



## **Mohammad Salim Uddin electrocuted at the India–Bangladesh border**

Fact-finding Report

Odhikar

Generally, barbed-wire fences are placed 200 yards inside from the Bangladesh-India border pillar. The members of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) guard the border on Indian Territory on the other-side of the fence. There are some border areas on which the Indian government has yet to put up barbed-wire fences. These areas have bamboo fences instead. Putting forward 'prevention of smuggling' as the reason, the members of the BSF run 11,000 volts of electricity through these fences from 8:00 pm to 5:00 am. As a result, anyone who touches these fences is instantly electrocuted and killed.

At 5:00 am on the morning of July 22, 2011, Mohammad Salim Uddin (22) of Thakurpur village in the area of Damurhuda Police Station, Chunadanga; and a son of Liakot Hossain and Mosammat Sufia Khatun, was electrocuted and killed on a bamboo fence when returning to Bangladesh by crossing pillar number 90 from Rangiyiapeta, India.

It must be noted here that the occupants of the Bangladesh-India border live below the poverty-line. No substantial measures are taken by the government to aid them, as a result, compelled by dire poverty, some occupants of these areas put their lives on the line and resort to illegal transaction of cattle across the border.

Odhikar conducted a fact-finding mission with regard to this incident. During the mission Odhikar interviewed-

- Relatives of the deceased Mohammad Salim Uddin
- Eye-witnesses
- Affiliated members of the law-enforcement agencies



Photo: 1. Deceased Mohammad Salim Uddin 2. This bamboo fence was connected with electric wires at the border

### **Mosammad Sufia Begum (40), Salim's mother**

Mosammad Sufia Begum informed Odhikar that at around 5:00pm on July 21, 2011, Salim left the house without telling anyone about where he was headed. Later that night when Salim did not return to the house, Sufia became concerned and upon asking the neighbours she found out that Salim with Tazmul Hossain, Samad Hossain and Mohsin, had gone to India to bring cattle. There are bamboo fences placed instead of barbed-wire fences near the border's pillar no.90. The Bangladeshi cow traders have to cross this border to bring cows into the country.

At around 3:00am on the morning of July 22, 2011, Mohsin Mia called Sufia on her mobile phone and informed her that he and a few others were trying to return to the country by crossing the bamboo fences. The bamboo fences were electrified Salim when he was crossing, had been electrocuted the moment he touched a part of the bamboo fence. The men accompanying him tried to pull him away from the fences but the BSF members had surrounded the border area and the men had to flee.

Mosammad Sufia Begum further informed that she conveyed the news of her son's death to Thakurpur Border Operation Post (BOP) of the Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB) and to Damurhuda Police Station, through her brother-in-law Fakir Mohammad. With the help of the police station Fakir Mohammad contacted Jubayer Ahmed, the Karpasdanga Police camp in-charge, and members of the BGB. In accordance with decisions arrived through correspondences between the BSF and BGB, at approximately 3:00pm on July 23, 2011, Salim's body was handed over to the BGB. Salim's body was then delivered by the police to Fakir Mohammad who returned home with him at around 3:20 pm the same afternoon. Salim was buried at around 5:00 pm in their family graveyard.

### **Samad Hossain (28), Cattle trader accompanying Salim**

Samad Hossain informed Odhikar that, compelled by need and poverty he contacted a man named Gobinda Saha in Shimulia village in Chapra Police Station area, Nodia district, India to engage in cattle trading. Gobinda Saha informed Samad that he would not have to pay any cash until Samad had sold the cows. Then Samad would keep Taka 3000 per cow sold. In accordance with the agreement, on the evening of July 21, 2011, Samad along with a few others sneaked across the border and went to Gobinda Saha's house. Around 7 Bangladeshi gathered at Gobinda Saha's house and at around 12:30 am on July 22, 2010, they started their journey back to Bangladesh with the cattle. At around 3:00 am on the same morning, they arrived at the border. While attempting to cross beyond the bamboo fences, Salim touched one of them and began to scream. The other men approached him and noticed that Salim had stopped moving. They saw that there were electrical wires hanging from the fences and realised that Salim had been electrocuted. Even with a considerable amount of effort, the men failed to free Salim from the electric supply on the fence. They thought that Salim died.

The members of the BSF started to surround them so that they left the cows and fled to Bangladesh.

**Mohammad Asaduzzaman Munshi, Officer-in-Charge, Damurhuda Police Station, Chuadanga**

Mohammad Asaduzzaman Munshi informed Odhikar that, at around 6:00am on July 22, 2011, a man from Thakurpur village called him on his mobile phone and conveyed the news that a man named Salim had died while on his way to Bangladesh from the border. He then contacted Jubayer Ahmed, the Karpasdanga Police IC, informed him of the incident and instructed him to deal with it. In compliance with the instructions, IC Jubayer Ahmed contacted the Thakurpur BGB Camp and the border's pillar no.90 area to verify the authenticity of the incident. Afterwards he discussed the matter of Salim's death with Camp Commander Shubedar Noor Alam. At around 11:00 am on July 22, 2011, Shubedar Noor Alam sent a letter to BSF battalion no. 42, Rangiyapeta, India.

BSF replied and informed the BGB that Salim's body would be returned through a flag meeting. In accordance with the letters exchanged between the two countries, at around 3:00pm on July 23, 2011, Mrinal Singh, Captain of the Rangiyapeta BSF battalion no. 42, Inspector Datta of Chapra Circle and OC Manash Chowdhury of Chapra Police Station placed Salim's body along with the inquest and post-mortem reports on the ground, 200 yards inside India from no man's land. With the help of the local people along with IC Jubayer Mohammad Asaduzzaman Munshi went to India and brought back the dead body of Salim to Bangladesh.

Asaduzzaman Munshi informed that, during the delivery of the deceased's body, OC Manash Chowdhury of Chapra Police Station informed that a case of wrongful death had been filed with regard to the incident of Salim being electrocuted and killed. It is case number 26 at Chapra Police Station; date: 22.07.2011.

Chapra Circle inspector, Datta, informed Asaduzzaman that the areas in which barbed-wire fences have not been set up in order to prevent illegal border crossing had been fenced with bamboo sticks. At 8:00pm every night the members of the BSF connect an 11,000 volt power supply to the bamboo fences which is again removed at dawn. As a result, those trying to cross the borders illegally are often electrocuted and killed. Asaduzzaman then had the inquest of Salim's body re-conducted by IC Jubayer. Salim's body was handed over to his relatives at 3:20pm the same afternoon. He observed that the inquest report held that there were burn marks on Salim's left thumb, the middle of his left index and on the left side of his neck. The post-mortem report prepared at the Nodia Hospital in India also conveyed that these marks were brought about by the electrocution.

**Shubedar Noor Alam, Camp Commander, Thakurgaon BGB camp, 35 BGB battalion, Chuadanga**

Shubedar Noor Alam informed Odhikar that, around dawn on July 22, 2011, he came to know from the locals that Salim from Thakurgaon had been electrocuted and killed on the bamboo fence while trying to cross the border with cattle from India to return to Bangladesh. At

around 11:00am that same morning he sent a letter to BSF battalion no. 42, Rangiyapeta, India.

In the letters exchanged between the border guards of the two countries, it was decided that Salim's body would be returned at a flag meeting which would be held on July 23, 2011.

At around 3:00pm the same afternoon, Salim's body was brought to the flag meeting by members of the Chapra Police Station and was returned in the presence of the BGB, BSF and members of the police from both countries. He informed that despite the issue of border-killings being frequently raised by the high officials of the government, the BSF continues to kill Bangladeshis. Due to the lack of manpower of the BGB, the members are unable to guard all the border areas.

### **Abdul Mannan (32), Village Policeman, Thakurpur, Chuadanga**

Abdul Mannan informed Odhikar that he was present at the time Salim's body was handed over by the BSF to the BGB on July 23, 2011. He carried Salim's body and delivered it to his family members. He informed that on frequent occasions in the border area of Thakurpur, announcements are made in public telling the people not to go to India to bring cattle. Yet people cross the border to bring cows from traders in India.

### **Odhikar's Comments**

The BSF are assigned to ensure and maintain security on the Indian-territory of the Bangladesh-India border area. On the pretext of security, the BSF members recurrently shoot and kill unarmed Bangladeshis. Shooting to death being a grave violation of human rights, the heads of both the States have come together and discussed how to bring this to an end.

Despite assurances given by the Indian government to put a stop to these killing, BSF members continue these murders on accommodating and altering pretexts.

During the mission it has been found that the BGB are much less in number than the BSF and many of the border areas in Bangladesh have undeveloped roads, as a result of which the BGB is unable to guard all areas of the border effectively.

Odhikar demands intervention from the Bangladesh government with regard to the continuation of such unlawful killings and compensation from the Indian government.