

## Trade round with India

*Initial headway made but teething time continues*

THE official-level trade talks between India and Bangladesh that concluded in Dhaka last Wednesday could not have been expected to produce a miracle, given the intricacies of the issues involved. The task before the trade round looked formidable, billed as it was, to pave the way for a free trade agreement (FTA) between two unequal economies. India has a per annum trade surplus topping US one billion dollar vis-a-vis Bangladesh.

Against such a testing backdrop, the Dhaka talks should be deemed to have ended on a forward-looking note. The Indian delegation leader S Ramasundaram characterised the outcome as a 'breakthrough'. But his Bangladesh counterpart Elias Ahmed was cautiously optimistic, saying there were no grounds for frustration. In the typical parlance of 'approach talks' to FTA, such negotiations are described as 'breakthrough talks'. That's why perhaps the Indian delegation chief chose to use the word 'breakthrough' to convey his impressions of the dialogue's outcome. However, what Bangladesh chief negotiator had to say was not basically at variance with Ramasundaram's observations. Ahmed's words --"we have entered the primary stage of FTA" -- are indicative of a step towards securing equitable trade terms with India.

So, the joint secretary-level talks may prove to be a precursor to a proposed free trade agreement between India and Bangladesh down the road. But, one has to wait and see how the process is taken forward by the next round of talks scheduled to be held in New Delhi in January. That is when the core trade issues, some of which commerce minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury had once dubbed as 'trade disputes' are likely to be taken up. If we have been through the primary stage in Dhaka, the next round in New Delhi is going to see the hard bargaining phase.

The importance of Dhaka negotiations basically lay in the setting against which these were held. A decision of the Indo-Bangla Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting held in Dhaka on July 14-16 prompted the trade talks. The JEC was revived after six years in hibernation and it's as part of the dialogue resumption process that the significance of the trade negotiations should be comprehended.

What the Dhaka encounters has yielded in concrete terms is: India has agreed to recognise Bangladesh's demand that she be accorded special and differential treatment (S&DP) to her exports to the Indian market.

One of the four prerequisites to the FTA talks that Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury had enumerated closely on the heels of the JEC meeting was to "obtain special and differential treatment to Bangladesh according to the WTO charter". It called upon strong economies to offer special trade terms to weaker economies for the next five to ten years. India seems to have theoretically acceded to this demand. What remains to be seen though, is how this 'recognition' of Bangladesh's demand is implemented by her in deed. There is an extant Indian pledge to accord duty-and quota-free access to 25 categories of Bangladesh products. Besides, Dhaka has put up a fresh list of 118 items for free access to Indian markets.

Bangladesh is for removal of tariff, non-tariff and para-tariff barriers by India under one package. New Delhi would like to adopt a piecemeal approach.

The deck seems to have been otherwise partially cleared for freeing up trade from Bangladesh side. India has offered 'a concessional dispensation whereby imported clinker could be certified by the Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institution (BSTI) instead of by BIS.' This could lead to reducing the licensing period for Bangladeshi cement. We think it augurs well that both countries have 'agreed to start negotiations immediately for mutually recognising each other's standards.'

The focus of Dhaka talks was naturally on updating and renewing the bilateral trade agreement signed by India and Bangladesh on October 4, 1980. It needed to be amended to fit in with the FTA perspective. The amendments suggested by both sides are on the table and these would be decided upon at a higher level between the two governments.

As to the provision for special and differential treatment (S&DT) to Bangladesh exports, the Indian delegation chief thought it would be embodied in the FTA, not in the revised bilateral agreement. Bangladesh says the 'essence' of the S&DT should be incorporated in the revised bilateral trade agreement. Let's see which way it goes.

FTA is something new for Bangladesh. And, especially in relation to India, it merits a deeper analysis before being adopted by her. It strikes a responsive chord in us, therefore, that the issue of signing up to FTA will be discussed with different chamber bodies, associations and think-tanks.

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

writes from Princeton

WITH his October 16 address to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad ran into immediate trouble in the West . But why? He did NOT advocate violence. Instead, he condemned suicide bombing, as every Muslim must, and gratuitous violence, which is harming the Muslims. Had Mahathir uttered a single word that could have been remotely construed as support for violence, he would have been thoroughly discredited as a "terrorist" and attempts would have been made to slap US and UN sanctions on his Malaysia. With Mahathir refusing to provide the rope for his own hanging, the West played the Jewish card and accused him of Jew-baiting. At the Apec forum in Bangkok, President Bush, according to reports, took Mahathir aside and told him that he totally disagreed with what Mahathir had said, and that such comments are "divisive." Israel's thug-in-chief Ariel Sharon had the gall to call Mahathir's comments "slanderous," and demonize the Arabs: "It will take more time for the Arab world, and particularly Palestinian society, to understand that violence and extremism will only lead them to incalculable disaster." And all Mahathir talked about was nonviolence!

Such acts of moral righteousness are not only hypocritical; they are also amusing. Nobody has accused Mahathir of being wrong about his comments that "Jews rule the world by proxy"; and "get others to fight and die for them" (whose interest are dead American soldiers serving in Iraq? Israel's, not America's!) Such moral indignation is comical because Jews and non-Jews denounce Islam and Muslims with a hundred times more vitriol in the American print and electronic media, with President Bush on down turning a deaf ear to Muslim complaints. On October 18, the "liberal" *The New York Times* in its editorial was quick to denounce Mahathir's "Islamic Anti-Semitism." It singled out the comments of Ahmed Maher, Egypt's Foreign Minister, ("a very, very wise assessment") and Afghan President Hamid Karzai (the speech was "very correct."). This was a not-so-subtle threat to Egypt, which receives over two billion dollars US aid per year, and Karzai, who is struggling to receive 1 billion this year, that endorsement of such "anti-Jewish" sentiments could jeopardize US aid

to his nations! The same day on page A6, the Times published the comments of Lt. Gen. William G. Boykin, a deputy under secretary of defense, who likened the war against Satan, adding that militant Islam wants to destroy America because "we are a Christian nation." He told an evangelical gathering while in full uniform "Muslims worship idols, not real God." "The Defence Secretary Rumsfeld said he could not prevent military officials from making controversial comments." There was no editorial from the Times or words from President Bush condemning General Boykin's inflammatory bigotry!

can tanks to murder Palestinian civilians. It is those Sharon-Netanyahu-Wolfowitz-Bush Jews, whom Muslims will never be able to satisfy regardless of how much they oblige them, who are jumping all over Mahathir, not the Chomsky-Jews. While every television talk show is teeming with pro-Israeli Jewish commentators, Noam Chomsky or his friend, the late Edward Said were never invited. No mainstream US publisher dare publish Chomsky's books anymore. The Zionists have successfully marginalized all the pro-Palestinian Jews like Chomsky as 'self-hating Jews.'" So when Mahathir says "Jews," pro-Palestinian and human rights activist Jews like Chomsky understands what he means; so should we. Besides, it is fruitless to appease one's detractors. As the holy Quran says, (I paraphrase) "Your enemies will never be satisfied until you adopt their religion."

Mahathir is absolutely correct in stressing that Muslims must shun violence. Violence is counterproductive. A nation born in terrorism never enjoys peace. Israel, born out of the violence of the Irgun and Stern terrorist gangs, has not seen peace ever since. After they embraced violence, the Palestinians have not experienced peace either. Mahatma Gandhi's and Nelson Mandela's nonviolence creed, on the other hand, is making India and South Africa world powers. Muslims should not be nitpicking every word in the "Mahathir Manifesto," instead, they should embrace all of it wholeheartedly. No document is perfect. President Thomas Jefferson's "The Declaration of Independence" is one of the most revered documents in the history of the United States. At one place in it Jefferson chastises "the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and condition." Yet, even today no one criticizes Jefferson or the document for those racist comments embedded in it about the Native Americans.

Let us not be deceived by semantics. "Jews" in Mahathir's speech do not mean ALL Jews. It is common knowledge that 5 per cent of the Israeli Jews subscribe to the "Peace Now" movement, whom the right-wing Jews call pro-Palestinian traitors and the Palestinians call

"peace Jews." Suicide bombing is so reprehensible because it kills innocent Jews. There are many, many Jews in Israel and in America who bleed for the suffering of the Palestinians. But they, or the Noam Chomskys of the world do not formulate America's Israel policy or rule Israel. Backed by American Jewish neoconservatives like Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, William Kristol, Walter Libby, Douglas Firth, Daniel Pipes and hundreds of journalist and television commentators, Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu use American F-16 planes, American Apache helicopters, American missiles and Ameri-

their strategies validated by the west. That is why the writer was disappointed when the Daily Star went overboard with joy at Shirin Ebadi's Nobel Peace Prize; it was not an award for Shirin Ebadi, the prize was politically motivated AGAINST the Iranian government (To "put the Islamic regime on notice," according to TIME magazine). Muslims should resist the temptation to forsake the right path for the sake of western accolades such as the Nobel Prize. Even Rabindra Nath Thakur, the first Asian recipient of the Nobel Prize, was annoyed at the extra affection the Nobel garnered from his countrymen in 1913.

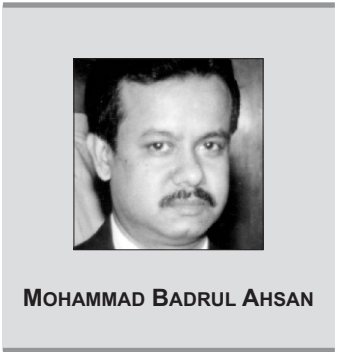
forefront, not oppressed in Burkhas, and Muslims should be spearheading the world's search for knowledge, not play second fiddle to the west. Those Muslims who shun modern knowledge should remember that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had urged the Muslims to "go to China," if necessary, to acquire knowledge.

Muslims must not forget the other lesson of the 13th century. As Mahathir correctly observes: "Today, we the Muslim ummah are treated with contempt and dishonour. Our religion is denigrated. Our holy places are desecrated. Our countries are occupied. Our people are starved and killed. None of our

57 out of 180 countries in the world. Our votes can make or break international organisations." The first organisation that the Muslims should break by leaving it en masse is their number one oppressor, The United Nations. As the recent events have so vividly demonstrated, every time a Muslim nation goes to the UN Security Council begging for justice, they get kicked in the teeth by a US veto. Before Muslims can take on the world, Mahathir wisely advises: "We must build up our strength in every field, not just in armed might. Our countries must be stable and well administered, must be economically and financially strong, industrially competent and technologically advanced." Mahathir reminds Muslims the Quranic verse that, "Allah will not change the fate of a community until the community has tried to change its fate itself." And most importantly, Mahathir reminds Muslim ummah that they must not underestimate the power of prayer: "You can and should pray to Allah S.W.T. for in the end it is He who will determine whether we succeed or fail. We need His blessings and His help in our endeavours."

Before President Bush lectures Mahathir Mohamad again he should learn some facts and the meaning of the word "fair." Is it fair Mr. President, to veto a UN resolution that simply pleaded that Ariel Sharon not murder Yasser Arafat, the democratically elected President of the Palestinians? Mr. President, do you know that it is Israel that occupies Syrian territory, The Golan Heights? As such, was it fair that that you vetoed a resolution that condemned Israeli attack on new Syrian territory? Mr. President, are you aware that Israel has been stealing Palestinian lands since 1919? Therefore, was it fair that you vetoed the resolution that asked Israel to stop building a fence twenty miles inside the Palestinian territory, grabbing more Palestinian lands? Mr. President, the whole world was against these three vetoes. Your veto does not make it right; it makes it doubly wrong. You are destroying America's credibility and America's moral authority by exercising vetoes to legitimize Israel's crimes. By being so unfair to the Muslims in general and Palestinians in particular, and by blatantly condoning all of Israel's atrocities you are exposing America to possible future retaliation. Mr. President, does it occur to you that America's long-term prosperity and security outweigh the expediency of your reelection campaign?

## One, few and many



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

SOME people always control the most. Twenty per cent people control eighty per cent of world's wealth. A few members of parliament represent the people of a country, even fewer people make the cabinet, and only one of them heads the government. Only fifteen countries of the world comprise the Security Council, and even fewer countries (US and its allies!) actually run the world. All human matters sharpen to a point from many to few to one as if there is a process of elimination that works in reverse to drive the progress of this world.

If you think, the real struggle of mankind has been to resolve this conflict between some and many. Monarchy was when power concentrated in one hand, but democracy has widened the circle by keeping more people in the loop. In business, the stretch is between monopoly and liberal business. In religion, a few messiahs and prophets have preached gospels, which inspired millions. And if you look at science

and technology, ideology, creative literature, art and painting, entertainment and sports, it's the work of some people, which have influenced many.

Let us say it's the division-of-labour equivalent of human destiny. Some will have the talents and skills to produce what is good for many. A few hundred workers can produce clothes for millions. One television show can be enjoyed by hundreds of millions of people around the world! One man's idea (Osama bin Laden) can shake up the world.

Every party has one leader, every orchestra has one conductor, every team has one captain, every plane has one pilot and every car has one driver. If you carefully examine, the control for most things in the world is in the hands of one or few. Companies have Management Committees or Board of Directors, nations have governments, discussions have panels, trades have unions, businesses have cartels, and others have societies or associations. It's amazing how the affairs of men are geared so that the most will sur-

The Holy Bible says, "For many are called, but few are chosen." And Shakespeare is defiant in *The Merchant of Venice* when he writes that he will not choose what many men desire, because he will not jump with common spirits and rank himself with the barbarous multitude. But Winston Churchill gave it a whole new twist when he gave a speech on the skills and courage of British airmen, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

The conflict, however, is only

produce a length of cloth.

The depth of reason is right in there. There are but a few truths embedded in many manifestations, and many rays of light beam out of a single sun. Every circle has only one centre, one diamond shines with many glints and many words write a single hymn. Many believers follow one prophet and many prophets obey one God. Many instruments make a tune, many thoughts make a decision, many withdrawals make a return, many dreams forge a success, many colours weave a rain-

of many?

Every man holds the world in him, as the world holds every man in it. In the end a crowd is so much the density of individuals as the individuals are a dispersed crowd. Many are magnified one, and one is reduction of many. That is why, one rouses many and many respond to one. Leaders and followers, herds-men and cattle, chiefs and tribes, bosses and subordinates, saints and devotees, human affairs is but an unfolding pattern of one and many.

Taking from crime syndicates to the Papacy, the structure of hierarchy is like a pyramid. One person sits at the top while the base widens as it scales down. The opposite doesn't exist, except in a quip that not enough Indians but too many chiefs. What one man achieves is lived by many. Often one man picks up what is discarded by many and the rest is history. The prophets and reformers, scientists and revolutionaries, visionaries and missionaries, propagandists and pamphleteers, all of them come under this category.

The law of large numbers has it that the number of successes increases as the number of experiments increases. One and few are the outcomes of many as history is nothing but a register of experiments that propel societies from phase to phase. Every generation has its number of successes and number of failures. If nothing else, this is one sure way to tell one or few from many.

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## CROSS TALK

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Another man's arrogance (George Bush) can perpetuate conflicts.

Remember the Pied Piper of Hamelin, who played his flute to lure all the rats out of the town afflicted by plague! When the Mayor of the town refused to pay the promised 1000 florins, the disgruntled pied piper played his flute again and all the children of the town followed him and disappeared into the cave of a mountain. Socrates died for a similar sin, condemned by the rulers for leading astray the young minds of Athens.

der to few or one.

But why does it happen? Why does the smaller number take over the larger one? The obvious answer is that some people are always more intelligent, energetic and fortunate than others. Some people have better vision, more organizing capacity, patience, tolerance and ambition. Some people are better managers, planners and executors. Then these are only common sense, the frontline portals of human reasoning. There must be something that goes even deeper.

resolved when the many owe it to the few or vice versa. Democracy is best at adopting this as political will. The people choose their representatives and trust them with their rights and freedom. The plurality works because a few not many are accountable for the political process. There is more milk than cream, more whey than milk, more substance than essence, and more quantity than quality. One couple can give birth to many children, one cornstalk bears many cobs, one pod holds many seeds, and many clumps of thread

bow and many petals shape a flower.

Therefore, singularity runs through the multitude like a thread across quilt. It combines many hearts, convinces many minds, wins many souls and connects many goals. But then what does it matter? Does one exist for many or many exist for one? The message carried by the American Eagle is "E Pluribus Unum", which in English means "Out of Many, One". Does it then mean that many are the divergence of one and one is the convergence

## OPINION

## Racing for education?

ANGELA MV ROBINSON

WHAT wonderful offers some English-medium schools are making! Hey, folks! Do you realize that OxLonBridge School is offering to take a child of 12 or 13 and cram into his or her poor little head enough to get through O Levels at the age of 15 or if the school has caved into parental pressure, even at 14! Do you realize that those who study English Literature at 14 or 15 years of age do not have the 'burden' of reading Shakespeare for the rest of their lives or even as a mature person! Hey, what an offer! Let the teachers hand out notes to memorise! Let them not learn to write notes for themselves

- which is a basic skill they will need in both higher education and future employment. Just memorise the answers to these questions, dear, and you will pass! You won't understand the subject, of course, but who cares?

Moreover, think of the money you save! If you can cram your child through school as fast as possible then you do not have so many fees, do you? Education is a race, isn't it, as well as an open bazaar? What is the importance of childhood, or growing up at a steady pace, compared to the passion to save money? Let them go to university when they are too young to handle the experience! Let them go off to coaching centers, some of them with their circle of drug peddlers,

who know full well that young people who are not getting enough emotional and caring support are ready victims for them! Why care that such pupils are encouraged not to bother with any subject that does not have an examination attached like Music, Art, Drama and PE? Why bother if they do not get cultural and social activities, field trips, and any training in emotional intelligence? Such things come from a 'proper' school life that is far too 'boring' because it takes things more slowly and includes such 'unnecessary' things as the education that comes from the rough and tumble of classroom life where they learn how friendships are made and broken, nurtured and damaged and how to live as one of a community rather

than individuals who just appear for their coaching sessions and disappear when they have finished. Why bother to train them in anything more than rampant individualism that only cares for its own advantage and profit?

Let us not think of the numbers of university graduates, in every country today who have fancy degrees but who are not only unemployed, but unemployable! It is a truism among many employers today that it is pointless to employ bright young men straight out of university because they think they know everything, think they deserve ridiculous salaries, do not grasp how much training they need in order to be useful to their employer and have no skills as a team player

because they have never had to be one! Let us not look round our own place of employment and muse on the number of people there who were NOT among the high-graders but are first-class men and women who are more than earning their salary! If we are employers, then let us not remember how often we look at the academic qualifications on the application form and discover that they pale into insignificance besides other qualifications such as experience and personal recommendations and, of course (what we can learn in an interview) those attitudes of heart and mind and that readiness to learn that make someone a pleasure rather than a pain to have around!

Let us forget all these things and

just be swept along with the tide that says anything but a high grade is not worth having and there is no pressure we should not put on our children to gain it! Let those of average and below average intelligence, who are fine young people, be given a sense of total failure as "bad students"! Let them stagger home from school and go, almost immediately into the hands of their private tutor! Let them grow up without learning the joys of playing with their siblings, having long conversations with parents, pursuing a hobby or interest and learning how to handle a social life! Let them grow up obsessed with computer games and television because that is the only cross we offer to their hungry souls!

Excuse me, I am feeling sick and want to go and lie down and think of (and thank God for) some parents and teachers I know who are part of a new generation who are truly Millennium people. They do not only want their children to do as well as possible in their examinations but also to grow up balanced and happy human beings with the desire to live their lives generously and with some skills to do so. These people understand that education at school is only the beginning of a process that will continue for their children's whole life-times and not something that is left behind with relief because it has been such a boring and soul-destroying process. Such education demands extraordinary com-

mitment from teachers, who deserve far more than most of such schools can afford to pay them, for they actually care for the personal, as well as the academic well-being, of those in their charge.

Dear reader, let us not think, for one moment, that we are being of any service to God, man or nation by drifting along with out-dated and dangerous habits of thinking about education. These may bring high financial profits now but the bill will have to be paid by our beloved children, and their nation, in the future. Who can stand by with indifference while this is happening?

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