

South Asian Cooperation: Case for Open Border Trade

CONSIDERED against a backdrop of waves of economic regionalism sweeping the world today, the South Asian nations look like laggards in forging closer trade and monetary links.

Synchronization of import liberalization programmes, tariff restructuring and realignment of exchange rates — even though carried out for the limited purpose of facilitating open trading at the borders — would nonetheless bring the economies of the region closer.

ness of full convertibility of the region's currencies.

Body-blow for Congress

For a ruling party to suffer reversals at the state assembly polls in India has not been a novelty in her politics for some years now.

The Telegu Desham Party, led by the charismatic NTR, climbs on to the driver's seat in Andhra with a 160-seat lead while the Janata Party has secured the majority in Karnataka with 115 seats.

More than a year ago, the Congress (I) had fared badly at the state assembly polls in northern India where a social coalition of a political force captivated the imagination of low caste peasantry and Muslim voters emerged as a winner.

The outcome could not have been more hurting to the Congress (I) government in general and Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in particular.

The results of the state assembly elections in India tend to affect the strength of the central government by implications, not in any direct manner.

Inside the Congress caucus, his position and authority may be weakened, if not openly challenged. Already Manmohan Singh who spearheaded the economic liberalisation policies has come under fire for the party's poor showing.

Preventible Deaths

A luxury passenger coach reached Dhaka at 4 am Saturday morning ending a night run from Chittagong. As is usual, the passengers would not venture out into the city at that hour — because of lack of transport and a surfeit of insecurity — and stayed back to doze off the hours remaining before daybreak.

One very dependable measure of a civilised social existence is predictability of life — and death. Death does not lurk everywhere — specially avoidable death. Preventing avoidable deaths should be one of the top concerns of our society, government and state.

Why? There can be no acceptable answer. And, evidently, there were no fire extinguishers. Why? Why was the place completely shut up? Why those who run the place forgot their charge and went to sleep? And finally and unbeatably a question looms above all else: why do buses have to reach Dhaka at 4 am? Why shouldn't they depart and arrive later?

The Dhaka-Chittagong buses have set a model for the national communication sector to follow. This is very much in their power to extend their cares beyond providing hitherto unfamiliar facilities and comforts to cutting down risks to the life of passengers.

We call upon both the government transport authority as well as the bus companies themselves to do the needful in the matter without the need of outside pressuring and without any further delay.

Why Temporarily?

The government has temporarily withdrawn the 10-month-old restriction on jatra until the arrival of Ramadan. So says an agency report. At the time of the imposition of the restriction we had opposed the action against a traditional art medium lauded and commended by the Prime Minister only days before as a national treasure.

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Newsprint

Sir, I fail to understand this paradox. In textbooks I've read that the newsprint mill in Khulna produces more than enough to meet the need of paper in the country and hence exports the excess to foreign countries.

Politics and people Sir, The collapse of autocrat Ershad regime in 1990, holding of an unprecedented free and fair parliamentary elections in 1991 and restoration of the form of parliamentary democracy there of raised hopes for a 'new Bangladesh' based on justice, cooperation, unity and development.

When the parliamentary form of government was accepted, we thought that all problems of our country would be solved through the parliament and we won't have to face any more hartals, gheraos, barricades, breaking of cars, loss of working days.

Cambodia Bounces Back with Difficulty

Henrylito D Tacio writes from Phnom Penh

The land mines continue to claim more than 300 victims per month. De-mining is an essential priority for Cambodia's rehabilitation

more than 170 schools have been constructed, 2,000 wells dug, and 50 kilometres of irrigation canals restored in three northwestern provinces which have the highest percentage of returns.

Through its TOKEN programme, UNDP covers the round-trip airfare of short-term consultants, and a daily subsistence allowance. Since 1992, the government of Cambodia has made extensive use of nearly 70 expatriate Cambodian TOKTEN consultants in the agriculture, education, economic reform and management, and health fields.

Indeed, building up the country's beleaguered cadre of human resources is essential if long-term progress is to be achieved. In this aspect, UNDP's TOKTEN programme is making a great contribution.

TOKTEN, which stands for Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals, brings back Cambodian professionals to serve as consultants. Most of Cambodia's best qualified and trained professionals have been fleeing the country over the past 20 years to escape civil war and find better opportunities.

Through this programme, something positive to rid the nation of the intolerable crisis. Shah Abdul Suddi 1-D/3-25, Mirpur, Dhaka.

BTV, Radio and Biswa Ijtema

Sir, Preparations for holding the annual Biswa Ijtema (in mid-January '95), the largest Muslim congregation after Hajj, are going on in full swing at Tongi. I earnestly request the Ijtema management committee to kindly arrange for live telecast and broadcast of the Akheri Munajat offered on the concluding day of the Ijtema to enable millions at home and abroad, join the Munajat along with those at the Ijtema venue.

M Nazmul Haque Dhaka

OPINION

The Dialogue and Discourses

Brig Mashuque Ahmed Chowdhury, psc (ret'd)

Writing a column essentially needs one to be objective, impartial and preferably non-partisan. Mr A S M S Kibria, our former Foreign Secretary, has been contributing his writings regularly to 'The Daily Star'. I had the privilege of meeting him on two occasions: First during one of his short visits to Kingston, Ontario, Canada in the year 1978 while I had been attending Canadian Land Forces Command and Staff College and his son was studying at Queen's University, and the second time when I was a member directing Staff at the Defence Services Command and Staff College, Mirpur and he was invited as a guest speaker.

With the failure of the dialogue, the opposition have drawn programmes to unsettle the government with a view to forcing the ruling party to agree to their demand without little realising that, their programmes, instead of unsettling the position will unsettle the economy and the nation first; on the other hand BNP, after having conceded some concessions have taken a posture of confrontation. It is unfortunate that neither opposition nor the position have any consideration for the nation; interest of the people seems secondary to their greed for power and hence the uncompromising attitude. They must not forget that the common citizens do not approve of unjust political activities nor they will condone politicians for their wrong decisions, final judgement will be people's.