

Decision time

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

THE must-awaited dialogue that has been taking place between the secretary general of the main component of the ruling alliance and general secretary of the principal constituent of the opposition alliance has dragged on.

If the comments of a few senior leaders of the two sides bear any merit, it does not foretell any good news for the people who are keeping their fingers crossed for the fruitful outcome of the dialogue which is supposed to pave the way for a free and fair election.

The prime minister in her uninterrupted crusade against the opposition is publicly accusing them for indulging in conspiracy to come to power through the back door and asking them to take part in the election if they have the trust on the people. Her speeches absolutely ignored the dialogue that her secretary general is carrying out with his counterpart of the opposition camp.

Even on October 11, the PM categorically said that the would-be chief adviser of the next caretaker government and the incumbent Election Commission (EC) are completely neutral for conducting the forthcoming elections.

In her valedictory speech in the parliament on October 4, she said: "Days of rigging elections are gone as people of the country are very much aware of their rights of franchise. There is no way to change the results as voters are much aware, contenders are powerful and observers and media remain active."

Her lectures sidetracked the story of how the Dhaka-10 bye-election was won in the heart of the capital city itself in spite of blatant evidence of vote rigging published in the print and electronic media and in broad day-light presence of the local and international observers.

In the same speech, the PM,

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probably for the first time, acknowledged that the 1996 election under the caretaker government was free and fair, which squarely contradicted her five years of ceaseless accusations as the opposition leader that the election of 1996 was rigged by the AL. Even her party's MPs took the oath only under international pressure.

In a democracy, the ruling party runs in the election more on its record than promises. Unfortunately, in the alliance ruled Bangladesh, the records were created, not on the good governance but on the committed misdeeds of the government. This government has put its hands on every sphere of the state, resulting its systematic destruction. The extent of the civil bureaucracy and judicial organ of the state has been politicized will make it difficult for any future government with noble intention to practice good governance.

Corruption in every nook and corner of the government has reached such a stage and has been rewarded to such an extent, where the power secretary becomes the rule and the quitting power minister becomes the exception, and in the alliance ruled Bangladesh, rule always prevailed over the exception.

One might wonder why the alliance government, following its massive victory in the last election, resorted to the route of misgovernance or no governance rather than the one to earn the trust of the people. The hypotheses that could be put forward are as follows:

The previous AL government, in spite of its failures to control a handful of its terrorist godfathers, had a

number of remarkable successes to its credit, such as self sufficiency in food, control of prices of essential commodities, water treaty, CHT peace treaty, successful management of 1998 flood, non-politicization of judiciary (Justice Aziz and Justice Jainal Abedin were confirmed by the AL government), and to a great extent the civil administration (neither of the IGs of police had AL affiliations) and the non-partisan head of state.

There were no specific godfathers, as exist today, or alternate seat of governance during the AL rule. There happened no Kansat, Phulbari, or Shanir Akhra in any part of the country. People, in thousands, did not take to the street at the wee hours of night to demand the essentials of life. It was not only believed by the AL leaders that they would be returned back to power in any fair election, people in general had the similar perception.

With this conviction in mind, AL did not try to play with the CTG and the EC. The only member of the EC who was allegedly a participant of the "janarat manch" did nothing in his tenure that would create any controversy to undermine his constitutional responsibility. The AL supporters in general believed, in addition to anti-incumbency factor, it was the CTG's bias and the inaction of the non-partisan president to prevent that bias, that deprived them of the victory.

From the very first day of its victory, BNP started doing what the AL did not do. BNP activists did not reciprocate the generosity showered on them by their adversaries in their moment of despair in 1996.

Quite to the contrary, the unprecedented prosecution and persecution of the AL supporters by the activists of the ruling alliance had no parallel in our history.

BNP party-men have amassed huge wealth through unbridled corruption, as money plays an important role in the election, and created an alternate source power to control everything that matters to the next election. They even replaced their own man with a loyal one from the Bangabhaban as soon he started behaving like the president of the republic, not of the party.

They have manipulated the EC by the putting their own men in the body. These people are not only blindly partisan and devoid of ethical values; they even lack "the same sense of Honour as the rest of us." They have amended the constitution with the objective to put a particular individual at the helm of CTG to avoid the similar debacle as faced by the AL in the last general election.

Earlier I wrote two pieces lauding Justice KM Hasan as a decent gentleman, albeit a staunch Zia loyalist, my perception through my limited encounter with him while he was our ambassador in a country where I was a university professor. I am on the verge of re-evaluating, painfully observing that Justice Hasan is keeping the whole nation hostage by insisting himself, through his silence, on the agenda of his former party's bosses. In fact, his apparent disinclination to relinquish the point only increases the mistrust.

Yes, Mr Tom Daschle, in North America, Europe, or even in our very neighbourhood in India, past

political affiliation should not be a barrier in holding a neutral position of the state. However, would you find in your country a retired chief justice who, in spite of the lack of trust of the bulk of your countrymen, would not feel embarrassed to accept a position that would pilot the most arduous democratic journey of your nation?

In fact, resolution of this single issue would pave the way for the solution of the other problems. A strong and neutral chief of the CTG would be easily able to reconstitute and reform the election commission, exactly the way Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed did in 1990 and Justice Habibur Rahman did in 1996.

It is not the outcome of the dialogue (which looks very bleak at this time), but only the love of Justice Hasan for the country, not for his former party, that could save the day. It could prove disastrous for the BNP, since it might be too late for the BNP to afford a fair election, but would provide the much-needed respite for the nation.

Time is running out very fast for Justice Hasan to make the much-awaited decision. If he fails, the country, in all probability, will plunge into deep turmoil. If that happens, it may not be as much as Khaleda or Hasina, but a retired chief justice of the nation's highest court by the name of Khandaker Mahmud-Ul Hassan, who will be unequivocally blamed for leading the nation into that irreversible catastrophe.

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LEST WE FORGET

Justice Muhammad Ibrahim

BAHAUDDIN CHOWDHURY

BENGALEES are self-forgetting people, often letting the past slip into oblivion. The Bengalee Muslims are even more apathetic to history. Even the well educated now are more busy with the present-day affairs. As such, they have scant interest to know about their illustrious predecessors, who rendered invaluable contributions in the overall development and progress of the nation. Needless to say, the future of a nation is bound to be dark if it fails to honour its own heroes. However, our civil society cares less about past or the future. Evidently, they are indifferent about epoch-making leaders of the past and in the process, seldom contribute to raising of the consciousness about the history for the sake of the future generation.

At a time of reluctance and apathy towards history by our civil societies, I consider it a proud privilege to write something about a patriot, idealist and great personality like justice Muhammad Ibrahim. I had the occasion of seeing him from close proximity during his last days and would venture to talk about him from the reservoir of my personal memory.

Justice Ibrahim joined the cabinet of president Ayub Khan as law minister following the imposition of martial law in 1958. That time, I was working as the press attache in the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi, but was transferred to bureau of National reconstruction in Karachi as deputy director violating my service conditions.

After I joined the Bureau, I was told to write and read out at a seminar an article on "National integration: Relations between West and East Pakistan." As I expressed my support for making Bangla as the state language of Pakistan in the initial stage of my article, I was threatened to be sent to jail as a sequel to an altercation on the article with the additional director of the Bureau. There is no denying that I was unnerved and turned to law minister Justice Ibrahim like most of the Bengalee government servants as he was seen by them as a "friend in needs". He made me his private secretary and arrangement was made for my accommodation at the 303, Peshwar Road, Rawalpindi, residence of the minister.

The law minister left his family at Dhaka as his differences with the president had already crept up and he was prepared to resign any time. My wife was also in Dhaka as she worked at the Eden Girls College and I had plenty of time to watch justice Ibrahim. I saw him restless and disturbed as he was soon disillusioned about Ayub Khan and began realising that he was taken for ride on false promise. Ayub Khan made him law minister for helping him formulate a modern, secular and democratic constitution. Popular politician Shaheed Shurwardhy had also become law minister of Pakistan government for enacting a constitution and holding national elections. Justice Ibrahim accepted the offer in Ayub's cabinet with the same intentions.

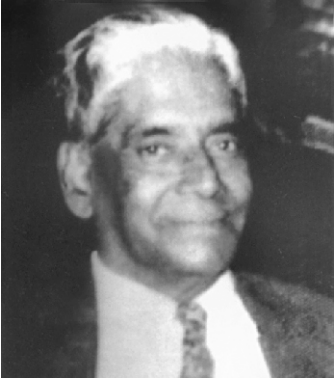
The political situation in Pakistan was then characterised by instability and the politicians were busy in changing or breaking political parties. It is against that backdrop Justice Ibrahim joined Ayub Cabinet as law minister with the purpose of formulating a constitution to create the ground for meaningful elections and in the process accomplish the rights and autonomy of the Bengalees in erstwhile Pakistan as Ayub Khan had also assured him of these goals.

The government took several people-oriented measures in the first year of the martial law like curbing corruption and smuggling with iron hand, improvement in the law and order situation and bringing down the prices of essential commodities. But soon the true face of the government began to come to the fore yet Justice Ibrahim relentlessly continued his

determined effort in the cabinet for what he wanted to achieve. It was because of his initiative the revolutionary Muslim family laws were enacted, which gave liberty and democratic rights to a large extent to the women.

Justice Ibrahim was involved in many momentous decisions like setting up a second capital in Dhaka that was taken as per his proposal. It was also decided that an imposing parliament building will be established with permanent seat of the legislature. This building under the design of famous architect Louis Khan stands today as a landmark site of Bangladesh and it is the contribution of Justice Ibrahim. Justice Ibrahim also tried to protect many Bengalee officials who were in trouble during the martial law. As a result, many Bengalees were benefited and he was seen as the "protector" for them in those days in the central government.

They accepted him as the president of the East Pakistan Association and in this capacity he extended help and assistance not only to the Bengalees in the then West Pakistan but also those lived abroad. I feel greatly honoured as he consulted with me on many matters because of my proximity with him. I was fortunate to learn many things and my small arena of knowledge was enormously embellished. At times he would take me to the cabinet meetings and



sitting in the next room I could guess the heated arguments he entered with Ayub Khan on many issues. He was otherwise a calm and soft-spoken person, but never failed to rise to the occasion whenever it was a matter of interest of East Pakistan and Bengalees. He used to argue forcefully for increasing the representation of the Bengalees in the armed forces and central government. He would always project the discriminations against East Pakistan and would make strong plea for substantially enhancing the allocations for development of East Pakistan. He was totally uncompromising on these issues. Justice Ibrahim remained an embodiment of this struggle till the last day of his ministership in the central government.

Here, I like to mention a small incident. The government took acquisition of a large segment of land for construction of Kamalapur railway station in Dhaka and a big number of people were rendered homeless in the process. Justice Ibrahim persuaded the then powerful chairman of DIT Mr Madani to resettle the affected in Khilgaon area after necessary development of the locality. Today's developed Khilgaon area is his contribution. Such instances are galore and all these are the tip of iceberg for a person, whose role for the development of erstwhile East Pakistan is largely unknown to many till today.

When Ayub Khan unduly denied promotion to Justice Kayani to Supreme Court and decided to remove him, Justice Ibrahim clearly wrote in the file that such a decision would make people disrespectful to judiciary. He mentioned his feeling in the "note of dissent" and Justice Kayani chose to visit Justice Ibrahim at his house to convey his thanks and respect for the principled position he had taken. He said Justice Ibrahim's stand for the sake of justice and fairplay would give him a unique

place in the history.

Gen Azam Khan was made Governor of East Pakistan at the instance of Justice Ibrahim and proved himself quite popular. Justice Ibrahim's differences came to a height over the formulation of the constitution. A sub-committee was constituted under foreign minister Manzur Quader to examine the report of the constitution commission set up by the government. Other members of the committee were Justice Ibrahim, AK Khan, Shueb and Bhutto. Justice Ibrahim on May 6, 1961, wrote to Ayub Khan "the unity and integrity of Pakistan is the main consideration and the national cohesion depends on the spontaneous consent of all to live together -- these are the fundamental elements of national unity and as such need to be preserved with great care. To that end it is important to eliminate mutual suspicion and distrust and also the sense of discrimination and exploitation -- particularly the yawning gap of economic disparity between the West and East Pakistan must be bridged and there is a need to recognise two parts as two separate economic entity. He clearly told the sub-committee that the central government's control will be only defence, foreign affairs, foreign exchange and communications between the two parts of Pakistan while the rest will be handled by the provincial governments.

He also recommended parliamentary system of democracy on the basis of universal franchise. However, if presidential form of government is accepted, in that case the position of a vice president has to be created and the president and vice president will be swapped between the provinces. In other words, if the president is from West Pakistan, then the VP has to be from the Eastern wing and subsequently, the positions will be inter-changed. He also demanded equal number of ministers from two wings of Pakistan. Not surprisingly, Ayub Khan did not accept these demands. Justice Ibrahim demonstrated indomitable courage during that difficult phase of martial law.

It was in November 1961 that Justice Ibrahim returned to Dhaka after attending the last meeting of the cabinet and did not go back to Rawalpindi. That time he expressed his desire to quit, but at the request of the president, he finally resigned a few months later -- in April, 1962.

Justice Ibrahim established contacts with different political leaders on return to Dhaka and played active role in fashioning anti-Ayub platform. He wanted to strengthen such a campaign bringing the Bengalee politicians under a broad platform with a view to realising the rights of the Bengalees. For this purpose, he held detailed discussions with leaders. But except Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman none agreed to his proposal. It may be mentioned that the first conference of the reconstituted Awami League under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took place in his Green Road's "Ambagan". Sheikh Mujib offered him to become the president of Awami League, but Justice Ibrahim did not agree as he wanted to play the role of a kind of "guardian" from behind the screen. He was a firm believer in secular and democratic politics and was a symbolic of a "Bengalee" from head to toe.

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Children could help you to win the election !

ZAKI HASAN

ANOTHER national election is approaching in Bangladesh. The political parties are trying to impress the voters by recalling their past achievements, and making promises for the future. It is not quite clear, in this election campaign, what each of the parties has done, or will do, for almost half of the population in the country. Even constituting almost half of the population, people aged below 18 years, i.e. the children, are rarely in focus when political parties set their priorities. Other than a few areas, e.g. primary education, some of the biggest crises for children in Bangladesh, e.g. children in hazardous labour, are not in the priority list of most of the political parties.

If we fail to do anything better for the children now, we will not see a better Bangladesh ever. It is unlikely that our great political leaders do not understand this fact. It is even more unlikely that they intentionally left the children's agendas out of their priority list. There must be something else that has hindered many of them from being child-sensitive leaders. It is unfair to generalize this for all the political parties and leaders but, undoubtedly, almost all parties and, many leaders, can make improvements in terms of their plans and actions for the children.

Each election gives the children, as well as the adults, a new chance to influence the parties for becoming better committed to the children's issues. But the responsibility should be more on the shoulders of the political parties. They should use this

We often see that some of the political parties are using children for many of the political activities, which include election campaigning as well. First of all, such malpractices should not only be discouraged, but should be made illegal. Then comes the question of listening to children through ensuring their true participation, which is obviously easier said than done. The leaders must know how to "translate" childrens' sayings into policy language, and vice versa.

opportunity to revise their agendas. It would be very easy for the Child-Rights organisations to organize a series of workshops and seminars where they could invite the party leaders to talk about this. This is certainly one way of doing it, and in many cases quite successfully. However, in my view, the better approach would be if the political parties themselves could organize sessions to hear about the children's problems, dreams, fears and ideas.

The political parties could claim that they are always with the people, which gives them the knowledge useful in determining the best thing for the people. This understanding was also present in preparing our national budget. But for the last few years the finance minister has been listening to various sections of the community, and this approach must be working well, as this has become a regular trend now a days, and is becoming even better with time and practice. The present finance minister even listened to children regarding the national budget, and he characterized that as a "great initiative." That attempt, facilitated by 'Save the Children, Australia,' an

international child-rights organization, did show an encouraging example of children's meaningful participation in determining national agendas.

Such attempts could be replicated in the case of national election, as 'Save the Children,' and many other Child-Rights organizations, are constantly facilitating various processes for mobilising and amplifying children's voices. But I am looking forward more to the political parties' own initiative, rather than the events organised by non-governmental organisations, as it would indicate a qualitative change in the parties' approach to listening to people, which in this case would be the children. The parties could approach the Child-Rights organisations for providing the necessary technical support. I am sure that those organisations would be delighted to do so. However, in the long run, the parties must also build their own capacity to listen to the children's voices and concerns, which will be an institutional change that is one of the essentials for achieving sustainable positive changes for the children in Bangladesh.

As I mentioned above, the political

parties are always with the people, but being with adults and being with the children are two completely different things. We often see that some of the political parties are using children for many of the political activities, which include election campaigning as well. First of all, such malpractices should not only be discouraged, but should be made illegal. Then comes the question of listening to children through ensuring their true participation, which is obviously easier said than done. If the parties try to listen to children's voices then they have to know of, and ensure, an environment in which the children will feel free to air their views.

The leaders must know how to "translate" childrens' sayings into policy language, and vice versa. They must find processes through which they could meet representatives of the children from all sections of the community. They must pay special attention to children with special needs e.g. children with disabilities. The parties must also avoid the practice of "show-off" dialogues, and they should be accountable for what they have listened to and committed for. It is

crucial for them to go back to the children and tell them about the steps that they have taken, and/or will take, following the children's suggestions. The parties must be aware of these, and many other, aspects of child participation which would allow them to truly consider the children as stakeholders. There are organisations and individuals who could help the parties to ensure that those aspects are taken care of. It would be wonderful to see such a system in practice, maybe initially, in a discreet manner and then as a part of the political system in our country.

Maybe the political parties are already doing it, which I might be unaware of. If it is already happening then we should congratulate the respective parties. But if not, then we should request the leaders to consider it seriously. This would not only do well for the children, but would also add to the total number of votes that the parties would get. We should not forget that children do influence the adult persons they are connected to in determining the preferred candidate in the national election. In addition, the children will become voters in future, and the parties would certainly enjoy long-term benefit for being considerate to today's and tomorrow's children.

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Regionalism and multilateralism: conflicts and needs

BIJAN LAL DEV

THE World has been experiencing surge in regional and bilateral trade agreements. The growth in these agreements has continued unabated since early 1990s, when the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade (GATT 1994), the predecessor of the World Trade Organization (WTO 1995), had reached at the final stage after 47 years of protracted negotiations. By July 2005, only one WTO member out of 149 Mongolia was not party to such an agreement.

A total of 330 Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) have so far been notified to the WTO. Of these 206 were notified after the WTO was created on January 1, 1995. Some 197 such agreements are currently in force and several others are to be operational soon. Among the best are known as the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Association of South-East Asian Nation (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), the Australia-New Zealand Closer Economic Relations Agreement, the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa, and The European Free Trade Association. The vast majority of the WTO members are party to one or more such agreement.

Against this background, one may ask, do regionalism and bilateralism overtake multilateralism? Is this trend supportive of the growth of global trade? Are these pacts helpful in eradicating the poverty existing in 50 Least Developed countries (LDCs) and many weaker developing countries? Do these trade alliances promote the spirit of multilateral trading arrangements under the purview of the WTO? Do these policies help implement the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). How effective are RTAs in promoting economic development and integrating developing countries into the global economy? Let us analyze the impacts and probable answers to these pertinent questions.

By definition, regionalism means actions by governments to liberalize or facilitate trade on a region basis, sometimes through free-trade areas or customs unions. It also includes bilateral free trade agreements between countries that are not in the same region e.g., USA-Singapore FTA. As the WTO members are increasingly embracing a trade policy strategy based on the promotion of free trade by targeting multiple fronts, trade experts warned that RTAs could potentially hinder the objective of a coherent and transparent multilateral trading system by discriminating against third parties, distorting trade flows, and by detracting limited resources from multilateral to RTAs.

The regional and bilateral trade pacts forged outside the scope of the WTO are increasingly becoming more attractive. Globalization is the order of the day. Globalization is needed to achieve trade growth, sustainable for many more years to establish lasting peace and harmony across the world.

This is the clear departure from the guiding principle of non-discrimination defined in article I of GATT, Article II of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and elsewhere. On the other hand, RTA promoters argued that it encouraged abolishing or reducing barrier to trade within the group which might be replicated by other WTO members. The RTAs have also allowed groups of countries to negotiate rules and commitments that go beyond what was possible at the time multilaterally. In turn, some of these rules have paved the way for an agreement with the WTO. For example, services, intellectual property, environmental standards, investment and competition policies are all issues that were raised in regional negotiations and later developed into agreements or topics of discussion at the WTO.

Experiences show that these issues as presented at the WTO over the years did not do the trade of LDCs and weaker developing countries any good. Rather agreement on Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights hindered the weaker economies from patenting their inventions.

The environmental standards set by the WTO restrict the products of LDCs to enter into developed countries' markets. The WTO sponsored investment and competition policies have been facilitating the multinational companies with modern technologies, huge capital and guaranteed markets to set up industries in poor countries destroying their local industries. As a result local industries, the employment situation have been deteriorating in most of the LDCs.

The Article XXIV of the GATT 1994 provides the WTO members with the mandate for the formation and operation of customs unions, free-trade areas and interim arrangements leading to the formation of a customs union, or free-trade area covering trade in goods. But such arrangement must satisfy the provisions of paragraphs 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the Article XXIV. Paragraph 5 states, "The general incidence of the duties and other regulations of commerce applicable before and after the formation of a customs union shall in respect of duties and charge be based upon an overall assessment of weighted average tariff rates and of customs duties collected."

Paragraph 6 establishes the procedure to be followed when a member forming a customs union proposes to increase a bound rate of duty. It allows the parties to achieve mutually satisfactory compensatory adjustment. Paragraph 7 authorizes the WTO to review the customs unions and free-trade areas to make any recommendation to ensure fair implementation of the agreements. Paragraph 8 allows the parties to seek settlement of any dispute that may arise from the application of the provisions of Article XXIV that relate to customs unions and free-trade areas.

It means that the GATT recognizes that RTAs can benefit countries. It also recognizes that under some circumstances RTAs could hurt the trade interests of other countries. As a safeguard against those risks, Paragraph 12 of the GATT 1994 states, "Each member is fully responsible under GATT 1994 for the observance of all provisions of GATT 1994, and shall take such reasonable measures as may be available to it to ensure such observance by regional and local governments and authorities within its territory. Each member

undertakes to accord sympathetic consideration to and afford adequate opportunity for consultation regarding any representations made by another member concerning measures affecting the operation of GATT 1994 taken within the territory of the former."

But the RTAs parties are desperate to exchange better market access facilities at all counts. This tendency results in contradiction, discrimination and increasing the risk of inconsistencies in the rules and procedures among RTAs themselves, and between RTAs and the multilateral framework. The increase in RTAs, coupled with the preference shown for concluding bilateral free-trade agreements, has also produced the phenomenon of overlapping memberships.

It is evident that RTAs should help trade flow more freely among the countries in the group without barriers being raised on trade with the outside world. It has been working very well and more than half of the world trade is now conducted under RTAs. The EU with 520 million people is doing 68 percent of their total trade within themselves. 12 years old

NAFTA involving the US, Canada and Mexico is exchanging 34 percent of their total trade mutually. Intra-ASEAN trade has reached 45 percent of their combined trade. The Latin American trade bloc MERCOSUR does 38 percent of their total trade within themselves. Interestingly, these intra-RTA trades have been increasing sharply in most cases. At the same time, intra-RTA investment is also increasing. Obviously, one of the exceptions is SAARC where intra-regional trade was about 4 percent in 1985 when it was formed and has remained almost stationary till to date. Similar situation exists also in case of intra-regional investment.

The successful RTAs have been elevating their cooperation status. Starting with Preferential Trading Arrangements, they graduated to FTA, then to customs union and common market and finally to economic union like the EU. The ASEAN now at FTA-status is pushing for the EU-style Asean Economic Community by 2015, five years ahead of schedule. China, India, Australia, South Korea and New Zealand are at the final stages of FTA negotiations with ASEAN. South American Countries are working on to form the EU-modeled South American Community joining together the MERCOSUR, the Andean Community which groups Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia and Peru

and other countries like Venezuela, Chile, Guyana and Surinam.

The USA is now in FTA talks with Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea, Middle-East and Central American countries. The 14-nation Southern African Development Community recently signed a protocol to form FTA by 2008 and gradually elevate itself to a common customs union within the next 12 years. South Asian PTA has graduated to FTA in July 2006. Besides, South Asian countries including Bangladesh are pursuing bilateral FTAs to bolster mutual trade.

The regional and bilateral trade pacts forged outside the scope of the WTO are increasingly becoming more attractive. Everyone has bilateral accords in its pocket undermining the WTO just as it struggles to stitch together a new deal accommodating trade interests of 149 members. Globalization is the order of the day. Globalization is needed to achieve trade growth, sustainable for many more years to establish lasting peace and harmony across the world. So, RTAs should complement the WTO. The WTO's transparency mechanism should be strengthened also to convert RTAs as building blocks, not stumbling blocks to world trade.

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