

Shootings on the India-Bangladesh border

Felani's last steps

India's shoot-to-kill policy claims one more innocent

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IT WAS all settled, says Mohammed Nur Islam, a Bangladeshi worker whose family migrated to India when he was six. His daughter's wedding would take place the day after their return in Bangladesh. But the wedding never happened. On January 7th India's Border Security Force (BSF) shot dead Mr Nur Islam's 15-year-old Felani, at an illegal crossing into Bangladesh from the Indian state of West Bengal. Felani's body hung from the barbed-wired fence for five hours. Then the Indians took her down, tied her hands and feet to a bamboo pole, and carried her away. Her body was handed over the next day and buried in the yard at home.



He's not quail-hunting

The BSF kills with such impunity along India's 4,100-kilometre (2,550-mile) border with Bangladesh that one local journalist wonders what the story is about. According to Human Rights Watch, India's force has killed almost 1,000 Bangladeshis over the past ten years. That implies a shooting every four days. The death toll between two democracies dwarfs the number killed attempting to cross the inner German border during the cold war. Mr Islam does not know why things went wrong. Like many from Kurigram, a desperately poor district in northern Bangladesh, he had made the crossing countless times before. He had paid 3,000 rupees (\$65) to traffickers on the Indian side.

The public outcry in Bangladesh has been huge, India's apology feeble. Until now, Bangladesh's own leaders have played down such killings. More preoccupying to the prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, are the implications for her attempted rapprochement with India. The picture of the dead teenager was first published by *Anandabazar Patrika*, a leading Bangla-language newspaper in Kolkata. This week walls near the Dhaka offices of Sheikh Hasina were plastered with posters of Felani that called for the killing to stop.

Partly because of the shooting, the approval ratings of Sheikh Hasina's government, already drooping, have slid further. She may now have to slow the rapprochement drive just as her Indian counterpart, Manmohan Singh, prepares to visit Bangladesh. Dhaka is a willing partner in a crackdown on Bangladesh-based Islamic extremists and insurgents from India's north-eastern states. India's promise of economic integration has yet to show much progress. Shooting the people you claim to want to do business with is a poor start.

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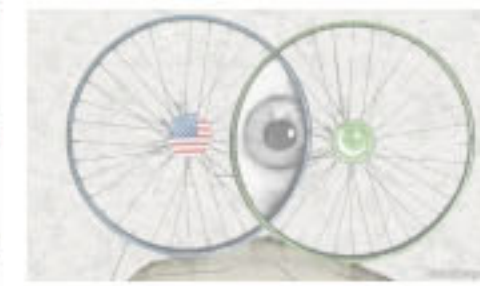
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