

Economic diplomacy and foreign policy

MOHAMMAD JASIM UDDIN

CONCEPTUALLY, diplomacy and foreign policy are interlinked. The latter is what a country does; the former is how it does it. Diplomacy may thus be assumed to be a dependent variable of foreign policy. Economic diplomacy focuses on a country's economic relations with other countries to put its foreign policy goals into operation. How a country manages its economic diplomacy relies on how it oversees its foreign policy objectives. Thus, nexus between economic diplomacy and foreign policy is irrefutable. How Bangladesh's economic diplomacy has been reflected in its foreign policy is something to be looked into.

Since 1971, Bangladesh foreign policy has gone through several phases; each decade indicates a phase. In its first decade, foreign policy focused on building overseas relations not only with the then politico-economic superpowers and wealthy Arab countries but also with the international organisations in order to receive foreign aid. Though goods and services trade had started modestly, foreign policy during this phase required pursuing diplomacy of recognition and was directed by the realities of the country's economic survival, hence the engagement in aid diplomacy.

Bangladesh's developmental needs guided its foreign policy in the 1980s, and looked to further the country's economic relationship with the West, the East and the Middle East to boost its manpower export and trade, and obtain sufficient foreign aid. With the enthusiasm for regionalism within South Asia, this phase was an attempt to consolidate initiatives of Bangladesh's foreign policy originated in the 1970s.

The third phase of Bangladesh foreign policy, with the revival of democracy, aimed at collaboration within South Asia and strengthening of relations with Washington, Tokyo, Beijing and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The key goals of such initiatives were to increase Bangladesh's goods and services export, attract inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI), get overseas development assistance (ODA) and join as many regional economic groupings or joint ventures as possible. Economic diplomacy -- which was linked to

foreign policy in the late 1990s -- focused on Southeast Asia with a "Look East" policy in the twenty-first century. In this phase, foreign policy was extended to Latin America as well as Africa with a "Look Africa" policy. Although a thorough cost-benefit analysis is yet to be done before pursuing new foreign policy directions, the two policies were geared towards "trade creation" and "trade diversification" as well as "investment creation" and "investment diversification."

Indo-centric aspects cannot be separated from Bangladesh foreign policy. Since independence of Bangladesh, it has been vibrant with a Framework Agreement on Cooperation and development between Bangladesh and India. India also granted a \$1 billion loan for Bangladesh's developmental needs. A significant amount of the loan, with stiff terms and conditions and procurement complexities, is yet to be disbursed. How our economic diplomacy and foreign policy address the issue remains to be seen. Another key concern for the fifth phase of foreign policy is cooperation between development partners (such as the WB, ADB, JICA, etc.) and the government of Bangladesh (GoB).

Bangladesh foreign policy, during its different phases, has made attempts to redirect focus from aid to trade, though destinations for exports are yet to be diversified. On the contrary, promotion of Bangladesh with a positive image of the country as a destination for FDI inflow is far from satisfactory. Likewise, bargaining between donors and the GoB on aid effectiveness and its disbursement continues.

Some critics argue that the functions of the policy makers and foreign policy makers and of the makers of economic diplomacy are not coordinated. Even Bangladesh's embassies, consulates or Diaspora are not properly guided by Bangladesh foreign policy and economic diplomacy. Lack of adequate coordination among the actors is a key concern for Bangladesh's economic diplomacy.

In contrast, some positivists argue that Bangladesh has been practicing economic diplomacy and, since independence, reflection of economic diplomacy on its foreign policy has

been evident. They cite the following to support their views: Bangladesh's increasing percentage in world trade, number of bilateral investment treaties and preferential free-trade agreements signed, trade fairs and exhibitions, investment promotion road-shows, etc. In order to utilise the multilateral regime, they say that Bangladesh foreign policy has to prioritise its economic promotion, which requires practical functioning of instruments and actors of the country's economic diplomacy.

Bangladesh's economic diplomacy will need to evolve with the issues in the days to come.

Among the instruments, image building, country branding, globalising Bangladesh's success stories (such as Grameen model of microcredit, social business, etc.), and institutionalising public diplomacy in the country's foreign policy are important to project a positive picture of Bangladesh abroad. Associating actively with global financial organisations is one of the key instruments of economic diplomacy and an important foreign policy objective. Bangladesh foreign policy has to be guided towards these directions.

Who are the major actors in economic diplomacy? What are the likely instruments of economic diplomacy? At what levels has economic diplomacy been pursued? What are the indicators of the extent of economic diplomacy? Why is economic diplomacy important? What are the priority issues of economic diplomacy, and how are they being handled? What are the major problems in economic diplomacy, and how can they be faced?

Bangladesh's economic diplomacy will need to evolve with the issues in the days to come. This calls for improved inter-ministerial coordination and cooperation. An important point, therefore, is to re-establish the overarching responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), because it is the principal institution of economic diplomacy and foreign policy of Bangladesh. MoFA has to open its door to qualified and competent people from all professions, and the diplomats have to be well trained and truly professional in diplomacy.

The writer is Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS).
E-mail: jasim_bliss@yahoo.com

A call for calm

SYED WASIFUL ISLAM

WHETHER we like it or not, the turn of events is causing our tempers to be frayed.

First it was Awami League going after war criminals mainly consisting of those openly siding with Pakistani army committing genocide, some old Jamaat-e-Islamis and Razakars. Then, after the ICT verdict on Mollah (he must be regretting his V for victory sign), the youth, bloggers, communists, freedom fighters, commoners, all suddenly joined the fray. Then Jamaat and Shibir started attacking the police. Then some bloggers allegedly defamed the Prophet of Islam, and allegedly wrote derogatory things about Islam, (as if Islam and Jamaat-e-Islam are same).

Really, any Muslim worth his name will not tolerate an affront to the personality of their beloved Prophet (sm). (However it is the duty of everyone to verify that such insult has actually occurred or is a staged affair) Then the tragic murder of Rajib occurred due to his alleged comments on his blog. Now the Awami League MPs have started to castigate the judge. Excuse me, are these the same MPs who with a holier than thou attitude, who deprived the exchequer of Tk.1,000 crore of custom duties? Are these the same MPs who by turn stay away from parliament but religiously collect their pay and abnormally lavish fringe benefits?

The irresponsible and alleged derogatory blogging by some has ruffled the religious sentiments of many Muslims, specially the Ulama and scholars of Islam. (read "dhormockery.") Imams of many mosques all over the country vented their feelings at Jumma khutbas, and in many places processions were taken out. (Jamaat-Shibir, taking advantage, joined them, turning peaceful processions into violent ones.) I was surprised to see a responsible paper like The Daily Star naming imams to add fuel to the fire.

Now the police tried to break up these processions with a heavy hand

(a mistake), firing tear gas, rubber bullets, baton charge etc. 4 persons were killed and a thousand wounded all over the country. People were picked up by the police for no other reason than being in the vicinity of the occurrence. Now that's really worrying.

What next? Are we heading towards chaos? Are some vested interest groups trying to destabilise Bangladesh by creating a polarisation? The situation is volatile, to say the least.

We need a call for calm, we need all parties involved to put aside their differences, we need mutual dialogue, mutual respect, clearheaded thinking, to work towards a solution.

We don't want strikes and hartals, and we don't want civil strife and beating of war drums. We don't want our fragile economy to suffer; we don't want to see our people lying dead on the streets killed by another set of our people. Please stop this madness, this rush to death in delirium.

We want sanity to return. We want our people to live in peace and harmony. Let love blossom not hatred. Can't we behave like responsible citizens? This is an urgent appeal to our leaders as well as to fellow citizens, to show political acumen instead of rabble rousing, to show maturity instead of petty bickering, to help lead the country out of this morass and self-destruction that we seem to be heading for.

Let us all work towards a viable solution so that we can hold our head high in the international arena and not become a laughing stock because of our pettiness and corruption. Let us work to offer a chance for a better future for our children and grandchildren. Let us not wash away all the fruits of sacrifices that have been made by our people in the past.

(We publish the above article, with which we do not necessarily agree, to promote exchange of divergent views on an issue that, we agree with the author, needs calm, deliberate and serious thinking to bring peace and harmony among our people).

The writer is an Islamic thinker who occasionally contributes to The Daily Star.

1033rd Birth Anniversary of Saint Atisha Dipankara Srijnan

HASNA JASIMUDDIN MOUDUD

As a child I often visited Kamalapur Bouddha Mahavihara with my father as we lived nearby. Kamalapur Bouddha Vihar became most venerable with the gift of ash relic of Atisha Dipankara Srijnan in 1978 by the government of China in honour of Atisha's birthplace as a token of friendship between China and Bangladesh.

Atisha was known all over the Buddhist world, particularly in Tibet, except in his own birthplace. For hundreds of years Atisha was known only in the limited context of Tantric Buddhism but not as a reformer of Buddhism.

As Buddhism became more complicated and divided, Atisha Dipankara appeared as a reformer and simplified Buddhism into a practice based on compassion. Atisha synthesised the Buddhist teaching of Sutra and Tantra in one book and offered the world a simple manual for obtaining Enlightenment.

After Unesco recognised Vajrajogini in Munshiganj as his birthplace and placed a Unesco World Heritage Site monogram in 2002, Atisha was finally rediscovered in his own motherland.

Atisha was born in 980 AD in the Royal family of Gouda in Vajrajogini village in Vikrampur, known as present as Munshiganj District. Atisha's village is still called Vajrajogini.

The story of Atisha is like Buddha's story. Both were born as princes and one left home to free humanity from sorrow and rebirth, while the other left home to spread the knowledge given by Buddha.

There were also other Buddhist scholars, like Siddah Caryias, born in Bangladesh but Atisha was considered the greatest Buddhist scholar and saint. Students and scholars from all over the world came to visit, study or teach in Mainamati, Paharpur, Jaggadal, Mahashan and other famous monasteries in Bangladesh. Atisha taught in many of these monasteries.

Atisha's earliest education began with the famous Pandit Jethari, under whom he studied five science subjects. Then he studied Hinayana and Mahayana forms of Buddhism under Pandit Rahul Gupta. He devoted himself to meditation at the famous Krishnagiri Mahashram near Bombay. At the age of nineteen he took his vows as a monk from Achariya Shila Rakshit at Odantapuri Vihara, who gave him the name Atisha Dipankara Srijnan.

After twelve years, at the age of thirty-one, Atisha finally became ordained as a Bhikku under Achariya Dharma Rakshit. He left home to study further under the great Pandit Chandrakirti in Subharna Dwip. After a dangerous sea voyage which took months he arrived in

Java and Subharna Dwip where he studied for twelve years. He finally returned to Magadha via Singhal (Sri Lanka). King Mahipala was successful in imploring Atisha to accept the post of Mahacharya at the famous Vikramshila Mahavihara.

During the middle of the 11th century, Pandit Lama Yes Hod, the king of Tibet, wanted to free and reform Buddhism as practiced in Tibet. He sent several messengers with many gifts for Atisha to travel to Tibet and reform the religion, but Atisha refused. When the king died a sad death at the hands of an enemy, Atisha agreed to travel to Tibet to teach Buddhism. When the principal Ratnakara heard the news he said: "Without Atisha India will be in the darkness."

Atisha was granted leave on condition that he would return within three years. He was accompanied by many scholars and disciples, including Padmaprava, son of the king of Nepal. He arrived in the western

part of Tibet at Holing Vihara where he began to preach Mahayana Buddhism, which was accepted spontaneously by the Tibetans. According to Tibetan Tanjore he wrote 175 books and translated many from Sanskrit to Tibetan. This was the reform and renaissance of Buddhism which the late king had dreamt of. After thirteen years of teaching, writing and spreading Buddhism he died in Tibet at Snye-thang Monastery.



WIKIPEDIA

The story of Atisha is like Buddha's story. Both were born as princes and one left home to free humanity from sorrow and rebirth, while the other left home to spread the knowledge given by Buddha. There were also other Buddhist scholars, like Siddah Caryias, born in Bangladesh but Atisha was considered the greatest Buddhist scholar and saint.

and historical evidence of Bangladesh being a route for passage of a very important product, Buddhism. Isolated urban centres, forts and monasteries more than a thousand years old needed patronisation, which may have come from powerful royal households or Silk Road traders.

In 1995, I visited Tibet to pay my respect to Atisha and visited the temple where the bodily remains of the

greatest Bengali Siddha rests. How did he and other Buddhist scholars travel from the Ganga-Brahmaputra plains and how did they survive the harsh climate at such high altitude? They had to walk and trek all the way up there. That they lived in Tibet, wrote immortal classics, preached in Tibet seemed a deep mystery to me. I could hardly breathe, walk or talk because of lack of oxygen and high altitude conditions.

The temple, Snye-thang Monastery, where Atisha died in 1054 lies out side Lhasa by the Brahmaputra River, one of the mighty rivers that flow down Bangladesh into the Bay of Bengal, thus connecting China, India and Bangladesh. As I came from the land of Atisha the monks and chief of Tibetan Buddhists all accepted me with great affection. I stood in silence by the urn containing Atisha's ashes. Some of the ashes rest in Beijing and some were sent to Bangladesh by the Chinese government as a token of respect for Atisha's birth place. I planted a tree in the courtyard where Atisha used to sit and meditate. A smooth and cool stone slab where Atisha used to sit remains, as if waiting for the master to return. There were many old and faded but carefully wrapped tankas in an adjacent room where the monks were chanting constantly. These tankas are said to be from Atisha's time. On the top shelves many ancient manuscripts and prayers books are preserved.

On the other side of the narrow river stood a small hill on which a large mural painting of Atisha illumined the grey landscape. The rich mineral colours made the beautiful image of Atisha very fresh, and have survived a thousand years.

In my book, *A Thousand Year Old Bengali Mystic Poetry* (1992), I included three Carya poems by Atisha Srijnan Dipankara, photocopies of which I obtained from the National Library in Bhutan. There are memories and relics of Atisha in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet.

I revisited Atisha's birth place on February 8, 2013. A pavilion was built by the Chinese government in memory of Atisha in 2004. It was deserted. The Atisha Dipankara Library and Auditorium was under lock and key. I could not locate the original Unesco monogram.

In view of the current tension in Bangladesh, Buddhist heritage needs to be reappraised by the modern generation as the proud inheritor of a composite culture in which each religion played a significant role.

Atisha taught Karuna and Mahakaruna (compassion) to the world. Buddha's message of peace and coexistence of all beings was taught by him in a simple way.

The writer is Visiting Scholar, Harvard Kennedy School.