

## SAFTA ratification

*Let it herald a new era in regional trading*

**W**E in Bangladesh welcome the seal of approval for operationalisation of SAFTA from the first day of next year through its ratification by the cabinet.

The economic prospect of the region is enormous, with a potential market of almost a billion and a half and growing constantly. It is inexplicable that given the regional imperatives and the size of the market, that intra-regional trade has hovered between three and five percent annually so far, an appalling figure indeed.

The new arrangement one hopes would spearhead a greater volume of trade amongst the member countries of the region. Along with the increased market access the new arrangement would enhance by almost 1.6 times the volume of interregional trade.

For Bangladesh the dynamic of gains, because of the potential greater market access, could help in mitigating some of the unfavourable balance of trade between it and other regional countries. For, as of now, we export very little while being the largest regional importer, almost 37 percent of the total regional import. According to experts it will also divert a significant portion of illegal trade to the legal process.

However, there is the possibility that reduction in tariff barriers, which are already low in Bangladesh, may mean further revenue loss for us, but one hopes that it will be compensated by other means by the more affluent countries. But apart from the support of the more developed countries of the region we must ourselves initiate appropriate measures to offset any likely negative impacts of the free trade regime.

For a start we must expand our export base because without diversification of our exports very little of the promises that the new trade mechanism holds out can be fulfilled. We must also reduce our reliance on import by going for import substitution.

The new trading arrangements demonstrate the awareness of the countries of the region that only through enhanced regional economic cooperation can the lot of the people of the region be improved. Enhanced trade and economic cooperation also has one significant spin-off, it reduces the chances of conflict.

We must exploit its full potentials.

## Murder at Mirpur

*Yet another culprit to be punished*

**A** businessman has been murdered after a relative lull for a short period of time. The reaction was massive in the area. However, taking the wrath out on public property does neither do any honour to the dead nor is it any respecter of the sensibilities of fellow citizens.

Whereas the administration may have achieved some degree of success in containing petty crimes, the one related to extorting money at gun point from the trading community seems to be on the rise. Most of the murders do have a sequel of previous intimidation and threats often known to the local law-enforcing agency in advance. The people of the locality in this particular case has stated that a group of toll collectors whom the police knew had been operating in the area for quite sometime.

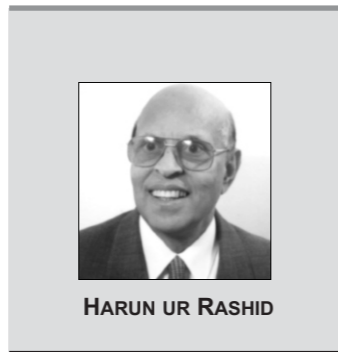
We do find it absurd that, in most cases, despite the masterminds and, at times, even the criminals involved in the actual acts having been identified by the victims' families and the local folks, no arrest of anyone takes place for some unknown reasons for days, or even months.

The culture of extortion and its impact including that causing ruthless murders is slowly turning into a regular feature of our society. With the recent empowering and re-equipping of the law enforcing agencies, there is absolutely no reason for such a crime to thrive.

We wish to see some results not only in bringing the culprit to justice, not just in this instance, but also in dealing with the extortionist culture with an iron hand eliminating the scourge once and for all. Given the will and sincerity of commitment the task should not be difficult to achieve.

## HONG KONG WTO MINISTERIAL

# How does the outcome affect Bangladesh?



HARUN UR RASHID

**T**HERE has been a spate of recent articles and speeches in media on the impact of the outcome of the WTO Ministerial meeting on Bangladesh. If one carefully gleans through them, one comes out with a perception that there are two views on the likely effects on Bangladesh. One view seems to be negative, while the other appears to be positive.

### Two views on impact

One view has been that the Hong Kong document did not follow the Geneva text wherein all WTO-member Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) including Bangladesh would be able to get duty and quota-free access for all products to all countries. At the end, Bangladesh has lost out in the deal as its export of textiles, and leather and vegetables are most likely to come within the ambit of 3 per cent of negative list of products. This will hurt Bangladesh the economy.

They argue that the failure of Bangladesh to get the access for textiles, according to a think-tank in Dhaka, was not to anticipate adequately the opposition from

some key countries against Dhaka's bid for duty and quota-free access for its textiles. This implies that skilful negotiation before and during the meeting with key countries would have borne fruitful result.

The other view appears to be that Bangladesh's textiles quota exclusion manifests robust existence of highly competitive entrepreneurs and good investment climate in the country due to

registering a growth of 127 per cent among the different export items.

Furthermore, the Commerce Minister who led the country's delegation to the Hong Kong meeting said on arrival in Dhaka that Bangladesh's position on export products would be clear after two follow-up meetings in Geneva and Washington to be held next year. There is a time gap between now and 2008 for Ban-

try, it is likely that in near future, Bangladesh may graduate from the LDC list of countries. Bangladesh has come to confront the reality of open market and tough competition in the global market.

### Real issues for Bangladesh

Bangladesh's economic base is very narrow. It should not depend on exports of a few products. Nearly 76 per cent of its total

and regulations that breed corruption.

Recently, the visiting British Minister for International Development has posed appropriate questions: "Why is it that in Bangladesh it takes 6 to 7 days to turn around a ship, compared to 6 to 7 hours in Singapore? Why does it take 38 signatures to import items into Bangladesh but only 2 in Singapore?"

Although Bangladesh private

## BOTTOM LINE

The wording of the 19-page Hong Kong WTO Statement is very expansive and sets out only policies. There are many complex details that were left out deliberately at the Hong Kong meeting to make it a success. The WTO member-states aim to complete a final deal at the end of 2006 in order to start a new global trade regime in 2008. When compromise takes place, each one has to give something away in exchange for another gain. That is why no one country seems to be happy in the compromise deal in Hong Kong.

pragmatic macro-economic management. There seems to be no justification for the doom and gloom scenario for Bangladesh out of the Hong Kong deal. Bangladesh has often in the past frustrated the doomsayers by manifesting its inherent capability to overcome impediments in an unsuspected and surprising way.

To substantiate their view, they argue that in four months of this current financial year, the country earned \$3.3 billion by exporting goods, showing a 12.47 per cent rise. The knitwear export grew by 26 per cent and the export of woven garments showed a positive growth. The country also earned \$13 million in export of textile fabrics during the period,

gladesh to consider strategies to make the best out of the deal.

Bangladesh during the last fifteen years has made sound progress in social and economic sectors. The private sector in the country has been imaginative and captured global markets in highly competitive fields. On average, exports grew at 15 per cent per year during the last 15 years. The services sector currently constitutes two-thirds of the economy, while the industrial sector has increased to 15 per cent. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and Goldman Sachs have given a "good certificate" to our economic success.

Given the continuing economic and social progress of the coun-

exports consist of textiles including ready-made garments and knitwear.

The export products need to be diversified. Many observers suggest agricultural processed food is an area that could be one of the main export products to Europe, Asia, and Africa

Although export diversification has often been promoted over the last two decades, it seems that except for ceramics and pharmaceuticals, no successful diversification has taken place.

There are two primary reasons that face impediments in export diversification. One is weak infrastructure including inadequate supply of electricity to industries and the other is bureaucratic rules

sector is vibrant and could easily pick up export opportunities, the government needs to address the bottlenecks, raised above by the British minister, in an increasingly globalised world, where speed is the driving force of progress and prosperity

### Hong Kong: Betrayal of poorer countries?

Lobby groups said the meeting ended with a deal that left the poorer countries out of the loop and the outcome seems to benefit the rich industrialised and middle-level developing countries

The anti-globalisation agencies condemned the compromise deal as a betrayal of the poor countries who were supposed to benefit

# We must unite to face the challenge

NURUL HUDA

**B**ANGLADESH of late has become a target of terrorists' bomb attacks causing loss of lives and property on one hand and image of the country on the other. It is indeed quite difficult today to quantify the extent of losses that the country has been suffering following frequent bomb explosions. Such explosions can be described, in other words, as man made calamity for the nation.

Those responsible for bomb attacks are, as it appears, being hired by some quarters who have a long term conspiracy against the country. The agenda of the masterminds seems to project Bangladesh in the words of former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger as an "international basket case."

With the passage of time, the country has moved to the path of progress and has been attracting foreign investments in different sectors. Even, newspaper like International Herald Tribune (IHT) recently carried a story on Bangladesh highlighting the country's achievements in some sectors, including the multi-million dollar modern shopping mall in Dhaka.

In the backdrop of frequent bomb blasts senior Indian journalist Hiranmoy Karlekar has written a book -- Bangladesh the next Afghanistan? The very name of the book of the former editor of The Hindustan Times suggest that Bangladesh has been negatively

portrayed. Karlekar is now Consultant Editor of The Pioneer and a member of the Press Council of India.

The author, as it appears from reports, has in his book argued that the headquarters of Islamic terrorism was shifting from Afghanistan to Bangladesh. He said that terrorist attacks in the country were part of a design to destroy Bangladesh's secular and democratic

partners, has been engaged in equipping institutions relevant for strengthening the country's fledgling democracy. If the incidents of bomb explosions cannot be tackled with an iron hand through collective efforts, the country's achievements in some sectors would go in vain. Democracy and development efforts are sure to suffer heavily in the process.

The BNP-led alliance govern-

ment can be the immediate target of the attackers, who might have short, medium and long term plans against the country. The alliance government may become the immediate victim for its failure to efficiently govern the affairs of the state.

When there is loss of life or damage to property in bomb explosions, people are expected to go against the government. Because the government is responsible for ensuring security of life and property of the people. But ultimately democracy and development process would suffer. The political rivals of the alliance, however, have no reasons to feel happy as in the absence of democracy, there cannot be any progress of society. Those behind such acts, would not

Bangla Bhai.

Meanwhile, there has been sudden rise in the demand for sophisticated security equipment like metal detectors, close circuit television (CCTV), binoculars, door phones, archways, vehicle mirror search etc., following increase in terrorist attacks across the country. The demand for military hardware has also increased to equip the elite force Rapid Action Battal-

It is high time that the nation forged unity against the conspirators shunning the path of divisive politics, which only strengthens the hands of the enemies. The unity should be in the spirit of the country's liberation war as the terrorists through their countryside bomb blasts had issued a serious warning, and have staged grievous follow-ups.

political parties and its vibrant intellectual and cultural life. It is also aimed at converting the country into a hard line Islamic one.

As the masterminds remain so far traceless, reasons behind such serial bomb attacks are yet to be properly unveiled. Those arrested in connection with the blasts, have made their intention clear that they want establishment of the Rule of Allah and the governance of honest people. Incidentally, both the slogans are being used by Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh, a component of the four-party alliance government. The party has however, repeatedly refuted the allegations.

Democracy in the country is still at a nascent stage and the government with support of development

issue of Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, was not taken with due importance. In other words, Bangla Bhai with his supporters were being used against the so-called political enemies of the BNP-led alliance. There were reports of several deaths in the hands of Bangla Bhai and his workers. But the media reports had fallen on deaf ears. Rather there were even loud demand from some political parties for action against them.

Today, award of Taka one crore has been announced for help in tracing Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai. Abu Hena, MP elected on BNP ticket, has been expelled from the party for his stand against some BNP leaders for allegedly giving shelter to

ion (RAB) with sophisticated weapons and hardy vehicles.

The government has been spending a huge amount of money for procurement of vehicles and equipment to ensure security of the people. There is also demand from the members of the public for ensuring security in private houses and establishments. In the process the countries which manufacture these items are finding Bangladesh as a growing market.

The investigating agencies should dig out all aspects in their reports while discharging the job of unveiling the identity of the conspirators engaged in terrorist attacks. The investigation should mention all the beneficiaries of such incidents.

It is high time that the nation

forged unity against the conspirators shunning the path of divisive politics, which only strengthens the hands of the enemies. The unity should be in the spirit of the country's liberation war as the terrorists through their countryside bomb blasts had issued a serious warning, and have staged grievous follow-ups.

The simultaneous bomb blasts at some key point installations (KPI) in 63 out of 64 districts of the country on August 17 last, should have been taken more seriously. The terrorists demonstrated the extent of their skill and strength through the well planned and coordinated attacks. Earlier there were attacks on Awami League rally on August 21 last year claiming several lives. There was attack on British High Commissioner Anwar Chowdhury in Shrine of Shah Jalal (RA), and on a rally addressed by Awami League leader former finance minister SAMS Kibria MP in Habiganj. Kibria was killed in the incident. But those responsible for these attacks are yet to be punished.

We do not know the findings of bomb blast incidents which took place during the time of Awami League rule. The citizens of the country have a right to know the outcome of the investigations of all bomb incidents and the identity of those responsible for such acts.

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# Do nuclear weapons pose major threat to mankind?

MD. ABDUR ROUF

**N**UCLEAR weapons is perceived to be the most dangerous threat to mankind. Centering nuclear weapons there have been lots of human activities. Some countries have obtained nuclear weapons, some are trying to obtain, while many are for nuclear non-proliferation and total nuclear disarmament. Enough resources and time have been spent on these activities. In this article, it is argued that so far mankind worked perceiving the image of the phenomenon that nuclear weapons pose most dangerous threat to mankind. The writer opines that in reality it does not do so. That compared to nuclear weapons, conventional weapons like landmines, small arms and disease like AIDS are more dangerous threats. Global warming, natural disasters and poverty as well are also more dangerous threats than nuclear weapons.

### The extent of nuke threat

Nuclear weapons in the hands of none is the best option for mankind, in the hands of one is the worst option, in the hands of many is a better option and in the hands of few is a worse option.

Mankind at present stands on the worse option with nuclear weapons in the arsenals of few states. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

(NPT) is an effort towards promoting the same objective. The UN nuclear watchdog International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is working to ensure peaceful use of nuclear energy, i.e., the countries which are possessing nuclear weapons will continue to possess them and the countries which are trying to possess nuclear weapons in the guise of peaceful use of nuclear energy are to be prevented. In other words, the IAEA is working for continuation of the worse option.

Had many countries, at least all regional powers and their counterparts, possessed nuclear weapons, the mankind would have been in the better option. There would have been a balance of power, therefore, less probability of the use of nuclear weapons by any. During the Cold War period, nuclear war did not break out because of the balance of power between the USA and the former USSR. With such option, the risk lies in its possible use by any irresponsible regime or any terrorist group. But history shows that nuclear weapons had been used during the World War II by a very responsible, world's top democratic regime of the USA. The USA used it within few weeks of its production by the Manhattan Project. But the regional powers namely, India and Pakistan have for long restrained themselves from using nuclear weapons.

The use of nuclear weapons by USA was criticised on the grounds that it was not needed to kill 220,000

It is theoretical perception that nuclear weapons are the major threats but in reality conventional weapons, poverty, diseases and natural disasters are the actual threats to mankind. In these days, when the fossil fuel reserve of the world is rapidly depleting, nuclear energy can be of great help to mankind. Albert Einstein rightly said "Politics is more difficult than physics and the world is more likely to die from bad politics than from bad physics". Time is ripe to take lesson from this to put politics on right track for human welfare.

people during the end days of the war when Japan was gradually losing ability to continue war. The proponents of bombings opine that more lives could have been lost had the war continued. They argue that the use of nuclear bombs put an end to the war. Against such opinion it can be said that it was not needed to drop two bombs on densely populated cities. To show US strength of destruction it could have been dropped on land uninhabited by people.

Therefore, the use of nuclear bombs by the USA on Japan was far from an outcome of reality perception and rational calculation. The responsible leaders also sometimes behave irresponsibly. Understandably, had the US required using nuclear weapons, it would have done so. But the USA is realising its objectives with conventional weapons, so, it does not require using nuclear weapons. Israel is believed to have possessed nuclear weapons to use it as the last resort if its existence is threatened. With the Palestinian policy of coexistence with Israel and nuclear balance

of power between India and Pakistan, regional nuclear war is less probable. If IAEA is given enough authority to have information regarding the nuclear capabilities of the states, and their efforts to obtain the capability, it is less likely that any terrorist group can obtain nuclear weapons.

The best option -- total nuclear disarmament is not heard today because some countries holding nuclear weapons want to eat the cake and keep it too. It is unethical to hold nuclear weapons to oneself and ask others not to do so. Had ethics prevailed in the decision making of some states, nuclear power could have done enough welfare to the mankind. Had the states with nuclear weapons started nuclear disarmament, the world-be nuclear states would have given up their efforts to obtain nuclear weapons. Total nuclear disarmament eludes because of image perception and over ambition of some people whose decisions matter. Understandably, the USA does not need nuclear

weapons. So, there is no harm for the USA and other states to go for total nuclear disarmament.

Some may argue that in a nuclear free world, there will be proliferation of protracted wars -- with conventional weapons -- more lives and properties will be destroyed, so, the world needs nuclear deterrence to keep conventional warfare limited. Strengthening the United Nations is the answer to these critics. Spread and proliferation of conventional warfare can be controlled by the UN with strong peace-keeping ability.

Perhaps, aspirations are there even to push mankind to the worst option of nuclear weapons in the hands of one. The US doctrine of the New American Century presumably has a surreptitious element of this sort.

From the above discussion, it is seen that there is less possibility of a nuclear war. Neither side can win an all-out atomic war. In today's international relations, such an all-out war has become an impossibility with a unipolar world led by the USA. If there is threat of limited regional nuclear

war that can be checked with effective role of the IAEA and regional balance of power. Now let us examine the extent of damage nuclear weapons caused to mankind. Nuclear bombs killed 140,000 people in Hiroshima and 80,000 in Nagasaki in August 1945. Initial death tolls stood at 220,000. Till 2004 the death tolls rose to 237,062 as more people died from cancer and other long-term ailments. But surprisingly, the World War II caused a total of 60 million or more deaths -- not by nuclear weapons but by conventional ones. World War I caused 20 million deaths -- none of these deaths caused by nuclear weapons.

There are around 30,000 nuclear warheads in the arsenals of little more than half a dozen countries -- enough to destroy the present civilization but that did not happen. So, some amount of rationality is certainly finding its way in actions of people whose decisions matter. It is no harm if nuclear weapons are there but those do never explode. However, it is in the best interest of man-

kind that there are no nuclear weapons.

### Magnitude of other threats

Now let us compare the loss of human lives by the use of nuclear weapons and by some other causes. Landmines kill or maim 2000 people a month, one third of them are children. That means during the last 15 years, landmines have caused more deaths than nuclear weapons did during World War II. Professor Rummel explains, "Nearly 170 million probably have been murdered by governments in the 20th century, 1900-1987; over four-times those killed in combat in all international and domestic wars during the same years". These death tolls had been caused by conventional weapons.

In terms of loss of human lives, some diseases have caused more havoc on mankind than nuclear weapons did. During the last 24 years, 25 million people died of AIDS. There is no AIDS cure till date, so more deaths will follow. According to WHO Report, 2005 about 530,000 women die a year in pregnancy and childbirth, more than 3 million babies die before birth, more than 4 million new-borns die within the first days or weeks of life, and altogether 10.6 million children die a year before their fifth birthday. Nuclear weapons could not inflict such havoc on mankind. According to another report, about 40 million people die due to tobacco related diseases across the world every year. Centre for Environment

most from the Doha Round. The anti-poverty campaign group dismissed the likely impact of ending EU export subsidies and US cotton export subsidies, not domestic subsidies to their farmers.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICTFU) said that the fact that rich countries would be able to protect key products, such as textiles, was a disastrous result for poorer countries.

Oxfam trade campaign chief Phil Bloomer said that, "This is a profoundly disappointing text and betrayal of development promises. Rich country interests have prevailed again."

### Conclusion

The wording of the 19-page Hong Kong WTO Statement is very expansive and sets out only policies. There are many complex details that were left out deliberately at the Hong Kong meeting to make it a success. They need to be thrashed out next year and the devil is always in the details. The WTO member-states aim to complete a final deal at the end of 2006 in order to start a new global trade regime in 2008.

When compromise takes place, each one has to give something away in exchange for another gain, and that is the bottom line of compromise. That is why no one country seems to be happy in the compromise deal in Hong Kong.

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