

How does Safta impact Bangladesh's exports?

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SYED MUAZZEM ALI

INDIA-Pakistan ties are accident-prone; and the tragic Bombay blasts of July 11 have surely slowed down their peace dialogue. India alleged that Pakistan, despite its solemn commitment of January 2004, has not been acting decisively against the terrorist groups, like Lashkhar-e-Taiba which, New Delhi believes, have been responsible for the blasts.

India also called off the Indo-Pakistan Foreign Secretary-level composite talks due to be held on July 21. Pakistan reacted sharply to these Indian allegations, demanded that India produce evidence about her involvement before leveling any charges against her, and expressed her readiness to cooperate in the investigations.

The just-concluded Saarc Foreign Ministers Conference, held in Dhaka, thus offered a good opportunity to both the sides to meet on the sidelines and resume their dialogue. The Indian and

Pakistani foreign secretaries met and both sides agreed to resume the peace dialogue for "the benefit of the peoples of the two countries" though no date has been announced for the next round of bilateral talks. While the two sides showed restraint and statesmanship at their bilateral meeting, they clashed on the issue of the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (Safta) and accused each other of obstructing its progress.

The creation of a free trade area is the sin qua non of any regional organization. After years of deliberations, the thirteenth Saarc Summit, held in Dhaka last November, had somewhat hurriedly launched the Safta, but various contentious issues remained unresolved. All these issues surfaced at the Saarc Foreign Ministers Conference.

The Safta, as per the last summit declaration, officially started from July 1, but it is mostly on paper. It was expected that the mid-annual Dhaka meeting would give the much-needed political boost for its

smooth implementation. However, the sharp divergent perceptions of the two largest economies, India and Pakistan, were too deep rooted for the meeting to overcome.

After the first round of meetings of Saarc Standing Committee of Foreign Secretaries, the Indian foreign secretary, at a press conference, accused Pakistan of violating the Safta agreement. He alleged that "though Pakistan signed the agreement which covers all tariff lines excepting the sensitive (negative) list, it has issued a notification which limits Safta tariff concessions for India only on items on the existing bilateral positive list" and he thought that this action was a "clear violation of the Safta agreement's Article 23." Earlier, the Indian side had alleged that Pakistan restricted 773 Indian items despite having ratified the Safta without any reservation.

The Pakistani foreign secretary, at a separate press conference, countered the Indian allegation by saying that Safta has necessary institutional mechanism to resolve

such bilateral trade disputes and that these disputes need not be politicized. He also maintained that their bilateral trade differences were in no way hindering the implementation of the Safta among other Saarc members.

The Pakistani foreign minister also claimed that despite inclusion of various items in their sensitive list, India's exports to Pakistan have increased manifolds during recent years but Pakistan's exports to India did not register any appreciable increase due to stiff tariff structure and non-tariff barriers applied by India.

Despite extensive discussions at the Foreign Minister-level, the issue could not be resolved. The meeting merely noted Indo-Pakistan divergent perceptions and passed it on to the Saarc commerce ministers to settle before the next summit.

Among other issues, the Dhaka meeting decided, in principle, to grant observer status to the United States, South Korea, and the European Union. They would be invited to attend the next Saarc Summit in India next April. The last summit had earlier decided to admit Afghanistan as a full member and China and Japan as observers. The Afghan foreign minister attended the Dhaka meeting as a special guest. The meeting also approved the Regional Poverty Profile 2005 for the eradication of poverty in the region, but there was no concrete

progress in making the Saarc Development Fund (SDF), created about three years ago, operational.

How does Safta impact Bangladesh's exports? Well, it is necessary to examine sensitive lists of various members to assess our long and short term benefits. Currently, Bangladesh exports fish, vegetables, jute, tea, fertilizers, leather, readymade garments, handloom, medicines, processed food, consumer goods, cosmetics, handicrafts, and ceramics to other member countries. However, many of these items have been placed in the negative lists of various member countries. So for a longer term benefit, Bangladesh has to expand its very narrow export list. Our exporters have to be bold and innovative to capture the free trade market potentials of the region.

Bangladesh's principal trading partner in the region is India. As per India's sensitive lists, Bangladesh has been permitted to export jute and jute goods, leather and leather products, ceramics, fruit juice, fertilizers, vegetables under free trade. Furthermore, India has committed to allow about eight million pieces of readymade garments from Bangladesh under Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ).

Our exporters have alleged that non-tariff and para-tariff barriers and bureaucratic wrangling had significantly hindered Bangladesh's exports to India in the

past. According to the Indian Department of Commerce's statistics for 2005-06, India's exports to Bangladesh amounted to \$1.633 billion whereas Bangladesh's exports to India were only about \$118.76 million. Thus there was a trade gap of some \$1.5 billion. If the Safta provisions are implemented in its totality and Bangladeshi exports are given greater access to Indian market, then it should be possible to reduce the trade gap gradually.

Pakistan has placed virtually all our principal export items namely, jute, fabrics, woven and knitted garments, special woven fabrics, footwear and textiles on their sensitive list. As per our Export Promotion Bureau statistics, Bangladesh exported goods worth \$46.17 million to Pakistan from July to March of FY 2005-06. The main export items were raw jute and tea. Hence, in the short term, Safta would not enhance our exports to Pakistan.

Sri Lanka has included fish, leather and footwear on her sensitive list, while Bhutan has placed all our principal export items, except tea, on her sensitive list. Likewise, Nepal has included almost all our major export items on her sensitive list. Maldives has also included three of our major items on their sensitive list. At the moment Bangladesh has limited trade ties with these countries and inclusion of our major export items in their

negative lists means, in the short term, the implementation of the Safta would not boost our exports to these countries.

The intra-regional trade among the Saarc countries is still very low and is only about 4% of the overall trade of the member countries, compared to 37% among North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta) members, 67% among European Union (EU) members, and 38% among Asean members.

Once trade complementarities are established among the Saarc members, the intra-regional trade will surely increase. As the predominant market player, India has to take the initiative in the matter. The regional countries import 5% of India's total exports, but only 1% of India's imports are from these countries. New Delhi should lead the way by removing all existing non-tariff and para-tariff barriers for implementation of the Safta in its totality.

Incidentally, all neighbours of India have been placed high on the latest "Failed State Index" (FSI) published by the Foreign Policy, a prestigious magazine, of the Carnegie Endowment and the Foundation for Peace, both based in Washington DC. Vulnerabilities of these states would surely have negative impact on India's development, and it would be in her own interest to make them more stable through strengthening the economic integration process under the Safta.

Institutionally, the Safta will take at least six more months to be fully operational as the member countries have not yet prepared specific rules for individual products under "the rules of origin" that determine the tariff line. Furthermore, most of the members have not even issued customs notification for the implementation of Safta. Since five out of eight Saarc members are LDCs, it is necessary to finalize a mechanism to compensate them for the tariff reduction.

In this era of globalization, there is no substitute for regional cooperation and creation of a free trade area lies at the core of such cooperation. As other regional organizations have shown, Saarc will only succeed if all the member countries forsake their national interest for the greater benefit of the region. Safta will bring benefit to the entire region only when all its provisions will be implemented in letter and spirit. After all, the regional economic integration is a comprehensive package and not an "a la carte" menu where one could select only the items they like and overlook all other items.

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Whither Hiroshima: Fading memories and a changing world

Survivors of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki are known in Japan as Hibakushas. As their numbers are in constant decline in recent years, many are worried that soon there will be no one to remind us of what happened more than six decades ago, and also to tell us that it was indeed a crime against humanity and that, for the benefit of civilization, such things should never happen again.

MONZURUL HUQ

THIS year marks the sixty-first anniversary of the dropping of atomic bombs on two Japanese cities towards the end of World War II. The anniversary also coincides with the world entering the age of atomic destruction, as the two bombs dropped on two Japanese cities within three days were the first and only example so far of such a deadly attack capable of wiping out cities and bringing untold misery to hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians.

Though number sixty-one doesn't fit in well with observance of anniversaries, for Hiroshima and Nagasaki it does not matter much, as counting of years is seen quite vital these days since the memory of the nightmare unleashed by the atomic destruction is gradually fading from people's mind and hence there is an urgency to remind people that forgetting the misery would only help those who intend to see the world full of rivalry and conflicts.

Those who remember firsthand what exactly happened on the day bombs were dropped in two Japanese cities on August 6 and August 9 have long become a minority in those cities. And with the passage of time their number is dwindling even more every year, raising the important question of who is going to tell people about the horrors of those days so that they can remain alert against any attempt to repeat the incidents of Hiroshima or Nagasaki anywhere in the world.

But as human existence is a temporary phenomenon, it is very

natural that even many of those who were children of Hiroshima on that ill-fated day sixty-one years ago are already gone by now, and those still surviving are about to leave within a short period of time. Both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as a result, are facing the serious problem of how to keep the collective memory of the atomic bombs and their aftermath alive, so that the message of peace can be passed over from one generation to another much more effectively with the hope that this would at least show us the flickering light when everything around seem to be turning dark and bleak.

Survivors of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki are known in Japan as Hibakushas. As their numbers are in constant decline in recent years, many are worried that soon there will be no one to remind us of what happened more than six decades ago, and also to tell us that it was indeed a crime against humanity and that, for the benefit of civilization, such things should never happen again.

But as we all know, the memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not only facing the problem of the disappearance of Hibakushas to convey the message of peace worldwide. A much more serious problem is that of the changing attitude of political leadership in advanced nations, as the race for armament is taking a new unprecedented shape with the arsenal of destructive weapons now capable of creating many more Hiroshima and Nagasaki without even sending a single warplane to drop them.

This is the paradox the atomic

bomb cities of Japan now faces more than six decades after they witnessed a massive destruction hitherto unheard of. As a result, both Hiroshima and Nagasaki are now trying to find new ways of preserving that memory, so that they would be able to continue sending the right signal to people everywhere that unless we keep a strong vigil, there is every possibility that another nightmare of a much more destructive nature might unfold anytime soon.

It is precisely because the world now has no shortage of such destructive arsenals, each and every unit of which has the capability of causing destruction many times more what Hiroshima and Nagasaki witnessed sixty-one year ago.

The city of Nagasaki has been fortunate to get an unexpected helping hand in preserving the memories of bombing in the form of three dimensional images created by a South Korean scholar who is presently teaching at a university in the city. Professor Jun Byungdug had for quite sometime been working on old images of the city taken by US military forces a few days before the bombing and immediately after.

He has transferred those images into three-dimensional forms using advanced information technology and as a result, the method is now capable of recreating the images of the city before the bomb was dropped and also capable of showing the blast and its destruction within the vicinity of the city. Professor Jun has already shown his three-dimensional images to various people including school children and he is

hopeful that his method would allow preserving the memory in an effective way even long after Hibakushas are all gone.

But how successfully preserving the memory would be able to heal the deep wound that the people of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and all of Japan suffered is a completely different question. The deceased Japanese film-maker Akira Kurosawa made a rather sentimental film in late 1980s about the spiritual scars that the atomic bomb left in Nagasaki. The film, entitled "Rhapsody in August," conveys Kurosawa's deeply disturbing feeling about the way memory passes into history and history is quickly forgotten. Gabriel Garcia Marquez once interviewed Kurosawa and asked him what that historical amnesia meant to Japan. Kurosawa's flat reply was that the drama was not going to be over until the United States apologizes to Japan.

Gone also is Kurosawa now. And another towering figure in Japanese film, Shohei Imamura, who also had raised the moral questions related to atomic bombing in his beautifully made film "The Black Rain," has passed away recently. So, not only Hibakushas are disappearing from the scene one after another. The leading figures of Japan's world of intelligentsia who always were focusing on the issue from the standpoint of morality are fading into the past as well.

And those who remain are hawkish politicians in Japan and elsewhere, not capable of calculating the dimension of human sufferings that bombs and arsenals of deadly weapons always bring, be it in Iraq, Lebanon or anywhere on our mother earth. Hence, there is an urgent need to restore the memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki before it turns out to be too late.

Monzurul Huq is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Nuclear non-proliferation treaty and the way ahead

Kofi Annan: "The objective of nuclear non-proliferation is not helped by the fact that the states that have nuclear weapons continue to insist that these weapons in their hands enhance security, while in the hands of others they are a threat to world peace. If we were making steady progress towards disarmaments, this situation would be less alarming. Unfortunately, the reverse is true."

DR. MOHAMMED MUNIRUZZAMAN

ON August 6, 1945 the US Air Force plane Enola Gay dropped the nuclear device "Little Boy" on the city of Hiroshima and three days later, on August 9, it detonated the "Fat Man" bomb over Nagasaki, Japan. Hiroshima and Nagasaki thus became the first and second cities in the world to be destroyed by atomic bombs.

Almost the entirety of each city and its inhabitants were wiped out in an instant. Survivors of the holocaust suffered great physical and mental pain. For many, the nightmare still continues. The hypocenter of the "Little Boy" bomb was slightly offset to the southeast of the prefecture office building, now displayed as the Genbaku Dome-Mae (A-bomb Dome).

The Uranium-235 gravity bomb exploded about 600m above the dome with a destructive power equivalent to 1.5 kilotons of TNT. Witness accounts of the destruction following the Hiroshima bombing speak of "a white flash, at the same instant searing heat and blast whirlwinds." The radius of total destruction was about 1.6 km, while resulting fires spanned 11.4 sq. km.

As many as 140,000 people died from the Hiroshima blast and its associated effects. On the morning of August 9, the US B-29 Bockscar carried the nuclear bomb "Fat Man," with Kokura as the primary target and Nagasaki as the secondary one. By the time the plane reached Kokura, a cloud covered the city. After several runs over the city, causing fuel to run low, it headed for its secondary target, Nagasaki.

At 11.01 (local time), the "Fat Man," containing a core of 6.4 kg of Plutonium-239, was dropped over the city. Forty-three seconds later it exploded 469m above the ground. The resulting explosion converted 1.176kg of fuel to energy with an equivalent blast yield of 21 kilotons of TNT.

The total number of people killed was around 80,000 including those who died from radiation poisoning.

The first public display of materials related to the atomic bombing took place on September 9, 1949 and began with the establishment of the A-bomb Memorial Hall in the Hiroshima City Central Public Hall. Subsequently, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Hall and the Peace Memorial Museum were established in the Peace Memorial Park in 1955. Unesco declared it a World Heritage site in 1996. Every year for the last 60 years the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been observed the world over. The question, however, that everybody wants to know is: how many atomic weapons are there and are we any nearer to eliminating them?

The Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, provides some of the answers. According to him: "Some 35,000 nuclear weapons remain in the arsenals of the nuclear powers with thousands still deployed on hair-trigger alert. Whatever rationale these weapons may once have had has long been dwindled. Political, moral and legal constraints on actually using them further undermine their strategic utility without, however, reducing the risks of inadvertent war on proliferation. The objective of nuclear non-

proliferation is not helped by the fact that the states that have nuclear weapons continue to insist that these weapons in their hands enhance security, while in the hands of others they are a threat to world peace. If we were making steady progress towards disarmaments, this situation would be less alarming. Unfortunately, the reverse is true."

The observations by the UN chief indeed make grim reading. Are we to assume then that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has lost its potency in the chessboard of 21st century state securities and politics? Not so, believe the experts.

In 1961, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a bill to stop the spread of nuclear weapons to more countries. At that time only the US, the Soviet Union, the UK, and France had nuclear bombs. China exploded a nuclear bomb and joined the league in 1964. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) allowed these five states (P-5) to have nuclear weapons and they subsequently became the five permanent Members of the UN Security Council. The treaty was signed in 1968.

The NPT allowed the five nuclear weapons states (NWS) to have nuclear weapons. All other signatories are non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS). The treaty now has 189 members including the P-5. The NNWS promised not to have nuclear weapons and agreed for inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). However, India, Pakistan and Israel refused to sign the treaty, and North Korea withdrew from it.

The NPT was originally

designed to decelerate the growth of nuclear weapons, if not totally stop their development. Though the lofty goals of total nuclear weapons elimination have not been achieved in the last thirty-eight years since signing the treaty, it is still believed the NPT has been a reasonable success.

If there were no NPT, we probably would see more than two dozen countries with nuclear weapons. There are fewer nuclear weapons and possibly fewer states with nuclear weapons programs now than there were some twenty years back. However, with constant changes in the geo-political scenario of the world, the treaty regime had to be constantly updated and improved.

The IAEA Comprehensive System of Safeguards, the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), Bangkok and Pelindaba Treaty establishing Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones, and the IAEA Additional Protocol to Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements of 1997 etc. are a few additional non-proliferation measures. Many believe the NPT is undermined not by the NNWS trying to acquire the nuclear weapon status, but by the NWS not down-sizing their stockpile of weapons and gradually eliminating them altogether.

The problems are further exacerbated by the fact that the US and China are still refusing to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) that bans testing of all nuclear weapons.

Against the above background, are we any closer to eliminating the threat of nuclear weapons? How effective is the NPT? What might we face in the coming years? These are difficult questions to answer. What we do know, however, is that the NPT will only survive as a viable international regime if it is supported and its principles adhered to both by the nuclear weapons states and the non-nuclear weapons states.

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Bengal Legislative Assembly homage to Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Trivedi

ON August 13, 1941, the Bengal Legislative Assembly (BLA) adopted a historic resolution commemorating the sad demise of Rabindranath Tagore on August 6 that year.

Reproduced below are some of the deliberations and the resolution as adopted in the BLA.

AK Fazlul Haque, first Prime Minister of Bengal and Leader of the House:

"Sir, with due leave and leave to the House, I beg to move a resolution on the sad demise of Rabindranath Tagore. Mr. Speaker, sir, it is not an easy task to pay a tribute in words to the memory of Rabindranath Tagore.

"During the last few days men and women all over the world have tried to pay their tributes of love, homage and respect to the memory of the great departed, and he cannot but at once see the versatility and the personality of Rabindranath when he finds that

people in distant parts of the world have had something to say, something to emphasize, the point that stands at prominently in the character of Rabindranath.

"Speaking as a Bengalee, belonging to the province which gave Rabindranath birth, speaking the very language which Rabindranath spoke, it is impossible to lose sight of the fact that the great man, who earned for the Bengali literature one of the highest positions in the languages and literatures of the world, is no more with us, and that all that now lives are his works enshrined not merely in books but in the hearts of millions of his countrymen.

"Sir, I am reminded at the present moment of those beautiful lines of Tennyson referring to the death of his friend whom he has immortalized in his "In Memoriam." We can truly say with the great poet: "We feel it almost half a sin to put in words the grief we feel, for words like nature half reveal and half conceal the sorrow within."

"It is not enough to say that he was great. He was great as a poet, he was great as a philosopher, he was great as an educationist, he was great as a humanitarian, he was great in his songs, and the whole world knows that he could not merely write poetry but he lived poetry throughout his life He has actually made it a problem with us.

"His realities of life are realities when poetry itself is a reality and when all is said and done we feel as Bengalees that we never knew when he was with us what he was, not merely to Bengal, not merely to the whole of India, but to the whole of cultured humanity all over the world.

"I leave it to others who can express better what we all feel on the side of the House and I hope that the few words which I have been privileged to speak on this occasion will be taken to be indicative of our deep sense of sorrow not as individuals, not as members of a community but as members of the great Bengalee race.

"We are proud today to have had in our midst someone like Rabindranath who belongs to the whole world. Regardless of his physical presence or absence the whole of the cultured humanity readily pays homage to this great soul."

Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose, Leader of the Opposition:

"Sir, I have listened to the tribute which was paid to his memory by the Hon'ble Leader of the House and I shall only add, attempt to add, a few words of my own. Sir, Rabindranath was a Bengali, we are proud that he belonged to Bengal, and in this connection may I repeat what I had occasion to say a few days ago: Through him the voice and spirit of Bengal spoke to the wide world; and the coming ages will recognize him as the prophet from Bengal; through him Bengali soul rose to the sublime heights of universalism.

"I desire to add one word more. If Rabindranath was great as a patriot he was greater as an inter-

nationalist; he dreamt the dreams of a freer world; he dreamt the dreams of the parliament of man, the federation of the world, And no greater respect can be paid to his memory than if we are able to contribute our share to the creation of the parliament of man, the federation of the world of which he dreamt."

Mr. Kiran Shankar Roy, MLA from Dacca:

"Sir, this is not the time or the place nor am I competent to appraise the value of Rabindranath's contribution to the world of thought and literature but undoubtedly he was the greatest lyrical poet of his time, perhaps, of all ages. Human moods, human longings, love, sorrow, joy, ecstasy, heart-ache in all its variations never found more exquisite expression as in his poems. But he more than that. He was a great philosopher, a great composer of songs, a great patriot without the narrow bitterness of nationalism - a seer, a visionary poet, a mystic... perhaps

once in a thousand years comes a man through whom an entire nation expresses itself.

"Such was Vyasa and Valmiki in ancient India, such was Homer in Greece, Virgil in Rome, Dante in Catholic Italy and in modern times Goethe in Germany and Tolstoy in Russia, and such was Rabindranath in India The country expressed Her dreams and aspirations, Her ancient wisdom as well as Her modern quest, Her contemplative stillness and Her urge towards dynamism.

"In short, Rabindranath Tagore found a perfect synthesis between Beauty and Truth which reconciles all pairs of opposites. Sir, it is a matter of great and special pride to us that Rabindranath, though a world citizen belonging to all countries and all times was also a Bangalee.

"It would not be human if we Bangalees did not feel this, at least on this day of our sorrow. Who wouldn't agree that the soft sky of Bengal is softer, the groves and

meadows more green, the sun is more golden, the moonlight more silvery, the south-wind more wistful and the waters in the rivers sweeter because of the magic spell this great alchemist cast on this soil?"

The Hon'ble Sir Muhammad Azizul Haque, Speaker of the House:

"Before I place the resolution for your acceptance, may I add my own humble tribute to the memory of Rabindranath Tagore. For over half a century and more he has not merely lived in this province or with the country, but with the whole world. An embodiment of the deepest and intense national feelings, he has kept himself in the forefront of the ideas which we call international, and I believe I am giving expression to the feelings of all when I say that after his death the world culture and humanity are poorer today. He was a man who walked with kings and yet never felt out of touch with the commoner."

The resolution, placed before the House, by Leader of the House, Prime Minister AK Fazlul Haque, and read out by the Speaker Sir Muhammad Azizul Haque:

"The Assembly records its deep sense of grief at the passing away of Dr. Rabindranath Tagore. Not only Bengal or India but the whole world has suffered an irreparable loss after the death of this noble son of Bengal whose contribution to civilization was immense. And the quality of his genius had earned both for himself and his country an honoured place in the community of nations.

"As a poet, he provided joy, solace and inspiration to millions and as a humanitarian he earned the love of all mankind. This House conveys its profoundest respect to Mr. Rathindranath Tagore and his relatives and mourns with the rest of India the loss of the great departed."

Rabindranath Trivedi is a retired Additional Secretary and former Press Secretary to President of Bangladesh.