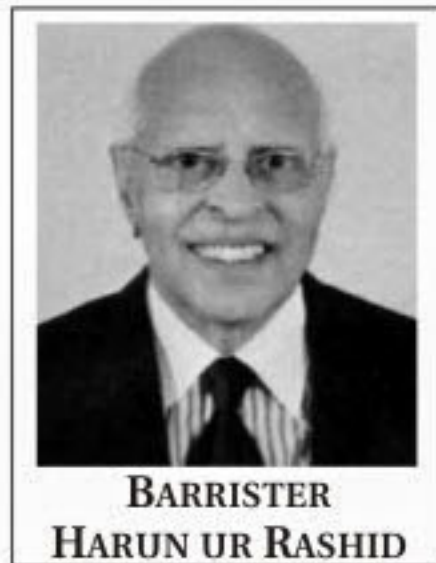


BOTTOM LINE

Barriers hamper exports to India



INDIA'S Commerce Minister Anand Sharma arrived in Bangladesh on April 23, leading a 33-member delegation and a host of high profile businessmen, on a two day visit to Bangladesh to hold talks on bilateral trade. It is an opportunity to discuss bottlenecks in the increase of trade, especially Bangladesh exports to India.

During Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in January 2010, it was agreed that a comprehensive framework of cooperation for development between the two countries, including strengthening of bilateral trade, would be put in place. In the joint communique issued following the prime minister's visit, it was agreed that, with a view to encouraging imports from Bangladesh, India would address removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers and port restrictions for Bangladeshi goods. Bangladesh also requested further reduction of India's negative list to increase its exports. Trade deficit for Bangladesh with India has been huge for years. It is reported that Bangladesh's official imports from India during 2009-10 stood at over \$3. 2 billion while Bangladesh was able to export only

\$304.63 million worth. However, in the first three quarters of the current fiscal year, Bangladesh's exports stood at \$359 million. Besides formal trade, informal imports from India are worth billions of dollars. It is reported that Bangladesh official imports are in the following categories: more than 35% intermediate goods, a little over 30% final consumer goods, 15% basic raw materials and more than 10% capi-

(Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution is being modernised with technical assistance from India);

- Ordinarily, a quality standard certificate from Bangladesh is not accepted by India, Bangladeshis are not allowed to open bank accounts in north-eastern states of India, and import-export number is issued from Kolkata, which is at least 1,680 km from Agartala;

- Visa restrictions make it difficult for business people to travel to India to promote trade from Bangladesh.

It is reported that the Bangladesh commerce minister raised these points with India last October, but the progress is disappointing. During the visit, the Indian commerce minister has reportedly agreed to consider Bangladesh's long-standing demand for duty free access of 61 items (including

ress on trade related issues on Indian side is very slow and unsatisfactory. Noted Indian columnist Kuldeep Nayar, in his recent article after visiting Bangladesh in mid-April writes: "It (Dhaka) has given the transit facilities to enable northeastern states to have better and quicker connectivity with the rest of India ... I have never been able to understand why New Delhi drags its feet when it comes to trade with Bangladesh ... India is too squeamish when it comes to dealing with neighbours." (DS, April 23)

India's unilateral acceptance of free trade regime for Bangladeshi goods will hardly dent India's large economy or market. In addition, this may lead to gradual integration of Bangladesh's economy with that of northeastern states of India. Researchers have suggested some steps to improve bilateral trade, such as joint ventures between the private sectors for local, regional and global markets, while trade complementaries can be developed by vertical specialisation through production sharing. The visit of the India's commerce minister will hopefully accelerate the removal of all kinds of trade barriers for Bangladesh exports and fulfill the aspirations and hopes generated in Bangladesh following the landmark visit of the Bangladesh prime minister to India last year. Many Bangladeshis believe that

India, with its vast resources and more than a trillion dollar economy, will be forthcoming in remove trade barriers. It seems that the implementation process of the areas agreed at the highest political level has been painfully slow, which is disappointing for the public in Bangladesh. The clear commitments at the highest political level of both countries to increase exports from Bangladesh by removing tariff, para-tariff and non-tariff barriers need to be implemented sooner than later. Both nations need to be mindful that the economic scenario around South Asia is changing rapidly. Economic globalisation has made it compelling that both countries seriously consider integrating their economies, and then with the region including South East Asia and China. Speed and deregulation are the 'mantras' of globalisation and key to success in economic growth and development. It is interesting to note although global trade by South Asian countries has greatly increased with other countries, trade within Saarc remains below 3%, while within Asean it is 25%. Prior to the 1947 partition, it was 20% within three territories -- India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh -- that constituted British India.

The writer is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

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tal goods, of total imports from India. Researchers in both countries have found that Bangladesh is not able to export its products to India for many reasons. Some of them are mentioned below:

- Bangladesh's main exportable products are largely within the ambit of India's negative list of goods that has 480 items, which include vegetable and textile products and readymade garments and knitwear;
- Non-tariff barriers in India, such as testing and certification, technical standards and banking impediments are some of the identifiable non-tariff barriers.

- Non-tariff measures are turned into non-tariff barriers while complying with sanitary and phytosanitary measures and technical barriers to trade;
- There are poor logistics for land ports, only certain commodities can pass through land ports, cumbersome customs requirements, manual clearance, excessive inspection as an excuse for security, no customs cooperation or joint inspection, lack of harmonisation of standards, lack of warehouse facilities in land ports, and no testing facility near any land port. (These impediments also apply for Indian exporters as well);

54 garment items) on the negative list. It is reported that India agreed to increase it to 10 million pieces from the existing 8 million pieces of readymade garments. Bangladesh wanted to inaugurate the "border haats" in April last year to facilitate trading in the currencies of the two countries, but due to centre-state bureaucratic tangle in India it was delayed. The Indian minister agreed to inaugurate two "border haats" in Sunamganj and Kurigram in June. Observers suggest that although the political atmosphere between the two countries is characterised by mutual goodwill and trust, prog-

Tiger of Bengal A.K. Fazlul Huq

SYED ASHRAF ALI

"IN my stormy and chequered life, chance has played more than her fair part. The fault has been my own. Never at any time have I tried to be the complete master of my own fate. The strongest impulse of the moment has governed all my actions. When chance has raised me to dazzling heights, I have received her gifts with outstretched hands. When she has cast me down from my high pinnacle, I have accepted her buffets without complaint. I have my hours of penance and regret. Disappointments have not cured me of an ineradicable romanticism. If at times I am sorry for something I have done, remorse assails me only the about things I have left undone."

That is how Tiger of Bengal A.K. Fazlul Huq summed up his great and eventful career. If the test of the statesman be the measure of his power to change the course of history, then Sher-e-Bangla deserves to be mentioned among the great statesmen of the world.

It was on this fateful day in 1962 that the apple of Bengal's eye Sher-e-Bangla breathed his last and plunged Bengal, nay the whole of this subcontinent, into an ocean of grief. It has almost become commonplace that when a prominent person passes way, it is claimed that his final departure has created a void which cannot be filled. To some extent that is often true, but it is absolutely and literally true in regard to the Tiger of Bengal. We have had many a great man and we shall have great men, but that special and peculiar type of greatness that Fazlul Huq represented is not likely to be reproduced anywhere. He was great in many ways. There was in Sher-e-Bangla a combination of the greatness of the past with the greatness of the present. He represented and always reminded one of what we have read in history about the great men of several hundred years ago. He also reminded us of what might be called the great qualities of olden days -- graciousness chiefly. We have achieved many things, but with a lack of those characteristics that have made life worthwhile since it began. It was unique mixture of the good qualities of the past -- the graciousness, the deep learning and tolerance -- with the urges of today that made Sher-e-Bangla what he was. To some, providence it gives physical strength and to others, intellectual eminence; to some it gives affluence and to others fame and recognition. Sher-e-Bangla was one of the fortunate few to whom Allah, in His infinite Mercy, gave in full measure all the things which human beings desire, and yet with a contrariety which is beyond

human understanding, combined all these gifts with a sensitiveness and sympathy for human sufferings which sometimes turned his personal achievements into agony at the futility and hatred all around. Sher-e-Bangla's was a career of outstanding service, of great achievement and of dedication to a cause. The flame of his faith in freedom and in nationalism did not flicker at any time. Neither his powerful pen nor his enviable gift of oratory in three different languages was ever used for any but the highest purposes.

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Great statement, great orator, great philanthropist, great administrator, great educationist, Sher-e-Bangla was undoubtedly almost an institution by himself. He had a heart that suffered for the poor and the people around him. His extreme kindness imparted a goodly grace to a personality that was even otherwise lovable. Courteous, shrewd, witty and kindly, he gave out of his mature judgement and experience counsel which was often sought and ever valued. His ardent patriotism, his deep scholarship and his robust thinking have always been distinct assets in the political evolution of the subcontinent. Single-minded in his devotion to the national movement, broad-minded in his approach to the various problems, Sher-e-Bangla had always been revered and adored as a keen intellectual. Entirely selfless, free from all narrowness, truthful in thought, fearless in action, meek as a lamb, but a lion in spirit as he was, Fazlul Huq never failed to rise to the occasion and respond to the call and urges of the country and its people. His foresightedness was indeed amazing, and in a letter written to the then Governor of Bengal, Sir John Herbert, on August, 1942

he had the courage and conviction to demand a separate Bengali army, and wrote: "I want you to consent to the formation of a Bengali Army consisting of a hundred thousand young Bangalis consisting of Hindu and Muslim youths on a fifty-fifty basis. There is an insistent demand for such a step being taken at once, and the people of Bengal will not be satisfied with any excuses. It is a national demand which must be immediately conceded."

He also pointed out in the same letter: "Administrative measures must be suited to the genius and traditions of the people and not fashioned according to the whims and caprices of hardened bureaucrats to many of which autocratic ideas are bound up with the very breath of their lives." A great man of dauntless spirit as he was, he never cared for his personal security and safety nor hesitated to bring a person to book whatever might be the rank and status of the person concerned.

In February, 1943, he made a statement in the capacity of Chief Minister of Bengal on the floor of the Bengal Legislative Assembly regarding the then government's policy on Midnapore Affairs. Sir John A. Herbert, the Governor of Bengal, could not relish the statement, and in a letter written to Sher-e-Bangla on the February 15, 1943, he demanded: "I shall expect an explanation from you at your interview tomorrow morning of your conduct in failing to consult me before announcing what purports to be the decision of the goernmenvt."

This letter very naturally angered Sher-e-Bangla, and in a befitting reply sent on February 16, the Tiger roared: "Dar Sir John, In reply to your letter of February 15, 1943, I write to say that I owe you no explanation whatever in respect of my conduct in failing to consult you before announcing what according to you is the decision of the government. but I certainly owe you a duty to administer a mild warning that indecorous language such as has been used in your letter under reply should, in future, be avoided in any correspondence between the Governor and his Chief Minister."

This was indeed the roar of a tiger which, in his own words, "reverberates from Bengal across the seven seas to the homes of the British Nation," not the roar of one "who is as docile as a tiger in a circus show." It was a roar which "makes thrones tremble," not the roar of one who "knows how to crouch beneath the throne and wag the tail in approbation of government policy."

The writer is a former Director General of Islamic Foundation, Bangladesh.

Kudos to a change driver: Sir Fazle Hasan Abed

MAMUN RASHID

SIR Fazle Hasan Abed celebrates his 75th birthday today. Those who know him well would say "celebration" is a loud word for Sir Abed. He is a solitary reaper, loves to work, always tries to think out of the box and creates opportunities for others who work for him with a shared vision. Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, was a brilliant corporate executive. The devastating 1970 cyclone and the Liberation War in 1971 had a profound impact on him. He decided to give up his worldly ambitions and dedicate his life to the poor and marginalised -- and Brac was born. Sir Abed is still the chairperson of Brac, one of the largest non-government development organisations. He completed studies at Dhaka University and then Glasgow University, and was holding a senior management position in Shell Oil Co when the cyclone struck, and in the following year the liberation war began. He moved to London and launched the campaign Help Bangladesh, by which he aimed not only to draw the world's attention to the genocide in Bangladesh but also to collect much-needed funding for the liberation movement.

Sir Abed described this in an interview with an English daily in 2004: "Suddenly, life seemed quite different from what it used to be. I felt that there was more to do than living the cushy life of a covenanted executive in a multinational corporation. That's when I came back, and it wasn't difficult to make the choice to serve my country."

After the victory, Sir Abed focused on the rehabilitation of the millions of returning war refugees. Brac was established with this primary goal, but later broadened its focus to poverty alleviation and empowerment of the poor. For decades, Brac has been a contributor to Bangladesh's social development. Today, Brac has a presence in more than 69,000 villages, covering over an estimated 110 million poor people. Brac works in areas such as health care, population control, primary education and microfinance. The "A Pinch, A Fist, A Cup of Water" programme dramatically brought down diarrhea-related deaths. In the past ten years, the number of people living under the poverty line has declined by 20%, literacy rate has doubled, infant mortality has been more than halved, and life expectancy rose by 13 years. Brac extended its poverty-alleviation

model to Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Africa. Sir Abed's contribution has been recognised by leaders around the world, including with a knighthood, making the whole nation proud. Sometimes we chase an illusionary version of success -- achieving material gains. Without a focus on more lofty things, life eventually loses all sense of purpose, and we are engulfed by emptiness. However, when we devote ourselves to serving others, life becomes meaningful and inner fulfillment is attained. This is the essence you get to realise when you meet the man mentioned. Sir Abed had a spiritual awakening and followed the path to inner serenity by dedicating his life to his underprivileged countrymen. In so doing, he created a social empire that has touched the lives of

Sir Abed had a spiritual awakening and followed the path to inner serenity by dedicating his life to his underprivileged countrymen. In so doing, he created a social empire that has touched the lives of so many and will keep on doing so.

so many and will keep on doing so. What keeps this selfless humanitarian going? What gives his life meaning and gives him the strength and the motivation to continually strive for a greater cause? Sir Abed once answered this question: "When I go to a village, and I see that some of the work that we do has improved people's lives it gives me the urge to go on doing this kind of work."

Sir Abed has traveled a long path. The other day, he was telling someone that he is having some pain in his legs and has to take help from a stick. We wish him good health, and the strength to walk further and take us forward. He needs to dream further too, because he once said: "Dream is not what you see in sleep, dream is what does not let you sleep." Good luck to a change driver, all the best to a great entrepreneur of our time -- Sir Fazle Hasan Abed.

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