bangladesh through various land and sea routes. While Bangladesh does not produce these narcotics, its porous borders and strategic location make it a transit country for international drug syndicates (UNODC 2005; Hassan 2022).

Poverty significantly complicates border crimes in Bangladesh, particularly through the vulnerable border communities (Rahman, Rani 2020). Limited legitimate economic opportunities make the people in border areas engage in illicit activities as a means of survival and income generation (Hasan, Khatun 2020). Smuggling has become an easy option for those struggling with unemployment

and low wages (Husain 2024b). This economic desperation fuels various border crimes, including drug trafficking, human trafficking and the illegal trade of goods. Individuals from impoverished backgrounds are more susceptible to recruitment by criminal syndicates, who exploit their vulnerability (UNODC 2025a). Addressing root causes like poverty through socioeconomic development initiatives is crucial to preventing border crime in Bangladesh (Alam, Uddin 2025).

Political sensitivities and periodic border tensions with neighbouring countries hinder joint enforcement actions and intelligence sharing (Legrand, Leuprecht 2021). Following the recent July Uprising in Bangladesh, widespread unrest and shifts in power have created a challenging environment for maintaining proper security along the extensive borders in Bangladesh. The disruption caused by the uprising may have weakened the operational capacity of law enforcement agencies and border guards. This issue has increased vulnerability to national security and regional stability (Ullah 2025). These political, geographical and socioeconomic causes of border crime are quite unique in Bangladesh compared to those of other regions and nations.

Border crime can also be caused by a weak state and corruption (Rotberg 2004). Where law enforcement is under-resourced, criminal syndicates exploit loopholes (Bayley 2005). David Jancsics (2021) noted that in the USA–Mexico border region, several corruption cases involved border officers being bribed to facilitate trafficking. Cross-border tribal or familial ties also can create local tolerance of smuggling, which can further enable these crimes (Flynn 1997). Uneven development and globalisation including illegalised migration and transnational networks create conditions for border crime (Sassen 1998). Globalisation and organised crime networks "challenge the sovereignty of nation-states", producing cross-border crimes such as trafficking and terrorism (Andreas 2003). Thus, border crime is rooted in global inequalities, demand for illicit goods/labour, conflict and weak governance – all of which create incentives and opportunities for illegal cross-border activity (Findlay 1999).

1.2. Controlling border crime and the associated challenges

Controlling border crime requires comprehensive strategies, but law enforcement agencies face significant obstacles. Governments use physical and technological measures – fences, patrols, surveillance cameras, drones and X-ray scanners (Amoore 2006) – as well as legal measures, such as treaties, extradition and mutual assistance (Nadelmann 1993). Regional initiatives, such as the EU's Schengen internal open-border regime versus its Frontex external border control, aim to coordinate enforcement (Mitsilegas 2015). Because "organised crime benefits from operating across borders", effective control demands a coordinated effort between local, national and international agencies with innovative data-driven policing (Edwards, Levi 2008). Data sharing platforms and joint task forces are increasingly used to target trafficking rings (Bruinsma, Bernasco 2004). Some

nations also attempt to close borders or implement stricter measures; one study in Nigeria found that simply sealing the border did not stop smuggling due to other weaknesses of the border. Instead, modernising customs and international cooperation can be useful (Asiwaju 1985).

However, practical and political challenges have made it difficult to take such measures. Jurisdictional limits and legal differences can complicate attempts at cooperation. Different countries have their own definitions of offences, evidentiary rules and penalties. Mismatches in legal frameworks often slow down joint investigations regarding the exchange of evidence or extradition (De Jonge, De Vries 2024). As an EU analysis notes, it is often impossible to prosecute cross-border criminal networks, which indicates that disrupting the crime may be a more realistic approach than going to trial (Europol 2021). Cross-border patrols or information exchange depend on trust and resources (Sheptycki 2000). Language, bureaucracy and mutual legal assistance treaties (MLATs) create significant delays in responding, controlling and investigating border crime (Nadelmann 1993).

Contestable borders, a porous border structure, high population density in border regions and an open border lead to crimes such as human trafficking, trafficking in weapons and drugs, unlicensed trade, extremist, insurgent and radical groups, counterfeiting, murder, robbery, kidnapping and extortion, terrorism. Many incidents where criminals targeted by law enforcement forces from either nation access the neighbouring country simply cross the unsecured border and engage in illegal activities there (Khakurel 2015). The contribution of corruption to the facilitation of migrant smuggling has also been highlighted in research. For instance, Cristina Alberola and Chloé Janssen (2019) argue that law enforcement officers are involved in corruption, which serves as the primary enabler of migrant smuggling. They see corruption as facilitating the acquisition of genuine, but false travel credentials from government representatives, which makes it very challenging for enforcement agencies to spot migrant smuggling. Corruption makes things difficult by reducing border controls. Smugglers and immigrants are simply allowed to cross borders by bribing officials (OECD 2015). Several towns in the borderlands are impacted by a range of cross-border crimes. In general, violent crime and property crime are more prevalent in border regions than elsewhere (Shirk 2003). Sometimes, a process or procedure is not clearly stated in a law or regulation. Due to the absence of legal guidance, discretionary power was used in those circumstances. Similarly, there are no processes specified for immigration border clearance or marine border governance in several countries, which creates a situation of indecisiveness for law enforcement officials (Arifin, Nurkumalawati 2022).

Bangladesh has witnessed a revolutionary change since the July Uprising, which exposed widespread corruption, bribery and misconduct within the Bangladeshi police force. Police personnel across the nation faced a surge in complaints regarding accountability. Such corruption and misconduct have long been practiced in Bangladesh, which hinders effective responses to border crime (Akash, Sharif 2025; Ullah 2025). Furthermore, the Rohingya crisis has intensified certain crime trends,

particularly human trafficking and small arms smuggling. Organised criminal networks, often involving local actors, exploit the lack of strong law enforcement and recruit Rohingyas from refugee camps to expand their operations (IOM 2019). Overall, due to these factors, it has not been possible to properly address border crime.

Corruption and local politics also play a vital role in this. Border officials, from customs agents to militia members, can be bribed or co-opted (Heyman 1995). There are documented cases of US border agents accepting bribes to allow drug and migrant smuggling (Jancsics 2021). Such corruption transforms border zones into "floating" zones where illegal flows go unchecked. Also, border control is often politicised. Enforcement officers face pressure from national agendas (as tough immigration rhetoric, e.g. the "war on drugs") which can conflict with human rights norms (Ering 2011). This politicisation may reduce the discretion of officers for humanitarian considerations. Moreover, controlling border crime involves integrated technology and policy, but must overcome the corruption, legal/jurisdictional gaps and political constraints (De Jonge, De Vries 2024).

1.3. Investigative challenges in border crime

The investigation of crimes that cross borders entails unique difficulties – jurisdictional fragmentation is one of those issues (Reichel 2017). Criminal activity often involves multiple countries, but law enforcement powers do not. Even sharing evidence digitally can be difficult, as evidence may reside on cloud servers under foreign laws, which requires international legal requests to examine (Casey 2011). For cross-border investigation in the digital age, even simply exchanging data involves many complex issues. Legal systems differ, and delays can make a piece of evidence outdated (Brenner, Koops 2004; Casino et al. 2022). For example, because encrypted communications or online marketplaces may involve servers in multiple states, authorities must navigate diverse data retention and privacy laws. These complexities mean that some international investigations can be delayed at the evidence-collection stage (Finklea 2017).

Mutual legal assistance is another challenge: countries use MLATs or joint investigation teams, but these are slow and subject to political vetoes (Nadelmann 1993). Prosecuting a foreign-based network is often impossible if the country where the crime occurs refuses to cooperate. Criminal prosecution of foreign-based networks may be impossible, which forces agencies to focus on disrupting supply chains rather than fully preparing for trials (Europol 2021). Language and trust issues challenge coordination, and investigators may lack trust in foreign police forces or hesitate to expose informants (Sheptycki 2000).

In combating organised border crime, standard street-level police investigation methods generally fail. Given the challenges, laws against organised border crime also offer specialised investigative methods and processes that strengthen the authority of law enforcement. The investigation is improved by unique investigative techniques such as electronic monitoring, covert operations, a regulated drug sup-

ply and the testimony of partners. If the use of these techniques is not constrained, human rights such as freedom to privacy may be violated. Most nations permit the use of specialised investigation methods with a court order. When the evidence is not related to the investigation, detectives must stop the interrogation (Beyene 2011). There are several challenges to addressing cross-border security, such as the proliferation of light weapons, a porous boundary, ineffective coordination between agencies, a lack of intercommunication, inconsistent jurisdiction, a lack of a skilled labour force and inefficient collaboration (Shidane 2020). Combating human trafficking at the border in Moyale, Kenya, law enforcement officials face several challenges, including settlements for border communities, intercommunity conflict-related instability, the border location, insecurity, linguistic obstacles, a shortage of interpreters employed by the government, corruption, insufficient training, inadequate norms and practices, insufficient resources and a lack of communication (Makokha 2020).

Cultural, linguistic and ethnic overlaps across borders facilitate criminal activity by obscuring national affiliations and complicating the identification of suspects (Andreas 2003). Language barriers, inadequate technology, a lack of motivation among staff to share knowledge, insufficient experience or skills, problematic leadership issues, organisational differences, a lack of positive relationships, a lack of system integration and standardisation, a lack of a legal framework for collaboration, differences in national laws and varying strategic priorities can be the most likely problematic issues preventing knowledge sharing among neighbouring countries. These factors negatively affect the investigation of border offences (Birdi et al. 2020). Cross-border criminal investigations are particularly important because of the complexity that results from the diversity of legal systems, which goes beyond time constraints to become prohibitive (Casino et al. 2022). The governmental policy of restricting entry may be viewed as ineffective because it reduces the options for legal entry, which leads to migrants turning to smugglers for help and the growth of the illegal trade (Makokha 2020). A number of institutional, psychological and legal difficulties face the police department's organised human trafficking investigation. Significant evidence of resistance to change in response to new legislation, an uncertain legal environment, a lack of expertise, a lack of tools and training, a lack of victim services, forcing victims to give testimony, negative attitudes towards victims of human trafficking and the difficulty of establishing the credibility of victims were identified as the main challenges in human trafficking investigations (Farrell, Owens, McDevitt 2013).

Technical obstacles add to the difficulty as criminals use encryption, VPNs, the dark web and decentralised currencies to hide their activities (Europol 2019). Tracing and attributing transnational crimes, such as money laundering, across multiple banks requires intensive forensic expertise. Training local prosecutors in international criminal law is often insufficient (De Jonge, De Vries 2024). Even when evidence is collected, differences in standards can slow down the activities of prosecutors. Bureaucratic complexity, legal heterogeneity and technical challenges make investigating border crime very difficult (Casino et al. 2022).

In Bangladesh, the limited technological resources are notable. Although the authorities have made some investments (e.g. installing CCTV along parts of the India–Bangladesh border), the overall level of technology remains lower than that of neighbouring countries (Team 2024). The Bangladesh Police lack widespread surveillance drones and comprehensive electronic databases for cross-referencing offenders. Furthermore, as the information technology infrastructure in remote posts is limited, basic connectivity is very poor (Huque, Ferdous 2024). Interviews with Bangladeshi officials reveal that inadequate infrastructure, such as roads, outposts and communication links, as well as limited resources hinder the effective use of technology (Husain 2024a).

1.4. Human rights issues

National immunity, diplomatic immunity and national sovereignty are all general principles of international law that apply to human rights on a global scale. Human rights are innate, fundamental rights but in order for them to function as legal rights, countries must agree to be obligated by them. On a global scale, human rights are primarily outlined in the body of conventions on human rights negotiated under the supervision of the United Nations, as well as in local human rights conventions (Koops, Goodwin 2014). Conventions and treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), for example, can be used to investigate border or cross-border crimes, and the investigating agencies must respect the rights that are mentioned in those conventions. Most nations tend to catch, prosecute and imprison victims of human trafficking on the basis of unlawful entry, fraudulent documents and participation in illicit activities. Due to these actions, the majority of trafficking victims doubt the criminal justice system; they are afraid of the system and do not cooperate with the police or other agencies. However, it has become challenging to investigate and prosecute cases of human trafficking without the assistance of the victims (Beyene 2011).

There are some issues regarding humanitarian and rights-based policies, since securing borders may prevent smuggling and trafficking, but it undermines victim protection and dissuades victims from cooperating with investigations (Miller, Baumeister 2013; Norfolk, Hallgrimsdottir 2019). Studies of migration routes (such as the Central Mediterranean route) present how smugglers' tactics and humanitarian crises produce hybrid outcomes, both voluntary movement and exploitation, which complicates the legal classification and responses (Bish et al. 2023).

1.5. Preventive measures

In order for the security institutions to successfully perform their duty, adequate personnel are needed. The government should hire specialists for staff and people from border regions, who need to be retrained. The well-being of the personnel from the border agencies should be taken care of to make them more efficient. This way they will not involve in illegal activities (Ojem, Ibrahim, Maiwada 2021). To communicate any accessible security-related information and to create a shared platform for security updates, all border security agencies are required to cooperate with each other. They may utilise the available technology more effectively to facilitate information flow (Khakurel 2015). The infrastructure at the border must be updated, including the roadways, modern equipment and accommodation for the staff. Salaries for border protection personnel need to be updated, and governments should allocate such funds in the budget because of the difficult working conditions. Meeting the security personnel's fundamental requirements will help prevent them becoming corrupted (Shidane 2020).

For preventing border crime, agreements like the "22 Point Smart Border Agreement between the United States and Mexico Secure Infrastructure" can be introduced among neighbouring countries. The agreements represent several attempts at collaboration between the United States and Mexico, including long-term planning, infrastructure protection, technology sharing, joint training, visa policy consultation, cross-border cooperation, pre-cleared travellers (Shirk 2003). The exchange of information between neighbouring countries is critical in investigating border crimes. Using appropriate technology is listed as the most frequent facilitator for knowledge transfer among organisations. Cross-border patrols, enthusiasm for information sharing, acceptable language proficiency, strong leadership and having enough economic capabilities are all treated as crucial components in this regard (Birdi et al. 2020). In the interests of developing the political and socioeconomic activities required for integrating economies and guaranteeing peace and stability, these actions towards the appropriate supervision of cross-border crimes must be taken (Addo 2006).

Technological advancements offer both opportunities for criminals and tools for law enforcement. While illicit markets use digital platforms and cryptocurrencies to expand their reach and evade detection, data-driven investigations can be a vital countermeasure. By employing network analysis and large datasets, the police can recognise patterns, identify criminal networks and develop proactive strategies. However, this requires that challenges related to cross-jurisdictional data sharing and ensuring admissible evidence be addressed (De Jonge, De Vries 2024). Several nations use domestic legislation to address organised crime and human trafficking, as well as platforms for global collaboration in investigating and sentencing trafficking cases. This is particularly important since it improves the investigation and prosecution of cases involving organised border crime (Beyene 2011). Contemporary investigations are hampered by the expertise of illegal

activity and the advancement of information technology, which calls for ongoing international cooperation among many entities. Given the numerous challenges, including those in the legal, technological and moral dimensions, the solution is not simple (Casino et al. 2022).

2. Theoretical framework

Michael Lipsky's (1980) theory, street-level bureaucracy, offers insight into the challenge of border control and border crime investigation. Michael Lipsky argued that frontline public servants such as police officers or social workers (the "human face" of policy) effectively shape policy through daily decisions. They operate under ambiguous rules and limited resources, using coping strategies and personal judgments to deliver or withhold services. Applying this concept to borders, customs, border guard and coast guard personnel and immigration officers are the classic street-level bureaucrats (Soss, Fording, Schram 2011). Their interactions with migrants and smugglers in effect constitute the lived experience of border policy. They decide who crosses, who is to detained or turned away and under what offences, which effectively shape the policy on the ground. Studies by border researchers highlight how these decisions of officers reflect competing pressures and norms. Linda Williams (2015) studied US police departments and found that officers, being pulled between political pressures, are hostile to immigrants. Departments with strong professional ethics tended to treat immigrants fairly despite anti-immigrant politics. This suggests that street-level agents can either assist or resist the broader policy climate.

However, at the border, the official atmosphere is often more securitised. Katja Franko Aas (2013) introduced the idea of a "bordered penality", where non-citizens face harsher justice. She argues that for migrants, street-level enforcement embodies a two-tier system where non-citizens are more likely to be penalised (deported or detained) rather than rehabilitated. In practice, a border officer may treat an undocumented migrant encounter as a criminal act that warrants deportation (penal banishment), whereas a citizen might receive a warning for a similar infraction (Aas 2013). Katja Franko Aas shows that this discretionary punishment reflects the "precarious membership" of migrants; their status grants border guards greater latitude to exclude rather than assist.

Nicholas De Genova (2002) further explored how street-level enforcement produces the very category of "illegality". He describes the border as a kind of lethal filter where the militarised barrier "simply tends to 'trap' the great majority of those who succeed to get across inside the space of the nation-state as migrant labor." In other words, border enforcement does not purely exclude migrants, but selects and detains them inside as cheap labour. Nicholas De Genova (2002) argues that

the routine decisions of border agents, often under the guise of national security, create "anonymous brown bodies", people transformed into disposable, illegalised migrants by policy. Street-level agents, by detaining or deporting some migrants but not others, actively produce the contours of illegal migration (De Genova 2021). This perspective critiques Michael Lipsky's focus on individual discretion, which emphasises that enforcement at the border is also a deeply political act that sustains a global regime of selective migration (Hess 2012). Sharon Pickering examines a similar dynamic through a gendered lens. In her ethnography of Australian maritime patrols, Sharon Pickering (2014) describes border patrol boats as "floating carceral spaces". She showed how officers and asylum-seeking women are governed by competing narratives of enforcement versus rescue. Border agents often enact a "masculine" enforcement role as interdiction or even control, and they sometimes play a "feminine" rescue role as providing aid. This gendered dynamic shapes how street-level bureaucrats perceive threats: for instance, they may view men as smugglers or fighters and women primarily as needy victims. Such framing influences discretionary decisions about who needs to be arrested versus admitted to care (Pickering 2014). Sharon Pickering's study highlights that street-level work at borders is not value-neutral, but infused with cultural meanings of gender, fear and heroism that guide the actions of officers.

Taken together, these theories suggest a critical, mediated view of border enforcement and control. Michael Lipsky's (1980) model shows us that attitudes and routines of officers determine outcomes. But Katja Franko Aas (2013), Nicholas De Genova (2002) and Sharon Pickering (2014) add that these outcomes are also structured by larger forces such as citizenship regimes, racial hierarchies and political economies. Border officials do not choose their operating environment. They work within two-tiered laws and a securitised politics that encourages exclusion. A critical analysis would note that street-level theory must account for how power is deployed unevenly. For example, when migration is framed as a security crisis, officers are likely to be pushed towards rigid enforcement strategies to limit the discretion Michael Lipsky described (Guiraudon 2000). On the other hand, in contexts emphasising humanitarian values, those same officers might bypass policies to allow asylum, consistent with strong professional norms (Williams 2015).

Moreover, street-level theory helps explain the enforcement challenges noted above. Limited resources and high workloads lead officers to ration the available services. At busy borders, this may mean prioritising obvious security threats and ignoring smaller infractions. The call for data-driven policing implicitly acknowledges that street-level practice is often reactive. Officers focus on visible patterns because they cannot monitor everywhere (De Jonge, De Vries 2024). Corruption can also be seen as an adverse coping strategy, as officers who are bribed have effectively lower enforcement pressure, a result of individual choice under corruptible systems (Heyman 1995).

Michael Lipsky's theory posits that the staffs have the discretion to reinforce the service-seeker with negative and positive reinforcements (Lipsky 1980). This

research conceptualises the challenges in investigating border crime. As mentioned above, the bribery and misconduct of the Bangladesh Police have hindered effective responses to border crime. For several political and situational factors, such as pressure from higher-ups, bribery and corruption, the police officers have used their discretionary power in a negative way (Akash, Sharif 2025; Bajpaee, Schröder 2024). As street-level bureaucrats, the police have exercised their discretionary power at will, which has led to improper investigations. Additionally, the police must follow instructions from higher authorities, as they depend on political leaders and the Ministry of Home Affairs for resources. Moreover, the use of discretionary power, combined with political and hierarchical pressure, has created significant challenges in responding to and investigating border crimes. Moreover, applying street-level bureaucracy to border crime control agencies, they decide how laws "play out" day-to-day. Katja Franko Aas's "bordered penality" and Sharon Pickering's "floating carceral spaces" reveal that the boundaries of the nation profoundly change the meanings of law enforcement. Nicholas De Genova's analysis suggests that the border itself is an instrument that street-level actors use (sometimes unwittingly) to construct illegality. A thorough framework would therefore combine Michael Lipsky's insights on discretion, challenges and coping. It would examine how border guards interpret policy, how they balance political mandates against norms and how their daily practices produce broader patterns of inclusion and exclusion at the border.

The SARA model (scanning, analysis, response and assessment) is a component of what Herbert Goldstein (1979) referred to as "problem-oriented policing". This model represents one of the best and most powerful methods for policing, which may help prevent crime, find remedies and assist police personnel in responding more efficiently (Glenn 2020). With this model, it is possible to decrease some of the investigative challenges, as officers may scan and understand the nature and types of border crimes that occur. Then the officers may analyse the types of crimes that occur along the border, as well as their frequency and causes. Based on the analysis, police have to develop a response to properly address and investigate border crime with the limited resources they have at hand. This might involve developing new strategies and techniques for investigating and solving border crime. Lastly, police might evaluate the impact of the new strategies and techniques on the investigation and resolution of border crimes and identify areas for improvement.

3. Method

This study was conducted using a qualitative method and an exploratory research design. The data were collected from primary sources through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide included open-ended

questions about the sociodemographic information of the respondents, the nature and causes of border crime, the challenges faced by law enforcement officials in combating and investigating border crime and lastly, suggestions from the respondents. The research focussed on the north-western border of Bangladesh, specifically three police stations in the border area. The police stations deal with several kinds of border crime which are frequent at the north-western border of Bangladesh, including drug trafficking, illegal goods trafficking, human trafficking, illegal entry, murder and extortion.

The study area comprised three police stations in the Chapainawabganj district, which includes Chapainawabganj Sadar police station, Shibganj police station and Gomastapur police station. These three police stations have 48 investigative officers in total, including 2 assistant superintendents, 9 inspectors and 37 sub-inspectors. A non-probability sampling approach, specifically convenience sampling, was used because not all officers were available at the time of the study due to official duties in other places and holiday leave. The available officers were interviewed, which resulted in 16 interviews (with 1 inspector and 15 sub-inspectors). The sociodemographic data of the respondents can be found in Table 1. The data were then sorted, narrated and transcribed to generate meaning. Open and axial coding techniques were used to categorise the narrative of the interviews, leading to several sub-themes that were subsequently grouped into several themes. Then, thematic analysis was conducted to generate the results from the data.

Table 1. Socio-demographic data of the respondents.

Socio-demographic variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age		
21–30	2	12.5
31–40	10	62.5
41–50	1	6.25
51–60	2	12.5
Gender		
Male	16	100
Educational qualification		
Higher secondary	2	12.5
Bachelor	5	31.25
Masters	9	56.25
Religion		
Islam	14	87.5
Hinduism	2	12.5

Socio-demographic variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Marital status		
Married	13	81.25
Unmarried	3	18.75
Rank		
Inspector	1	6.25
Sub-inspector	15	93.75
Income		
15001–20000	7	43.75
20001–25000	9	56.25
Working hours		
12–16 hours	10	62.5
16–20 hours	2	12.5
24 hours	4	25
Duration in Police Service		
1–10 years	9	56.25
11–20 years	4	25
21–30 years	3	18.75
Duration in investigation		
1–5 years	6	37.5
6–10 years	7	43.75
11–15 years	3	18.75
Duration in border crime investigation		
Less than 6 months	6	37.5
6–11 months	2	12.5
1– 2 years	6	37.5
More than 2 years	2	12.5

Source: Authors' own research.

The study also made use of field observation. The researcher closely monitored some of the activities of the officers when investigating border crimes. These investigation officers shared their experiences of what they faced during their regular activities. There are also other officers, in addition to the investigation officers, in the police stations who cannot directly take part in the investigation, but inquire about crimes and assist the investigation officers. They also shared their experiences with the researcher, which helped develop a deeper understanding of the investigative challenges. These observations helped develop further descriptions of the empirical data in the study.

This study has multiple limitations that impact its generalisability to some extent and need to be specified. As several investigation officers were occupied performing their official duties in other regions, it was not possible to interview them all. In the three selected police stations, there was only one female investigation officer. However, she was also preoccupied with official duties in another region, which is another limitation of this study, as no female investigation officers were interviewed. There were not enough investigation officers available to conduct the required number of in-depth interviews, which lessens the generalisability of the study to some extent. Also, a major problem facing the Bangladesh Police is that the investigation officers are frequently transferred; across the whole police department, one year is the average duration of an officer serving at a police station, which is another limitation. The officers' duration of service in the border region and overall are specified in the socioeconomic data (see Table 1). Most of the investigation officers interviewed for the study have not been in the police stations of the border region for very long, and they were not experienced in investigating border crime. This led to an incomplete picture of the investigative challenges faced by the officers.

4. Analysis and findings

In this section, the findings from the in-depth interviews are presented thematically. Several sub-themes and themes emerged in this study, which are described with quotes from the respondents. Also, the insights from the field observation have been incorporated in this section to critically describe the issues of investigative challenges in border crime. It is crucial to describe the nature and causes of border crime and the responses to those crimes in order to better understand the investigative challenges. Thus, all these issues are discussed in this section.

4.1. Nature, pattern and causes of border crime

The Bangladesh Police confront various crimes at the border, including illegal entry, drug trafficking, firearms smuggling, illegal goods smuggling, human trafficking, money laundering, kidnapping, murder and extortion. All the respondents confirmed that these crimes frequently happen in the border area. Illegal entry also occurs, as some parts of the border area are wide open and supervision of law enforcement agencies is absent. Murder and extortion are less frequent crimes in this region. However, several murders have occurred, as some trafficking groups had internal clashes.

> I [an investigator] mainly deal with border crimes such as drug trafficking, illegal goods trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, murder, etc. All the border areas are highly crime-prone. (R5)

Offenders can easily disguise their illegal goods in some products so that they don't easily get caught. (R6)

The crimes that occurred in the border area can be either organised or individual in nature. Mostly, organised crime occurs because certain groups are involved. Border crimes are often coordinated by influential political leaders, who use young, impoverished individuals (e.g. women and children) in need of money.

These crimes are mostly committed by the powerful person on the border area. They use vulnerable people who need money and have family problems to commit these border crimes. The offenders here use the unused cultivation lands that have no physical border to commit border crimes. (R2)

We [investigators] also found some criminals who had inherited crimes from previous generations. (R4)

People who are estranged from their families (…) are more likely to engage in border crimes. (R1)

There are some groups who are involved with border crime because of previous generations. Committing these crimes is generational for them; they learn the criminal tactics from their parents or grandparents. Also, there are some cases where young people who are estranged from their families join organised crime groups and commit these crimes under the guidance of influential individuals. Traffickers and smugglers exploit unguarded areas along the border to transport their illegal products, occasionally disguising the products to avoid detection at the border. The primary causes of border crimes, as identified by investigation officers, include open and unsecured borders, corruption within border security agencies, inadequate surveillance and poor border management. Corruption and the use of discretionary power have led to a lack of supervision at the border and have facilitated the activity of organised crime groups.

Open borders, corruption within border authorities, border areas that are far from a police station [and] an easily assessable border (…) are the main causes of border crimes. (R1)

The following factors contribute to these crimes: a lack of supervision by the border guard, corruption within the border agency, etc. (R16)

The lack of coordination among law enforcement agencies, inefficient border security agencies, insufficient patrolling in border areas, negligent border security agencies, the lack of manpower in border areas, the distance between border areas and police stations and vulnerable groups being coerced into committing crimes are some core causes of border crime. The lack of supervision and awareness, along with the temptation of quick financial benefits, are crucial causes that encourage people to commit border crime in this border area.

4.2. Responses to border crimes

Border crimes require special attention and specific responses due to their transnational nature. Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) is responsible for patrolling the borders of Bangladesh. However, in certain circumstances, the Bangladesh Police also conduct patrols in response to prior crime-related information. Both the BGB and the Bangladesh Police have the authority to apprehend criminals in the border area. The Police maintain local sources to collect intelligence for their investigations.

> We [Bangladesh Police] maintain patrols in border areas on a routine basis with patrol pickups, local vehicles, walkie-talkies, shotguns, life jackets, light-reflecting jackets, handcuffs, flutes, etc. (R12)

Following an arrest, a report is filed at the local police station, which initiates the investigation process. Investigation officers often rely on local sources to locate offenders and use various technologies such as call detail records (CDR), crime data management systems (CDMS) and the National Identity Server (NID) to gather evidence.

> Technological tools are operated by special units [of the Bangladesh Police]. So, we [investigators] have to depend on them for call detail records, fingerprint analysis and information from the national identity server. (R10)

Forensic testing of evidence is carried out when necessary by specialised units such as the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Cyber Police Centre (CPC) upon the request of the investigation officer. Sometimes, the police also use techniques such as ambushes to apprehend an offender.

> We [investigators] must rely on the cyber police unit to gain access to even a little amount of information, which causes delays in the investigation process. (R10)

Once all the necessary information is collected, a charge-sheet for a crime is made and submitted to the court in order to start the prosecution process. Exclusive jurisdiction for investigating border crimes lies with the Bangladesh Police, making it a crucial step in identifying patterns and addressing such crimes effectively.

4.3. Investigation challenges faced by investigation officers responding to border crime

Investigating border crimes is a difficult task that requires careful attention to different factors in order to uncover the facts. Due to its transnational nature, border crime presents additional challenges that require special skills from investigators. In Bangladesh, investigators face numerous obstacles when dealing with border crime.

4.3.1. Lack of evidence

Due to the poor infrastructure, the investigator may miss some evidence. Some areas of the border region do not even have any proper roads or means of communication. Thus, it takes time to reach those areas. At a crime scene, the investigator may not find enough evidence; it may have been spoiled or taken by someone. There is no proper system for evidence preservation until the police reach the crime scene. Most of the time, there are many onlookers and other people at a crime scene, making it easy for them to spoil evidence. When police reach the crime scene, they often cannot find any usable evidence.

> We [investigators] also face problems getting witnesses from the border area, as they are not helpful and don't want to testify easily. (R11)

> [I]f a crime happens at the border, it takes a long time for us to get there. Till then, we can't find enough evidence to prove that case. (R16)

Physical, oral or documentary evidence is crucial for proving or disproving a case in the legal context of Bangladesh. But the investigator will drop the case if enough evidence cannot be found. And these are regular challenges in the investigation of border crime.

> [W]e [investigators] can't gather evidence from across the border [from neighbouring countries] or from the originating place of that crime; when we don't find any evidence, we have to drop the case and most offenders flee from the country across the border due to the slow investigation. (R1)

Here, the challenges in gathering evidence for an investigation are affected by several other factors, as the police do not have enough vehicles to get to a crime scene. In each police station, there are only two vehicles, one of which is always reserved for the officer in charge of that police station. This complicates the situation for the investigation officers, who have to rely on local transport, which usually is not very reliable in border areas. Also, most of the investigation officers are not properly trained to collect evidence from crime scenes. There are different teams for collecting, storing and analysing evidence. However, most of the police stations do not have an evidence collection team, which leads to improper evidence collection and a failure to investigate the facts of the crime.

4.3.2. Lack of manpower and overburdened caseloads

Due to a lack of manpower, the existing investigation officers are forced to take on additional cases. Thus, to decrease their caseloads, they have to complete investigations quickly, and then they have another case to solve.

> Bangladesh Police lack manpower. So, we [investigators] get too little time for an investigation. Because of the high caseload, one investigation officer must handle at least 9–10 cases at a time in our police station. (R4)

We [investigators] have to fast-track the process of one investigation to completion, and then we have to jump to other cases. (R7)

Many of the investigation officers feel burdened with the caseloads and have stress from time to time. They cannot even get a proper meal due to their workload of investigations. The Bangladesh Police have to depend on the government to recruit personnel, but the government does not seem to care about this issue. Therefore, with this little manpower, the police department has to manage the overburdened caseloads.

4.3.3. Lack of technological support

Police stations in Bangladesh suffer from a significant lack of technology, which hampers investigators' access to necessary information. They must rely on specialised police units such as the Criminal Investigation Department, cyber police units and police headquarters to obtain the required information.

The investigators have to depend on other [special] agencies to get access to crucial information that is needed instantly for an investigation. Sometimes it takes 2–3 working days to get a small piece of information. (R6)

Sometimes the investigator has to transfer sensitive cases to a specialised unit like the Police Bureau of Investigation or the Criminal Investigation Department to investigate. (R7)

Specialised police units have easy access to information. Transferring the cases to the special unit ensures a fast investigation, but there are few special units and they are not available in every region.

4.3.4. Lack of financial support

Almost all respondents expressed concerns about finances. Every police officer needs to be on duty for 24 hours. They are obligated to respond whenever they are summoned. However, they are paid on average like other government employees who only work 8 hours a day. Even in times of inflation, the government does not provide any additional financial support to the officers.

The government pays us the money depending on our grade specified in government salary scale. But in the same grade, other government employees have to work only 8–10 hours a day. But we have to be on duty for 24 hours. (R8)

We [investigators] don't get paid enough for our transportation and other investigation bills. (R11)

There is a common salary structure for all government employees in Bangladesh. Even with the extra duties for additional hours, the investigators are not compensated. This discrimination has sometimes led to a lack of motivation in investigations.

4.3.5. Lack of collaboration and coordination

The lack of collaboration is a huge problem in every sector in Bangladesh. All governmental organisations have to collaborate and coordinate with each other for several purposes. But there are no specific rules or regulations for collaboration. This has caused a huge gap in intelligence-sharing among the agencies, and ultimately leads to failure in investigation.

> A lack of collaboration between the Bangladesh Police and Border Guard Bangladesh exist. When the border guard files a case, they do not include all of the information of that crime in the general diary. (R1)

> Lack of intelligence-gathering is the result of a lack of collaboration that creates information gaps within the investigation. (R16)

> Investigators don't get enough collaboration from other law enforcement agencies. But we expect to get operational and informational support from [several special units such as] the Border Guard, the Rapid Action Battalion and the Drug and Narcotics Control. (R4)

In the case of border crimes, without the support of border agencies, it can be quite difficult for the police to handle an investigation. But there is no existing framework or regulation that can address these issues in collaboration. This has made the agencies share intelligence or information at their discretion. Sometimes, other law enforcement agencies do not help the investigators at all, and from time to time are even hostile. They make the investigation officers wait when they need support. They delay the support process with several excuses.

Many of the investigation officers have tried to contact the law enforcement agencies of the neighbouring country (India) to solve their cases, but they were denied any help by any means and told to follow proper protocol to get information, which could take several months.

> I [investigator] needed just some information from an FIR that was filed in India. But they denied giving me that information and told me to follow the procedure and give them an application through the ministry. (R8)

If an information exchange system was developed between Bangladesh and the neighbouring countries regarding border crime issues, the investigation officers would benefit and would be able to do proper investigations.

4.3.6. Political pressure and pressure from higher-ups

All the strategies and other planning frameworks of the Bangladesh Police are comparatively traditional. As a result, an investigator cannot go beyond the rules by which they are bound. This is a serious problem in Bangladesh, where powerful people with connections to high-ranking government officials can easily get away with their crimes. If officials want to mislead an investigation in other directions, the investigator has no choice but to follow.

There is so much lacking in strategic planning. (R16)

In many cases, when we [investigators] are about to reveal the fact of a crime, we are told to mislead that fact in another way as the powerful people have connections with the higher-ups' police officials. We are obligated to follow the orders of our superiors. (R8)

Sometimes, to maintain the chain of command, investigators have to do something that they are not willing to do. And they have to force themselves to obey their superiors to avoid any difficulties from higher-ups in future.

4.3.7. Challenges in information-gathering

In most police stations, investigators lack a suitable environment and opportunity to properly interrogate offenders. The absence of proper interrogation settings with appropriate materials is a common problem. Also, the people from border areas can sometimes be hostile. They assist offenders by hiding them and providing incorrect or misleading information to the police. In addition, the local source used by the investigation officer can have the wrong or incomplete information, which hampers the investigation in different ways.

We [investigators] can't properly interrogate offenders due to a lack of interrogation techniques and the interrogation environment in the police station. (R10)

We [investigators] always have to be aware of the people in border areas. (…) They become hostile when we get to them to collect information about a case. (R16)

The local source sometimes gives us misleading information. So, based on that information, the investigation takes a detour away from the facts. (R5)

The investigators also lack skills in collecting intelligence and information from sources and witnesses of crimes. Information-gathering requires special skills such as rapport-building, observation and the ability to psychologically assess individuals. As most of the investigators in the Bangladesh Police are not properly trained in collecting information, this issue remains a big challenge.

4.3.8. Changing pattern of crime in the border area

The evolving patterns of border crime in Bangladesh are influenced by modern technology and emerging techniques. Crimes committed in the past two decades have new patterns, and new methods are used. However, the Bangladesh Police has yet to introduce proper crime pattern technology to address this issue properly.

Crime patterns are changing every day in border areas. So, to keep up with the pattern, high-tech technologies need to be introduced in force to track down the changing pattern. (R8)

There are not many investigation officers in the Bangladesh Police, but the government is unable to train all of them. Only the investigators from special units receive special training on recent technology and crime pattern analysis. Another challenge in this regard is that the investigation officers get transferred frequently. The average investigator stays at a police station for one year. For this little time, the authorities do not want to train an investigator to investigate special crimes such as border crime.

4.4. Consequences of these challenges of investigating border crime

Investigation officers experience mental and physical stress due to their caseloads, round-the-clock shifts, pressure from superiors, unsolved cases, busy police duties and working in challenging environments. These factors minimise their ability to focus on their work; sometimes they need to push themselves to fulfil their duties.

> During an investigation, we get a lot of pressure that creates physical and psychological stress on us. This stress leads to inattention, getting sleepy all the time, etc., which minimises our performance in the next investigation. (R3)

> We [investigators] can't see our family often. (…) Work pressure doesn't even let me sleep. Every police officer spends their life in this manner. (R8)

Investigation officers take on the stress of the victims and their families during investigations, fuelled by a sense of responsibility towards their fellow citizens. They try their best to solve cases by any means possible. However, due to their caseloads, their stress levels continue to rise. When cases remain unsolved, they cannot find relief.

> We [investigators] are facing a lot of stress every day. People's stress is transferred to us when they file a case. Solving crimes and investigating make us different people. We [investigators] face so many physical and mental stresses that we can't spend time with family and relatives. (R11)

More or less, all the investigation officers and all the police officers of the Bangladesh Police go through a lot of stress daily. They must always be on the move. They also suffer severe mental and physical health problems from this stress. They cannot take holiday leave like in other jobs. The staffing shortages lead existing personnel to work harder to handle the caseloads. As a result, the investigators are constantly stressed and unable to provide a quality service to the citizens.

4.5. Suggestion for minimising the investigative challenges of border crime

Investigators receive compensation from the police department after a successful investigation, but that is insufficient. The respondents generally feel that this payment does not cover their expenses of investigation. Additionally, police officers typically receive additional allowances such as housing, lunch, transport and dearness allowances to manage their monthly expenditures. However, the gover-

nment has temporarily suspended dearness and transport allowances. All of the respondents want the allowance to be reinstated.

> We [investigators] get compensation for every investigation. But that is not enough for us. We need extra privileges for conducting investigations. We spend more than this compensation during the course of an investigation. (R11)

The government needs to create more positions and fill them with skilled officers so that the caseload of each investigator can be decreased. Of course, that is not possible in a short time. However, gradually increasing the number of police officer positions would effectively reduce the currently overburdened caseloads.

> The government has to recruit more manpower to decrease the caseloads of every investigation officer, so that we have enough time to investigate and solve cases in a proper and effective way. (R14)

The existing difficulties accessing information can be easily improved if the technological tools that are commonly utilised by specialised police units like Criminal Investigation Department and the Cyber Police Centre can be made available at the police station level. Investigators can quickly obtain essential information regarding their investigations in this way.

> If we [investigators] get the technological tools like call detail records, fingerprint identification from the National Identity Server and call tracking at the police station level, then it will be very easy for the investigation officer to access information. (R7)

Some of the respondents also suggested a special unit in the Bangladesh Police for investigating border crimes so that the caseloads could be reduced. In this way, all border crimes can be properly investigated with more time and effort.

> A special border crime investigation unit can also be established to reduce caseloads and handle border crime investigations in a sophisticated manner. (R2)

There are various reasons why the investigators cannot effectively execute investigations. The lack of all kinds of logistical and other support has complicated the process of investigation. Consequently, the investigation officers also lack dedication in their investigations. With few resources, proper allocation and strategic planning can make the investigation effort successful. But the whole Bangladesh Police force lacks strategic planning at every level, which further complicates the investigatory efforts.

5. Summary and theoretical discussion

This study mainly focussed on the challenges of investigating border crime in Bangladesh. While exploring the investigative challenges, it also explored the causes, nature and responses to border crime. The research found that border crimes such

as illegal entry, drug and substance trafficking, illegal firearms smuggling or human trafficking are committed by powerful individuals who often exploit vulnerable groups and criminal gangs. Open borders, corruption among border agencies, inadequate supervision, ineffective border security, poor border management, lack of employment opportunities, lack of crime awareness and insufficient patrols have been identified as the main causes of border crime, which supports the findings from the literature (Beyene 2011; Khakurel 2015; Ojem, Ibrahim, Maiwada 2021). Investigators face several challenges, including a lack of evidence, large caseloads, limited manpower, insufficient technological and financial support, inadequate collaboration with other agencies, political pressure, changing crime patterns and poor communication in border areas. Investigators often endure mental and physical stress, including insomnia, inattention and demotivation, which affects their ability to serve citizens effectively. Prior studies echo these challenges, highlighting insufficient collaboration, resource shortages, corruption and a lack of technological advancement (Hatchard 2006; Birdi et al. 2020; Makokha 2020; Shidane 2020). The respondents recommended increasing manpower, technological resources, financial and logistical support, operational efficiency and training. They also emphasised the need for improved collaboration among agencies and neighbouring countries. These suggestions align with the literature on the subject (Addo 2006; Birdi et al. 2020; Ojem, Ibrahim, Maiwada 2021).

Several political and geographical issues make investigating and addressing border crime more complicated for law enforcement agencies. As Bangladesh is situated in the middle of the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent, the border has been frequently used by drug smugglers as a smuggling route (Tayeb 2022). The continuous political instability in Bangladesh makes the border areas vulnerable to smuggling and trafficking (Ullah 2025). The Rohingya refugees frequently cross the Myanmar–Bangladesh border to take shelter in Bangladesh (IOM 2019). Overall, these factors combine to make the borders of Bangladesh vulnerable, which in turn attracts criminals and organised crime groups, who take advantage of this weak border and commit their crimes. In addition to these challenges in investigating and addressing border crime, there are several other factors which are more complicated, such as the use of individual discretion and police corruption.

The concept of "street-level bureaucracy" by Michael Lipsky (1980) has helped describe the issues of corruption, bribery and negligence, which can complicate border crime investigations. The investigation officers here can be described as street-level bureaucrats who can apply their discretion, as there has been a lack of supervision and minimal internal oversight in the Bangladesh Police. The recent "July Uprising" in Bangladesh has made people understand how inefficient and corrupt the Bangladesh Police has been for a long time. Several political leaders and influential people have exploited the police personnel for their own benefit (Akash, Sharif 2025; Ullah 2025). Police personnel apply their discretion as street-level bureaucrats under the wings of their higher-ups and political leaders. Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald Salancik (1978) emphasise that an organisation's reliance on external

resources, such as financial and logistical support, can make that organisation obey any command from that external organisation. Also, the interplay between economic, political and institutional factors makes an agency dependent on their controlling authority (Sarat, Clarke 2008; Dewey, Woll, Ronconi 2021). This study found pressure from higher-ups and political pressure to be a core investigative challenge which complicates the investigation of border crime. The police department has to depend on the political party in power for their resources. Thus, the police have to entertain any command from higher-ups and political parties, even to receive resources and advantages.

Addressing the challenges in investigating border crimes is essential, as it concerns the sovereignty and national security of the state. Border crime is very difficult to prevent, combat and investigate due to its transnational nature. Therefore, these challenges should be addressed in a comprehensive and organised manner. The law enforcement agencies from bordering countries should take comprehensive, actionable steps together to prevent and control cross-border crime. To do that, common international laws and conventions, such as the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC), should be ratified and implemented by the neighbouring countries. Such frameworks facilitate extradition, mutual legal assistance and the transfer of criminal proceedings, which are crucial for overcoming diverse legal systems and jurisdictional limitations between the bordering countries (UNODC 2025b). However, the effectiveness of these formal attempts at cooperation can be hampered by slow processes and some states' preference for national solutions (Dandurand, Jahn 2021). Despite these challenges, informal relationships and networks between law enforcement agencies across borders have been shown to drive effective collaboration, often preceding formal agreements (Legrand, Leuprecht 2021).

Most of the investigative challenges depend on each other, as the lack of all kinds of logistical support leads to a lack of evidence and limited access to information, which are significant factors in an investigation. There is a huge lack of dedication and motivation among investigators, as observed in this study. All the interviewed investigation officers indicated the logistical and internal challenges. However, measures can be taken at the individual level in investigating border crimes; strategies such as the SARA model (scanning, analysis, response and assessment) can be used for effective investigation with minimal resources (Goldstein 1979). Also, a data-driven approach can be implemented by law enforcement agencies to prevent and control cross-border crime (De Jonge, De Vries 2024). The systematic stress and inequalities facing the police officers prevent them from taking such steps on their own. Sometimes, the investigation officers hide their incompetence behind systemic and institutional barriers. On top of that, the poor system has created opportunities for investigation officers to take bribes and apply their discretion in investigations. This whole system needs to be developed in a way that accountability and transparency can be maintained in every position in the police force. Moreover, the investigative challenges in border investigation are

a very complicated issue that requires special attention and comprehensive effort from all stakeholders to ensure effective investigation so as to prevent, combat and control border crimes and to strengthen the safety and security of the state.

5.1. Recommendations

In order to overcome the investigative challenges, investigators must put forward their best effort. All the investigators recommended several adjustments. It may take some time, but integrating these suggestions into the law enforcement institution can help mitigate the investigative challenges. All of the recommendations are provided below as the findings of the study:

1. Increase technological support at police stations for easy access to information, offender profiling and crime pattern analysis. Utilise modern technologies for investigation and surveillance.
2. Increase police manpower to manage excessive caseloads, ensure continuous patrols by providing enough vehicles and appoint assistants for investigators to handle clerical duties.
3. Establish dedicated investigation units for border crimes and provide in-service training on modern investigative techniques and procedures.
4. Strengthen inter-agency collaboration, including coordination with Border Guard Bangladesh and other law enforcement agencies for proper intelligence- and information-sharing.
5. Enhance financial resources for investigations, ensure reimbursement of investigation expenses and revise laws to align with modern investigative needs.
6. Allow investigators sufficient time to conduct thorough investigations, increase holiday leave to ensure proper physical and mental health and implement crime scene teams for immediate response.
7. Develop systems to ensure accountability and transparency within the police force to prevent corruption and abuse of power.
8. Divide border areas into beats, ensure proper patrols with essential tools and develop infrastructure to improve operational efficiency in border areas.

Moreover, the combined efforts of investigation officers, police departments and the government should work together to overcome all obstacles for the proper investigation of border crime. This study mainly explores the investigative challenges law enforcement personnel face when investigating border crime. Improvement in this alone cannot significantly decrease the cross-border crime rates. Reducing these challenges can create a deterrent effect, however, which may contribute to lower border crime rates and other preventive factors of border crime.

Conclusion

Border crime is transnational in nature, so investigating it is different to investigating traditional crime. The Bangladesh Police have sole authority to investigate these crimes. The investigation officers are giving their best effort in investigating border crime, but the crime rates are increasing day by day, as border crime allows criminals to earn more money in a shorter amount of time. When investigating these crimes, the investigators face many challenges all the time. Investigation officers in border areas admit their inability to effectively investigate border crimes due to poor surveillance and significant technological gaps. They believe that securing the entire border with fencing, barricades and improved surveillance will automatically reduce border crime to some extent and facilitate the investigation process. The Bangladesh Police face numerous challenges across all sectors, requiring the introduction of new technology and techniques and increased financial, logistical and tactical support for effective investigation. Corruption is the root cause of many challenges in the investigation of any crime. However, as most of the officers in the police department in Bangladesh are corrupt (Ullah 2025), they use their discretion as street-level bureaucrats and often mislead the cases they are investigating for financial gain or on orders from higher-ups.

Corruption and other unethical measures should be detected by the internal oversight body to ensure a fair and just investigation. The government should also revise the colonial-era laws with a modern perspective. The lack of manpower, which creates several challenges in investigation, should be addressed properly by the authority. The current ratio of police officers to inhabitants in Bangladesh is 1:755 (Islam 2019). It is nearly impossible for the police department to handle such a large population. Thus, if the crimes can be prevented, the caseloads and other challenges will automatically decrease. The government of Bangladesh has already proven its success in preventing drug-related crimes by adopting a "zero tolerance" policy. The government should also adopt a "zero tolerance" policy against cross-border crime. All the powerful people who are behind these crimes need to be apprehended in order to prevent and control these crimes. All the law enforcement authorities have to develop a collaborative framework combining all the agencies so as to ensure collaboration among them in combating and investigating border crime. Also, as border crime is mostly transnational and organised in nature, preventing it will require a more comprehensive response, where addressing the investigative challenges is just one factor.

This study has several limitations that leave room for other research to fill the gaps. The root causes and prevention strategies of border crime have not been thoroughly explored from a broad perspective in this study, which needs further exploration. In the Bangladesh Police, there are only a few female investigation officers and, in this study, no female investigation officers participated in an interview. Exploring and contrasting the investigative challenges of border crime

from a gender perspective is also crucial, which can be explored further. The study was conducted with only 16 respondents, as most of the investigators were busy with their duties. Research on this topic can be conducted on a larger sample for more generalisability.

Declaration of Conflict Interests

Funding

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