

Felani murdered nine years ago: Odhikar's statement on the killings of and human rights violations on Bangladeshi nationals along the border by Indian Border Security Force

Dhaka, 6 January 2020: January 7, 2020 marks nine years since the death anniversary of Felani Khatun¹, a Bangladeshi adolescent who was shot dead by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). In 2011, on this day, BSF members shot and killed Felani Khatun at the India-Bangladesh border and hanged her body from the fence. However, the main accused of the murder, BSF member, Amiya Ghosh along with his superior officers who were directly involved in Felani's killing, were not punished. The farcical trial of Felani's murder was first heard at the BSF's internal court, the General Security Forces Court (GSFC), where the accused Amiya Ghosh was acquitted. Later, the same court, after reconsidering the verdict, acquitted Amiya Ghosh, retaining their earlier verdict.²



Felani murder was a blatant example of the Indian government's aggressive policy on Bangladesh over the past decades. The killing and torturing of Bangladeshi children at the border is nothing new to the BSF. In 2010, a school boy, Hasnat Halsham (15) was tortured to death by BSF members.³ BSF members shot dead school boy Hasanuzzaman (16) in 2015⁴ and two more school students named Sohel Rana and Harun ur Rashid in 2017⁵ and Sohel Rana Babu (14)⁶ in 2019.

¹ Fifteen-year-old Felani Khatun was gunned down allegedly by Amiya Ghosh, the BSF member of 181 Battalion, when she, along with her father, was returning home from India through Anantapur border under Phulbari Upazila in Kurigram District on 7 January 2011. The young girl lived and worked in New Delhi; however, her marriage was arranged in Bangladesh. Felani and her father attempted to cross the border. While crossing, Felani's dress got stuck on the barbed wire on top of the border fence and BSF opened fire at her. Felani was left up-side down, tangled in the barbed wire for about five hours. As she pleaded for water during her last breath, no one came forward to help. The image of Felani's death went viral, internationally, and started an outcry.

² The daily Prothom Alo, 3 July 2015; <http://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/568783>; Outlook, 3 July 2015; <https://www.outlookindia.com/newswire/story/bsf-jawan-acquitted-on-re-trial-in-felani-khatun-killing-case/905108>

³ For details see Odhikar fact-finding report, January 2010; <http://odhikar.org/a-young-boy-died-after-being-tortured-by-bsf-in-the-thakurpur-border-at-damurhuda-chuadanga/>

⁴ The daily Naya Diganata, 24 April 2015

⁵ The Daily Star, 20 June 2017; <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/bsf-kills-2-bangladeshi-teens-jhenidah-border-1422979>

⁶ New Age, 29 January 2019; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/63200/bsf-shoots-at-yet-another-bangladeshi-on-thakurgaon-border>

The role of the Government of Bangladesh in terms of ensuring its own border, territorial integrity, sovereignty and security of its citizens is not strong. Taking advantage of this apart from India's political and economic interference on Bangladesh, incidents of killing, torture and repression on Bangladeshis by the Indian Border Security Force have crossed the limit. Every year, Bangladeshi citizens are being killed and injured in BSF firing or due to torture along the India-Bangladesh border areas. BSF members have even illegally trespassed into Bangladesh territory, killing, torturing and looting Bangladeshis inside the country. However, according to the agreement and related treaty signed between the two countries, if a citizen of one country crosses the border illegally, it should be identified as infiltration and accordingly the person should be arrested and to be handed over to the civil authorities. However, India has long been violating such understanding and agreement.

According to information gathered by Odhikar, from 2009 to 2019, a total of 455 Bangladeshi citizens were killed by the Indian Border Security Force. Furthermore, 657 Bangladeshis were injured and 518 Bangladeshis were allegedly abducted by BSF during this period. In 2019 alone, 41 Bangladeshis were reportedly killed by the BSF.

India and Bangladesh have more than four thousand kilometers of land borders, almost all of which are surrounded with barbed wire fences by India.⁷ Moreover, India has also constructed barbed wire fencing and observation posts inside the zero line (no man's land), violating international law.⁸ Apart from this, the Government of India has already started pushing Bangla-speaking Indian nationals into Bangladesh⁹, who have recently been excluded from the National Register of Citizens (NRC) made to identify illegal immigrants in India, which is a matter of grave concern.

Odhikar demands a fair trial of the killings, acts of torture and other human rights violations perpetrated on Bangladeshi civilians along with Felani, by BSF members. Moreover, Odhikar strongly protests and condemns India's political and economic interference on Bangladesh. Odhikar believes that an independent sovereign state can never tolerate such aggressive interference upon it by another state. The international community will also have to take an active role in this matter. Otherwise, the widespread dissatisfaction with Indian interference could ultimately become a threat to regional security and stability.

In solidarity,
The Odhikar Team
www.odhikar.org

⁷ The daily Naya Diganta, 3 October 2019; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/last-page/445062/>

⁸ According to the Indira-Mujib Agreement of 1972, no permanent structure can be built within 150 yards of the border. The Telegraph, 2 December 2019; <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/north-east/bangladesh-nod-for-zero-line-fencing/cid/1723568> The daily Jugantor, 23 October 2019; <https://www.jugantor.com/todays-paper/last-page/235325/> and New Age, 3 December 2019; <http://www.newagebd.net/article/92518/bsf-sets-up-structure-on-no-mans-land-at-godagari-border>

⁹ The daily Naya Diganta, 2 December 2019; <http://www.dailynayadiganta.com/first-page/460928>