

HOW COW

CHINTITO SINCE 1995



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

EVERY day since time immemorial, perhaps close to one koti students of different levels - from pre-school to doctorate - write essays on 'a cow', but not one of them ever mention India, and yet over the past fortnight, the media has been relentless in doing just that, and not without reason - the cows from across the border have stopped doing the triathlon.

Despite their intelligence being eternally questioned, the Indian cows are adroit enough to survive long distances by road, are great swimmers and, as they make the final few steps across Radcliffe's line, they wink first at the BSF and then smile at the BGB, and land straight into a *khatal*, where a party unknown to the cattle family pays a fine for each of them, and then they are on their way to abattoirs in Bangladesh.

So what is all the 'how cow' about? Apparently following an Indian home ministry directive early April, and now close to the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Azha, volunteers of Hindu nationalist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (the philosophical guru of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party BJP) have been manning the border to prevent 20 to 25 lakh cows doing the ride-swim-and-walk because cow slaughter has been banned in Modi-dom.

When India denied us our much-needed legitimate river water, they succumbed to the West Bengal logic that water was in short supply across the border, but stopping migration of excess cows defies all rationality. It has been projected by the UN for July 30 that India will become the world's most populous country by 2022, but now this unprecedented *how-cow* promises to make it also the country with the most cows, maybe even sooner.

The Indian official reason for the ban on cow travel (aka smuggling) is



PHOTO: GLOBAL VOICE ONLINE

that the cost will become so high that Bangladeshis will be compelled to "give up eating beef." (DS August 26) Fat chance of that. Common economic sense is that when one market closes, the Myanmar channel will expand, as through that avenue, about five thousand cows have already journeyed to Bangladesh.

Also, it requires no financial analyst to imagine that Bangladeshi farmers will be encouraged to rear lakhs of cattle, as the illegal trade is valued annually anywhere between \$600-900 million. We may even have a Cow Bank. With farmers abandoning jute, rice and vegetables crops, Old MacDonald's farm may be sung with a twist, 'Here a cow, there a cow, everywhere a cow cow...'

Prior to slapping the ban, India did not do its arithmetic homework. If the prohibition continues, Indians will

have to spend almost Tk. 40,000 crore extra annually to take care of over 12 million cattle till they die naturally, according to *The Economic Times*. Now that will hurt their farmers because the cows are already there - grazing and grazing and grazing, *hamba...* and more are in the belly.

The Indian leather industry must be prepared to be dependent only on goatskin and their footwear will have to rely more on rubber, plastics, fabrics, etc. Ironically, Bangladesh tanneries claim to be well-stocked and apprehend no immediate shortfall, more so because of the dwindling demand for hide and skin worldwide.

Let us talk sense. India has the cows and cannot slaughter them, nor sell or smuggle. We need over two million cows every year and can pay for them. It is a simple matter of demand and supply. Therefore, a landmark treaty akin

to the historic Bangladesh-India land deal needs to be signed and implemented immediately because a 68-year wait, as in the case of the enclaves swap, will be suicidal for the cows as well as the beef-relishing people of Bangladesh.

The two countries will have to declare a 'ceasefire' of sorts that will be effective once every week from dawn to dusk. During the so-called 'truce', BSF and BGB personnel will look away as the cows make their way (winking or not) from across the border to Bangladesh. A part of the 'fine' - about a Tk 1000 per cattle - that was being paid prior to the ban will be shared between the two forces. Everybody smile for the *cowfi*.

In return favour for the cows, Bangladesh traders will be allowed to transport *eelish*, Tangail sarees, *Porobarir chom-chom*, and such *deshi* goodies,

again while the two border forces turn a blind eye, and receive an enabling fine. Dark spectacles shall be recommended as part of the uniform. Who can be a loser in this deed except those not signing on the dotted line?

Another clause of the two-nation pact will be to declare a one-mile deep "No Cow's Land" along the border. For the sake of transparency, during the rest of the week, no cow shall be allowed in the NCL, violation of which will entail doubling of the fine. While this could be profitable, our forces must continue to maintain the highest form of integrity. For the sceptics amongst you, there is no need to call that strip "No hilsa" or "No saree" Land because only cows can walk. Hah! Got you!

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Wither BIMSTEC FTA

MD. RIZWANUL ISLAM

MEMBERS of the Trade Negotiating Committee of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), a

nothing new; a framework agreement for FTA was signed way back in 2004 but nothing concrete is yet to happen. And perhaps the inertia is for good reasons and with positive effects.

If we look at the preferential trade agreements already in force between

pieces of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Thailand and Myanmar are already part of the preferential market access regime of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

India, the largest economy of this group of seven countries, also has a preferential trade agreement with members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its manufacturers already enjoy preferential market access in Myanmar and Thailand. Since preferential trade agreements mean reciprocal market entry benefits, manufacturers from Myanmar and Thailand enjoy market access benefits in India too. Aside from preferential trade agreements under SAARC, it also has bilateral preferential trade agreements with Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Thus, while BIMSTEC may have something to offer on other fronts, it is not clear how much it can deliver on the trade front.

Trade analysts generally differ on the impact of FTAs (as they are somewhat misleadingly referred to in popular parlance) or preferential trade agreements but even the most enthusiastic proponents of preferential trade agreements concede that these agreements may have significant unintended costs. Many laypersons may not be aware that what is typically touted as a 'FTA' has often much less to do with free trade and more to do with preferential trade. While a FTA would provide for freer flow of goods (and these days, more often than not, services as well) between its

signatory countries, manufacturers from third parties would typically lose their market share simply because their goods would be deprived of the preferential import tariff enjoyed by manufacturers of FTA parties. Thus, an efficient manufacturer may lose its market share to a less efficient one.

A particular problem with preferential trade agreements is a complex set of rules known as 'rules of origin'. Most preferential trade agreements use rules of origin to determine which imported goods from manufacturers of its counterparts would actually enjoy tariff concessions. Primary goods or goods manufactured in a single country using domestic inputs only, pose no issues regarding the rules of origin. However, in today's economically inter-connected world, there are few goods which are fully manufactured in a single country or with all inputs from a single country. For goods produced using inputs of multiple countries, typically a rules of origin would require that a defined portion of the value of total inputs must be sourced from FTA member countries. And such a rule is just one of many more complex rules and the rules vary from product to product.

For this reason, the rules of origin increase complexities for manufacturers as well as for customs officials. Manufacturers willing to enjoy preferential market access would have to strategise how to source inputs for their products so that their finished products qualify under the rules of origin. The process can be so complex

that sometimes reportedly the manufacturers simply pay the normal tariff rate applicable to imports from all countries and forego the preferential tariff, which they could have enjoyed if they bothered to comply with the formalities under the rules of origin of the FTA. Customs officials in a similar vein would have to assess whether goods imported from an FTA partner country qualifies under the rules of origin of the respective preferential trade agreement. This task can be quite tedious and resource consuming.

A BIMSTEC FTA would surely be an achievement for members of the Trade Negotiating Committee, as they would have an achievement in their portfolio.

But there is serious doubt, if concluded, how much trade - let alone truly net-welfare enhancing trade - would take place under that FTA. Thus, for really delivering on the trade front, instead of concluding a BIMSTEC FTA BIMSTEC member countries may do well to work for strengthening the existing FTAs within the SAARC and ASEAN regime (this is particularly important for SAARC member countries as compared to the ASEAN, as progress in the SAARC is quite lacklustre). Or perhaps, they could work for a greater trade bloc involving all members of SAARC and ASEAN and create a much bigger market. In current geopolitics, the latter idea may be unthinkable, but the unthinkable may not remain so forever.

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regional bloc of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, are going to meet in Bangkok between 7-9, September 2015, for working on a functional Free Trade Agreement (FTA) among member countries. BIMSTEC's free trade agenda is

and among these countries, we would probably have a clear sense as to why the proposed FTA has not materialised for over a decade. Five of these seven countries (excluding Myanmar and Thailand) are already parties to preferential trade agreements under the aus-

QUOTABLE Quote

GEORGE ORWELL

THE FURTHER A SOCIETY DRIFTS FROM TRUTH THE MORE IT WILL HATE THOSE THAT SPEAK IT.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Small statue
- Probst of "Survivor"
- Easter animal
- Zodiac ram
- Knight wear
- Character found in kids' books
- Brewing item
- Near the ground
- Heels
- Track athletes
- Color
- African expanse
- Work
- Passes
- Keg attachment
- George Washington's wife
- Des Moines setting
- Ornate Vase
- Constant yakker
- Rude look
- Pianist Eubie
- Wyoming's Grand-National Park
- Cubist painter Fernand
- Woodwind part
- British school

DOWN

- Agency
- Like beds before house-keeping
- Snooty ones
- Model Banks
- Mouth part
- Historic time
- Cigar tobacco
- Men's hat
- Cookie quantity
- Boars' mates
- Assortment
- Sailor's call
- Train unit
- Robe part
- Rent out
- Stocking supporter
- Decorative
- Trinidad's neighbor
- Come to
- Beeper's kin
- Need to
- Small body of land
- Qualified
- Sturgeon eggs
- Finish

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S	C	A	N	S	P	O	R	T
T	O	N	E	R	P	A	N	E
E	M	O	T	E	A	P	I	M
A	M	I	D	T	S	G	I	N
L	A	N	D	H	O	B	A	N
S	T	R	E	I	S	A	N	D
DALES								
T	A	R	D	I	N	E	S	S
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C	O	L	O	N	A	G	I	L
A	M	E	N	D	L	A	K	E
W	A	R	E	S	B	E	D	S

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott