

BANGLADESHI TRUCKS

India may allow use of its land

BSS, New Delhi

India may allow vehicles from Bangladesh to enter and ply its territory when they bring goods, to improve bilateral ties and facilitate trade by reducing freight costs and decongesting borders.

Indian commerce department has proposed a unilateral offer in this regard, reports the Economic Times (ET) of India.

The Indian commerce department had written to the road transport and highways ministry, which would be in charge of framing the rules and protocol, about the proposal to unilaterally allow Bangladeshi vehicles to ply in India. And the latter has given a conditional acquiescence.

"We have written back saying that we support the proposal but it needs to be approved by the Cabinet given that the offer is a unilateral one. There needs to be clarity on whether and when it would

translate into a bilateral agreement from which we could also share the benefits. Stakeholder ministries like home affairs need to be on board for this," a highways ministry official told the ET.

A commerce department official said a final decision will be taken only after the Cabinet clears the proposal.

At present, vehicles carrying cargo from both sides have to unload the goods at border check posts. The goods are then transferred to vehicles of the importing country to be taken to their destinations.

This unloading and loading - combined with the rapid rise in bilateral trade growth that has crossed \$5 billion - has led to massive congestion at the border, especially at the land customs stations or integrated check posts, besides taking a toll on trade transaction and freight costs of exporters and importers.

If India goes ahead with its move, it

will significantly bring down trade costs and speed up goods movement from Bangladesh to India.

The highways ministry official quoted earlier said that to facilitate the move, the ministry would need to frame rules under the Indian Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 as well as protocol and procedures particularly regarding acceptable documents.

A bilateral Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) to enable vehicles from both sides to enter and ply within the other's territory was mooted years ago. In fact, in 2011, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh had agreed to work towards concluding the agreement.

It won't be the first time that India makes a unilateral offer to Bangladesh. Under the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement, India provides duty-free, quota-free access to all but 25 products to its market.

Dhaka moves

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includes Additional Secretary of the Home Ministry Dr Kamaluddin Ahmed, Foreign Ministry DC (UN) Saida Muna Tasneem and DG (Americas) Mahfuzur Rahman.

This is going to be the first high-level official delegation to the US since the January 5 parliamentary polls, which America termed "deeply flawed" and did not credibly express the will of people.

Foreign ministry sources say the delegation, which is also going to attend the second steering committee meeting of the newly floated "Global Fund for Community Engagement and Resilience" scheduled for February 20, will hold meetings with officials of the US State Department, as well as labour, trade, energy, human rights and refugee officials.

According to the programme schedule, the Bangladeshi team will hold a meeting with US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Nisha Desai Biswal on February 18 at Washington DC when Dhaka is expected to place a comprehensive report on progress and achievements in regards to the RMG sector and other areas.

After meeting with Biswal, the Bangladesh delegation would hold a meeting with the officials of US Trade Representatives, Department of Labour, and officials drawn from different offices including economic, energy, food security, counterterrorism and refugees.

Sources say Dhaka will apprise the US officials about its achievements and progress in the areas of RMG factories, labour and work place safety and the ongoing steps to further improve the RMG sector, achievements in counterterrorism, energy and connectivity cooperation between Bangladesh and its neighbours, etc.

"Even for a country with a long and unedifying history of parliamentary pandemonium, nothing can be as shameful and disgraceful as the use of pepper spray by a member on his peers to disrupt proceedings," the Hindu newspaper said in an editorial.

They add the US officials might come out heavily on the issues of the parliamentary polls, extrajudicial killings, suppression and oppression of political opponents, and workers' rights as well as safety issues.

BGMEA opposes retailers' plan

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After the twin industrial disasters -- Tazreen Fashions fire and Rana Plaza building collapse -- the Accord and Alliance were formed to monitor and ensure factory safety in Bangladesh.

The European platform will inspect more than 1,600 factories while the American body will visit nearly 700 units.

The government has also formed 30 panels under Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) to check 2,000 garment factories. The Buet teams started their inspection in November last year.

Contacted last night, BGMEA Vice-President Reaz-Bin-Mahmood said in a country like Bangladesh, it is "not possible" to enforce the standards of the US and European nations.

For example, he said, the Accord and Alliance want the factories to use very thick electrical coils. But no company in this country produce such coils.

The inspection agencies also want fire sprinkler system in the factories and this is not stated in the BNBC.

The fire sprinkler system is a protection measure used worldwide. A sprinkler sprays water when a fire breaks out and a predetermined temperature is exceeded.

Reaz-Bin-Mahmood said if any electrical bulb is burst out, the sprinkler system will be turned on only to create panic among the workers and other people in the factories.

"We have to gradually improve the standards," he said. "We do not want any repetition of Rana Plaza or Tazreen incidents."

Asked, Mikail Shipar, secretary to the ministry of labour and employment, said the Accord and Alliance prepared the factory inspection standards without consulting the government.

"We will try to make a common set of standards for all inspection agencies," Shipar said.

"I have already asked the ILO (International Labour Organisation) to arrange a meeting involving the Alliance, Accord, BGMEA, Buet and other stakeholders for making a common set of factory inspection standards."

Protector turns into predator

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Sarkar said the locals had filed a complaint with the Rajuk about three weeks ago in connection with the attempted land grabbing, but to no avail.

CR Das, executive secretary of Baridhara Society, said they had helped Wasa in setting up the enclosure in the park because there was no other open space to keep their equipment.

"They even dug up a trench there to build a concrete boundary wall to detach the site from rest of the park," he said, adding, "But they had to stop in the face of protests by locals."

Sarkar alleged that the move was intended to grab the park land, as the society members occasionally say that they would build a society office and sometimes speak of a waste recycle plant there.

Once the park land is grabbed, it will further destroy the environment and pollute the lake, he fears. Several other residents in the vicinity also voiced similar concerns.

Robots to build

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should look like before being left to get on with it, researchers said.

All that guides them are signals from infrared and ultrasound sensors and simple 'traffic' rules that determine whether to go or stop.

They also know when to lift a building brick and where to attach it, as well as how to avoid collisions and even how to reach higher levels by constructing staircases.

While the robots are just over 6-inches long and the building bricks are made of lightweight foam, the scientists are impressed by what their creations are capable of.

"The key inspiration we took from termites is the idea that you can do something really complicated as a group, without a supervisor and secondly that you can do it without everybody discussing explicitly what's going on, but just by modifying the environment," said US computer scientist Prof Radhika Nagpal, from Harvard University.

"If they [robots] built carelessly, it would be easy for them to build in a way where they got stuck," said team member Dr Justin Werfel, from the Wyss Institute for Biologically Inspired Engineering in Cambridge, US.

Urdu and the Nawabs

FROM PAGE 16

the language spoken in the Dhaka Nawab family. Nazimuddin could not speak Bangla. But the speech he delivered at the public meeting had been prepared in Bangla written in the Urdu script, by Mizanur Rahman, a senior Bangladeshi government official in Karachi. In the post-speech period, Aziz Ahmed, the non-Bangladeshi chief secretary of the provincial government, told Nurul Amin that he had not seen the text of the governor general's speech, but if he had, he would have advised Nazimuddin against making his remarks on the state language issue. Aziz Ahmed would later serve as foreign secretary in the Ayub regime, working under Foreign Minister ZA Bhutto, who would appoint him minister of state for foreign affairs in post-1971 Pakistan.

The Dhaka University State Language

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