

## Indo-Bangla trade talks

Indian attitude surprises and disappoints

THE decisions reached at the end of the Dhaka round trade negotiations with India on Wednesday fell short of the give-and-take attitude that India as the next-door neighbour and a much larger economy was expected to reflect. It's the huge demand side to her economy standing in contrast to the recurrent trade deficits we have had with her -- to the whopping tune of more than US\$ one billion annually -- which made out a strong case for India's elusive reciprocity to materialise this time around. We know trade by definition is not a charitable matter on either side of the counter. But one would have thought that the promises made by Indian leaders from time to time to give a fair and equitable deal to Bangladesh were not rhetorical but meant to be kept in progression. But alas, what has been achieved in the trade talks does not commend itself to even meeting Dhaka's minimum expectations. Even taken at the face value, it looks like a consolation package.

The outcome has three elements, two of them trade related while the last one is focused on 'transit'. First and foremost, India has agreed to offer duty-free access to 40 Bangladesh products under 16 categories. Secondly, this is apparently linked to the Indian demand for lifting the ban on import of yarn and sugar through overland routes. Finally, the transit issue, which the Indian delegation touted as a *quid pro quo* for according duty-free access to any wide range of Bangladesh products, has been set aside for consideration at the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) forum, understandably in deference to Bangladesh's wishes.

It is the attitude of India that has determined the final outcome of the talks as it was bound to. We recall that for quite a few years now we have had bilateral talks at the official, ministerial and even prime ministerial level where, among other things, the question of offering duty-free access to 25 categories of products from Bangladesh figured routinely. More to the point, this was followed by an expression of intent to concretise things. The commerce minister under Deve Gowda's prime ministership came to Dhaka and accepted duty free access of 25 categories of products and promised to implement speedily. To the best of our knowledge, the Indian business community is also quite favourably disposed to this proposal. Later on, during Awami League rule, the matter was to receive a highly favourable response from no less a person than Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee himself. The Indian prime minister while in Dhaka to inaugurate the goodwill bus service to Kolkata gave the impression that the matter would be sorted out on his return to the Indian capital.

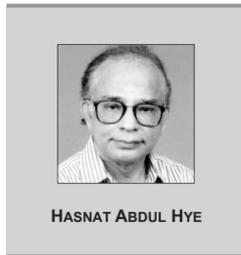
So, India was agreed on the question of access and Bangladesh was expectant; but nothing happened in concrete terms. And now we face the new scenario of the transit-transshipment issue being palmed off as a necessary prerequisite for India's granting of zero-tariff trade access to Bangladesh. The Indian delegation has done a lot of hard bargaining on it, at times appearing so uncompromising and unyielding that it looked as though they were not entirely focused on the trade issue. As it is, the talks had to be postponed twice in four months due to persistent differences on what should be the negotiating agenda. If transit was on the Indian mind as a *quid pro quo* for the trade accommodation what then was the need for the protracted negotiations without making the 'linkage' factor clear to the Bangladesh side beforehand?

Now, what has been conceded by India will have very little to do in terms of reducing the yawning trade gap. While Bangladeshis asked for 191 products under 25 categories, India has agreed to give access to 40 products only, spread thin over 16 categories. What's worse, not all the forty items are produced by Bangladesh and some on the allowed list are produced on a scale that does not square up with local demands. Bangladesh's major exportables like jute products, tea and frozen food were dropped out of consideration, let alone some other items in high demand on the other side.

What surprises Bangladesh was the way transit was being pushed down our throat in exchange for facilities already agreed to by two Indian governments. Bangladesh did not refuse, but asked that the transit issue be discussed at the JEC session, where it properly belongs.

In the ultimate analysis, it does not make economic sense for India that she overlook the value of letting Bangladesh economy grow by an expansion of her export trade with India. If Bangladesh economy prospers it is India more than any country in the world that will benefit the most from it. We urge India to display robust economic sense, far-sight and vision to usher in a new era of equitable trade relationship with Bangladesh to the mutual advantage of both countries in the years to come.

# The writing on the wall



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

IT is now as certain as daylight that a Palestine state will be born. The writing on the walls of the West Bank and Gaza are clearly visible even while they are being bulldozed by Israeli tanks. What is uncertain is how much more blood will be shed and how many more lives will be lost.

One year ago the Palestine leader went round the world to mobilise commitment of recognition before declaring Palestine as a state. According to newspaper reports, behind the scene diplomatic intervention by America dissuaded countries from making the promise. The deadline fixed for the declaration came and went without expected announcement adding further frustration to the Palestinians. It was as if they were told that the price of blood for freedom, peace and honour had not yet been paid in full. Ariel Sharon had to be given more time to out Herod Herod in a reversal of historical roles. Much later, a declaration of intent came from the American side in the middle of the war against terrorism. Speaking before a university audience in America the secretary of state in a paroxysm of goodwill mentioned about the creation of a Palestine state. Many interpreted the change of tack as being the adjunct to the war against terrorism. Before giving further support the Muslim world had to be assured about the fairness and justice in American foreign policy in the Middle East. Welcome as the reference to a Palestine state was, particularly coming from no less a person than the secretary of state, the occasion and the audience were incongruent. Obviously, the secre-

tary of state was aiming at the Muslim world using the university audience as proxy. Even then the choice of location bespoke of a cavalier attitude and the timing seemed opportunistic.

Whatever hope was kindled by the informal academic discourse evaporated after the successful war against terrorism in Afghanistan. American foreign policy again tilted towards Israel which encouraged the Sharon administration to unleash wave after wave of bloody attacks with tanks, helicopters and

desperate reaction against the illegal occupation of land by Israel since 1967 and retaliation against barbaric atrocities committed by well-armed Israelis on a daily basis. The *intifada* did not appear all on a sudden taking an enemy unawares. Decades of violation of human rights and defiance against international calls for vacation of occupied land prepared the ground for angry reaction by the Palestinians. Reaching the end of tether they retaliated with light arms and stones against fortified tanks that demolished

responsible for these attacks. It is doubtful if the Palestinian authority has any control over the suicide attackers because the acts are so decentralised and scattered. Moreover, without a personal sense of righteous indignation and hatred no one decides to commit suicide at the behest of others. There should be no doubt that Israel and its policy of aggrandisement and naked aggression are squarely responsible for the deaths and destruction on both sides. It is a travesty of justice to allow Sharon to use 'terrorism' as

does not recognise the 1967 border and does not intend to withdraw there. Defying the UN and American calls to withdraw immediately from the West Bank it is continuing its armed aggression there so brutally that even media is not allowed to report. Israeli arrogance and inhumanity have reached their apogees. It is losing the sympathy of many so fast that the capital of sympathy for holocaust is at the risk of devaluation.

More than the sequence of the future peace process greater uncer-

Whether under Chairman Arafat or any other leader, a Palestine state will be born. This is the indelible writing on the wall. Israel will not enjoy security and peace in the long run if the birth of Palestine is preceded by more bloodshed, deaths and destruction. If it keeps on stoking the fire of hatred against itself, the animus will permanently lodge in the psyche of each Palestinian, now and forever. Because of the legacy of blood, terror and humiliation unmitigated by last-minute compassion and understanding by Israel the peace that will come will be fragile and elusive. A people denied of honour and dignity and subjected to humiliation for long tend to have a memory that is not only unforgiving and revengeful but is also passed on generation after generation. With so much of bitterness history and mythology become inseparable profoundly influencing the national legacy. A document assuring Israel of peace and security will be of little consequence, if the mindset of the Palestinians is permanently impaired by prolonging the present policy of blatant aggression and inhuman repression. America, too, stands to lose the long-term good will of the Muslim world if it fails to follow an even-handed policy in the Middle East showing genuine concern for the violation of human rights caused by the current Israeli occupation and incursions. Nothing would have driven the fairness and seriousness of American policy at work more than a direct flight of Secretary of State Powell to Jerusalem. His five-day tour of Arab countries will only prolong the carnage and it will be seen as a ploy. When he met the king of Morocco at the first leg of his peace mission the latter asked, "Why are you here first, why not to Jerusalem?" If he does not meet Arafat, it will raise further doubts about American sincerity and fairness. It is high time for both America and Israel to think of their long-term interests.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

## IN MY VIEW

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fighter planes against ill-armed Palestinians. For good measure, America was bamboozled by Israel with the argument that if terrorist attack against America could justify war in Afghanistan why Israel should be debarred from taking recourse to the same act of retribution against Palestinian "terrorists". Weighed down by this fallacious reasoning America not only nodded and winked but also gave open support observing that Israel had the right to retaliate against terrorism. This attitude reflects either utter naivete or willing complicity. By no stretch of logic or sophistry can the event of September 11 and the *intifada* be equated and treated on same footing. America is not an illegal occupier of territory and had not been engaged in acts of aggression and repression. The suicide attack against America was wanton and without immediate provocation. The attackers also did not say what were their grievances, leaving the world to engage in speculation. Inconceivably, the suicide attacks of September 11 were glaring cases of terrorism. But the *intifada* is a

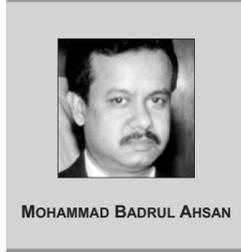
homes and killed civilians with impunity. Enraged even at the minuscule number of casualties on their side the Israelis used 'weapons of mass destruction'. The disproportionate use of weapons took heavy toll of lives among Palestinians and appalled the world. The UN and the EU called upon Israel for restraint and implementation of the UN resolutions 242 and 348. Facing the terrible and murderous Sharon government some Palestinians chose the path of suicide attacks which were not only branded as acts of terrorism but were alleged to be masterminded by the Palestinian Authority. The Israelis failed or refused to recognise that all the acts of defiance and retaliation ranging from stone throwing to suicide attacks are responses to their cruelty and savagery which in turn stem from their illegal occupation. The *intifada* in its latest incarnation is not the same as wanton terrorist attacks as seen on September 11. However unfortunate and regrettable are the deaths of innocent Israeli civilians it is their government and not the Palestinians who are

the excuse for his crimes against both Palestinians and civilian Israelis.

It has not taken long for America to realise the gravity of the situation. For the first time in the history of the UN, America not only voted in favour of a resolution asking Israel to withdraw from occupied areas but also moved a resolution for the creation of a Palestine state. This is a much more serious policy pronouncement than the earlier informal one made by Secretary of State Collin Powell. The problem now is in respect of the steps to be followed leading to the creation of the Palestinian state. Israel and America have emphasised on security concerns like declaration of ceasefire and observance of the same before political negotiations can take place. Being more neutral and pragmatic, the EU thinks this approach to be erroneous and is in favour of political negotiations taking precedence. In fact, there is no need for political negotiations if Israel agrees to the pre-1967 border as has been enjoined by the UN resolutions. But Israel has made it plain now that it

tainty has now emerged over the negotiating authority. Israel under Sharon is loath to discuss with Yasser Arafat. He has been made a house prisoner in Ramallah for the past few months and humiliated without end. Resisting Israeli pressure America continued with its recognition of Arafat but has lately started disliking him saying that "his time is passed". This change in American policy only reinforces the Palestinian ire at American pro-Israeli bias. Neither America nor Israel seems to appreciate that Arafat with all his failings is the elected chairman and enjoys the support of his people. To treat him like a pariah dog and humiliate him is to add salt to the injured feelings of the Palestinians. Sharon declared in the Knesset the other day with reference to Saudi proposal that Israel will not be dictated upon. Only an abominably arrogant and mentally deranged person can say this and at the same time dictate who can or cannot be the leader of another nation. And Israel boasts of being a democracy.

## Man and earth



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE sun rose over the eastside of the river as chirping birds announced the break of dawn. A withering night still hung over the village, the splendour of day filtering through its flimsy shroud. The early-rising peasant stood in the middle of his land and surveyed the world between night and day. The dusk, he observed was similar to the dawn, when light and darkness converged in the recurring cycle of beginning and end.

It occurred to him that his father must have once stood on this land, and his grandfather before him, and so on. His son tells him that each person in the world has two parents, four grandparents and eight great-grandparents, that for every generation one goes back, the number of ancestors doubled and that every thousand years contained forty generations, the total number of ancestors being more than he could count.

The peasant looked around him. The silhouettes of trees and houses, the meandering meadows slouching through paddy fields like tortu-

ous ropes, the dark water in the river creased by the morning breeze, and the tranquillity of a blind night finding its way to the illuminated dawn made him wonder if this was how the world had progressed since its beginning. He suddenly felt as though the ground under him was reeling, as though his ancestors were stacked up under his feet, who were now moving.

The overwhelmed peasant walked away from the spot where he stood, feeling guilty that he must

also tells him that there was an old man in the ancient world who claimed that life on earth had descended from a single common ancestor. Half a billion years ago, one possibly had a fish as an ancestor and all of one's ancestors were microorganisms two billion years ago.

The peasant thought of his father in the diluted darkness of the fading night, and his heart filled with the grievous pain of a swirling void that rose from the depth of his soul which

crawling in mirth. Frogs croaked somewhere in a bush, and dogs barked at a distance, their sound vibrating in the residue of the night lingering in the air. Night came after day, and death came after birth, the rotation of beginning and end forever compounded in the repetition of life. His father repeated his grandfather, he repeated his father and his son repeated him, the pillar of ancestry growing taller as one repetition piled upon another. The seed is repeated in the crop,

how the world has been populated by leaps and bounds as every generation multiplied itself in the pursuit of life. He glanced over the stalks of paddy that were laden with grains and it seemed to him that there was something common between the proliferation of men and crops.

It reminded him of the season of his life, how his parents once sowed the seed and he was born and how he sowed the seeds in his turn for his children. In the scarce light of the

ensconced itself under the earth's hard crust. Land and its soil hold all the mysteries of life, which comes from it to which it also returns, he reasoned within himself. Man and crops provide succour to each other and together they close the circle from dust to dust, he concluded.

Then this funny idea crossed his mind that man is a plant, which has its roots in the earth, his ancestors buried in it, their flesh blended with its grains and lumps. At last the peasant understood why land has been so close to his heart, why he always loved to till his land and his heart swelled in the excitement of seeing bounteous crops. Now he knew that all his crops were generous gifts from the forefathers, who were laid to rest in the bosom of this earth.

The peasant walked again and again on his plot of land in deference to his ancestors. Meanwhile, the sun was shining in the splendour of the dawn, the dark of the night completely erased from the clear blue sky. For a while his mind filled with excitement, and then it slumped in anticipation of the dusk. All things repeat in heaven and earth, the dusk and the dawn, birth and death, crop seasons and lifecycle of man.

In that unbreakable cycle of destiny, every birth is a repetition of death and every man lives for his ancestor. The peasant wanted to rush home to meet his son before it was dusk.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## CROSS TALK

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have stepped on the footprints of his ancestors thus being disrespectful to them. He wanted to recall who were his ancestors but realised that he couldn't go beyond his grandfather's name. A sense of guilt seized his mind, and he felt sorry for himself, blaming his ignorance, which made him an isolated piece of a forgotten whole.

He closed his eyes to concentrate on the past, hoping to salvage what was lost in the depth of time, and he could see nothing but criss-crossing lines. Genes and blood diffused across the planet, his son tilted him, which made every man a distant cousin of another man. His

was connected to the soil of this village. He thought of the seasons of life, how he grew up in the fields of this village, his childhood dispersed in the trees and bushes, his childhood spilled in its ponds and rivers, and his youth depleted in its sunshine and rain. His father had also lived in this village, and was buried in its soil like the seed of a crop, its land soaked in the fluid of his body, which decomposed within its layers. Man has intimate relationship with land, he said to himself.

A few partridges flew over his head and he saw a crane swoop onto the river, while clucking ducks came running like pot-bellied babies

sire in the scion, and each sowing season is revived in harvesting, every death signified in birth, the peasant fathomed. And he amazed at how one seed is multiplied in the bounty of crops, and parents are multiplied in their children, the profound mystery of creation seeded in the daily monotony of dusk and dawn. Every day the night folds into the dawn, and the day folds into the dusk, the same nature donning its costume of light and darkness and strutting on the stage of eternity twice a day!

The simple-minded peasant marvelled how the children of Adam and Eve have spawned the earth,

dawn, he frantically wanted to find something that was gone, his wistful eyes scanning the horizon with the vacant look of someone who was bereft of his hopes. The charcoal-coloured sky was bleak and mournful where clouds floated like rafts of sorrow, the winds blowing over the paddy fields whispering in the distressed voice of a dejected soul.

The peasant walked a few steps again as though he wanted to move away further from the footprints of his ancestors. How many layers of footprints must have gone under this earth, he pondered, one layer for each generation coated in dust until it finally hardened and

# Israel continues to exploit America

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED  
writes from Princeton

THE Israelis should be asking themselves some tough questions: why does every nation on earth, save the US, hate them? (In spite of Jewish stranglehold on the US print and electronic media, American support for Israel is more governmental and legislative than popular.) No, it is not because they are Jewish. No, it is not because the whole world is anti-Semitic. Frankly, the world is getting tired of Israeli evocation of the Nazi Holocaust as an excuse to shut the Europeans up and persecute the Palestinians. The reason the world hates Israel is because of its murderous arrogance. The world knows that the likes of Israel's present and past Israeli Prime Ministers Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir and Ariel Sharon of the Irgun and Stern gangs carried out terrorist attacks against the British and the Palestinians during its war of independence, and expelled 800,000 Palestinian civilians from their homes in 1948 to create the state of Israel. The world hates Israel because Israel stole Palestinian lands in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza and built illegal Jewish settlements on them. The world hates Israel because the Israelis, armed with American F-16 fighter

jets, American Apache helicopters, American tanks and machine guns and American acquiescence brutally suppress the Palestinian aspiration for freedom.

America too should be asking itself some tough questions: why is the US the only nation to back Israel to the hilt as the Israelis savagely brutalize the Palestinians? Are the rest of the world of 200 nations, including America's closest European allies morally bankrupt, only America and Israel always righteous? Why were so many United Nations resolutions opposed only by the US and Israel? What exactly has America received from Israel in exchange for its four billion dollars annual economic aid, billions more in military aid, and total political backing of Israel? How about betrayal from Israel, and September 11!

Jewish writer Samuel Katz wrote in a Jewish magazine recently: "In the mid '50s, A'man (the Jewish Defense Agency) suffered a serious setback during the infamous Operation Suzzannah, when Israeli agents provoked Jews in Egypt to attack American and British targets and incite anti-Western sentiment. The bungled operation was a severe embarrassment for the government of Prime Minister David Ben-Gourion and his defense minister, Pinhas Lavon." Americans have

## LETTER FROM AMERICA

Sharon had called President Bush an "appeaser" after September 11, denied President's Bush's request to let Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat go to Beirut to attend the Arab summit last month, and continues to defy President Bush's repeated demand to stop the Israeli incursion into the Palestinian territories to destroy the infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority, and to withdraw immediately. Who does the Israeli-controlled American media support? Not Bush, the President of the United States, but Sharon, the Prime Minister of Israel!

forgotten the "Lavon Affair," when Israeli government agents attempted to kill Americans for Israel's benefit. The American Israeli lobby did not permit any congressional inquiry into the Lavon affair. Billions of American dollars kept on flowing into Israel unimpeded. Israel was rewarded for deliberately killing Americans.

In the mid-1980s, American Jew Jonathan Pollard was caught spying for the state of Israel. Pollard not only supplied Israel with information about America's secret operations and agents in the Middle East, he divulged to Israel America's intelligence network in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Europe as well. To curry favour with the Soviet Union, Israel promptly shared the information with the Soviets, resulting in the compromis-

deliberate. Yet, the Israeli lobby prevented the US Congress from conducting an inquiry into the murder of Americans on The USS Liberty by Israel. Billions of American dollars kept on flowing into Israel unimpeded. Israel was rewarded for deliberately killing Americans.

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ing of American intelligence operations in the Soviet bloc and the execution of several American agents. Once again, the American Israeli lobby prevented any congressional investigation into the Pollard spy scandal. Billions of American dollars continued to flow into Israel. Once again, Israel was rewarded for betraying America.

Instead of apologizing for Pollard, every Israeli Prime Minister in the last decade has requested the sitting American President to release Pollard from jail. It is due to the fierce opposition of America's intelligence community, several of whose colleagues were executed due to Israeli betrayal, that Pollard is not being released. One shudders to think what would have happened to Egypt, if it, not Israel

had carried out such treachery. Egypt would have been decimated, like Afghanistan. Yet, in the American news media every one parrots the same theme; "Israel is America's only friend in the Middle East." With a "friend" like Israel, America does not need enemies. Can anyone tell me a single way in which Israel has benefited America? For billions and billions of dollars of American economic and military aid, and absolute American political backing in the United Nations and outside, Israel has repaid America with the murder of Americans, betrayal and treachery of America, and indirectly, September 11 mayhem.

Although the twin towers housed several premier Jewish businesses, according to news reports astonish-

ingly only one Israeli was killed in the World Trade Center (WTC) terrorist attack. It is well known that Israel's super efficient intelligence agency, Mossad, has infiltrated every Middle East terrorist group. There are reports that Mossad warned Israelis to keep away from the WTC on September 11. If by warning Israelis to keep away from the WTC on September 11 Mossad saved a few human lives, Mossad is to be commended. But why did they warn only the Israelis? Why did they not warn the Americans and save American lives too? Is it because the Israelis believe that if the Arabs kill the Americans, it is good for Israel? Shouldn't Israel be punished for withholding information that could have saved American lives?

The one American community the Israeli lobby has not been able to brainwash is the American Muslim community. That is why every "expert" on terrorism, who invariably is either Jewish or Israeli, casts aspersions on Muslim Americans. Although none of the September 11 hijackers were long time residents of the US, the Israeli lobby attempts to convince Americans that the whole Muslim American community is suspect. The Israeli media lobby shoots down any attempt by Muslim Americans to point out that they are

citizens of America, not of Israel, and that as American citizens they love America, and do not like Israel's exploitation of America. Sharon had called President Bush an "appeaser" after September 11, denied President's Bush's request to let Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat go to Beirut to attend the Arab summit last month, and continues to defy President Bush's repeated demand to stop the Israeli incursion into the Palestinian territories to destroy the infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority, and to withdraw immediately. Who does the Israeli-controlled American media support? Not Bush, the President of the United States, but Sharon, the Prime Minister of Israel! "As the head of a democratic nation, Sharon must do what is right for Israel," they say. If America's interest is of no interest to Israel, why should Israel continue to receive billions and billions of dollars of American money?

Israel's murderous ruthlessness in pursuit of its interests is well documented. What Muslim Americans worry is that the super intelligent Israeli agents will engineer another Lavon Affair or USS Liberty massacre on US soil and blame it on Muslim Americans!