



News & News

(Dec-2005/Jan-2006)

nepal

SAARC Summit ends with pledge to fight poverty

The thirteenth summit meeting of heads of state or government of member countries of SAARC concluded in Dhaka on 13 November 2005 stressing the need for collective efforts to foster mutual understanding and cooperation amongst each other.

In the Dhaka Declaration, His Majesty the King and other SAARC leaders have reaffirmed their resolve to strengthen cooperation in trade, social welfare, environment and disaster mitigation.

New chairperson of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Prime Minister of the host country Begum Khaleda Zia chaired the concluding session of the Summit.

His Majesty the King attended the concluding session together with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz of Pakistan, Prime Minister Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup of Bhutan and President of the Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom.

The SAARC leaders also adopted the reports of the 25th and 26 Session of the SAARC Council of Ministers as well as the Declaration of the 13th SAARC summit before concluding the Summit.

Meanwhile, His Majesty the King along with other heads of state or government of SAARC countries

had a retreat at the State Guest House at Jamuna in Dhaka.

New chairperson of SAARC Begum Khaleda Zia accorded the distinguished guests a warm welcome on their arrival. The SAARC leaders are learnt to have had informal consultations during the retreat.

During the retreat three agreements namely the Agreement on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matter, the Agreement on the Establishment of SAARC Arbitration Council and the Limited Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters were signed in the presence of the SAARC leaders.

Nepal - Pakistan JBC Meeting Concluded with Fruitful Decisions

Entrepreneurs during the second Nepal - Pakistan Joint Business Council (JBC) meeting in Kathmandu have renewed their zeal to expand trade and economic ties between two countries in the days come.

They have reached an agreement to expand bilateral trade, joint investment and tourism promotion in the meeting held at the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) secretariat. JBC is the joint body of FNCCI and Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI).

Nepali entrepreneurs asked the duty free access for more products besides 'tea and jute' to Pakistan. "There is a huge potential for Nepali and Pakistani joint investment in the areas of pharmaceutical, tourism, herbs", textile, hydropower etc.

"The Nepali delegates also underlined the need to start Kathmandu-Lahore direct flights to fuel business and economic activities and increase flow of tourists,"

The meet decided to organise trade fairs in both the countries, start training

programmes, ask their respective governments to grant free visa to promote tourism and trade. The joint meeting also agreed to hold next meeting in Lahore, Pakistan by the end of 2006.

Chandi Raj Dhakal, president of FNCCI led the Nepali team, while Chaudhary Mohammad Saeed, president of FPCCI led the Pakistani delegation. Senior Nepali government officials, Pakistani ambassador to Nepal and business representatives from both the countries took part in the council meeting.

Dhakal said, "After the implementation of SAFTA, mutual cooperation in regional level will increase." He urged the Pakistani delegation to invest in Nepal. "Regular exchange of information, business delegations and organising trade fairs will further boost trade between our friendly nations."

Similarly, Saeed expressed concerns over the low volume of trade, despite a trade treaty between Nepal

and Pakistan some 23 years ago. "Trade volume between the two countries is negligible. In such a context, both countries should pay extra heed in expanding bilateral trade."

Pakistani Ambassador to Nepal Soheil Amin underscored the need to take stock of the issues raised in the meeting. He informed that he is trying hard to expand trade and economic ties between the two countries.

Binod Bahadur Shrestha, immediate past president of FNCCI and coordinator of JBC said that the meet would be instrumental in expanding private sector's role in identifying new areas of cooperation for economic advancement in both the countries.

The Remittance Accounts nearly 12 % of GDP

South Asia's economic growth is expected to remain 6.9 per cent in 2005 with the contribution of India's estimated growth about 7 per cent and Pakistan's 6.6 per cent, a World Bank's Global Economic Prospects (GEP) for 2006 stated.

But, growth of other South Asian countries is estimated to decline to 5.1

per cent in 2005 from 5.9 per cent 2004. It is because of increased political instability in Nepal and Bangladesh, flooding in Bangladesh, and after effects of the Tsunami in Maldives and to a lesser extent in Sri Lanka.

The increased oil price is expected to generate substantial economic cost to oil importing poor

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countries. In South Asian, financial burden of higher oil price is expected to be passed to the consumers causing higher prices of commodities and higher taxes.

Persistent global imbalance and rising public debt in high income countries are other reasons that can dampen growth prospect with long-term interest rate rise.

However, the report pointed out the recent strong economic performance of developing countries as backbone to sustain global economic growth. A long-term growth in South Asia is forecasted to remain at around 5.5 per cent during 2007-2015. Trade reforms, banking sector liberalization, privatisation and infrastructure development are expected to improve the investment climate, productivity growth and income in South Asia.

The GEP entitled 'The Economic Implications of Remittance and Migration' said that international migration could generate substantial welfare gains to migrants and their families, as well as their origin countries and destination countries if policies to better management of migration are introduced.

It said that remittance had contributed to decline poverty in several low income countries including 11 per cent in Uganda, six per cent in Bangladesh and five per cent in Ghana.

The remittance also contributes to increased household investment in education, health and entrepreneurial activities.

The report said that South Asia is expected to receive an estimated US\$ 32 billion in 2005, a 67 per cent increase from 2001. The remittance accounts nearly 12 per cent of Gross Domestic Products (GDP) of Nepal. India will be the largest recipient of remittance of about US\$ 21.7 billion in the world in 2005. Developing countries received 30-35 per cent of remittance from other developing countries. "In South Asia, most of the migrants move to another developing countries," the World Bank said.

The WB said that developing countries are the major beneficiaries of remittance as US\$ 143 billion goes to developing countries and the high income countries receive only US\$ 51 billion.

The report has suggested the developing countries to seek agreement with countries to which their nationals migrate in order to improve the condition under which they cross borders, maintain employment and send a part of their income home.

Growth in exports drops

Despite the efforts by both the private and public sector to boost Nepal's exports, growth in exports continues to decline. The downward trend in export started from the last fiscal year.

A massive decline in exports in the Nepali readymade garment in the main reason behind the sluggish exports growth, particularly to the third countries. Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), in its recent macro-economic report, has stated that though the country witnessed a rise of 15.6 per cent in total exports during the month of Shrawan. However, it is still behind the total exports during the same period in the last fiscal, when it had recorded a growth of 22.5 per cent.

According to the central bank's statistics, the total imports during the first month of the current fiscal has increased remarkably 34.4 per cent. It had risen by only 5.8 per cent during the corresponding period in the fiscal 2004-05.

During the month of Shrawan, Nepal exported various goods worth about Rs 5.17 billion, whereas total imports exceeded the figure and stood at Rs 13.46 billion. Dut to sharp increase in imports vis-a-vis exports, trade deficit during the month stood at Rs 8.30 billion.

According to NRB figures, Nepal's exports had registered an increment of eight per cent during the fiscal year 2003-04 and almost the same level of about eight per cent to Rs 58.24 billion in 2004-05.

"Exports have not been able to achieve the expected growth," says an official at NRB, adding that such a trend will affect the overall economy in the coming days.

Quota system phase out following the termination of multi-fibre arrangement (MFA) has hit the Nepali readymade garment exports hard, resulting in the slowdown in the overall foreign trade.

The NRB official stressed the need of market diversification, stating that the single country concentration would not be beneficial for external trade in the long run.

Tourist arrival by air goes up by 14 %

The number of tourists visiting Nepal by air in the month of November of 2005 has gone up by 14 per cent compared to the number during the month last year.

A total of 27,511 foreign tourists came to Nepal in November of 2005 by using the air route, according to the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation. The number of tourists visiting Nepal during the same period last year was 24,095.

The number of tourists arriving Nepal from India in November this year has gone up by 30 per cent and the number of tourists from the third countries by about 10 per cent, the Ministry has stated in a press communique.

About 250,700 foreign tourists in total visited Nepal in the first 11 months of this year, it is stated.

SAARC

Agri credit flow in India rises 56%

Bank credit flow to the agriculture sector has seen an increase of about 56%, touching Rs 83,502 crore in the first half of the current fiscal against Rs 53,550 crore in the corresponding period last year.

Of the total sum of Rs 83,502 crore disbursed by commercial banks, co-operative banks and regional rural banks (RRBs) disbursed 59% of the annual target of Rs 1,41,000 crore and 111% of the target of Rs 75,000 crore, which has been set for the April-September period, according to an official release.

Public sector banks disbursed Rs 47,489 crore, which is 56.87%, while co-operative banks provided a total credit of Rs 19,924 crore

or 23.86%. Private commercial banks and RRBs disbursed Rs 8,175 crore and Rs 7,914 crore respectively.

As per the statement, co-operative banks have disbursed Rs 18,230 crore as crop loans and Rs 1,694 crore as term loans out of the total credit flow of Rs 19,924 crore.

Out of total credit disbursement of Rs 7,914 crore by RRBs, Rs 7,020 crore (89%) was for Rs 894 crore for term loan.

35 SEZs get green signal in India

The board of approval special economic Zones (SEZs) has given the green signal to 35 projects including a formal approval to Reliance's Rs 16,000 crore petrochemicals SEZ at Jamnagar and a number of it-based special zones of companies like Tata Consultancy Services, HCL, Dalmia and syntel International. A total of 60 proposals were considered by the board.

Three 1,000 acre multi-product zones have also been cleared which include Rajasthan Explosives' proposal for an SEZ at Dhaulpur, Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation's proposal for a special economic zone at Krishnagiri and SRM Infrastructure's SEZ in Mewat, Haryana.

Syntel International's proposals for two IT-based SEZs, one each in Pune and Bangalore, have been approved while TCS has received the go-ahead to set up a project in Chennai. The board of approval meeting was chaired by commerce additional secretary GK Pillai.

Other IT-based SEZs which have got the approval include HCL in Noida, Unitech, and Dalmia SEZ in West Bengal. The Dalmia SEZ will be spread over 3.5 million sq ft. The IT SEZs are expected to result in investments worth Rs 4,000 crore.

Other important clearances include Adidas' proposal for a footwear SEZ at an investment of Rs 300 crore over 100 hectare in Tamil Nadu and Dlvi Lab's Rs 300 crore pharma SEZ.

The RILSEZ, which would be spread over 14,000 acres, will house the company's own facility besides those of other companies in the petrochemical sector. The board had cleared 17 proposals recently.

Pakistanis pin hopes on cross-border business

With Pakistan's exports to India registering 86% increase in the first five months of the current fiscal over the same period last year, businessmen from Pakistan are optimistic that opening of five points on LoC for transporting relief material to earthquake-ravaged Pakistani regions, could pave the way for more intimate people-to-people and business relations between the two countries.

According to them, post earthquake humanitarian efforts by India can provide impetus to make trade between India and Pakistan reach the \$5 billion mark in the next two years. These are the findings of a recent PHDCCL survey.

Advocating the promotion of surface trade over the existing overdependence on sea trade via a third country, 90% of the delegates suggested that emulating the J & K example, such points across the international border should also be considered. It would not only make intra-region movement of the goods of both the countries easy, but would also open up new vistas in the whole South Asian region for their goods.

Such intended measures would also help the exporters of both the countries reduce their transport costs. According to them, opening up of the Wagah border itself would pave the way for Pakistan becoming a gateway for Indian goods to Central Asian countries.

90% of the respondents said that MFN status granted by India to Pakistan is by itself not sufficient to promote balanced trade relationship between the two countries.

ADB lends \$ 20m to Sri Lanka

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) said in Manila recently it is extending a loan of \$20 million to improve technical education and vocational training in Sri Lanka.

The loan will go to raising the quality and standards of programmes for technicians through the upgrading of six technical colleges and the strengthening of the Ministry of Skills Development, Vocational and Technical Education (MSDVTE) and other relevant institutions, the ADB said.

Additionally, the loan will help establish a University of Vocational Technology to address the shortage of technology specialists and qualified instructors for technical education, the ADB said in a statement from its headquarters in the Philippine capital.

The loan carries a 32-year term, including a grace period of eight years and an interest rate of one per cent per annum during the grace period and 1.5 per cent afterwards.

ASIA

China's trade surplus swells

China's trade surplus swelled to a record \$12.01 billion in October, the government reported, as US and European retailers bought more Chinese made toys, televisions and computers in the run-up to Christmas.

The surplus widened from \$7.56 billion in September as exports jumped 29.7 per cent from a year earlier, outpacing a 23.4 per cent gain in imports, the customs bureau said on its Web site.

"China's trade surplus will remain a sticking point between China and the US," said Chen Xingdong, the chief China economist at BNP Paribas Peregrine Securities in Beijing. "It's hard to close the trade gap because there's very little China can buy from abroad that it doesn't already make."

Exports amounted to \$68.1 billion and imports totaled \$56.1 billion, the customs bureau said.

What China wants to import raw materials like oil and products with "high

technological content" – it often finds difficult to obtain, Chen said.

US, China sign deal on textiles

The US and China signed a deal to resolve a trade dispute over imports of Chinese clothing and textile products into the United States, US and Chinese officials said recently.

The deal, announced by US Trade Representative Rob Portman and Chinese Commerce Minister Bo Xilai, would take effect Jan. 1 and cover 34 clothing and textile categories including 14 that the US industry considers the most sensitive. Portman said the agreement was fair to both countries, and called it an example of what "hard work" and "good faith" could accomplish.

Bo, speaking through a translator, called it a "win-win" situation for both China and the US after three months of "practical and equal negotiations."

However, he also said the agreement would have a much greater impact on China's 20 million textile workers than the several hundred workers in the US. "I know that Mr. Portman has shown some flexibility at the end of the day, but I don't think that's enough," Bo said. "That's still a far cry from our original expectations."

The agreement would allow for imports of most clothing and textile categories covered by the deal to increase by 8 to 10 per cent in 2006, by 12.5 per cent in 2007 and by 15 to 16 per cent for 2008. All of these percentages are above the 7.5 per cent growth allowed under safeguard procedures the US has been imposing.

Japan's economy crawling along

Japan's industrial output growth remained sluggish in October while the jobless rate saw the sharpest deterioration in more than a year, official figures showed recently, suggesting the world's second-largest economy is recovering but at a slow pace.

The trade ministry said October industrial output rose 0.6 per cent from September, the third consecutive monthly expansion but defying hopes of a stronger pick-up.

Separate data showed the unemployment rate rose to 4.5 per cent in October from 4.2 per cent in September, the first increase in three months.

Both sets of figures fell short of expectations.

Industrial output picked up 0.4 per cent in September but economists had been looking for growth of about 1.2 per cent in October after the previous month's disappointing figures.

"We have seen the same thing for the past few months – a forecast of high growth and then the figure turns out to be lower than expected," said Toshio Sumitani, economist at Tokai Tokyo Research Center.

"Auto makers and some other sectors are faring well but overall production cannot be said to have broken out of a standstill yet," he said.

The government also said spending by households headed by wage earners in October rose 1.3 per cent in real terms from the previous year to an average 325,501 Yen (2,720 dollars), posting the first rise in four months.

As more companies boost customary winter bonuses after robust earnings, "personal spending towards the year-end is likely to pick up," Sumitani said.

Consumer spending underpins more than a half of the economy and is playing a key role in keeping Japan's recovery on track.

South Korea's economic recovery picks up

The South Korean economy picked up speed in the three months to September, with consumer spending logging the highest growth rate in 11 quarters, the central bank said recently.

Gross domestic product (GDP), the total output of goods and services produced in the economy, rose 4.4 per cent from a year earlier in the July-September period, the Bank of Korea (BOK) said. Compared with the three months to June, GDP expanded 1.8 per cent, the strongest sequential gain in seven quarters.

GDP grew 3.3 per cent year-on-year in the three months to June after a 2.7 per cent gain in the first quarter, with the latest figures showing that the recovery in Asia's fourth-largest economy continues to pick up pace after being in the doldrums for several years.

"Growing consumer spending is picking up momentum (while) exports jumped by a large margin," the central bank said in a statement.

Consumer spending increased 4.0 per cent in the third quarter from a year ago, the highest growth rate in 11 quarters and well up on the 2.8 per cent gain in the three months to June.

US, ASEAN agree to push for trade, investment agreement

The United States and Southeast Asian nations have agreed to work for a region-wide trade and investment as part of efforts to improve ties clouded by a dispute over Myanmar.

Both sides released a "Joint Vision Statement on the ASEAN-US Enhanced Partnership" ahead of recent meeting between seven Southeast Asian leaders and US President George W. Bush at a regional summit in South Korea. The statement said ASEAN and the United States had agreed to launch a partnership covering cooperation in the political, security, economic, social and development fields.

On the economic front, the two parties agreed "to work together to conclude a region-wide ASEAN-United States Trade and Investment Framework Agreement" said the statement. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. It offers a combined market of more than 500 million people.

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A Southeast Asian trade official attending the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum said the statement could lay the ground work for a US-ASEAN free trade pact.

WORLD

US economy added 56,000 jobs

US economy added 56,000 jobs in October, the Labour Department said recently in a report weaker than anticipated by private economists.

The report showed the jobless rate, based on a separate calculation, decreased to 5.0 per cent from 5.1 per cent in October.

The report suggested a sluggish recovery in the labour market after hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Job creation, seen as one of the best indicators of economic momentum, was weaker than the 100,000 estimated on Wall Street.

But the report included a revision showing a slightly better picture for September – a loss of 8,000 jobs compared with the prior estimate of a loss of 35,000.

US trade deficit rises

The US trade deficit exploded to a new record high of 66.1 billion dollars in September, data showed recently, intensifying political tension as oil imports surged and Chinese goods flooded in.

A strike at aviation giant Boeing in September also contributed to the gap between US imports and exports widening from August's deficit of 59.3 billion dollars.

The new figure reported by the Commerce Department smashed the previous high of 60.6 billion dollars reached in February and was also far higher than Wall Street's forecast of 61.3 billion dollars.

White House spokesman Scott McClellan blamed rising energy imports in response to the havoc caused by hurricanes Katrina and Rita, as well as the Boeing strike that dampened exports of aircraft.

"It's important that we continue opening markets to American products, on a level playing field, and that's what we're going to continue to do," he said.

But Democrats were scornful of the administration's trade policies and demanded action in particular against China, which stands accused of manipulating its currency among other practices to bolster its exports.

"The trade deficit report measures the rate at which we are selling our country off, piece by piece, shipping American jobs overseas, and draining our national financial resources," Democratic Senator Byron Dorgan said.

"The president and Congress need to get their collective heads out of the sand," he said. "We've got a serious significant and chronic problem and it requires urgent action."

Growth of the British economy slowed

Growth of the British economy slowed during the third quarter, official data showed recently raising pressure on finance minister Gordon Brown to lower his optimistic fiscal targets analysts said.

The economy grew by 0.4 per cent during the third quarter of 2005 compared with 0.5 per cent for the previous three-month period, according to initial estimates from the National Statistics office.

Gross domestic product (GDP) growth on a 12-month comparison stood at 1.6 per cent during the third quarter, taking the annual rate up from a 12-year low of 1.5 per cent in the previous quarter.

Russia keen on stake in India-Iran pipeline

In a major snub to US geopolitical interests, Russian energy minister Victor Khristenko recently said his country wants to be part of the \$7-billion India-Iran gas pipeline. Brushing aside US threats of sanctions, he said Russian oil company Gazprom will share the risks involved in the project and will work towards making it a real time project.

Speaking to reporters at the sidelines of the ministerial round table Mr. Khristenko said: "Yes we have proposed that Russia and Russian company, Gazprom, is prepared to share the risk along the route of the pipeline project. We do hope that other stake holders will be benign towards possibly sharing risks with Russia and Gazprom so that such Projects can move from potential phase to real time discussion and project implementation.

India is expected to formalise a trilateral agreement between India, Pakistan and Iran by January to give shape to this project. The petroleum Ministry will seek Cabinet approval in January year for entering into a trilateral agreement with Iran and Pakistan for importing natural gas through the over US \$ 7 billion Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline.

German inflation slows

Inflation in Germany, the euro zone's biggest economy, slowed slightly in October after topping its highest level in more than four years the previous month, final data showed recently.

The German consumer price index (CPI) was unchanged in October from the figure for September and was 2.3 per cent higher than it had been in October 2004, the federal statistics office Destatis said in a statement.

The 12-month rate of change in therefore lower than the 2.5 per cent recorded in September.

"The annual rate of inflation continued to be strong affected by the president rise in energy prices," the statisticians wrote in a statement.

Excluding heating oil and fuel prices, CPI would have edged up by 0.1 per cent month-on-month and risen by just 1.8 per cent year-on-year in October, they calculated.

Australian inflation set to rise

Inflation in Australia is expected to increase gradually over the coming year, the central bank said recently, but economists were comfortable that an interest rate rise is unlikely in the short term.

In its quarterly statement on monetary policy, the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) said risks to inflation, including high oil and labour prices, were being offset as domestic demand growth eased back to a more sustainable pace.

Given these factors, "the rise in inflation is expected to be relatively modest, with underlying inflation levelling out at around three per cent in the second half of 2006," the RBA said.

As the same time, the bank warned that policy will need to be responsive to any sign that demand and inflation pressures are stronger than currently expected.

"The board will continue to monitor unfolding economic developments and make such adjustments to policy as may be required to promote sustainable growth of the economy with low inflation," the RBA said.

For economists, the language suggested little change on balance, accompanied by enough of a note of caution just to keep the markets on notice.

Global GDP up: OECD

Economic growth picked up slightly in major economies during the third quarter, with the United States and eurozone showing the biggest increases, a preliminary estimate released recently by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) showed.

Gross domestic product (GDP) among the 30 members of the OECD rose by 0.8 per cent, 'slightly higher' than the second-quarter figure of 0.7 per cent.

"It was also higher than the 0.6 or 0.7 per cent recorded for the five previous quarters and the average quarterly growth rate over the last nine years of 0.7 per cent", the OECD said.

US growth topped the list at 0.9 per cent, roughly the same as its average for the previous seven quarters, while euro zone GDP rose by 0.6 per cent.

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BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Following Business Opportunities have been received in the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FNCCI). Interested Parties may contact with parties concerned.

IMPORT

1. International Trade Relationship Division

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2. I Schroeder KG (GmbH & Co.)

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• Soapnut shell (Rittha)

3. Opt international Limited

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• Non-Ferrous metal scraps.

EXPORT

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• Home Care Products,
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2. Tri-Star Marketing Company

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8. VIVALUX Co., Ltd.

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9. Wonder-Working International

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11. TriStar Overseas

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12. Liaoning Mec Group Co.Ltd.

28F, World Trade Center,
25, Tongxing Street,
Dalian 116001, China
Http://www.cenfait.com,
Http://www.mec.com.cn
Tel : 0086-411-82103333
Email : cenfaith@sina.com;
cenfaith@hotmail.com

- Small profitable industrial projects : food Machinery; plastic machinery; other profitable projects.

13. Sathuta International (Pvt.) Ltd.

Bathlagoda,
Ibbagamuwa.
Sri Lanka, 60 500
Tel : +94 37 2221836-8
Fax : +94 37 2221839
Email : greensac@sltnet.lk;
greensacinfo@greensac.com

- Cut foliage, pot plants & flowers.