

Tripura CPM says import curbs on Bangladeshi products will affect people on both sides of border

While trade representatives have welcomed the central government's import restrictions, the Opposition CPM has emerged as the first voice of dissent.

Tripura's Leader of the Opposition Jitendra Chaudhury said on Wednesday the central government's import restrictions on Bangladeshi products would lead to losses for both India and the neighbouring country, even as he acknowledged what he said were the probable triggers for the curbs.

"A slew of anti-India comments were coming from Bangladesh with encouragement from the Bangladeshi administration. A lot of human trafficking of Bangladeshi nationals into Tripura also came to the fore recently. I feel these restrictions might have been temporarily imposed because of all these reasons," the CPM leader told reporters.

However, Chaudhury said trade and commerce "benefit a country, subcontinent, continents, and international relations in economic, cultural, social, and political aspects".

"This (restriction) is a loss for us indeed", he added. "Trade and commerce means economic transactions and expansion of scope of employment. If this is stopped, it would lead to loss not only for us, but for people on the other side of the border as well."

Two days ago, the director of the industries and commerce department, Shailesh Kumar Yadav, chaired a meeting at the Integrated Check Post in Agartala to discuss the Centre's new import restrictions.

In the meeting, Yadav said that some items including edible oil, fish, LPG and crushed stone would be exempt from the restrictions.

The meeting, also attended by officials including from the BSF and the customs and immigration departments, discussed concerns related to the Directorate General of Foreign Trade's order restricting the import of items including garments, plastic goods, wooden furniture, fruit drinks, processed food through any land customs stations or integrated check posts in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura as well as through land customs stations at Changrabandha and Fulbari in West Bengal.

While trade representatives have welcomed the restrictions and committed to complying with them, the Opposition CPM has emerged as the first voice of dissent.

Asked when elections might be held in Bangladesh, especially given that the chief advisor's administration has been delaying polls since the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government's fall last year, Chaudhury said, "I can't comment on whether or when elections will be held in Bangladesh. But they are descendants of the 1971 Liberation War tradition. They are the torch-bearers of that tradition. So, that spirit can be hijacked for the time being... The Jamaat-e-Islami or forces who supported Pakistan as razakars (in 1971) can't always suppress the conscience of Bangladeshi citizens forever. I can't, however, comment on whether the elections will be held in December".

Chaudhury, who visited Bollamukha near the international border at Belonia in South Tripura district, said many parts of the area were inundated in pre-monsoon rain, which also caused crop damage, adding that waterlogging and flooding were likely in the forthcoming monsoon as natural

water flow to the Indian side had been hampered by an embankment built on the Bangladesh side.

Chaudhury, who was accompanied by local MLA Dipankar Sen, Ashok Mitra and others, called for steps to be taken on a war footing to tackle the situation.

Amid tensions over the embankment built in Bangladesh in April, months after a similar structure was seen near the international border at Devipur in Tripura's Unakoti district, a state government team visited Belonia and border villages, and held discussions with public representatives, the district magistrate, and other officials. The visiting officials then said repair work on embankments on the Indian side damaged in last year's devastating floods would be completed by June.