

## **ASIAN HIGHWAY: DILEMMA BETWEEN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY OF BANGLADESH**

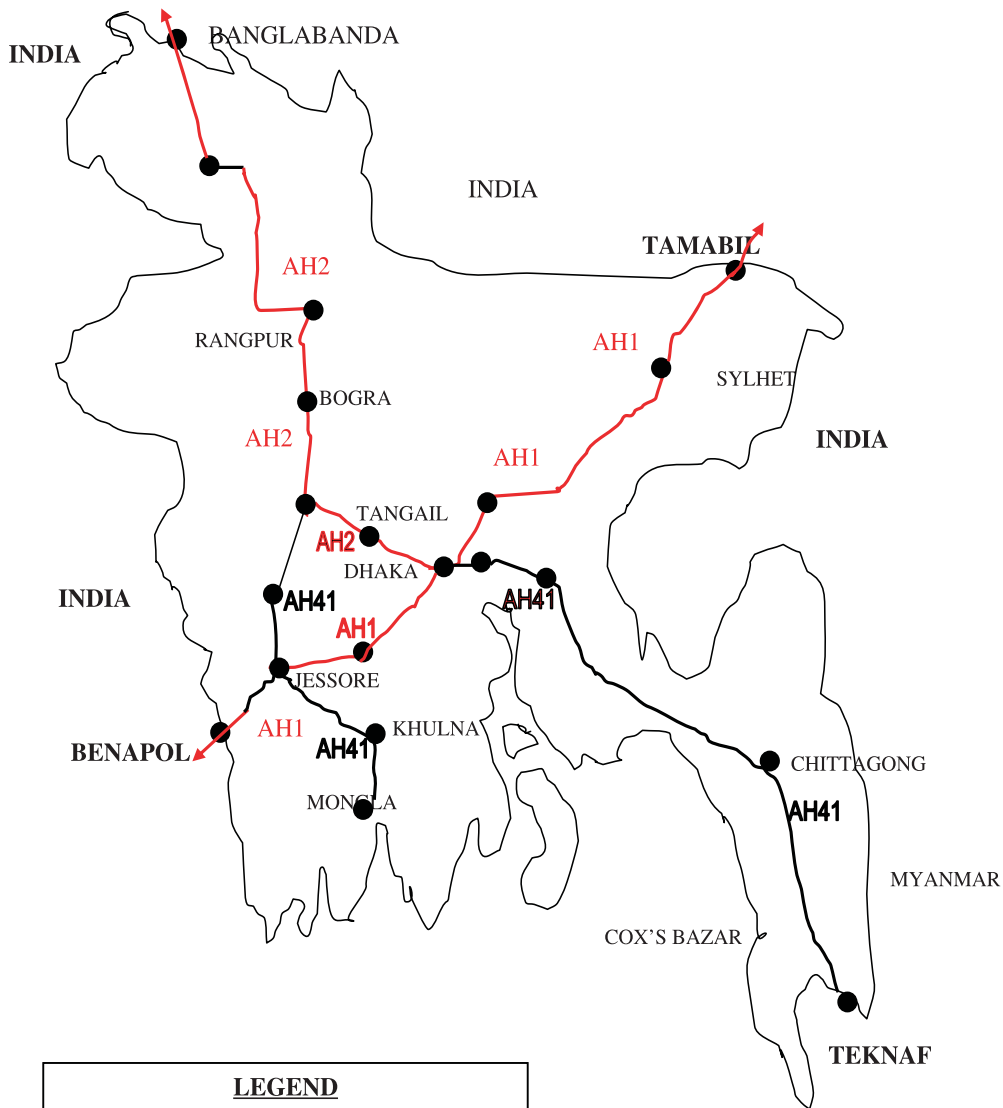
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### **INTRODUCTION**

After lot of debate and study in 2003, an ‘Intergovernmental Working Group’ of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific (ESCAP) finalized a plan to integrate the road transport networks of 32 countries of The Asia Pacific region to facilitate trade and tourism and to open up opportunities for landlocked countries. The plan envisages an Asian Highway (AH) Network extending from Tokyo to Istanbul with around 141,000 kilometers of highway across the whole of Asia. (UNESCAP, 2006). The working group also formulated an ‘Intergovernmental Agreement (IA) on the AH Network’ and adopted it on 18 November 2003. The agreement stipulated that the last date for joining the project would be 31 December 2005. However, only 26 out of 32 countries involved in the project have joined the project till date. Bangladesh has refrained from joining due to disagreement on the route alignment inside its territory. According to the present plan, the AH is to enter Bangladesh at two points, one through Panchagarh district at Banglabandha and the other at Benapole in Jessore. The two are to meet near Jamuna Bridge and then one route will travel via Dhaka to Sylhet and enter India near Tamabil while the other, a sub- regional route would head for Teknaf via Chittagong (UNESCAP,2003:12) (see Map 1). Bangladesh’s proposal to change the route alignment to connect Yangon through Taknaf, instead of an exit route through Sylhet, was not accepted by ESCAP due to Myanmar’s reluctance to accept the changed route. As it stands, the Myanmar government has designated the Yangon-Meiktila- Mandalaya route as its primary choice for AH, presumably because this gives it access to both India and to Yunan provinces own AH link from Kunming to the Myanmar border at Ruili (Sobhan, 2000: 83). Analysts argue that the route alignment of the Network inside Bangladesh provides an opportunity for road transit between the two parts of India. The AH project, due to its importance and route alignment, has generated a lot of debate in political circles as well as among the people of Bangladesh. Considering the transit and security issues involved, Bangladesh has decided not to join the Network until the route alignment is changed.

*Proposed Asian Highway Routes Through Bangladesh*

**Map 1**



## **AN OVERVIEW**

### **Conceiving and Identifying the Network**

Developing an international highway network is a hugely expensive and time consuming exercise. It involves building roads of common standards through vastly different kinds of terrain, ranging from mountains to deserts, river crossings and forests. Because many ESCAP member countries cannot afford the high costs of building such a comprehensive network, it was agreed that the basic thrust of the AH project would be to coordinate the development and upgrading of existing regional highways among member countries. The basic principle for the formulation of a network under the Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development (ALTID) project was to minimize the number of lines and routes to be included in the network and make maximum possible use of the existing infrastructure. (UNESCAP,1996:2). In this regard, participating countries agreed that the basic underlying principles for the AH network would be to include only major national roads in the network and make maximum use of existing roads, avoiding the construction of new highways except in cases where it was deemed necessary to complete 'missing links'. While the existing and potential trade flow was the main criteria in the selection of routes, the revised route criteria selected were as follows (UNESCAP,2003a:2):

1. Capital-to-capital links (to promote international transport and regional integration).
2. Connections to main industrial and agricultural centres (to promote links between areas of economic activity).
3. Connections to major sea and river ports (to integrate water and land transport networks).
4. Connections to major inland container terminals and depots (to integrate rail and road transport networks).
5. Connections to major tourist attractions (To promote use of AH by tourists).

### **Routes Through Bangladesh**

The original plan of the AH envisaged five routes through Bangladesh (Nabi, 2004:6). The basic principle followed by ESCAP is to let member countries decide route alignment through their own countries. Accordingly, Bangladesh proposed two routes of AH from Dhaka to Yangon in 1992; one via Chittagong and the other via Sylhet-Astogram. In reply, the Myanmar government proposed only one route through Sylhet (The Daily Bhorer Kagoj, 18th January, 1997). Myanmar did not show any interest regarding the Chittagong-Teknaf-Yangon

route. Later, The Bangladesh government again proposed that the Jessore-Bonarpara-Hatikumrul (206 km) and Sylhet –Tamabil (56 Km) routes be included in the network. In this proposal Bangladesh also changed its original proposal of the Sylhet-Astogram-Imphal route to the Sylhet-Tamabil-Imphal route.<sup>1</sup> The latter route is about 360 km longer than the previous one and was accepted by ESCAP at the insistence of Bangladesh. But in 1996, Bangladesh again requested reversion to the shorter route and the latest proposal remains under consideration till date.<sup>2</sup> From the economic and engineering point of view, the Sylhet-Astogram-Imphal route is much better than the Sylhet-Tamabil-Imphal route, since the latter is much longer and traverses steep hilly and difficult terrain. Reportedly, the latest proposal has not yet accepted by ESCAP due to Indian objections.

In October 2005, Bangladesh again proposed replacing the route to Yangon via Teknaf with the existing route from Tamabil to Benapole or Banglabandha (The Daily New Nation, 26th October 2005). But in separate letters, governments of China, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Sri Lanka refused to back Bangladesh on the ground of time constraints (India News, 20th December 2005). They also mentioned that Bangladesh should ratify the Agreement first and then bargain with the UN Economic & Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP), the initiator of the project, to modify the route alignment. As per articles 10(2), 11 and 14 of the Agreement, only those countries, who signed the agreement, could propose changes in the route plan. It is also learnt that the Myanmar government did not show any interest in including the proposed Dhaka-Teknaf-Yangon route as part of the AH (The Daily Star, 20th October 2005). So, in line with existing policy, and until the Myanmar government agrees, the proposal to change the ‘route alignment’ will not be accepted by UNESCAP.

The new alignment proposed by Bangladesh was based on the UNESCAP agreed concept of connecting capital to capital i.e. Dhaka to Yangon directly. This would also connect Bangladesh with South Eastern and Far Eastern Asian countries by a land route. The length of the proposed road would be about 830 km. Although there are missing links, but a substantial part of the road is, at present, motorable. However, in many places the road needs major improvement to bear sustained traffic. Bangladesh has been negotiating with the Myanmar government for construction of a road to connect the two capitals and also to

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1. Mohammed Rahmatullah, Personal Interview, Dhaka 24 April, 2006.

2. Ibid.

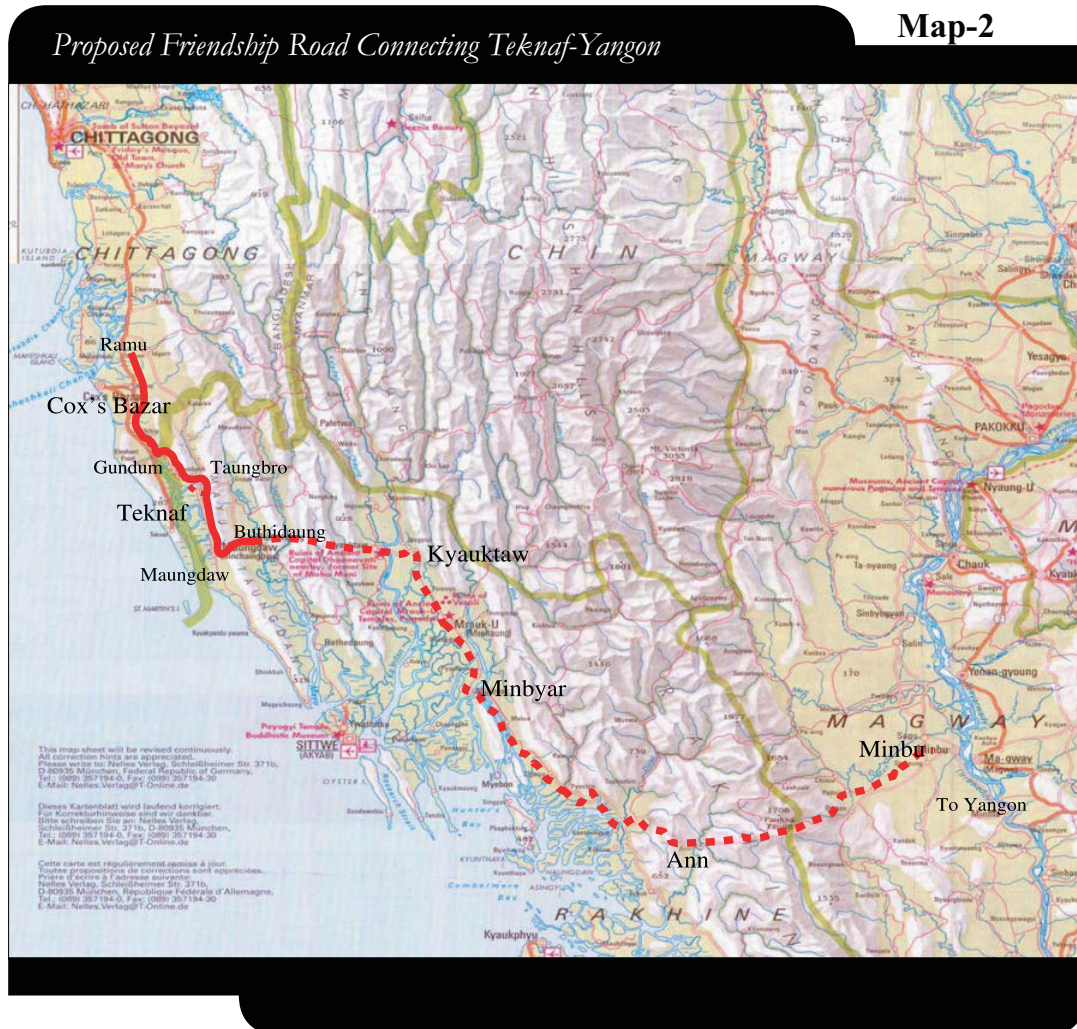
include it in the AH network. However, the project could not be implemented due to Myanmar's reluctance. However, the two countries have agreed in principle to the proposal of constructing a 130 KM road between the two border towns of Bangladesh and Myanmar at the expense of Bangladesh.

The proposed 130 Kilometer "Bangladesh Myanmar Friendship Road" (See Map 2) would connect Gundum of Bangladesh to Bawli Bazar of Myanmar. (Rashid, 2006:16). Bangladesh is committed to constructing 43 kilometers of the road in the first phase, out of which 23 kilometers would be in Bangladesh and 20 kilometers inside Myanmar. The work is likely to start after a formal signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries. Even after constructing the road, a gap of about 92 would remain between Buthidaung and Kyawktaw of Myanmar. This is a long patch, passing through the high and steep hills of Rakhine (Arakan) province without any physical infrastructure. Any construction work in this area would be very expensive. At the moment, Myanmar government is not interested in constructing any road in this area.<sup>3</sup> The disinterest is believed to be for reasons of national security and economic. The Myanmar government has been fighting separatist insurgency movements in the area for sometime now. The Rakhine province has been troublesome for Yangon for quite some years. Analysts believe that due to reasons relating to the insurgency, Myanmar is not interested in pursuing the project. The Bangladesh government has approached many donor agencies for funds for the highway project so far but with no success. (The Daily Star, 11th February 2004). The donors are not interested in the affairs of Myanmar because of their experience of dealing with the ruling military administration of Myanmar.

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3. *ibid.*





## ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF ASIAN HIGHWAY

### Globalization and Infrastructure Development

An important aspect of the ongoing globalization process has been the increasing integration of national economies. Such a trend stems from the understanding that the economies of adjacent or regional countries can generate strong development synergies through effective cooperation among the states in the areas of trade, transport, investment and finance. Such cooperation reinforces the effort of the regional countries towards strengthened global integration of their respective economies.

Surface transport networks in South Asia still continue to fragment for various historical, political and economic reasons. As a result their potential as engines of economic growth at the regional and sub-regional level remains largely unrealized. On the average, only 4 percent of the total global trade of SAARC countries is accounted for by intra-regional trade, which is well below

the level attained by regional blocks such as the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA), The European Union (EU) or the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) where such trade ranges from 30 percent to 60 percent. (Inoue et al, 2004: 7). The same situation prevails in the investment sector, where there is hardly any cross border investment except for small Indian investments in some of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), particularly in Nepal. In the present day world of globalization, integration of transport and communication infrastructure is becoming increasingly important in improvement of trade and commerce between states.

### **Impact of Asian Highway on Regional Trade and Commerce**

This notion of getting mutual gains by improving and promoting economic cooperation has also gained grounds in recent years in South Asia. The region has largely been bypassed in the recent rapid growth of world trade. There is a growing concern among the economists of the region about likelihood of further marginalization of the region in the process of globalization unless conscious efforts are undertaken to deepen and broaden existing intra-regional economic relations. (Inoue et al, 2004: 7). Within South Asia, the vision of a meaningful cooperation between nations is being pursued mainly within the ambit and under the stewardship of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Intense efforts have been taken to arrive at an agreement on the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) for the growth of intra-regional trade. SAFTA is a now a reality and came into effect on 01 July 2006.

Despite having the potential to generate large scale trade and investment in the Eastern South Asian sub-region which consists of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and India, actual trade in the sub-region is very minimal. The percentage distribution of export of the regional countries is shown in Table 1.<sup>4</sup>

<i>Percentage Distribution of Exports by Destination</i>					<b>Table-1</b>
Country	Year	Export by Destination			
		Industrial Countries	ASEAN	South Asia	Others
Bangladesh	1981	34	12	4	54
	1999	85	5	2	8
India	1981	51	6	3	40
	1999	57	13	5	25
Nepal	1981	53	5	43	19
	1999	60	1	30	9

*Source: Bakht and Sen (2002)*

4. Quoted in Sobhan, 2004:10.

In spite of having enormous potential, actual intra-regional trade has been very minimum; for Bangladesh it has been only 2 percent of its total export. In view of the potential, efforts are being made under an initiative taken by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to search for ways to stimulate intra-regional trade and economic cooperation under the auspices of the South Asian Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) (Inoue et al,2004:8). The countries included in this initiative are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal. Such sub-regional grouping for cooperation, popularly known as “Growth Quadrangles”, like the Mekong Basin initiative has worked very effectively in different regions of the world. The trend of increase of exports and imports of these sub-regional countries are shown in Table 2.

<i>Exports and Imports of the Sub-region, 1990-1999(%)</i>				<b>Table-2</b>
	Export Growth 1990-1999	Import Growth 1990-1999	Exports as % of Imports	
			1990	1999
Bangladesh	11.7	9.6	45.7	54.1
Bhutan	7.0	10.5	86.2	63.8
India	9.2	7.2	74.3	87.4
Nepal	11.4	14.2	47.8	38.0

*Source: Bakht and Sen (2002)*

Although the trend and percentage of export orientation has increased during the nineties, the South Asian economies are still by and large characterized by their persistent inward orientation. In the 1990s, the share of intra-SAARC export in total SAARC export stood at 3.2 percent. By 1999, it rose marginally to 4.6 percent (Inoue et al:2004:10). This marginal rise was mainly due to the modest increase registered by Indian exports in the region. The initiatives taken for the improvement of sub-regional cooperation in trade, commerce and investment largely depends on market access and transport integration in the region.

Although the major portion of the trade between Bangladesh and India takes place along the land route (Inoue et al: 2004: 34), the inefficiencies and constraints at border crossings constantly hinder further growth of trade. The border between India and Bangladesh has ten road-based and four rail-based land border check posts. Facilities in most of the check posts are very inadequate. Nevertheless, due to flexibility and ease of movement, road based transportation in the region enjoys the major share in goods transportation. Modal shares of different routes in the region are shown in Table 3.



*Modal Shares of Different Routes*

**Table-3**

Year	Passenger	Share%		Freight	Share %	
	Road	IWT	Rail	Road	IWT	Rail
1974-74	54	16	30	35	37	28
1984-85	64	16	20	48	35	17
1992-93	66	13	12	61	31	7
1996-97	73	14	13	63	30	7
1999-2000	76	13	10	65	25	10

*Source: Alam, 2004: 59.*

From Table 3 it is evident that in Bangladesh the modal share of road transport, both passenger and freight, have steadily been increasing over the decades. Presently, about 76 percent of passengers and 65 percent of all goods are moved by road transport. This mode of transport is also crucially important for Bangladesh to access markets in the North Eastern Region (NER) of India. Due to the peculiar geographical layout and position of the transportation network of the NER of India, any significant increase in regional trade and commerce will be dependent on the improvement of the road transportation network. The AH network is designed to provide that facility to Bangladesh.

## **SECURITY CONCERNS OF BANGLADESH**

### **Geo-Strategic Realities of Bangladesh**

Maintenance of security in the truest sense is an important and difficult responsibility of a nation-state. Even with adequate capability and resources, states find it difficult to safeguard their security. A country's external threat usually emanates from its neighbours. Bangladesh's geo-political and geo-strategic realities can be seen in the following manner. Bangladesh is almost entirely surrounded by India on three sides. The two countries share a common border of 2,556 miles. The exception for Bangladesh is a small but significant border of 172 miles with Myanmar (Rahman, 1999:17). The Bay of Bengal, with a shared coastline of about 450 miles with India and Myanmar, bounds the south. It shares 54 rivers with India and 3 with Myanmar. Bangladesh is roughly 4.38 % of the size of India. Being a lower riparian state, Bangladesh depends on India for the amount of water it receives. Equitable sharing of water remains a thorny issue in Indo-Bangladesh relations. Bangladesh commands access to the Indian Ocean through the Bay of Bengal. The use of sea lines of communication

and demarcation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) with neighbours could someday become a bone of contention. Bangladesh exists as a strategic wedge between mainland India and the seven Northeastern states of India. Each of these states is land locked and has a natural and shorter route to the sea and other parts of India through Bangladesh. In these states, insurgents have been fighting a prolonged and protracted war for self-determination. These states are yet to be fully integrated with the Indian Union. These insurgencies may have security implications for Bangladesh, especially in the Northwestern part, due to the location of the Siliguri Corridor. The corridor restricts the Indian Land 'Line of Communication' with the Northeastern states. In fact, Bangladesh falls within the internal security matrix of India. India is an emerging regional economic and military power with which Bangladesh has to reconcile for its security strategy. The challenge for Bangladesh is to develop a range and pattern of economic relations with India that will help it to achieve a high rate of economic growth and strengthen security through mutual cooperation.

Bangladesh maintains a very cordial and strategic relations with China. This strategic relationship is factored in India's geo-strategic perceptions. The extra regional power's strategic interest in Bangladesh may increase its concerns about the strategic requirements of India. Bangladesh's role in South Asian inter-state relations, especially after the establishment of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) also adds to its geo-political importance. Bangladesh commands natural road and railway links between Southeast Asia and Central Asia and other parts of South Asia. It has a significant amount of gas reserve, both proven and probable. It is also under severe pressure to export gas to India from International Oil Companies (IOCs) - who have invested in Bangladesh for gas exploration but have not got quick return on their investments in Bangladesh. India is also interested in importing gas to meet its growing energy demand. Export of natural gas may entail security ramifications for Bangladesh. (Karim, 2002:9).

### **Geo-Strategic Importance of Asian Highway for Bangladesh**

As stated earlier, Bangladesh is surrounded by India except in the south because of the Bay of Bengal and a short patch of about 72 km in the south-east because of Myanmar. In other words, Bangladesh is virtually "India locked" except the south. The very location of Bangladesh has thus made the 'route alignment' of AH Network important for it. In the present AH plan, Bangladesh does not have an opening to any third country by land route. Its access to Myanmar, The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Chinese markets will depend completely on bi-lateral relations with India, with whom historically Bangladesh has not enjoyed a cooperative and friendly

relationship. The sea line of communication can also be easily blocked by India if it so desires. Any land outlet through Myanmar to the rest of the world bears significant strategic and economic importance for Bangladesh. Any such outlet may work as a lifeline for Bangladesh in time of any eventuality. The proposed route through Teknaf-Maungdaw-Yangon meets this strategic requirement. It would also allow Bangladesh to import essential armaments and goods during any emergency. Moreover, linking Bangladesh with India and other regional countries such as, Nepal through the AH bears significant economic consequences for Bangladesh.

## **CRITICAL EXAMINATION BETWEEN THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS VIS-À-VIS THE SECURITY CONCERNS**

### **Economic Benefits**

In the present day world, integrated transport network, easy border crossing facilities, uninterrupted and easy movement of goods etc are pre-requisites of increased investment and economic growth of a region. Because of the introduction of the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) and increased understanding in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) about liberalization of trade, the South Asian and South-East Asian region is poised for expansion of internal trade and investment. This possibility may be adversely affected if transport integration and infrastructural development are not achieved side by side. Because it is strategically located in the South Asian region, Bangladesh can be one of the major beneficiaries of the AH Network. It has the potential to become the hub of the transport network between South Asian countries and ASEAN. Under the auspices of the project, the volume of trade between Bangladesh and India is likely to increase substantially due to easy facilitation in the border crossing and liberalization of trade. Bangladesh is likely to become an attractive investment destination due to its competitive labour force, access to sea, reduced transportation costs and for its locational advantage in relation to the landlocked hinterland of India, Nepal and Bhutan. The liberalized trade regime and prospect of easy market access to India and the adjoining sub-region could attract domestic, Indian and Thai as well as other Asian foreign direct investment in Bangladesh. This assumption is based on the principles underlying the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) initiative and the resulting use of trans-border industries set up across the US –Mexico border to enable prospective investors to access the US market. (Sobhan,2000:124).

There are many in Bangladesh who are quite pessimistic about the prospects of easy access and movement of Bangladeshi goods to and through

India even if Bangladesh joins the AH. Some of the actions of India in regional affairs reinforce their view. In 1997, India allowed Nepal the right of transit into Bangladesh territory but then imposed so many conditions that road based transit has become virtually impossible. The issue of duty free access of Bangladeshi products have been dealt with in such a manner that even today Bangladesh has not been able to derive much benefit from the concessions offered by India. The continuing existence of non-tariff barriers to Indian markets is another example of India's non cooperative attitude. To maximize the benefit of transport integration, Bangladesh needs to be very careful and prudent while negotiating conditions of agreement for movement of goods and passengers through India. In this case, Bangladesh may find a more accommodative India in striking a balanced deal as she also has a big stake in this agreement.

Transportation cost is a significant determinant of competitiveness in this highly competitive world. Due to locational and infrastructural advantages, Bangladeshi products would be much more competitive in NER of India than Indian products. This factor alone would work in favour of Bangladesh to increase the volume of its trade in the region. Bangladesh can also earn a huge amount as royalty if transit for Indian goods is granted through its territory. It is estimated that about 24 million tons of freight move to and from North Eastern States and the rest of India. This is expected to rise to 52 million tons by 2007 (Inoue et al, 2004:17). It is assumed that a large portion of this freight would be transited through Bangladesh. It has been estimated that at the present rate Bangladesh could earn about 8 billion taka by way of freight and other charges leviable on Indian goods if transit facilities are provided (Inoue et al, 2004: 18).

Asian Highway would also open the door of regional tourism and Bangladesh can become a great beneficiary of such tourism. This would open the window to strengthen the service sector of Bangladesh. But there are also difficulties in immediate integration. Firstly, Bangladesh's national highway system does not have the excess capacity to absorb additional regional /international traffic (Ahmed,2002:23). Creation of such capacity would require huge investment. Secondly, standard of road construction and load bearing capacity of different regional countries vary widely. Considering the difference in axle load limit, which is 8.2 tons in Bangladesh vis-à-vis 10.2 tons in India, Bangladesh has not been allowing trucks from India to travel its roads. Although Bangladesh has recently raised the axle load to 10 tons, (Sobhan, 2004:82) it will take quite sometime to upgrade the infrastructure to the Indian level. Thirdly, limited cargo handling capacity of Chittagong Port is another hindrance in maximizing economic benefits. Chittagong Port is presently considered very inefficient and one of the most expensive ports in the world. It takes 7-10 days to clear a ship. The port

is already overburdened and cannot cope with the demand of Bangladesh alone. Optimum use of AH inside Bangladesh hinges on the improvement of internal road infrastructure and the cargo handling capacity of the Chittagong port. Construction of a deep sea port along the coast of Bangladesh would definitely improve the situation. At present freights of North Eastern States of India need to travel more than 2000 km to reach any sea port. An efficient Chittagong port or a deep sea port can cater to the needs of NER of India, Nepal, Bhutan, the south-western part of Myanmar, and Yunnan province of China. Bangladesh has already started exploring the feasibility for building such a port. (The Daily Star, 13th July 2006).

### **Security Concerns**

The present route alignment of AH has raised many strategic issues including question of giving transit facilities to India for its NER. M Abdul Hafiz observed in the 'Daily Star' of 24 August 1999 that geographical location with NER is the only clout Bangladesh enjoys with India and wondered "what will happen when we will be bereft of the only leverage in our hand."<sup>5</sup> Many also support the government stand of not joining the AH project on the point of transit. The view of the passage of military equipment through transit without or against the consent of Bangladesh is not at all well-founded. Shipment of arms through Bangladesh is not at all needed by India unless the Siliguri corridor is severed. This can only happen in case of Chinese invasion of India, which is an extremely unlikely even in the present day world scenario. Again, the argument that transit facility would increase unauthorized smuggling of contraband items like drugs, arms etc. to Bangladesh also cannot be sustained on logical grounds. Bangladesh has had river transit with India since 1972 and so far, there has been no complaint regarding illegal smuggling of such items through the river route. Smugglers are more likely to use porous India-Bangladesh border rather than specified transit route. Moreover, modern technology can also help find out contraband items in freights to be transited through Bangladesh.

Asian Highway, on the contrary, is likely to strengthen the security of Bangladesh by improving most of the 'elements of national security' as described by Buzan. Out of the five elements, except the military, Bangladesh can strengthen itself in the remaining four elements i.e. political, economic, societal and environmental elements, by joining the project. AH may work as a bridge between people and regional friction and tension is likely to be reduced through close interaction between states and societies. The resulting economic development is also likely to have a positive effect in bringing peace and harmony within the societies of Bangladesh.

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5. Quoted in Ahmed, 2002:29.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the review and critical analysis carried out in this study, the researcher has come up with the following recommendations:

1. As there is immense economic potential and not much serious security concerns related to the project, Bangladesh should join the AH Network without any further delay.
2. The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) should form a committee to study the possibility of a common and comprehensive agreement on transit encompassing India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar under the auspices of the AH Network. The committee should consider the economic, security, social and environmental aspects of the agreement and recommend most beneficial terms for Bangladesh.
3. To minimize the possibility of security threats due to transit through Bangladesh (if granted), the GOB should constitute an expert committee to recommend possible measures needed to be taken at the entry point of AH at the international border and during the entire route of transit.

## CONCLUSION

Although the present route alignment of AH is not likely to bring maximum advantage to Bangladesh, she has few alternatives. In the geo-strategic context, any route through Myanmar is the most desirable one. The route through Sylhet-Tamabil-Gauhati-Imphal is about 360 km longer than Bangladesh's proposed Sylhet-Karimganj-Silchar-Imphal road. It also passes through a very difficult hilly terrain inside India. All these go against efficient and optimum utilization of AH by Bangladesh to integrate with the regional economies. Bangladesh is interested in connecting Yangon with Teknaf either under the auspices of AH or under a bi-lateral arrangement. But due to internal compulsions and resource constraints, Myanmar is not interested in investing in such a project. Bangladesh's proposal of constructing a 130 km road inside Myanmar under bi-lateral arrangement does not fulfill the requirement of connecting the two capitals. Considering the present inability of Myanmar to invest money in any large project, India and Thailand are helping Myanmar construct a road to connect these two countries through Myanmar.

The 'IA on the AH Network', which came into effect on 01 January 2006, does not provide any option to change the 'route alignment' on the proposal of a country who which not join the project. As per present provisions, Bangladesh



can try to change the route alignment or add another route in the AH to connect Dhaka with Yangon via Teknaf only after joining the Network. Considering all aspects, including trade, investment, transit, security etc, it may thus be concluded that Bangladesh will be greatly benefited by joining the AH Network. It will help boost the country's development and economic integration with regional economies.

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