

Founder Editor S.D. Rohmetra

Cross LoC trade dwindling

It is now more than four years that trade initiatives across LoC were taken and two points, namely Salamabad in Uri and Chakan Da Bagh in Poonch, were earmarked for exchange of trade. But contrary to expectations, trading exercise is not taking off and contrarily in recent months it has shown downside trend. The reason is quite simple. Firstly the pre-requisites of good trading system are lacking on either side. There is no banking system nor is there quick telephonic communication facility. Despite several requests made by the prospective traders the requisite facilities have not been provided. During the past week only one truckload was reported at Chakan Da Bagh from PoK side.

The fact is that suspicions and doubts still linger in connection with the conducting of trade exercise. At several occasions objectionable articles have been found hidden in boxes of various goods that are being traded across the checkpoints. At least on three occasions objectionable articles like live cartridges, SIM cards and satellite phones were recovered. These were hidden in the boxes loaded with merchandise. Why should this have happened and why should have Pakistani traders resorted to this objectionable act? Although the authorities took strict action and blacklisted the senders and the receiving companies or firms, but the fact remains that subversives are trying to use the trading route for transportation of objectionable material. This cannot be called a cooperative stance and naturally leads to many obstructions.

However not to let the entire enterprise a confidence building measure fall apart, the authorities have approached the Home Ministry for supplying them with full body scanner machines that would scan a loaded truck without the need of unloading its merchandise. The practice prevailing at the moment is that all merchandise has to be unloaded and scanned item by item to ensure that there is no objectionable material. The practice of opening each box and each bundle of merchandise is a cumbersome and time-consuming job. It causes long delays. The proposal of obtaining such machines for the check posts will reduce the time taken for checking the trucks. Each machine is reported to cost something around 11 crore rupees and the Home Ministry has to bear all this cost.

The main purpose of opening the trading points across the LoC was to reinforce confidence-building measures. It was expected that the people especially the businessmen on both the sides would find an opportunity of contributing to the building of goodwill among the people on both sides of the dividing line. But some incidents of attempt at smuggling objectionable items have aroused the suspicion of security forces. Trade route cannot be converted into a route for smuggling in arms and ammunition and other material, which the terrorists use in their subversive activities. The army is required to prevent the enemy from doing so. It is, therefore, decided that after installing full body scanner machines at the check post, it will be handled by the army and the civilians jointly. Though they will be assigned specific duties but they will be jointly responsible for clearing the goods as clean and not objectionable.

We want that relations with PoK should become very cordial. With this impression we had accepted that we open two points for secure trade. Pakistan accepted the proposal with much reluctance. We, too, had reservations but we also believed in constructive policy of creating circumstances that would generate the goodwill of PoK people. If our goodwill gesture is to be responded by equal good will from the other side than nothing should be done that threatens our security and sovereignty. A person interested in doing business has no need to transact objectionable things to the other side. It is negation of good will effort.

In final analysis we will say that the genuine traders on both sides should sit down and discuss how best the underlying idea of cross - LoC trade can be made as a strong confidence building measure in this part of the world. If 21 articles were recommended for trading through these check points and these have come down to just 3, it makes no sense of continuing to run the trade through these points. This is not going to help strengthen confidence building motions. Therefore on both sides a realistic and more practical methods need to be taken to ensure the purpose of opening the trading points is rightly served.

Guidelines from Planning Department

Instructions from the Planning Department to District authorities to take into account critical and important components while preparing Detailed Project Reports (DPR) is a good though belated exercise. We have been often drawing attention of the authorities that the projects undertaken lack some of the essential and critical components and this makes their utilization a farce. If a bridge is constructed at considerable cost and time, but the connecting roads are not there, what purpose does it serve? Likewise if structures are raised for schools, hospitals or office but lack proper sanitary facilities, connectivity, proper electrification etc. the effort is not worth making. What actually happens is that a project is completed and handed over but the critical components are not taken care of. This has been the reason why the Planning Department had to issue guidelines to Administrative Secretaries and Divisional Commissioners to ensure that whenever new projects are worked out, they accompany the critical and important components also. It is generally found that the main cause of delay in making the projects functional is avoidance of critical components in the original plan. It is but natural that cost of completion of the project will escalate and then other problems follow.

We consider it a right step on the part of the Planning Department to alert the District level authorities that they should not fail to make a comprehensive plan of development in their respective districts. We would like to suggest that before according formal sanction to any DPR, the officials of the Department of Planning could think of obtaining a no objection certificate from the concerned departments who are the stakeholders in the project under consideration. This would save the hassles of resolving obstructions and objections when the project is actually executed on the ground.

Wavering stand on Chabahar port

Remember, when the Chinese troops brazenly penetrated 19 kilometers into our territory in Ladakh some two months ago? Remember the nonchalance with which our leaders tried to wish it away with all those silly apologies and all's wells? For them it was a bad dream that should have been avoided.

Remember the apologies Indian Ministers put on offer to pooh-pooh the Guardian disclosures about the American snooping of our mission in Washington? The EU, spearheaded by the German Chancellor nearly threatened a breakdown of relations with it strongest ally, the US over the same charge? Remember the reference to the resumption of joint India-China military exercises after Defence Minister Antony's just concluded visit to Beijing? The virtual warning served by a Chinese General only days earlier concerning the border dispute with China, its menacing tone going almost unnoticed.

Such was our obsession with the talks which the Indian National Security Adviser was having on the self-same border dispute with his Chinese counterpart in Beijing that we forgot that Chinese do not normally issue threats as a prelude to supposedly serious meetings, particularly when the talks are heralded as possible beginning of a new era, as significant as the change of leadership in the country, a decennial one in China.

Ostrich-like, we continue to choose not to see, shut our eyes, dig our heads into the sand, allowing ourselves to be blinded by the hyperbole of our own imaginations.

To go by our National Security Adviser's talks with the Chinese High Representative the two countries did agree, after decades of talks, to work out a framework for future talks. So wait and see. Trust our Chinese

neighbour to tell us about the framework. I hope that doesn't, like the General in question, include handing over Arunachal Pradesh to China.

I was in fact impressed with the Pakistan Prime Minister's visit to China. The other day, Beijing, being the first foreign capital Mr. Nawaz Sharif chose to visit after taking over. Again, he did score over the Indian Government in that he simultaneously dispatched a special emissary, former Foreign Secretary, Mr. Shahryar Khan to New Delhi with a personal message for Dr. Manmohan Singh.

China which has over the years maintained its "all-weather friendship" with Pakistan chose to add a dash of "honey" this time over adding the relations between the two countries were sweeter than honey. It is not relevant to my purpose to mention what all was achieved by the Pakistan Prime Minister

during his Beijing visit but more impressive was that he managed to return with \$ 18 billion in his kitty, almost all of it committed to building and doing up the Karakoram highway, extending it to Xinxiang (Sinkiang), passing through Azad Kashmir etc. and ending up at Gawadar port in Balochistan where the Chinese are now operating the port they built for the host country, Pakistan, as between 'all-weather' friends, has handed over the running of the port to its builders. Assured access to the port is, of course, a coveted prize for Beijing but importantly it is now proposed to build a pipeline from there to Xinxiang.

Incidentally, Xinxiang, the western most province of China, is predominantly Muslim. And they have been rebelling against Beijing for years. The Ughuir population is current-

ly faced with the problem of Chinese Hans being relocated to Xinxiang with the sole purpose of colonizing it to effect a demographic change in the province. Ughuirs and other Muslim sects there have close links with terrorist outfits including those in Pakistan, Afghanistan and some of the Central Asian republics like the Tajiks, for instance.

So the Chinese are busy consolidating their position in that region in sharp contrast to New Delhi, as has been its wont, continues to keep talking with Iran on developing the Chabahar port in south-eastern Iran - only a short distance away from Gawadar port in Balochistan.

For almost a decade India has shown interest in developing the Chabahar and the surrounding area as a regional commercial hub.

It was first discussed when the former Iranian President Mohammad Khatani came to New Delhi in 2003. "Serious" talks were resumed a decade later and only after China offered a 60 million credit line to Tehran, close to the prospective Indian investment in Chabahar and presumably a precursor to a Chinese bid there.

With the imminent withdrawal of the Americans from Afghanistan, India, Iran and Kabul got together on the sidelines of the NAM summit in Tehran last year to secure their interests. That's how Chabahar project got a fresh lease of life. Delhi needs overland access to Afghanistan for the shipment of its goods and other projects of Afghan reconstruction as well as development of its mineral resources.

Chabahar provides precisely such access, via an Iranian-built road to western Afghan border linked to the

Need to boost State agriculture

Shiban Khaibri

Despite the fact that the state of Jammu and Kashmir having a population of 1.26 crores and being basically an agrarian economy, is importing food grains and all required edible items from other states and the current scenario is that, day in and day out, the pressure on the scarce land is mounting for non agricultural uses. It may look incredible but it is only a fact that our state has become a food deficit state by as much as nearly 40% and if remedial measures are not immediately taken, it might take a worst scenario by crossing the figures of 50% by 2030. A meager amount of Rs.1095 crores or 3.74% of the total budget is proposed to be spent on Agriculture and allied activities as per the provisions of the state budget of 2013-14. This does not include the massive central assistance in this sector for schemes like Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna (RKVY), saffron growing mission, technology improvement mission and animal husbandry sector. In the views of the state agricultural minister, the avoidable situation has accentuated because of the conversion of agricultural land for commercial use as also switching over to horticulture sector by most of the farmers engaged in conventional core agricultural activities. The other sordid story about the participation in the agricultural activities is that only a meager 28% of the people are involved in agricultural activities. Also the percentage of cultivation has climbed down to 28% in 2011 from 41.10 in 1961. There has been considerable decrease in the number of cultivators and that was bound to aggravate the problem of shortfall in the food production. There has been no comprehensive study undertaken to account for the reasons responsible for lesser number of people taking to farming. The other interesting factor is that many from among the farming sections especially in the valley are not seen interested in carrying out cultivation of their own agricultural land and do employ labour force from other states. The national figures too are not encouraging that way and as per the census of 2011, absolute number of cultivators has fallen by 90 lacs in just two decades while proportion of agricultural labour has increased by 3.5% which could be explained by the falling size of land holdings over the period under reference.

If we could really visualize that land is that which is supplied by nature and is not, not even in the least, made by man, perhaps we could value its utility in countless magnitude. It supports and sustains our lives, every aspect of it -- right from our birth to our death. Land is sacrosanct to the civilization, culture and all institutions of the mankind. The stark fact, however, about land is that it is absolutely fixed in supply, completely inelastic and cannot be made, manufactured or reproduced. That also speaks about the dangers, the unbearable pressures, the fixed land has to undergo as a result of catering to the needs of the ever increasing human population. How much can we milk the existing, rather shrinking land for producing enough to feed teeming millions, not only existing ones, but those which are getting added every year to it, is a very sensitive question having far reaching ramifications. It also cannot be made mobile. Then how come is the agricultural land getting converted into non agricultural uses in brazen violations of the existing laws, not to speak of the new bills thought of to be introduced in the state legislature for prohibiting such conversions?

Shocking, as it may appear, the lush green paddy fields from Qazigund down to Pampore in Kashmir valley and likewise in other southern, western and eastern sides of the valley have considerably shrunk and replaced by buildings, business establishments and shopping rows. Same is the position, though not to the alarming extent, in Jammu division, be it Jammu Bari Brahmana Vijaypur or Jammu R.S.Pura or Jammu Srinagar national highway areas. Coming up of new unplanned colonies on agricultural land has and is causing huge impact on the food production. In Jammu division, however, the production of food grains has not suffered as it has been in Kashmir valley. The reasons other than conversion are construction of roads and bridges from out of the agricultural land, the acquisition of massive chunks of land for laying railway lines, industrial estates and the like. The fragmentation of joint families and increase in nuclear families has resulted in massive increase in demand for housing projects and colonies. The increase in money incomes and improved life styles in many cases too have led to drop in labour intensive and time and energy requiring core agricultural activities and such farmers either are turning to cultivating cash crops or going in for horticulture area. About growing of vegetables, the production is not sufficient to cater to the needs of the state including for the tourists visiting the state in lacs in peak months, resulting in the import of vegetables from other states resulting in them being sold in the market comparatively at unaffordable prices by the common people with fixed incomes. Many erstwhile famous varieties of vegetables grown in specific areas are not grown at all and have vanished as housing colonies have sprung up there.

Though there are several laws in the statute to protect agricultural land from illegal conversions like Land Revenue Act, Agrarian Reforms Act, prohibition of conversion of land and alienation of orchards act, still a need was felt some three years back to bring in a stringent law to prohibit conversion of agricultural land and a bill was drafted and introduced in the Legislative Assembly in 2011 which was referred to the select committee. As is wont with the state leadership to act in a lackadaisical style in such matters, more than two years have gone but there has been absolutely no progress in the matter while the existing laws too have been very rarely invoked against the defaulters. It is a travesty that the members on the select committee could not develop consensus on the subject even after three extensions were obtained by them. The bill having thereafter gone to the Joint Select Committee for consideration in the budget session 2013 has reportedly not met even once so far. The critics and analysts may argue that there being sufficiently enough laws in force already which prohibit conversion of any type of agricultural land, going in for a new enactment and that too not known when, is tantamount to allowing things to go the other way. The state as a policy matter, has been preparing district plans for the last 30 years aiming to strengthen the decentralization of planning process but agricultural sector does not seem to have been given the required preferred attention. If some bold steps are not taken irrespective of pressures or considerations from whatever quarters to stop further shrinkage of agricultural land, things might get worse in the years to come.

Right to food

Amulya Ganguli

The desperate hurry with which the Manmohan Singh Government pushed through the food security ordinance showed that the Congress had realised that it had nothing to show for its last four and a half years in office. The economy has slumped, inflation has risen and foreign investments have dried up. To deepen the mood of doom and gloom, the Prime Minister has become even more tongue-tied while the finance minister's occasional attempts to talk up the economy impress no one.

The party had no alternative, therefore, but to fall back on the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty to rescue it. And, the only recipe which the Congress's first family could think of was a heady dose of populism. The return of the paternalistic, mai-baap sarkar is not unwarranted in a situation where the economic reforms with their emphasis on free enterprise and individual initiative are petering out with the growth rate beginning to resemble the "Hindu rate" of the licence-permit raj.

It is doubtful, however, to what extent the ordinance will bring in votes for the Congress. As of now, it is no more than a paper exercise. In a way, this is better for the party since the manifold flaws of the measure will not become apparent till after the elections, especially the

next general election in case it is brought forward. Till then, the party can flaunt the ordinance to claim how its heart bleeds for the poor.

It is only much later that the fallout from the profligacy of the measure, which makes a mockery of fiscal discipline and increases the burden of subsidy well beyond tolerable limits, will begin to be felt. The Congress president, however, is less interested in the long-term effects than on immediate electoral gains. Besides, she probably always thought that the reforms were a bad idea.

Brought up in Indira Gandhi's household in her formative years as a young member of the family who was new to India, Sonia evidently imbibed to the full her mother-in-law's insistence on following the socialistic precepts based on the Congress's 1955 promise to introduce a "socialistic pattern of society". Not surprisingly, the party's resolution at a conclave in Shimla in 2003 was to open up the private sector to the quota system for employment.

The Congress wasn't aware at the time that it was on the verge of winning power after eight years. Moreover, its success in 2004 was not because the electorate was eagerly awaiting the "nationalisation" of the private sector, but because of the BJP's follies, viz. the Gujarat riots of 2002, which were held responsible by Atal

Bihari Vajpayee for his party's defeat.

If the Congress did not try to strangle the private sector on coming to power, the reason was that the reforms initiated by the Vajpayee Government had acquired a momentum. Since these were in tune with the market-oriented policies prescribed by the Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh duo in 1991, the Congress had no option but to carry on. It was believed at the time that Manmohan Singh had picked up the threads where he had left them in 1996.

But, it was an illusion. If the prime minister had genuinely come to believe that socialism was an "outdated ideology", as he said recently, he did not have the gumption to go against Sonia Gandhi's preference for the concept. Hence, the absence of what is called big-ticket reforms. Although this failure was earlier ascribed to the presence of the Left on the Government's side, it was mainly Sonia Gandhi's reluctance to allow the full flowering of the reforms, which tied the Government's hands.

The higher growth during UPA-1 and the early years of UPA-2 was a continuation of the process, which started in Vajpayee's time. But, the effects of the disinclination to pursue reforms are now evident in the falling rupee and with the economy in the doldrums. Arguably, Sonia Gandhi has belatedly

realised that the best atmosphere for elections is not one of stagflation. But, her answer, in accordance with the advice of her left-of-centre National Advisory Council, is to throw money and food at the poor.

While the rural employment scheme demonstrates how money can be spent on unproductive expenditure - "how many ditches will you dig? how many ponds will you rebuild? how much forestation will you do?" as the rural development minister Jairam Ramesh asked recently - the right to food, which aims to provide 5 kg of food grains at throwaway prices to 67 per cent of India's 1.2 billion population with an annual expenditure of Rs 1,24,724 crore, is an example of an extravagant dole.

Yet, like the right to education which has led to a situation where only 30 per cent of Class III students can read Class I textbooks because there are no examinations till Class VIII, Sonia Gandhi is not interested in what actually happens on the ground, but in making the gesture of a munificent feudal family.

There is little doubt that the logistics of procuring 600 lakh tonnes of food grains and storing, transporting and distributing them are beyond the creaky capacity of the corruption-ridden Food Corporation. But, it will be for the next Government to clean up the mess. (IPA)

The Black Day

Sir,

The Government that claims to be secular and nationalist is observing the black day of 13th July as a Martyrs Day every year. It was a part of a communal movement which spread up to the farthest corner of the State that is Kothi and Mirpur and thus keeping this communal tension alive. The happening on that day is not likely to be taken as free from prejudice unless supported by authentic and impartial version available and leave the reader to form his own opinion, as to whether the persons who were killed as a result of the police/military firing during these communal disturbances created, merited being officially declared as national martyrs.

Such is the origin of the Martyrs Day which is now being officially observed as National Day by the so called secular Government.

Here is how Mr G S Raghavan formerly Editor of the "Hindustan Times" the "Nation" the "Sunday Times" and other papers described these happenings in Srinagar in his book 'The warning of Kashmir' published in 1931.

"He says :

"The hearing in jail fall on 13th July. On that day, a mob stormed the jail and demanded admittance along with the Sessions Judge. When the Judge had passed the gates, the crowd also attempted to get in. The other gates had been forced and the inner gates were

attacked. At the suggestion of the Judge, two Muslim lawyers representing the accused harangued the visitors to go out of the jail precincts. Findings that there was no possibility of ingress, the crowd went out and started stoning officials and set fire to the police lines. The Police force was then called in. All efforts to pacify the unruly mobs proved futile. While there was commotion outside the jail there was also disturbances inside. Prisoners tried to force the front gates. About this time, certain prisoners were being taken from the court to the jail. The crowd stoned the policemen and the prisoners were liberated.

The prospect was by no means satisfactory. The District Magistrate's order was defied, who had been summoned to the spot by the time, declared the crowd to be an "unlawful assembly" and ordered its dispersal. The order was defied and finding that the mob could neither be pacified nor dispersed, the District Magistrate directed fire to be opened. The crowd fell off but later it re-assembled and resumed stoning. It had to be dispersed with a Lathi charge. Part of the crowd, however, moved towards the Hari Parbat Fort; the cov- alry had to pursue it and disperse it again. A section of the recalcitrants proceeded towards a place called Maharaj Ganj which is a business locality and loot over an extensive area followed. From Bhoori Kadal to Alikadal-a

long stretch, the Hindu shops was raided. Other localities such as Safakadal, Ganji Khud and Nawakadal too formed the centres of loot. Bazar streets were littered with property, books of accounts were burnt, the Hindu shopkeepers were molested, in short pandemonium prevailed."

"The Hindu merchants lost lakhs worth of goods. Mr Wakefield has affirmed that the articles were so strewn about the roads that his car would not pass, it is also his testimony that not a single Mohamedan complained to him about his premises having been invaded by the looters."

"The most extraordinary portion of the story was that almost simultaneously with the happenings at Srinagar, there was an uprising at a place named Vicharnag, some 5 to 6 miles away. It had been stated that untold atrocities were committed there; men owning lakhs were reduced to indigence and women were subjected to the worst possible and the most indecent assaults. A military force was dispatched to the place, but by that time the havoc had been completed. Elsewhere, the Hindus were the victims of ambuscade. Some lost their lives and many suffered physical injuries. Stray assaults continued till long after."

Yours etc...
Yuvraj Gupta
31/7, Trikuta Nagar Jammu

Readers Write

No eye on earthquake victims

Sir,

With great displeasure we are putting some light on the victims of earthquake that rocked Doda Distt. two months ago.

Even after a long gap the Govt. has not taken proper steps to help affected people.

The people whose houses have been damaged have not yet received any funds from Govt. Apart from people the students have also suffered a lot in their studies. The school buildings which were damaged have not been constructed as they would have been. The students are attending schools for very short periods due to lack of arrangements.

Until now Govt. has not done what they were required to do or what local people of Distt. Doda hoped from them. The funds which were given for people have not reached. No major importance has been given to local people.

So it is highly hoped that the concerned authority and officers will look into this matter and will honestly and strictly do what they are required to and for what they are paid for.

Yours etc...
Nitin Raina and others,
Bhadarwah