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Prime Minister Gujral calls for regional cooperation

The Prime Minister, Mr. I. K. Gujral urged the political leadership of South Asia to keep the engines of cooperation running so that the process could change the face of the whole region. Addressing a banquet hosted in his honor by the Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, Mr. Gujral said the most fitting reply to those in favor of status quo lay in the prosperity which can be brought about by developing new frontiers of cooperation.

Mr. Gujral, who arrived in Dhaka to attend the trilateral business summit of the Prime Ministers of India,

Bangladesh and Pakistan, directly put across to Sheikh Hasina India's request for buying natural gas from Bangladesh. During his talks with her, he obliquely hinted that the transit facility through Bangladesh be provided by constructing a link in the Asian Highway.

He said trade and commerce needed infrastructure and transport linkages if they were to develop sustained growth. Effective infrastructure required long-term visions and a spirit of cooperation that, in the present context, only an enlightened political leadership could provide. Stress-

ing that the scope for cooperation between India and Bangladesh was immense, he said to obtain this, it was essential that a new climate of cooperation emerged with the realization that it was in helping each other that the two countries could help themselves. Regional and sub-regional cooperation would upgrade the infrastructure and generate employment in both countries.

Complimenting Sheikh Hasina for mooted the business summit, he said it was her vision and initiative that had brought together India, Bangladesh and Pakistan to develop a common platform for building bridges of cooperation between them. Praising Sheikh Hasina's maturity of leadership, Mr. Gujral said no time should be lost in building on the natural affinities of the neighboring countries of the region. He said the agreement on Ganga water had to be implemented in good faith and this required wisdom and political will on both sides.

The Bangladesh Prime Minister praised Mr. Gujral for reduction of tension in the region and thanked him for his government's support and "your personal interest" in reaching an accord on the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Election Schedule

February 16: Andhra Pradesh (21 seats), Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar (34 seats), Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir (1 seat), Karnataka (18 seats), Manipur, Meghalaya, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu (14 seats), Tripura, Uttar Pradesh (52 seats), Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Dadra Nagar Haveli and Delhi;

February 22: Andhra Pradesh (21 seats), Bihar (20 seats), Karnataka (10 seats), Madhya Pradesh (22 seats), Maharashtra (24 seats), Mizoram, Nagaland, Orissa (10 seats), Tamil Nadu (25 seats), Uttar Pradesh (33 seats), West Bengal (20 seats) and Pondicherry;

February 28: Goa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir (2 seats), Kerala (20 seats), Madhya Pradesh (20 seats), Maharashtra (24 seats), Orissa (11 seats), West Bengal (22 seats) and Daman & Diu;

March 7: Jammu & Kashmir (3 seats).

An Introduction to the Indian Election Process

The entire election process in India is controlled and conducted by an Election Commission (EC). This is an independent body and it ensures that elections are held in a free and fair manner. The Election Commission fixes and announces the dates for elections.

Candidates either belong to a political party or contest on their own, as 'independent candidates'. There is a last date for filing of nomination papers, by all candidates. Once nominations have been filed, they are scrutinized to check authenticity of information given in the nomination papers. Once the scrutiny is over, the candidates are given a withdrawal date, by which they can withdraw their nomination if they so desire. This entire process ensures that there is no wastage of votes and only serious candidates are contesting. The EC also registers election symbols for each party and ensures that they are not similar. Dates specifying the start and finish of the election campaign period for parties and candidates are fixed by the EC.

Gandhi statue to be unveiled at the Martin Luther King's Park in Atlanta

A statue of Mahatma Gandhi was unveiled at the Martin Luther King Jr. Park in Atlanta on January 24, 1998. The statue was donated by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). The 6.3-foot, bronze statue, sculpted by Ram Sutar of New Delhi, will be part of the Martin Luther King Jr. Historic National Park site. According to the National Federation of Indian-American Associations, the statue will be surrounded by landscaping and lighting.

C-DAC offers key language software products free on Internet

The Center for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) has offered Key Language Technology Software Products free on Internet for non-commercial use. This would go a long way in promoting use of Indian Languages on Computers. Announcing this in the Technology Development for Indian Languages (TDIL) annual meeting, C-DAC executive director Dr. V. P. Bhatkar said that in continuation of the Bhasa Program under which few fonts were available for the public. ALP word processor under DOS, LEAP word processor under Windows 95 and two fonts in each Indian Language developed by C-DAC would now be made available free on Internet. In his address he traced the history of computing facilities in Indian Languages beginning with GIST (card word processing and Desktop publishing) under C-DAC initiatives.

Inaugurating the annual meeting the Electronics Secretary Shymal Ghosh complemented C-DAC on taking initiative by putting software products in public domain. In his speech he referred to the initiatives

taken by the Department of Electronics in the area of development and use of IT in Indian languages. Recently a project on Development of Internet Tools and technologies for Indian Languages has been started which would initially focus on the development of such tools for Hindi, he said. He also highlighted the efforts of the Department to make available the complete environment of computers to be localized in Indian Languages, which has resulted in the availability of Hindi PC-DOS from IBM. He mentioned that National Center for Software Technology, a society of DOE has undertaken joint development work with Microsoft for enabling Indian Languages support on Windows NT.

The Meet is designed to further the interest of IT companies to take up the development which will help in addressing the requirements of a large non-English speaking community in India to work on computers. This will also create awareness among the new users to join the umbrella of computer-literate population by working on computers in their own languages.

The Election Commission

Role

Under Article 324 of the Indian constitution the Election Commission is vested with the role of supervision, direction and control of preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to Parliament and to the Legislature of every state and of elections to the offices of the President and Vice President.

Before each general election to the House of the People, the Legislative Assembly of each State, the first general election and thereafter before each biennial election to the Legislative Council of each State having such Council, the President may also appoint Regional Commissioners as he may consider necessary to assist the Election Commission in the performance of functions listed above. The conditions of service and tenure of office of the Election Commissioners and the Regional Commissioners shall be determined by the President as per rules, and subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament: The President or the Governor of a State, will make available as many staff as is required by the Election Commissioner the discharge of duties conferred on the Election Commission as stated above.

Constitution of the Election Commission

The Election Commission consists of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election commissioners, if any as the President may from time to time fix, and the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election The President, subject to the provisions of any law shall make commissioners made in that behalf by the Parliament. If any other Election Commissioner is appointed, then the Chief Election Commissioner acts as the Chairman of the Election Commission.

Provided that the Chief Election Commissioner is not removed from his office except in like manner and on like grounds as a Judge of Supreme Court and his conditions of service shall not be varied to his disadvantage after his appointment. Provided that any other Election Commissioner or a Regional Commissioner shall not be removed from office except on the recommendation of the Chief Election Commissioner.

General Electoral Roll and Elections based on adult suffrage

There can be no special category, electoral role based on grounds of religion, sex or race, and elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative assemblies is to be on the basis of adult suffrage, i.e., every Indian citizen who is not less than eighteen years of age on such date as may be fixed under any law, made by the appropriate Legislature and are not otherwise disqualified on grounds of non-residence, unsoundness of mind, crime or corrupt legal practice, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter at any such election.

India gets 26 more transponders

The INSAT system has been augmented with the positioning of ARABSAT-IC at the orbital slot of 55 deg. East longitude. The Department of Space (DOS) signed an agreement with the ARABSAT Organisation in November 97 for the acquisition of the satellite in orbit. DOS has completed all the tests on the satellite which is now ready for use as part of INSAT system. The satellite has been designated as INSAT-2DT and carries 25 C-band transponders and one S-band transponder. It was launched in 1992 and is expected to be available for use for another 5 years. INSAT-2DT transponders will be loaded in a phased manner and Department of Telecommunications and Ministry of Information and Broadcasting are making necessary arrangements in the ground segment for using the satellite.

Speech by the Prime Minister of India I. K. Gujral at the *Bangladesh-India-Pakistan Business Summit,* Dhaka - January 15, 1998.

Your Excellency Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,
Your Excellency Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif,
Distinguished Delegates and Friends.

This is a truly historic occasion. For the first time, the leaders of Bangladesh, Pakistan and India have come together on a common platform. What is more, we have come together on a common platform with captains of trade and industry to see how we can jointly work together to usher in a new era of cooperation and prosperity for our peoples.

Madam Prime Minister, I would like to express my deep appreciation for the bold and far-sighted initiative that you have taken in bringing us all here together today. Our presence here is a tribute to your statesmanship and the esteem and affection in which all of us hold you. I thank you for the excellent arrangements that your government has made for this meeting and for the warm hospitality extended to me and members of my delegation.

Our countries are inheritors of an ancient and highly developed civilisation. From the sophisticated urban design of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa and the technological wizardry of the Ashokan Pillars, to the amazing fineness of the Dhaka Muslims, our peoples have been known through much of human history for their creativity and productive skills. Our growth, however, was stunted by colonisation, which left us impoverished, even as Europe and North America were making the transition to industrialised societies. Today, we have a unique opportunity to work together to overcome poverty and accelerate economic growth for the shared benefit of our people.

In this age of globalisation, nations in different parts of the world have discovered the advantages of regional economic cooperation and the development of a common, regional economic space. At the end of World War II, who would have imagined that France and Germany, who had fought three bitter wars in the preceding 80 years, would come together to create the European Community which has now become the European Union. Nearer to us, the countries of South East Asia have been able to achieve commendable success in development with regional cooperation through ASEAN playing a key role. In America, both NAFTA and Mercosur reflect the same economic imperative.

The prospects of forging closer ties of economic cooperation in our own region have improved perceptibly. There is, today, an increasing convergence in our macro-economic policies, with an emphasis on deregulation and a greater role for the private sector. All of us are seeking to unleash the creative energies of our entrepreneurs and workers and bring about improvements in efficiency so that we can compete more effectively in the new globalised economy. In the last few years, we have seen a quickening of growth in our individual economies with increases in GNP ranging from five to seven percent. There is no reason why we cannot sustain and accelerate this pace of growth, given sound economic management and capitalising on regional synergies.

Economic Cooperation is now high on the SAARC Agenda. The goal of achieving a Free Trade Area in South Asia has been accepted, and the time frame for achieving it advanced to the year 2001. Let us, today, reaffirm our commitment to work jointly to achieve this goal. This would involve progressive acceleration of trade liberalisation in the SAPTA negotiations in terms of the products covered the depth of the tariff cuts and lifting of non-tariff barriers. In concrete terms, we would have to liberalise at least 25% of trade each year to usher in a Free Trade Area in South Asia by the first year of the next century.

Under the first two rounds of SAPTA, India offered the maximum concessions covering around 1000 tariff lines. We also offered the deepest tariff cuts with special concessions for the Least Developed Countries. The impact of these openings will take some time to be assessed as they came into effect only between March and July last year. I understand that Pakistan is still to issue the Consolidated National Schedule giving effect to the Second SAPTA Agreement. I would suggest to them to do so, and to ensure that this is on a non-discriminatory basis in conformity with the provisions of SAPTA. I would also ask them to trade with India in line with their international commitments and obligations.

The Third round of SAPTA negotiations made a promising start in July this year, with all delegations agreeing to follow an across-the-board or sectoral approach to speed up trade liberalisation. There have, however,

been delays in scheduling the next meeting. It is time that we collectively ensure that the momentum is maintained.

India remains committed to fast forward SAPTA liberalisation. I make this opportunity to offer that, as a special gesture. India will be prepared to lift quantitative restrictions on agreed items of interest for Bangladesh and other Least Developed SAARC Countries. Our negotiators will also have the requisite mandate to reduce tariffs significantly with deeper cuts for Bangladesh and the Least Developed SAARC Countries as part of the latest round of trade preference talks. This should impart the required momentum in the SAPTA liberalisation process. Our SAARC partners, particularly Bangladesh, will also have an added opportunity to access our market and enhance their exports to India.

The achievement of a Free Trade Area in South Asia will not only provide a stimulus to trade and investment within the region, but would also make the region a more attractive destination for foreign investors. With an enlarged regional market of more than one billion people, the SAARC partners would acquire a greater weight and significance in their global and regional strategies. I am glad that SAARC has recently commenced discussions on promoting investment in the region. We must move to quickly put into place a Regional Taxation and for settlement of commercial disputes. This would significantly enhance investor confidence and create an enabling environment for greater investment flows. To encourage Indian entrepreneurs to invest in South Asia, I am glad to announce that the Indian government has decided to double the ceiling for overseas Indian Investment under the Fast Track in this region.

Today, trade liberalisation alone is not sufficient for expansion of trade and investment. We have to speed up our arrangements for trade facilitation. I am glad that meaningful initiatives have been taken by SAARC in this direction. Given our common administrative background, it should be possible to quickly work out conformance and harmonisation arrangements in areas such as Customs Procedures, Standards and Quality, and Electronic Data Exchange leading to paperless trade. This will help reduce transaction costs and make intra-SAARC trade more efficient and prosperous for our business.

Limitations in physical infrastructure also act as brake on the growth of trade. Intra-Regional Transportation and Communication links remain weak. Improvements in these sectors are critical if we are to derive the full

benefits of geographical proximity. We need to identify additional routes by road and rail, augment air links and look at ways to reduce freight costs by sea. Port infrastructure also needs upgradation and development. India is prepared to work with its neighbours in identifying and undertaking joint projects, both short-term and long-term, to improve and upgrade transport facilities. We must develop the capacity to not only handle the anticipated expansion of trade within the region but also connect to the proposed trans-Asian transport networks. Our region is strategically situated at the crossroads of Asia, between the oil rich countries in West and Central Asia and the dynamic economies of South East Asia. We should derive full benefit from this advantage.

As an immediate measure, India is prepared to double the number of freight trains from India to Pakistan from the existing level of 10-15 trains a month to one every day. We also offer to increase the frequency of the Samjhauta Express, which presently runs twice a week from India to Pakistan, to six times a week. This would not only be in keeping with our commitment to make travel easy within the region and promote greater contact between our peoples, but would also signal our resolve to move forward in practical ways.

Regional cooperation, today, is no longer driven only by exchange of commodities and manufactures. We should, therefore, establish tradability of some key resources that our region is richly endowed with, so that true complementarities are brought into play. Only then will South Asian economic cooperation have a significant trade creating and growth generating impact. This is a rich seam that has remained unexploited to our collective loss. Let us, at this Summit, pledge that we will make up for lost time and opportunity and work to establish arrangements on a bilateral or trilateral basis to enable and facilitate such exchanges in key resources like electricity, natural gas, etc. We will find that our private sectors will be very interested, as will be international funding agencies and foreign investors. India, for one, provides a large and virtually inexhaustible market for many of these resources. I offer to optimally harness these resources through concrete projects involving Joint Ventures, both at Government and Private Sector levels, and buy these from our neighbours for mutual benefit. This too will augment the exports of our SAARC neighbours to India. As a first step towards regional cooperation in the field of energy, I propose that SAARC undertake a study on the possibility of a Regional Electricity Grid.

On international trade issues, there is so much that our

(Continued on page 7)

Industry to be involved with the Commerce Ministry in WTO-related policies

The Commerce Ministry has decided to involve the trade and industry in formulating policies related to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Ministry representatives should interact with the industry on a continuous basis with the aim of ensuring that the country derives maximum benefit from future pacts.

Apex chambers have been asked to nominate persons to discuss various WTO-related issues with officials of the Ministry. This will ensure that the industry would have a key role in deciding the course of the country's ties with WTO. The Ministry has also chambers to nominate experts for specialized discussions on certain subjects.

These decisions were taken at a meeting between officials of the Ministry and representatives of the chambers. Commerce Secretary P. P. Prabhu presided over the meeting, which was also attended by India's Ambassador to WTO, Mr. S. Narayanan, and representatives of CII, FIEO, FICCI, ASSOCHAM and PHDCCI.

It was decided that the Government and industry associations in order to thrash out strategies beneficial to the country to derive maximum benefit out of the new trade regime would jointly organize workshops. Ministry officials stressed on the need to make full use of the flexibilities available under various WTO agreements. Detailed analysis of these issues would be done with the active participation of the industry, academicians, experts, lawyers and economists.

Mr. Prabhu delved on the need to be part of the multilateral system as it offered better leverage in protect-

ing the country's interests, as compared to bilateral fora. Both advantages and disadvantages are integral part of all international agreements, he noted. It was important to maximize the advantages while minimizing the perceived negative impact of the disadvantages.

He stated that the Ministry would welcome feedback from the industry as valuable input for future negotiations with the WTO so that the necessary safeguards could be built into global agreements. Responding to criticism from the industry about rapid opening up, the Commerce Secretary argued that the country had opted for liberalization out of its own initiative.

Mr. Narayanan stated that India would do better through multilateralism than bilateralism. Liberal economies performed better than others did, he argued. On the industry's criticism that the WTO has become another tool to push the interests of the industrialized nations, he noted that developing countries could also expect equal treatment in the global trade regulatory body.

The industry demanded transparency in all matters related to WTO, especially with stress on dissemination of information on these issues. A complaint over the years has been that the industry was not being consulted while finalizing various WTO agreements.

Industry representatives attending the meeting called for more attention to anti-dumping mechanism and non-tariff barriers, which were affecting the country's exports. The industrialized nations were also seeking to push anti-subsidy measures against Indian exporters without genuine reason, they felt.

India, Italy to build transport plane

Italy and France have sought a partnership with India to build a new transport plane which can be used for civilian and military purposes. The development of a 70 seat Light Transport Aircraft (LTA) envisages Aerospatiale of France as a third partner, the visiting Italian Prime Minister, Mr. Romano Prodi, said at a press conference.

"As the European military industry unified, we want to emerge as competitors in some segments with the U.S.", Mr. Prodi observed. The HAL has already been apprised about this proposal and is "thinking over this idea," he added. The decision to build a 70 seat LTA in partnership with a third country was announced by the former Prime Minister, Mr. H.D. Deve Gowda, during the Bangalore air show held in late 1996. "The Italian Prime Minister's announcement appears to be a follow-up of that decision."

Prime Minister Gujral's Address to the Bangladesh-India-Pakistan Business Meet

(Continued from page 5)

countries can do together, because we have common concerns and expectations from the existing WTO regime. Even on new issues, there is a striking convergence in our views and approaches. So let us use the SAARC mechanism to become an interest group within the group of developing countries, pressing for a development friendly orientation to the International Trading System. Trade and Industry should also coordinate their thinking and provide inputs to help us evolve a South Asian view on the WTO.

The private sector has played an important role in the common endeavour to expand trade and commercial links and accelerate economic growth in our region. We commend the work done by the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry in throwing up ideas, posing ambitious targets and forging a consensus. It is heartening that we can count on the full support of our business communities in building the framework for economic cooperation in our region. Indeed, they must take the lead in evolving concrete proposals for mutually beneficial business cooperation, looking beyond a Free Trade Area towards a South Asian Economic Community with the free movement of capital, goods and services within the region.

Excellencies,
Ladies & Gentlemen.

We stand at the threshold of a new century. This century has seen us attain political independence, an epoch-making event that triggered the end of the colonial era across the world. I am confident that, in the next century our region will successfully overcome poverty and usher in an era of prosperity. Our products will once again be recognised for their excellence, even as our workers will be prized for their skill and ingenuity. We require statesmanship, vision and perseverance in fully harnessing the synergies that would flow from regional economic cooperation if we are to fulfill this promise.

I am reminded here of a verse from the Rig Veda, one of the oldest treaties of the Indian subcontinent. It says, and I quote;

“May you walk in step together, May you speak in one voice, May your minds unite in knowledge”.

Unquote.

I hope we can keep these simple words in the backs of our minds, even as we strive together for a brighter tomorrow for our peoples.

Thank you.

Chinese business team, FIEO hold talks

A business delegation from the Yunnan Provincial Import and Export Corporation of China (YPIEC), discussed prospects of strengthening bilateral trade with representatives of the Federation of Indian Export Organizations (FIEO). The Corporation's managing director, Mr. Wu Xuepu told the FIEO members that the aim of the business team is to establish contacts with Indian businessmen for mutual trade as well as explore possibilities of joint ventures and third country collaborations.

Mr. Xurpu said the trading corporation was established in 1950 and has a turnover of 220 million dollars. It is ranked 188th among the 500 key import and export corporations in the world in 1996. The company is engaged in trading of wooden products, electrical and mechanical products, metals minerals, textiles, food, vehicles, diamonds, gold and silver apart from other goods.

The FIEO chairman, Mr. K.K. Jain told the visiting delegation that both countries could jointly undertake many projects of mutual interest keeping in view the vast size of the market available both in India and China. He said India-China trade has shown an upward trend with Indian exports rising from Rs. 1112 crore in 1995-96 to Rs. 2100 crore in 1996-97, an almost 200 per cent increase.

Regarding banking channels, he said Indian exporters could open direct letters of credit with their counterparts in any part of the world as this country has a large banking network. He suggested that frequent exchange of business delegation between the two countries would further boost trade and economic relations.

The meeting was attended by a large number of Indian businessmen who were especially interested in items like handlooms, handicrafts, raw silk, optical glasses, pharmaceuticals, agro-products, consultancy services and paraffin wax. Regarding movement of goods, it was suggested that Kuming airport of Yunnan province could be utilized.

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India's first IT park nearing completion

The first phase of India's pioneering information Technology Park is nearing completion. The \$378 million International Tech Park (ITP) promises to establish Bangalore and India among the world IT leaders, ITP's Chief Executive Officer Kang Kok Hin said.

The park, which is located 18 kilometers from Bangalore, is a tripartite joint venture between Singapore Information Technology Park Investment Ltd., Tata Industries Ltd. and the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board. The Tatas and the Singapore consortium each has a 40 per cent stake while the state board controls 20 percent. The park is expected to be inaugurated in June by Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and the Indian Prime Minister.

When completed, the park will have offices, commercial and production space, apartments and recreational facilities spread over 172,000 square meters of "high performance work environment" and 135,000 square meters of production space. The ITP will provide a single-window clearance for all licenses, permits and approvals from Indian government agencies. The Park makes good business sense given India's rapidly rising IT sector. The 1997-98 turnover is projected at Rs. 193 billion (about \$ five billion), growth of 36 per cent over the previous year.

Companies setting up shop here include Sony, Siemens Components, Hitachi Micro Systems Asia, Hitachi Asia, Tata Consultancy Services, Singapore Technologies, The Singapore Software Center, Rotary Engineering, RSP Architects, Planners and Engineers, Singapore Medical Center, Times Bank, Gemplus Technologies and SAPAG.

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