

Transit or trade?

Instead of granting transit, we can change our tariff duty regime, which will enable our traders to move Indian merchandise between western India and the "seven sisters." Bangladeshi traders will also be able to move goods/merchandise, originating in or destined for the "seven sisters," through Chittagong port.

ABUL KALAM AZAD

THE transit issue is back again to the forefront of discussions on Bangladesh-India relations. Apart from political reasons, some people are trying to justify granting transit to India on economic grounds. They are projecting the issue against the backdrop of globalisation and trade liberalisation and claiming that granting of transit will create additional trade for Bangladesh.

Other than a fixed "royalty" annually, I do not see how transit for India is going to create additional trade for Bangladesh. Instead, Bangladesh will destroy its chance of creating additional trade by moving goods/merchandise, either originating in or destined for India, through Bangladesh territory and through Chittagong port. Instead of granting transit, we can change our tariff duty regime, which will enable our traders to move Indian merchandise between western India and the "seven sisters." Bangladeshi traders will also be able to move goods/merchandise, originating in or destined for the "seven sisters," through Chittagong port. The process of such trade creation is described briefly in the following.

What is the purpose of transit? India wants to move goods (1) Between the northeastern India and western India;

and (2) between northeastern India and rest of the world through Chittagong port. But, such movement of goods can take place through trade also. What is the modus-operandi of such trade?

It is simple. Bangladeshi traders will import goods from northeastern India and export them to western India/outside world. Similarly, they will import goods from western India/outside world and export them to northeastern India.

Thus, India gets movement of goods originating in India or destined for India through Bangladesh territory and through Chittagong port. And all this happens through the normal course of international trade.

Why does such trade not take place now? It is because of the existing tariff-duty regimes of both India and Bangladesh. Simple modifications in the present tariff practice of the two countries will result in normal international trade flow between western India, Bangladesh, northeastern India and rest of the world.

However, India will get this facility for moving only legally traded goods. If it wants to move unspecified goods in sealed containers, it will not be content with such a system. The movement of goods in sealed containers through Bangladesh territory is likely to invite attention from terrorists operating in

northeastern India, and make Bangladesh vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

What will Bangladesh gain? An annual payment of, say, Tk. 500 cores. Not a big deal! Bangladesh will have to invest at least Tk. 5000 cores in infrastructure development. The price for transit should include similar transit provisions for Bangladesh to and from Nepal and Bhutan; uninterrupted and perpetual corridors for Bangladeshi enclaves in India for linking them with the mainland; ensuring fair share of Ganges water for Bangladesh; settlement of maritime boundary disputes to the satisfaction of Bangladesh.

This may be a "big" price for a "small" facility, but transit is the only "commodity" we have that India wants from Bangladesh. India should have fulfilled these demands a long time back, not as quid pro quo but as a gesture from a good and great neighbour. But, unfortunately, India did not care to do so. So, Bangladesh is left with no other option but to make a tall list of claims in lieu of transit facility wanted by India.

Besides, confusion should not be created about MOUs and Protocols. These are signed by the state or government heads to underscore the agreements in principle. It is the signing of agreements containing the details of implementing the principles that really matters (because devils live in the details). For some countries, even signing of an agreement is not enough -- it must be ratified by their national parliaments.

For example, Bangladesh and India signed an agreement for exchanging our enclaves. Bangladesh returned Berubari to India accordingly, but India did not comply with the terms of the agreement by returning our enclaves because the Indian Parliament is yet to ratify the agreement.

So, if our government forgets the genuine and rightful claims of Bangladesh while granting transit facility to India, people will think that our statesmen are only too eager to concede to Indian demands -- and not as eager to protect Bangladesh's interest as a sovereign state. We would like to conclude by reminding our leaders of the words of a great statesman, Sir Winston Churchill -- a state has no permanent friend or foe, it has only interests.

(Adapted and abridged from the author's original article "Why make fuss over transit, if trade can do the trick?" included in the book *Top Priorities: Tough Decisions*.)

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Maritime border delimitation

Recent incidents over exploratory moves by India and Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal and their claims over maritime zones of Bangladesh, which have been widely covered by our media, alerted the nation to the serious consequences of the lingering delimitation problems.



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IT was encouraging to hear Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni speak about the resolution of the maritime border problems with India and Myanmar as one of the priorities of the new government. The government has formed high-powered expert committees on the maritime delimitation issue and on the sharing of waters of common rivers with India. The gravity of the problem was brought to light by our media to bring pressure on the government to give due attention to it. Commodore (Retd.) Khurshed Alam, in his columns in The Daily Star, did a great job in making the people aware of the problem, and drawing the attention of the government to it.

Recent incidents over exploratory moves by India and Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal and their claims over maritime zones of Bangladesh, which have been widely covered by our media, alerted the nation to the serious consequences of the lingering delimitation problems.

Bangladesh showed interest in the preservation, exploration and exploitation of the sea resources, and was the first South Asian nation to enact a law for the purpose. It's an irony that while Bangladesh adopted her Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones Act in 1974, when the 3rd UN Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) began to revise the traditional law of the sea, it could not make much impact on the outcome of the

conference which culminated in the adoption of the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Bangladesh law differs from those of the 1982 Convention, so the delimitation problems with India and Myanmar were predictable. Even back in 1974, Bangladesh's move to conduct exploration in her maritime areas was frustrated by India's protests.

Bangladesh ratified the Convention only in 2001. Even after ratification, we didn't bring our domestic laws in line with the Convention. Most importantly, we failed to engage our neighbours in negotiations on delimitation issues.

The facts and laws reveal that we need to negotiate with them more than they need to negotiate with us. So, the responsibility for taking initiatives for negotiations and pursuing a course of vigorous diplomacy for the purpose lies more with us.

What is at stake

Ours is a land and resource hungry country. We need to expand our maritime zones and exploit the resources therein more than any other country. So the 1982 Convention came as a blessing to us. The Convention extended the Exclusive Economic Zone to 200 nautical miles, and also the limits of the continental shelf to 350 miles where such length is available. These extensions were made for exploitation of the living and non-living resources of the zones exclusively by the coastal states.

On the other hand, they have led to the

problems of delimitation of the maritime borders amongst neighbouring states. Extended claims often overlap. To resolve this, the Convention's first prescription is to go by the principle of equidistance, which means that median line would be the border between two neighbouring states where their maritime zones overlapped. In case this fails to provide justice, the Convention prescribes the principle of equity.

It is now well established that application of the principle of equidistance, which is more formal and mechanical in nature, does not always ensure justice. In such cases, the principle of equity would need to be resorted to.

Bangladesh's delimitation problems qualify for the application of equity. Bangladesh's mostly adjacent rather than opposite location of maritime borders with the neighbours; concave, unstable, and broken nature of her coastlines; her historical interest in the Bay of Bengal; and dependence of her coastal people on living and non-living resources of the sea provide Bangladesh with sufficient arguments to plead for equity.

Are we prepared to argue and advocate our case for equity? Can we prove materially and legally to India and Myanmar that the Bay of Bengal is a perfect case for the application of the principle of equity, and that otherwise it would be violation of both treaty and customary norms of international law?

To prove our case, we need to make geological and geo-morphological surveys of the zones; show the impracticability of the application of the principle of equidistance in the region; accumulate facts to prove our historical title to the areas we claim; prove the dependence of our coastal people on the sea resources; and gather relevant case references, which justify the application of the principle of equity, from international adjudication and arbitration.

We need to adjust our law of drawing the baseline, from where the breadth of the maritime zones is to be measured, with that of the Convention. Our method of measuring the baseline from the straight lines drawn by joining some outer points at a depth of 60 feet has not been accepted by the UNCLOS Convention. We have to measure it from the straight line formed by joining the outer points at the low-water tide mark.

The most encouraging development has been the increase in people's awareness of the sea issues. The foreign minister's concern about maritime border delimitation, and formation of an expert committee, is the reflection of the people's concern. This needs to be vigorously pursued further.

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A hub of regional trade?

Towards a knowledge-based society

Technology alone won't fix or alleviate a business problem. It is important to understand that knowledge management is often facilitated by ICT -- technology by itself is not knowledge management.

TARIQUE MOSADDIQUE BARKATULLAH

THE term 'Digital Bangladesh' has created renewed interest in government and commercial organisations in utilising Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Digital Bangladesh comprises e-governance and service delivery through utilising ICT, but the vision encompasses much more. In order to be successful there has to be knowledge creation and management.

The government and the organisations have invested heavily on technologies and overseas consultancies to utilise the potential of the promised e-governance and e-services. But technology alone won't fix or alleviate a business problem. It is important to understand that knowledge management is often facilitated by ICT -- technology by itself is not knowledge management.

Digital Bangladesh is dependent on the development of indigenous capability to plan, monitor and manage national projects. This can be represented through a three-tier model. The 1st tier being the

knowledge centre, which will provide research and create technology and solutions. The 2nd tier are the consultancy service providers, who will provide specifications, supervise implementation, and document all activities for the knowledge centre. And the 3rd tier are the manufacturing and service industries that provide services and commodities.

Academia and research institutions provide knowledge, allowing the 3rd tier to incorporate all available knowledge in the service arena. This will create partnership between all stakeholders, and their success will depend on the value of the knowledge created in the knowledge centres and its effective dissemination by the players in other layers.

The absence of knowledge centres, and development activities centered on procurement of services and commodities from overseas result in dependence on overseas suppliers. The development of the electoral roll and national ID card has saved the country from monetary loss, and created an opportunity for earning foreign exchange through export of similar service.

To create ownership of digital

Bangladesh by the general public, the following must be promoted: education, health, agriculture, entrepreneurship, and governance.

Activity within those areas will take place via limited initiatives and partnership, advocacy and expanding community expertise. Increasing the number of initiatives may make it unmanageable.

Initiatives and partnership

In order to leverage joint resources and spur visible action, initiatives will require stakeholders' partnership, which will be responsible for producing concrete and measurable deliverables.

The initiatives are expected to set targets within a timeframe based on current baseline data, taking into account targets of the Millennium Development Goal and national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

The following areas may be considered for improving visible national indexes, promoting education and entrepreneurship, and attracting foreign investment.

Better connectivity with broadband

A key enabler is communication. To improve accessibility to information, the initiative will have to accelerate the roll-out of communication infrastructures and increase broadband access. ICT infrastructure is essential to achieve regional integration and enable poor people to participate in markets, which will help in

reducing poverty.

Bangladesh has undertaken a project through ADB's efforts to support sub-regional cooperation in eastern South Asia, which stems from the formation of the South Asia Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ) by the foreign ministers of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN).

The 9th Saarc Summit had endorsed SAGQ as a sub-regional initiative. The SASEC Information Highway Project aims to connect SASEC countries more efficiently through broadband and bring social goods to South Asia, especially the rural areas.

Telecentre and community e-Centre

Bangladesh Telecentre Network has established a number of telecentres and Community e-Centres (CeC) to provide local language content for the users besides serving as e-services centre. They will also be established under SASEC program. Telecentres can provide various services in health, agriculture and education.

Free access for all schools to Internet

Communication technologies, such as Wimax, can connect educational institutions to the Internet, creating a new generation of innovative citizens. However, till date, no effective measures have been taken in Bangladesh in this area. ICT professional skill assessment and

enhancement program

This is an indigenous program to enhance professional capacity of the knowledge and ICT workforce. It aims at making industry-ready knowledge workers. India and the Philippines have a number of software finishing schools to groom young knowledge workers for industries. These programs will help in expanding community expertise.

Media strategy, advocacy and outreach

The impact of digital Bangladesh depends on its ability to protect its activities and achievements, generate interest, and secure continued financial support, and also on evaluation of ICT development using internationally recognised indicators and utilising all modes of information dissemination such as radio, TV, cell phone and tele-centre.

Meaning of Digital Bangladesh

Building an indigenous knowledge and infrastructure base is important in building a sustainable digital Bangladesh. The basic goals for digital Bangladesh should centre on:

- A broadband infrastructure with access for every Bangladeshi from their homes, work places, schools, telecentres or CeC with technologies like Wimax and 3G Network.
- A digitally literate population and workforce.

- A digitally enabled nation, providing e-government information and service at regional level.
- Digital business development with Internet in business and e-commerce.
- Internationally competitive information and communication technology, human capacity and business.
- A legal framework that assures freedom of expression, while protecting the rights of creators and innovators towards building an indigenous knowledge and technological base.

Barack Obama has voiced a similar desire for US: "Let us be the generation that reshapes our economy to compete in the digital age. Let's set high standards for our schools and give them the resources they need to succeed. Let's recruit a new army of teachers, and give them better pay and more support in exchange for more accountability. Let's make college more affordable, and let's invest in scientific research, and let's lay down broadband lines through the heart of inner cities and rural towns all across America."

In light of the global reality, digital Bangladesh is not a dream but rather a necessity for survival in the 21st century. A well thought-out plan should be launched to make "Digital Bangladesh" a reality.

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Teaching: The easy life



RECENTLY, one of my many unemployed banker friends announced that he was thinking of retraining as a teacher.

"It'll be a lot less stressful than working in a bank," he said.

"And he'll get to leave work at 3 pm instead of 3 am," his wife added.

In fact, he revealed that several of his

colleagues plan to abandon the nerve-jangling, dog-eat-dog world of finance and go into education: a slow, cushy occupation characterised by long, paid holidays.

What an excellent idea! However, it's vital that we give these smart people some understanding of what is required before they cough up the funds to retrain as teachers.

The easiest way to do this en masse, I reckon, would be to organise a reality show like "Survivor," but with an education theme.

It would go like this. Twelve people from the business world would be air-dropped into a school for six weeks.

They will have no mobile phones,

secretaries, Blackberrys or Starbucks.

They will have an expired whiteboard marker, a register of names they cannot pronounce, and an 80 percent payout.

Each will be locked in a room containing 40 students, of which five have hyperactivity disorders, four are learning-disabled, six speak no English, seven have severe behavioural problems and three are borderline insane.

There will be one teaching assistant, who has locked herself in the sewing closet for her own safety.

Task one: Get all the students all off the ceiling and into their chairs without touching them.

Task two: Get them all to stop screaming without traumatising them by raising

your voice.

Task three: Remove all guns, knives, transmitters and explosives from their persons without weapons of their own.

After they have mastered the above, contestants move onto the REAL challenges. Each contestant must get 40 children to learn all the material on the curriculum. To add realism, the curriculum will be entirely rewritten twice a week.

In the middle of each day, there will be a one-hour lunch break, during which time contestants will not be able to eat anything, because they are double-booked, on playground duty and chess club supervision.

While teaching full-time, contestants

will simultaneously be required to:

Attend three faculty meetings; take a course in teaching technology; have a 20-minute session with the parents of each child, during which they will be required to pretend they can differentiate one brat from 1,300 others; write six college application referral letters; organise one fundraiser; fill in 17 forms; write a five-page report on each child, including nine they have never met; and do a Masters in Education.

Every night, they will take home 40 essays, most of which consist of random lists of miss-spelt nouns. Armed with a red pen and a splitting headache, they will decipher each of them and write out corrected versions.

Every weekend will be filled with extra-mural activities, which will consist of shivering in sports fields, while a thousand children sneeze viruses at them.

Contestants' only break will be a single bank holiday. However, since everyone connected with schools has the same day off, they will find that every possible relaxation activity is fully booked by the people they need to get away from.

Now, banker friends, when would you like the retraining to begin?

Oh, you want to think about it a bit more, do you?

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