

Ctg container operators' strike postponed

Prevent repeat of such strikes

AFTER four days of nonstop strike at the port city by Bangladesh Road Transport Owners' and Workers' Federation, a compromise was reached with authorities on September 30, but not before serious damage had been caused to the country's exports and imports. We cannot condone such action by any party that holds the economy hostage. The Road Transport and Highways Division is well within its rights to enforce a ban and charge fines on heavy movers that cause damage to roads by overloading. That trade unions feel it is their right to blackmail authorities into submission is hardly a conducive way to do business, especially since the Chittagong port carries 97 percent of all import and export activities of the country.

The garments sector (RMG) suffered the greatest losses as deadlines were missed by manufacturers to ship goods on time. With no other option, the RMG sector had to resort to expensive air freight. The container operators have only postponed the strike but a repeat of this situation cannot be allowed. Yes, the Federation may have serious issues of harassment with regards to the fines being imposed which the authorities should address. But the highway link between Dhaka and Chittagong cannot be allowed to be damaged because trucks and trailers willfully flout the law. An inter-ministerial meeting is to be convened on October 4 to discuss the issue and measures should be taken therein so that such strikes are not repeated. The authorities cannot bow down to undue pressure, and if such action is threatened again, the perpetrators should be held to account.

WHO's Zika warning

Preventive and awareness efforts necessary

THE mosquito borne Zika virus is a serious issue that requires state-community measures to effectively combat. The virus is known to be a cause of major neurological diseases including microcephaly and Guillain-Barré syndrome, and it is pregnant women and their to-be born children who are the most at risk. This week, the World Health Organisation issued a warning to Bangladesh and 11 other Asian countries as two cases of microcephaly have been identified in neighbouring Thailand.

Zika is borne by Aedes mosquitoes, the same species which carries dengue. The WHO has issued the warning so that precautionary and preventive measures can be taken. Since travels between Bangladesh and the countries of Asia where cases of microcephaly have been identified are frequent, the danger is very real for the entire region. What is needed is to combat the breeding of Aedes mosquitoes, and in case of reported cases, proper health facilities for the affected.

Bangladesh has faced a dengue epidemic, and faced it well. The precautions are the same, from proper disposal of waste, disrupting standing water, and tackling the issue before the virus can spread. Of course, the community must be actively involved, alongside government efforts.

Due to the risks involved, the government must be efficient in the health screening process of those entering the country from abroad. On top of that, awareness is the call of the day: to educate people about the risks, symptoms, prevention and treatment is of utmost importance. Lessons learnt from combating dengue should make the process even more effective.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Teacher recruitment needs filtering

Neither the existing viva tests nor the ministry recommended written tests for teacher recruitment is enough to ensure quality education in public universities. Most teaching posts are given to top CGPA holders - a faulty and archaic process. An excellent CGPA holder may be a good student, not a good teacher. Teachers must be active academically, socially and pedagogically, implementing innovative and effective teaching strategies. I recommend the following additional recruitment criteria for teachers: minimum test scores, demo classes taken by candidates, and taking votes from students. We urge the UGC and authorities concerned to bring positive and effective changes in the teacher recruitment process at public universities.

Juel Rana
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Waste is money

Each day Dhaka city produces over 3000 tons of household waste. The City Corporation collects almost less than half of it. The rest remains on roadsides and open areas. Cities are left struggling to handle the costs of waste management involving disposal technologies, and the impact of waste on the local and global environment. Some private and community based organisations have proved that trash can be cash. At the Green Road Government Colony in downtown Dhaka, Waste Concern employees go door to door collecting refuse from 800 households, hauling it by rickshaw vans to a nearby shed. They sort out inorganic material before placing the trash into brick bins. Each month, the plant produces 3 tons of bio-fertiliser, which sells for about USD 0.04 per kilogram. The revenue is enough to make the operation self-sustaining, covering production costs and providing well-paying jobs to employees. Evidently, a lot can be achieved through innovative initiatives.

Mishkat Khan, On e-mail

Sub-regional cooperation can be the answer

SELIM RAIHAN

THOUGH There is a strong demand for a deeper regional integration in South Asia, the progress has been rather slow. Actual implementation of agreements often does not match the declared ambitions, and in this context, lack of political will and leadership, institutional weaknesses, and capacity and resource constraints have been argued to be the major impeding factors. The political rivalry between India and Pakistan has often constrained the SAARC to be a functional regional forum. The recent cancellation of the SAARC

subcontinent's north east, it endeavours to cooperate on trade, investment, communication, tourism, energy and natural resources development. Its objectives have been expanded over years to incorporate substantial land and port connectivity.

The economic needs and drivers for a deeper integration in the BBIN sub-region are more prominent compared to these countries' integration with the rest of South Asia. Especially, a deeper integration among the BBIN countries is very important to place BBIN as the gateway for further integration with China and Southeast Asian countries. The

As far as intra-BBIN trade is concerned, there is substantial potential for the rise in intra-regional trade. However, despite India providing almost full duty-free-quota-free market access to exports from South Asian LDCs, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan are facing escalated challenges to at least secure and then to increase their exports to the Indian market. These challenges are related to their limited export capacities, lack of diversification of their export baskets, and various non-tariff measures (NTMs) and procedural obstacles (POs) due to inadequate infrastructure and lack of support

improved to meet different international standard requirements. Unless and until these exporters develop their capacities, they will not be able to diversify exports and become competitive in the regional and international markets. A number of supply side factors at home can actually undermine the exporters' competitiveness and constrain economic and export diversification. These factors are directly associated with the domestic production and investment environment. Most prominent of these factors are access to finance, weak physical infrastructure, inefficient ports and high transport costs, shortage of skilled workers, technological bottlenecks, lack of entrepreneurial and management skills, lack of information, and high cost of doing business.

There are some signs of heightened 'new' commitment among political elites of the BBIN countries. The recent speedy resolution of the land boundary agreement (LBA) between Bangladesh and India, the positive reception of the India-Bangladesh Maritime Arbitration Award announced in July 2014, establishment of border haats along the border between India and Bangladesh, and the BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement are signs of such 'new' political commitments.

However, the aforementioned 'new' commitments have not really been translated to resolve the issues related to NTMs and POs discussed above. There is a need to put renewed emphasis on this. There are some recent initiatives by the Government of India to solve the trade infrastructural problems at the border by setting up of Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) at major entry points on the land borders between Bangladesh and India. Two such ICPs have been put in place recently. Such ICPs need to be established at the borders between India and Nepal, and India and Bhutan.

There is also a need for cooperation among different institutions in the BBIN countries to deal with NTMs and removal of POs. Cooperation is needed in a number of areas for harmonisation of TBT and SPS measures, Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) among respective organisations of these countries, and for introduction of increased automation of their customs clearance procedure.

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ILLUSTRATION: WORLD BANK.ORG

summit is such an example.

In order to take forward the regional integration process in South Asia, a good and effective initiative is the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) initiative, which is a sub-regional coordinative architecture of countries in South Asia. BBIN operates through Joint Working Groups (JWG) comprising official representation from each member state to formulate, implement and review quadrilateral agreements. Areas of cooperation include water resources management, connectivity of power grids, multi-modal transport, freight and trade infrastructure. Focused on the

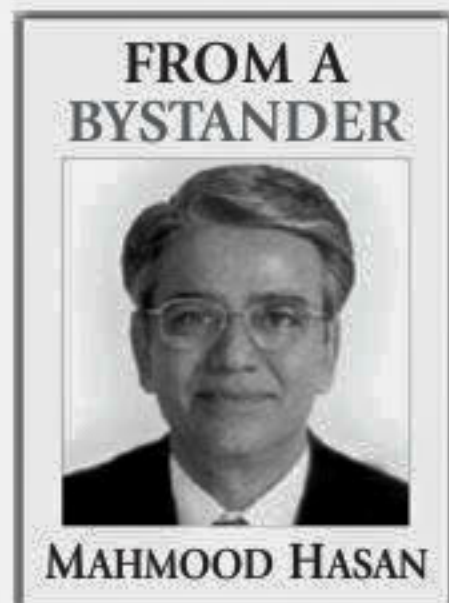
political economy drivers also seem to be more favourable. In the context of some structural factors, especially the political rivalry between India and Pakistan, which has confined the progress of SAARC, and landlockedness of Nepal and Bhutan, the BBIN sub-regional initiative has seen a great interest from the political elites from these four countries. The extra-regional drivers for BBIN are also favourable as there are growing interests from the international organisations like the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank for improvement in connectivity and infrastructural development in this sub-region.

facilities both at home and in the Indian market. However, streamlining of NTMs and removal of associated POs are very important as such actions are likely to intensify further market integration in the BBIN sub-region through development of regional value chains. These will also encourage larger intra and extra-regional investments in the BBIN sub-region which can be instrumental for growth integration among these countries. To make these happen there is a need for policy integration among the BBIN countries.

Domestic capacities of the exporters in Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal need to be

INDIA PAKISTAN CONFRONTATION

Jingoism should not get out of hand



FROM A BYSTANDER
MAHMOOD HASAN

OVER the past couple of weeks, relations between India and Pakistan have taken a nasty turn. Rhetoric emerging from Delhi and Islamabad has not only deeply worried people in the sub-continent, but also leaders around the world. The heightened military tension between the two nuclear neighbours of South Asia did not come suddenly. It was in the making since July, 2016.

First, was the killing of Burhan Wani, a Hizbul Mujahideen commander in Indian Kashmir on July 8, 2016. This led to massive protests in the valley which still continues. Nearly hundred people have been killed so far by the Indian security forces trying to quell the uprising. Second, was the terrorist assault on the Indian army base in Uri on September 18, in which 18 Indian soldiers were killed. The incident created outrage and anger in Delhi, which squarely blamed Pakistan for the attack. Third, India claimed to have crossed the Line of Control (LOC) and conducted a "surgical operation" inside Pakistan occupied Kashmir on September 28 to destroy terrorist hideouts.

Pakistan however, denied any involvement in the Uri attack and blamed India for the gross violation of human rights in Kashmir by the Indian army. Pakistan also rejected the Indian claim of a surgical operation and instead declared that 7 Indian soldiers were killed and one soldier captured when firing broke out across the LOC in Kashmir. As tension mounted, civilians living near the LOC have been evacuated to safer places.

It is difficult to get the facts as both sides hyperbole the narrative on the Uri attack and the surgical operation. Clearly the storyline released to the media, in both India and Pakistan by the respective governments, is to appease public sentiments in both countries. After the Uri disaster the Indian public mood was up in arms for revenge on Pakistan. Pakistani leaders have also been threatening India. Tension has reached unprecedented levels.

The immediate casualty of the grave military tension has been the postponement of the 19th Saarc summit scheduled to be held in Islamabad from 9-10 November, 2016. India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Afghanistan decided not to attend the meet, because of Pakistan's role in abetting terrorism and interfering in the internal affairs of member countries. Sri Lanka also joined in to skip the meet.

India has also mounted an offensive to diplomatically isolate Pakistan, accusing it of exporting terrorism. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj made an impassioned appeal at the UNGA on September 27 to isolate Pakistan. Delhi is also said to be considering other measures to isolate Pakistan.

The postponement of the Saarc summit bodes ill for the organisation, which is already in a limbo. Saarc will not die because of postponements, as it is a legal entity. Compelling Pakistan to postpone the summit was meant to punish Islamabad for its irresponsible behaviour. Indeed, in the eyes of outsiders, Pakistan would be seen as incapable of holding such a meet. But a closer look will tell that by pushing the summit to a later date all the member states have lost an opportunity to put pressure on Islamabad to come clean on terrorism.

Though the Saarc Charter prohibits raising bilateral issues in the formal sessions of the summit, leaders can always discuss their disputes at the retreat, which is a recognised forum of the summit. Looking at the post-

India and Pakistan need to sit down immediately and start the "comprehensive" dialogue that was agreed between the two in December 2015, when Sushma Swaraj visited Islamabad. The recognised structure at the level of Foreign Secretaries should immediately convene to diffuse the tension. The UN, US, Russia and China have all asked Nawaz and Modi to exercise restraint and cool down tempers.

India has to give up its inflexible stance to discuss only "terrorism", before taking up other issues with Pakistan. India has to recognise that the Kashmir issue has remained unresolved for the past seven decades and the demands of 12.5 million Kashmiris cannot be quelled by military force. Pakistan also has to eliminate all terrorist outfits



Indian Border Security Force (BSF) soldiers patrol along the border between India and Pakistan near Jammu.

ponement one can ask cynically: did Pakistan really lose by postponing the summit? Not much, as past records demonstrate Pakistan hardly had much interest in the organisation.

There are now proposals to have a Saarc without Pakistan. There is also talk that the 19th summit venue be shifted to a different location. All these are wishful ideas given the present status of Saarc Charter.

The root cause of tension between the two large neighbours of South Asia is the unresolved Kashmir issue. They have gone to war over Kashmir in 1947, 1965 and 1999 but the problem could not be resolved.

from its soil to convince India that it is serious to resolve all bilateral issues.

Let us be very clear, disputes can be solved in two ways - war or negotiations. For India and Pakistan war cannot be an option, particularly now as a conventional conflict can quickly turn into a nuclear clash, which will endanger the whole of humanity. Thus responsible meaningful negotiation is the only civilised way to resolve bilateral disputes. Both the countries just cannot allow jingoism to get out of their control and behave irresponsibly.

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