



Standoffs on India's border



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ATUL LOKE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Top, barbed wire marking the border between India and Bangladesh near Hakimpur in the Indian state of West Bengal. Above left, Hamidul Islam, left, alongside another resident of a village in a Bangladeshi district near the border with India. Above right, Abdul Rahim Gazi, a Bangladeshi refugee at a holding facility at Charchat village in West Bengal.

BY ANUPREETA DAS,
SAIF HASNAT AND HARI KUMAR

India and Bangladesh share one of the longest borders in the world, through which impoverished Bangladeshis often slip unnoticed in search of jobs and smugglers ferry goods as varied as cattle, gold and raisins.

But that sieve-like, roughly 2,500-mile (4,000-kilometer) border has increasingly become a fault line between the traditionally friendly neighbors.

India is rounding up those with Bangla-

Moves to send immigrants back to Bangladesh have raised tensions and left people stranded

desi papers, or undocumented immigrants suspected of being from the country, and deporting them across the border, sometimes in the dead of night.

Bangladesh, which says India is avoiding proper repatriation channels, has stepped up patrols to stop the influx and push people back across the border.

On a recent morning on the Bangla-

desi side of the border, armed guards captured a man, three women and a child in the farming village of Durgapur. The group had apparently made their way from the Indian state of West Bengal on foot under cover of darkness, when fishermen spotted them around 4 a.m., village dwellers said.

For around 24 hours, the captives

squatted in the so-called buffer zone between the two countries as Indian and Bangladeshi border guards met to determine their fates.

Hundreds of people gathered to watch the action, including Motiar Rahman, 45, a village resident, who had rowed his boat across a narrow river to where the group was caught.

"Those people were standing at the bank of the river, which is inside Bangladesh," Mr. Rahman said.

Bangladeshi guards accused their In-

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