

## INTRODUCTION

The independence of five Central Asian countries, i.e., Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in the early 1990s resulted in fundamental changes of their foreign policies, as well as their border relationship. The Central Asian countries inherited a military-based approach in border management, in which “security” usually takes precedence over “facilitation”. Lack of experience in effectively handling border management, the Central Asian countries have to undergo a transition period to adopt a viable form of border management.

Border management is the means to promoting open and secured border to allow the movement of people and goods. Effective border security is the efficient management of border processes and procedures leading to unimpeded flow of people and goods including means of transportation for the mutual benefit of countries bordering each other. Border management whilst ensuring security must also at the same time facilitate legitimate trade and travel. Recognizing that trade is an important element contributing to the social and economic development of the nation as a whole, the Central Asian countries have been striving to introduce a sound border management system which is able to strike the balance between the encouragement and facilitation of physical movement of persons and goods across the border whilst at the same time ensuring that security is not compromised. At present, the border management system in Central Asia varies from country to country in terms of legal and institutional framework. The form and substance of border management, however, remains largely similar in terms of the control measures utilized.

Border management is essentially maintained under a “Customs, Immigration and Quarantine” (CIQ) environment. Thus a number of public controlling bodies are involved. The government agencies involved in the decision-making processes related to border management differ slightly in each country. Although they are tasked with different responsibilities specific to their mission, the agencies share a common strategic undertaking, which is, safeguarding the national security, wealth, health and well-being of the community at large. Traditionally, the major tasks related to border management for all modes of travel and means of transport seeking entry into or exit from a country includes:

- Protection and prevention of threats to national security through illegal entry of undesirable persons bent on causing mischief and harm to the country;
- Protection and prevention of loss of revenue through smuggling and improper filing of trade documents;
- Protection of the health and well-being of the community through preventing illegal entry of harmful medicinal products and other psychotropic substances;
- Protection of flora and fauna and preventing entry of the same which would be detrimental to the agricultural interests of the country; and
- Prevention of illegal entry and exit of arms, explosives and other materials of like nature.

Public bodies involved in the performing of the border management tasks include, amongst others, the Ministries of Finance/Customs, Trade, Transport, Interior, Defense and Health. Each Ministry’s mission is delegated to the appropriate agencies or organs and includes commonly the Customs Service, the Border Guards Service, and Quarantine Control Services.

In Central Asia, as in most countries, the major task of the Customs Service is the levy and collection of import and export duties and taxes, and including the control over the movement of goods and means of transport to ensure that imports and exports are in compliance to the rules and regulations established by the government. The Border Guards Service caters to immigration control requirements and maintaining a presence at border checkpoints, not unlike a military force responsible for illegal incursions into the country. The tasks of quarantine control are vested in veterinary, phyto-sanitary, sanitary and health services. Their mission includes the prevention from entry of infectious and hazardous organisms constituting a menace to flora, fauna, animal and human health. In addition to the above major agencies, officials of the Ministry of Transport are also present owing to the control over the movement of means of transport and the routes of travel within the country.

As a result of the complex nature of the requirement of many agencies at the border, inter-agency cooperation and coordination is required to ensure a safe and efficient border management. Besides ensuring that border security is not compromised, an effective border management can generate monetary and non-monetary benefits for the business community and result in the furtherance of legitimate trade. The benefits may include but are not limited to the following:

- Saving of compliance costs arising from simplification and harmonization of processes, procedures and formalities (preparation and submission of required documentation);
- Saving of costs for services related to transportation, cargo handling, warehousing and cargo examination;
- Saving of time arising from expeditious border and customs clearance, inspections and other forms of frontier control.

The traditional form of border management resulting in the presence of the numerous agencies at border checkpoints will have to be reassessed in order to reap the benefits stated above. The introduction of an Integrated Border Management (IBM) concept will go a long way towards meeting the national aspiration of ensuring border security and facilitation. The establishment of an IBM will require intra-agency coordination, inter-agency collaboration and international cooperation.

The objective of an effective border management through an IBM should strike the balance between rule-based control and trade facilitation of cross-border traffic, in particular, movement of goods and means of transport. To maintain the balance between the two major requirements at the border, namely, national security and trade facilitation, various enhancements are required as follows:

- a) Access to technical aids and inspection equipment such as X-ray machines to facilitate the inspection and examination of goods and means of transport;
- b) Competent officials who have undergone intensive training and are committed to their profession;
- c) Review and instituting legal reforms;
- d) Inter-agency coordination and collaboration;
- e) Simplification and harmonization of processes and procedures of trade documentation;
- f) Simplification and harmonization of processes and procedures related to means of transportation and/or the drivers;
- g) Development of intelligence and effective exchange of information both within and without the agencies concerned;

- h) Institutional reforms such as establishment of inter-agency and national facilitation committees to develop border management strategies; and
- i) Strengthening and/or modernization of infrastructure capacities at the border checkpoints.

Of equal significance as mentioned above, international cooperation will also be a key factor. This will require close cooperation and coordination between neighbouring border agencies and that from countries not in close proximity to the country concerned. Cooperation and coordination can also come from international organizations, in particular, through the provision of information to assist the agencies responsible for border management in the fulfillment of their intelligence-gathering and analysis capability.

International and regional cooperation are particularly relevant to the Central Asian countries owing to the countries being in landlocked positions. As a result, the development and promotion of trade in these countries and the movement of goods and means of transport from neighbouring countries (including those not within Central Asia) are subjected to reliance on transit movements. There are also instances where the territory of one country, usually an enclave, is sandwiched between the territories of another. In such instances transit is made more acute. An example of this is found in the Republic of Tajikistan and Republic of Uzbekistan.