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Accounts Diverge on Shots Fired on Indian Border

By REUTERS

CALCUTTA, June 10 — Indian and Bangladeshi troops exchanged heavy fire along the border that divides the usually friendly countries, officials said on Saturday, though the two sides gave different accounts of the clash.

Bangladesh accused India of an unprovoked attack. But a top Indian official said the Friday night skirmish, the most serious in nearly two months, occurred after a Bangladeshi smuggler had been shot dead by India's Border Security Force.

Inspector General Somesh Goyal of India's security force said that the Bangladeshi man had been killed after he attacked an Indian soldier with a knife to avoid arrest.

Bangladeshi soldiers then opened fire on a security force patrol, and Indian forces returned fire, he said.

Mr. Goyal said the incident took place at the Gede-Nimatata frontier, about 90 miles north of Calcutta.

Bangladeshi security officials, however, said the clash erupted after Indian soldiers opened fire on a Bangladeshi patrol.

A Bangladeshi military official said "the unprovoked firing caught us off guard," but the patrol returned fire immediately. "A heavy exchange of machine guns and mortars continued until early Saturday."

He said one man was killed and three seriously wounded in the clash, and hundreds of frightened villagers fled their homes.

"The situation is still tense, and we are trying to communicate with the Indians for a meeting with a view to stopping further escalation of the incident," the official said.

Mr. Goyal said the dead man was carrying 50 bottles of a cough syrup that is used as a drug and regularly smuggled across the border, along with nine pounds of marijuana.

Indian officials said their forces tried unsuccessfully to contact the Bangladeshi military on a hotline to explain that they had killed a smuggler.

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