

Another observable phenome

non is the degree of GDP growth as

nations embrace the doctrine of free

trading. With enhanced export

earnings unleashed by free trading,

the GDP growth does tend to move

upward, but doesn't necessarily

lead to a higher per capita income

and a better standard of living:

unless export gains are preserved

to stimulate further saving, invest-

ment, employment and growth by



LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA THURSDAY JULY 31, 2003

Water-logging invasive

City in comatose, coordination key to solution

ATER-LOGGING considerably cut down the pace of life last Monday and Tuesday when there was rain for about 36 hours. The dilapidated drainage system of the city cannot take the load of more than 10mm rainfall, but during those 36 hours there was around 60mm.

The result was that most of the roads and lanes went under water. The worst-affected areas were Mouchak, Malibagh and Shantinagar crossing. The situation in most areas of old Dhaka also became precarious.

The problem is a recurring one and its ill-effects are far too known to be recounted. But lack of sound planning and coordination between government agencies on the one hand, and between them and the DCC on the other, are contributing significantly to an aggravation of the situation. Water-logging in the Mouchak-Malibagh area is the result of a WASA storm sewer line terminating at the Malibagh rail-crossing. Its extension by another 500 metres will have greatly eased the problem of choking. But the technical difficulties arising out of the need for laying the line across the bottom of the railway track are yet to be solved. WASA has sought permission from the railway authorities to do the work, but the latter want it to be done during the dry season to avoid disruption of train service. So coordination between the two agencies is clearly missing, and so is the sense of urgency. Citizens know how much trouble they are facing for the government agencies' inability to quicken the pace of the work they are supposed to be doing in public interest.

Water-logging at Shantinagar crossing persists for a different reason. Or is it? The road level was raised by the DCC at a cost of Tk 6 crore to avoid accumulation of rainwater on it, but WASA has not created the drainage line to flush out the water. Here, the DCC and the WASA are not working in tandem.

Then in many areas, particularly in old Dhaka, WASA's storm sewers have broken the surface drains of the DCC. The surface drainage network of the DCC has been crippled by the fact that nearly 2,500 drains are not functioning, which, claims the WASA, is also leading to blockage of its sewerage pipes. Last but not the least, 22 natural water channels and some pools in the low-lying areas have been cloaged.

So, water-logging on such a scale was only inevitable given the way the city's drainage system has been managed. The government agencies have to address the problem on the basis of a well-thought-out plan and, more important, achieve better coordination and understanding among themselves.

Bus terminal disciplining

Welcome, but go the whole hog

FTER close to a week of joint Police-BDR operations at five city bus terminals, several hoodlums and extortionists have been arrested. As an immediate impact, incidence of passenger harassment and free-for-all extortionist activism has suddenly evaporated. But will it last?

The action follows Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's directives to rid the transport sector of virtually a reign of terror being perpetrated by vested quarters. We welcome the crackdown at Syeedabad, Joy Kali Mondir, Gulistan, Mahakhali and Fulbaria bus terminals. We hope this is just the beginning of a bigger campaign.

The essential thing to realise is that the operations have been carried out at the end-point. Just as there are bus terminals all over the country which are plaqued by

Economic diplomacy: Obstacles and opportunities

M. SHAHIDUL ISLAM

badly need--and at cheaper price--

our economy is unlikely to see the

international trading is blocked by

factors both indigenous and extra-

neous as the enterprising skills

evolve and get honed through trial

and error due to the lack of requisite

level of research to ascertain goals

and strategies. New inventions and

innovations elsewhere are con-

stantly crowding out our traditional

goods in a global market full of

We also face a major handicap by

being South Asians. While geogra-

phy made us neighbours, recent

history lends little credence that we

are coexisting as good neighbours.

A solid proof of our 'bad neighbourli-

ness' can be found in the pattern of

intra-regional trade among SAARC

countries as a percentage of world

trade. Currently, it stands at 3.4%

against 38.4 % in East Asia, 37.3%

in North America, and 63.4% in the

Bilateralism within SAARC

As an economic entity, South Asia

also suffers from the lack of internal

cohesion, despite being home to

one-fifth of the world's consumers.

Once the SAARC members decided

to devise a uniform strategy prior to

the next September's World Trade

Organization (WTO) meet in

Cancun to coordinate what one

might call 'better argument and

bargaining power,' no hell broke

loose to have the meet postponed at

the last moment. The August 9 and

10 Dhaka meeting of SAARC com-

merce ministers and secretaries

were postponed without any credi-

The melodrama of this kind,

centerina the SAARC rendezvous,

has by now degenerated into a

tasteless facade. In recent months,

another SAARC meeting --

scheduled in Dhaka on April 19-20--

This shows that, unlike the EU

members, SAARC members are

pushing for free trade bilaterally.

The practice is not uncommon

among countries in other regions.

By December 2002, 250 FTA were

notified to the WTO. The number is

expected to rise to 300 soon.

ble explanation.

too got postponed.

multiple choices.

As it stands now, our progress in

bright side of globalisation.

Yet, a fundamental difference in the South Asian euphoria for free trading is noticeable in the hidden ATIONS prosper by intent of players for whom the free specializing in production, trade paradigm seems more like a by making divisions of convenient political slogan than an products and labour, and, to economic necessity that must be paraphrase Adam Smith, 'by embraced and addressed creating wealth through innovation'.

Unless we get into the production Free trade or MFN? and selling of things that others

in Indian markets.

such concessions from India.

And, the FTA members' being

barred from the Most Favoured

Nation (MFN) status pursuant to

another WTO rule, Dhaka and Delhi

should decide soon if the granting

MFN status to Dhaka by Delhi will

help reduce the 'Himalayan' trade

deficits between the two neighbours

and make it more congenial and

viable to embark on free trading at a

lucrative due to the South Asian

desire for free trading being as yet a

hybrid version of globalization that

pursues country- specific strategies

to derive maximum economic

benefits by overcoming constraints

imposed by national political bound-

Although the trend is not in colli-

sion with the central supposition of

globalization that posits that, the

world's nations are economically

interdependent, it however smacks

an 'Orwellian notion' -- that some

nations are more interdependent

than the others. Interdependent

they are in many aspects, but a

bona fide recognition of that fact is

hard to dawn upon regional protago-

Since the 1980s, the ASEAN mem-

bers formed a vanguard grouping

among developing nations to inte-

grate their national economies. As a

result, the ASEAN ratio of trade to

GDP increased substantially

between 1985-96. The block

decided to increase both intra-

regional and international trading as

a complimentary move, not as one

Looking East, why

not as a bloc?

This particular proposition seems

later stage.

Despite the WTO regulations being emphatic about granting of lowest tariff to all trading partners if such a facility is granted to one, Dhaka has been struggling for years to ring out

contradicting with -- and undercutting-- others' goals and capabilities. In 1996, Singapore and Malaysia achieved trade GDP ratio of 281% and 150% respectively while Thai-

land and the Philippines trailed behind with 70% each. Trade GDP ratio with respect to Vietnam and Indonesia were respectively 82% and 42%. The phenomenal increases in merchandise exports, which grew 'double digit' during the period, bears testimony to the birth of an industrial revolution in East Asia

The ASEAN countries are now

preparing for free trade with the EU.

the signing of a general agreement for trade in August 1973, Bangladesh opened its market for border trading with Myanamar after signing a border trade agreement in May 1994. The progress however remains unsatisfactory.

Dhaka's desperation to look East via Myanmar also led her to discuss account-based trading modalities during Bangladesh commerce minister's visit to Yangoon in May 2002. As Dhaka and Myanmar move toward constructing a road link, Dhaka's entry to the ASEAN

seems a near certainty. But the

Indian linkage with the East remains

tively affect the macroeconomic benefits and the cost of social adjustment in individual countries. The apprehension is based on spurious findings.

For, the concern for domestic adjustment derives its argument from the fear that too much of economic liberalization could displace millions of workers and farmers; that the burden of adjustment will not be shared equally or equitably; and the poor will be victimized. Apprehensions of the like over-

towards increased per capita

income--coupled with an egalitarian

social distribution method--can

quickly retrieve the region from the

dark pit of poverty in which it finds

If South Asia acted as a block, it

could argue more forcefully about

exporting manpower to other econ-

omies. The globalization's empha-

sis on ensuring free movement of

goods, services and capital can be

logically extended to include free

movement of labour who constitute

the most worthwhile pool of

The same argument can be used

to imply that, since Bangladesh

receives 60% of its remittances from

expatriate workers in the Middle

East, it should be more focused in

forging FTA with Middle Eastern

nations to obfuscate heaped up

While that prospect seems far-

fetched. Bangladesh is unlikely to

conduct balanced trade with any

bigger economy unless our skilled

and semi skilled labour can work in

countries we choose to trade freely

annual trade imbalance with India is

nearly \$1 billion now, with Pakistan

\$63.14 million, with Sri Lanka

\$14.55 million, with China \$900

million, and with Thailand \$ 170

million, to name but a few. As of now,

globalization and immigration are in

perpetual conflict and Dhaka has

little hope of counting on foreign

remittances (from countries with

which trade imbalance is mounting)

have withdrawn his objection to

as an incoming trade dividend.

Regionally, Bangladesh's

resource in South Asia.

trade imbalances.

with

Factoring in human

itself

resources

As well, mass employment is look the fact that a positive spurt often a commonplace in 'uncalculated' free trading as domestic industries in poorer economies fail to compete with outsiders and get We import more from beyond the region: 32% from the ASEAN combined (mainly from China, Japan, Singapore and

reining in imports.

locked out Should that come to South Korea) and 16.2% from India. India, on the other hand, imports most of its goods from the US, Germany, Japan pass, a huge army of jobless will join the annual influx of about 1.6 million and the UK. Much of the Indian exports too head to the same destinations. As India mainly imports capital goods and newcomers seeking jobs in Bangla desh alone. oil and oil products, it remains an uphill task for Bangladesh to gain a foothold for traditional Bangladeshi products

The scenario will be equally alarming for all nations of South Asia where unemployment rate now averages at 4.7% across the board. Add to this the prevalent asymmetry in the range of products among SAARC members. Bangladesh's main exports are jute, leather, ceramic, frozen fish, tea, and readymade garments. The traditional markets for these products are in North America and in the EU nations

But, we import more from beyond the region: 32% from the ASEAN combined (mainly from China, Japan, Singapore and South Korea) and 16.2% from India. India, on the other hand, imports most of its goods from the US, Germany, Japan and the UK. Much of the Indian exports too head to the same destinations. As India mainly imports capital goods and oil and oil products, it remains an uphill task for Bangladesh to gain a foothold for traditional Bangladeshi products in Indian markets

The notion of free trading can not grow in a vacuum. It needs economic choreography and crafts manship. It also needs an influx of huge Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and setting of joint ventures to produce things in a place where it cost less.

As political differences often impinge upon such strategic decisions, South Asian traders and governments find themselves locked in negotiations that all sides take as irreconcilable. It's time they learn to deal with neighbours in a conciliatory manner and do things jointly to overcome global challenaes

Author and columnist M. Shahidul Islam is a senior assistant editor of this paper.

The Sonia factor

nists.



she was unwilling to share power with Mulayam. I do not know why the Congress announced Sonia Gandhi's candidature for prime ministership from the Shimla conclave itself. What was the hurry when the elections were still 15 months away? There was no challenge to her within the party, nor was there any opposistates. tion building against her. She has galvanised the Congress and she deserves the highest position the party can win minister Yet long before the elections, the

next polls. I am sure that Sonia Gandhi and her party strategists must have weighed the pros and cons. Mere bravado does not bring votes. True, the party has done well at the polls. During Sonia Gandhi's presidentship, the party has taken the tally of successes from five to 15

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the Nehru dynasty. But this fact can cut both ways.

Was the announcement really necessary? The Congress was under no pressure to do so. What the announcement has done is to convert the contest from the party to person. It would have been betw

Sonia Gandhi's nationality, the point on which he left the Congress. But the NCP has said after their meeting that projecting Sonia Gandhi will be a "historical blunder." The primary consideration is to stall communal ements, not to install Sonia Gandhi.

has made the party a pale carbon copy of the BJP. The BJP has become saffronised Congress and the Congress secular BJP, as somebody puts it.

Winning elections is important but should it be done at the expense of what the Congress has stood for? In fact, pluralism, if secularism is an overused term, is the ethos of the country, the principle on which independence was won. The party seems to be vacillating at a time when it needs to be determined. The Congress would have lost Guiarat anyway because the poison of communalism has penetrated too deep. But if the party had made a frontal attack on the Hindutva forces, it would have at least silenced those who say the Congress does not want to annoy the Hidutva elements. Fundamentalism of any hue -- Hindu, Auslim, Sikh or Christian -- has to be fought relentlessly. The Congress should not look compromising on this point One thing that I have not been able to understand is why a five-star hotel at Shimla was chosen as the venue of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) have the Congress conclave. This was made. The Sankaracharya appears hardly the place from where the slogan Congress ka hath, garib ke guarantee for the protection of *sath* (the Congress hand -- the party's mosques at Varanasi and Mathura in symbol -- is with the poor) should have been raised. It sounded hollow This formula can sell provided the in those luxurious surroundings. Why didn't the party managers think of Sangh parivar accepts it. Some leaders in the BJP are in favour of the Sevagram at Wardha? Mahatma Gandhi's cottage in the backdrop of the conclave would have been more issue with the RSS or its rowdiest convincing. The 118-year-old Conress would have looked like going to he roots. It seems lost at present.

mission in hand Among Bangladesh's immediate neighbours, Myanmar too is a member of the ASEAN. Following unbridled globalization might nega-THE PRESI-DENT DOWN Meanwhile. NO KOU DIDN'T! I DID! YOUJUST WANT TO BE THE "HERO YOU WERE THE HERO LAST TIME. SO WHAT LET SOME BODY ELSE BE HERO

South Asia too should have chosen as yet contingent upon Dhaka trading with the ASEAN under the allowing transit and transshipment as a bloc

Dhaka outside the SAFTA. India's

the contrary, the penchant for bilateralism had prompted India to seek free trading with others unilaterally. India is a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and Bangladesh seems hell-bent on following suit. The SAARC and SAFTA thus seem to have lost their relevance and fallen to disuse. handicaps by signing FTA with

Meanwhile, SAFTA had three rounds of talks in October. Novem-

ber and December of 2002 to discuss over a draft treaty prepared by the Secretariat, only to wait indefinitely for responses from member

states

aegis of the proposed South Asian facilities to the former Free Trade Area (SAFTA). Quite to The cost of not acting

T WANT

(Palla Kal)

latest proposal to give birth to what it calls a 'South Asian Union (SAU)' further complicates the scenario and undermines the SAARC's

This hybrid blend of South Asian globalization is laced with an embedded apprehension that

Realed New Tribue

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mlg.

The Indian dilemma is compounded by Delhi's lack of open communication with the seven North Eastern states abutting Bangladesh. Delhi, hence, expects to overcome these geopolitical and geo-economic

extortionist activities so also are there inter-district highways where illegal toll collection goes on with festive aplomb. All these pastures for extortionist foraging will have to be flushed before we can claim that the transport sector has been chastened.

The highway and bus terminal criminals have godfathers and leaders behind them. On top, there is the regularly paid-for support of the police behind the syndicates, as it were. Toll collection has become a big enterprise with its board of directors, if you like, and non-contributive shareholders, not to mention the backward and forward linkages they have for self-protection and sustenance.

There are some tell-tale signs: leaders of bus owners and workers associations 'left the terminals keeping their offices closed' during the special operations. They were allegedly collecting several lacs of taka in the name of their associations. Other influential persons have often been blamed for their part in the extortion game. While thinking of maintaining presence of special force at the terminals from now on, the authorities have decided to change the posse frequently so that they did not develop any link with dubious elements. Basically, the thugs will have to be de-fanged in such a way that any future victim will readily come forward to lodge his complaint. That will be the real test of success.

The transport sector's maladies run far too deep to be exorcised at the terminals. Since the government has taken a plunge, it has to go the whole hog by weeding the socio-economic parasites of toll collectors out of the whole network. Till then, let's not rest on the oars of success in a small race.

KULDIP NAYAR writes from New Delhi

T is natural for a political leader to wish to be the country's Prime Minister. There is nothing immoral about it. Why should Sonia Gandhi be run down for making her intentions clear? She is the Congress president. If the party wins a majority in the general election, she has every right to head the government.

Even a self-effacing person like Lal Bahadur Shastri did not hide his desire to be the Prime Minister. When Jawaharlal Nehru suffered from a stroke at Bhubaneswar, I told Shastri -- I was his press officer then -- how people believed that he was such a staunch Nehruite that he would himself propose the name of Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, whenever the occasion arose. "I am not that much of a sadhu as vou imagine me to be," was his reply. The honour, he said, was that of being Bharat ka pradhan mantri (India's prime minister). None would say no.

Sonia Gandhi made herself clear a few years ago when she was given to understand that Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party would support her to reach the magic figure of 272 in the 543-member Lok Sabha. She did not make it because

or degree exams.

We debate about the quality of

teaching in our educational institu-

tions, but who is really responsible

But these elections were confined to the states. The issue of her nationality did not bother the voters. They were choosing the chief

The Lok Sabha election is a differ-

would now be between Italian-born Sonia Gandhi and Indian-born Atal Behari Vajpayee.

The Congress has made another mistake. It has declared that Sonia

BETWEEN THE LINES

the Congress and the BJP but it But he has rightly criticised the party for naming her as the leader of the future coalition. To the discomfort of the BJP, the Muslim voter is tilting towards the Congress. This is mainly due to the mess the RSS and the

to be in favour of a constitutional

exchange of the Babri masjid site.

formation. But they are afraid to join

But Sonia Gandhi faces a piquant

situation within her own party. Many

in the Congress believe that a soft

saffronisation is required to attract

Hindus, particularly women from the

community. A few Congress chief

ministers have taken a position which

Kuldip Navar is an eminent Indian columnist.

party had made a frontal attack on the Hindutva forces, it would have at least silenced those who say the Congress does not want to annoy the Hidutva elements. Fundamentalism of any hue -- Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian -- has to be fought relentlessly. The Congress should not look compromising on this point.

Congress has unwittingly created a poll issue. The BJP has re-ignited the embers of controversy which lay cold. From Pramod Mahaian to Mukhtar Abbas Nagvi, the important functionaries of the BJP have made it clear that the party will make Sonia Gandhi's Italian origin an issue at the

"When people elect the prime minister, many issues linked to the country's security and interests will crop up," says Naqvi. The Telugu Desam Party has demanded an amendment to the constitution to ensure that only Indian-born are eligible for the post of prime ministership. This is just the beginning. It may well become the central issue at the

ent proposition. People will vote from the national point of view. They will be conscious that they are electing the prime minister. It is difficult to quess how they would react when the opponents go hammer and tongs at Sonia Gandhi's Italian origin. Nationalism and patriotism are emotive slogans. The real issues -- governance and development -- might be pushed into the background. The Congress would be on the defensive all the time

Early naming of a person for prime ministership has not been productive in the past. The Janata Party was routed in 1980 when it projected Jagjivan Ram for the office of prime ministership. Sonia Gandhi is from

Gandhi would lead the coalition if and when formed. That the party will have no truck with communal parties needs no clarification. But the announcement that the Congress will not accept anyone except Sonia Gandhi closes several doors. A coalition is a consensus of sorts. No party can foreclose the options which will come up after the polls. The Congress may have to put together different patches to block the undesir-

At present, neither Mulayam Singh nor Laloo Prasad Yadav is a problem. But either of the two can become a problem if he wins some 40 seats. Sharad Pawar of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) seems to

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO TH

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

DESCO billing

Since 9/4/03 Dhaka Electric Supply Company (DESCO) has taken over the distribution and commercial services from Dhaka Electric Supply Authority in the Gulshan Area Hopefully this change has been made for providing better service to the consumers.

Inspite the improvement of the power supply, consumers of the Gulshan area were happy with the billing system of DESA after the introduction of computerised billing system, especially their system of providing necessary information in the computerised bills (payments made the previous month/months) obviated the problem of over pay-

Under the new DESCO billing system no such details of payments are shown in the bills instead a note on the bill warns of disconnection if bills are not paid within the stipulated date. This is causing harassment to the consumers of DĔSCO. So, I would like to draw the atten-

tion of DESCO to this matter and take necessary steps to follow the previous (DESA) system P. G. Muhammad, Gulshan Dhaka

for this debacle, is it the students or **Result disaster in SSC** is it the teachers -- who are to be blamed for it. The question about the This is the third year since the new quality of the teachers arises when grading system has been introduced they accomplice the students in their in SSC. The percentage of passing misconduct. No matter in urban or including all the boards are 35.91

whereas the rest, 64.9 percent have rural areas, teachers in general are failed. In the past two years the not competent for their positions scenario was similar. The governeven though it is truer in the cases of ment instructed the teachers to be rural areas. The few qualified remain very strict in the exam halls to stop absorbed in private tuition. They are cheating among the students and never serious in the classrooms. So this is one of the reasons why a large the students actually remain ungualportion of the students failed. The ified for attending the board exams. scenario is not different in the HSC, Md. Abu Musa, Chittagong

English and importance of grammar

English has obtained Taher Uddin Ahmed the unique status of international language and has become the medium of higher education irrespective of subjects -- science,

technology, medicine, engineering, law, history, geography, and what not. But such an important language was never cordially accepted in our country. During British period, English was the official language. As a result those desirous of becoming members of the Indian Civil Service or even of the lower cadres had to learn English in an apt manner. Knowing of English was the precondition for any government employment or service. Then every body had an eye for government service. As a result every body would try to learn English. But later on, during Pakistan days, majority of the students would learn their lessons by rote and many would adopt

unfair means in the examination hall. They would certainly learn less. It happened so then and continued getting worse now. And, of course in case of English it is more so.

Utter negligence has been shown to English grammar and if the present system of teaching continued for some years a day will come when there will be no English knowing people in the country beyond the capital. A process of decay has already started and the results of the SSC examination of 2003 is the glaring instance of it. The percentage of pass (36.8) was the lowest since independence and the standard was also not up to the mark. Only 1392 obtained GPA 5 out of the

total 4,11,420 successful candidates. The urban areas performed far better than the rural. The dispar ity is glaring and more so in case of

English. The question is how to learn English? Without knowing grammar can any one know English? This is an impossibility. So utmost impor-tance should be given to English arammar which should be taught igiously from class III to Degree level

Question for SSC examination should be set from the chapters of Parts of Speech, Number, Gender Verb, Tenses, Appropriate preposition. Pairs of words. Narration. Analysis of sentences and Syntax There must be at least 20 transla-

tions and 20 corrections based on different rules besides writing o paragraph, application and letter. One hundred marks may be kept reserved for English grammar. Questions should be so set that the examinees do not find ready answers in any note book available in the market. The result will be that the students would care to learn their lessons be attentive in their duty of gaining knowledge. I hope the authorities of the

Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education shall ponder over the points made . Taher Uddin Ahmed Khilgaon, Dhaka



wing, the VHP.

The Congress would have lost Gujarat anyway because the poison of communalism has penetrated too deep. But if the