

Prof Yunus, Grameen Bank win Nobel Peace Prize

He has made us all proud

OUR heartfelt congratulations to Professor Muhammad Yunus and Grameen Bank for winning the Nobel Peace Prize, the first Bangladeshi ever to do so. It is a momentous achievement and it has made Bangladesh look larger in the comity of nations.

The prize was awarded to Prof Yunus in recognition of his tireless efforts to lift millions of poor Bangladeshis out of poverty through the use of microcredit. He founded Grameen Bank in 1976 to extend microcredit facilities without any collateral to the marginalized poor, especially women in the rural areas. And refuting many established economic theories it soon became evident that poor people were better managers of credit and could be trusted to repay it on time. Microcredit contributed largely towards empowering the rural women in Bangladesh and helping them develop their entrepreneurship skills.

The phenomenal success stories of microcredit as a tool for development of the poor traveled far and wide and prompted many at home and abroad to replicate the system. It is no wonder that while conferring the award on him, the Nobel Committee commented: "Yunus and the bank he founded had used the innovative programme to create economic and social development from below. Yunus and Grameen Bank have shown that even the poorest of the poor can work to bring about their own development."

Through the decades Grameen Bank has evolved its unique system of lending, providing training, organising beneficiary groups and assisting them in many different ways towards becoming self-reliant. At present the bank has 6.6 million borrowers in over 70,000 villages. It is worth mentioning that 97 per cent of the borrowers are women. Today, Grameen Bank's model of microcredit is being copied in over 100 countries, from the United States to Uganda.

Prof Yunus did not stop at extending credits only. He showed his mettle in diversifying in other areas of business like textile manufacturing (Grameen Check) and Grameen Phone. But in all these endeavours the pro-poor focus remained in the centre stage.

Prof Yunus had rightly said once: "In Bangladesh, where nothing works and there is no electricity, microcredit works like clockwork." His microcredit has brought fundamental changes in the lives of the poor.

The state of our cricket

Why can't we improve further?

BANGLADESH by now has graduated into second stage of experience in the world of international cricket. However we could only be happy with occasional sparks of good performance by individual players of the team. Unpredictability, particularly in batting, has been one of the trademarks of our team. It is said that batsmen save the match and bowlers win it. We shall have to save it and win.

The game of cricket has been described by one of its veterans in India as also a game of the mind. Alongside physical fitness it needs a strong mind. It requires considerable concentration in the field. We do not think our cricketers are wholesale lacking in or indifferent to this. Frankly we do not find any real reason behind their mediocre and off-beat performance.

We feel in order for a better performance, a number of factors have to be seriously addressed simultaneously by the BCCB, the Coach and the players themselves.

To begin with a Board comprising of reputed former cricketers and people having ample knowledge of the game should be fully transparent in the management of the game both at national and international levels. Above all it must be free from any influence by political heavyweights. The biggest disservice you can do to any game or sport is to politicise its apex body.

On the other hand, the coach and the players must work in unison in an atmosphere of mutual trust and high commitment. No coach worth his name can deliver if the team members do not persevere. The coach has to work in all departments of the game particularly in those areas where weakness persists. As for the players, they should look at the various aspects of the game most seriously. Don't we possess the required level of strength of nerve and professional attitude?

All said and done, we wish to be optimistic about the future of our cricket.

RMG sector still in ferment



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

Activists from civil society associated with human rights and labour rights also lent their support to workers of the RMG industry. Their participation in the movement demonstrated wide-ranging agreement for some of the workers' demands.

This severe labour unrest in the country's premier export earning sector was followed by the signing of an MOU on 12 June between the government, garment factory owners and workers' leaders. Representatives from the BGMEA, the BKMEA and 39 labour organisations took part in the discussions. It was hoped that this

The Minimum Wage Board announced on 5 October the final pay structure for the workers in the RMG sector. They fixed Taka 1662.50 as the minimum monthly wage including basic salary, house rent and other allowances for the entry-level workers. It was also indicated that there would be seven grades for the workers and four grades for the employees (associated with the management of the factories). It was clarified that the minimum wage for Grade-1 workers would be a total of Taka 5,140 including basic salary, house rent and allow-

however not really pacified a large section of the workers. Several representatives from the Garments Sramik Sangram Parishad, an alliance of 11 organisations of garments workers, have strongly opposed the final recommendations of the Wage Board. They have rejected it. They have also stated that the movement forward has been insufficient and negligible given the steep rise in the cost of living. They have also underlined that, in US dollar terms there has practically been only a minute increase. In this context, they have drawn attention to the fact that

state-owned enterprise is Taka 2,450, almost 50 per cent more than in the RMG private sector.

This short-sighted approach on the part of the BGMEA and the BKMEA has not led to any return of stability in this important sector. Instead, we have continuing turmoil, with three planned industrial strikes in this month. This includes a 24-hour strike in the garment industry on 16 October. It also means more violence on the streets, unrest in the factories and possible destruction of private property.

day, payment of wages by the first week of each month, medical and earned leaves and festival allowances due to workers.

I have always taken interest in the RMG sector because I believe that it is contributing directly to our national development. The entrepreneurs associated with this industry also deserve support from all of us for their efforts to bring in women into mainstream industrial activity. This has indirectly reduced malnutrition, encouraged education among girl-children and also brought about a revolution in family planning and gender empowerment. These are the positives.

The present Administration would have completed its tenure within weeks, but the RMG sector and its problems will have to be dealt with — sooner the better. Industry and banking sources have observed that there are around 1,900 sick RMG units, which are plagued with Taka 574 crore bad loans. The interests on these loans now stand at Taka 521 crore. These are worrying figures.

Whoever forms the next government has to attach priority to the resolving of the growing crisis in liquidity within the RMG sector. Initiatives have to be taken for rehabilitation of some of the RMG units which have a fair chance of survival. Decisions in this regard need to be taken urgently without political considerations. A leaner and more stream-lined RMG industry will then emerge. It will be that much more competitive. This will eventually also have a better fall-out effect for the workers.

In the meantime, the owners of RMG units need to display a little more of understanding and adaptability.

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POST BREAKFAST

The RMG sector is contributing directly to our national development. The entrepreneurs associated with this industry also deserve support from all of us for their efforts to bring in women into mainstream industrial activity. This has indirectly reduced malnutrition, encouraged education among girl-children and also brought about a revolution in family planning and gender empowerment.

consensus would help in ensuring labour rights and peaceful atmosphere in the factories.

The MOU also endorsed the decision to constitute a Wage Board (taken earlier on 31 May) to examine the question of minimum wage for workers. This MOU also agreed on other significant areas — no termination of any worker for having been involved in the latest agitation and the issuing of appointment letters and identity cards to workers. The government also formed 15 inspection teams for monitoring workers' condition in factories.

I thought that both the garment factory owners and the government had realised the need to resolve differences realistically and move forward. I felt this was encouraging. Unfortunately, my assumptions appear to have been hasty.

It would be Taka 3,840 for Grade-2, Taka 2,449 for Grade-3, Taka 2,250 for Grade-4, Taka 2,046 for Grade-5 and Taka 1,851 for Grade-6. It was also decided that apprentice workers would receive Taka 1,200. Similarly, it was fixed that the salary structure for employees would vary from Taka 3,580 to Taka 1,851 depending on their grades.

The board had earlier announced on 12 September a controversial three-tier draft proposal but had been forced to backtrack in the face of stiff opposition.

This time round, on 5 October, the Board Chairman claimed that the figures had been agreed to on the basis of consensus. He also pointed out that the agreed salary structure would create difficulties for the owners.

This latest salary package has

the minimum monthly wage for workers in the RMG sector was fixed at Taka 930, twelve years ago. At that time it was equivalent to about US dollar 20. After a gap of more than a decade, it would now be about US dollar 24 thanks to the depreciation of the Taka to the US dollar.

I fail to understand the sympathy of the Chairman of the Wage Board for the owners or their ability to bridge the gap between workers' demands and their available resources. The final recommendations appear to be unrealistic even by the poor salary standards fixed for government civil servants and industrial workers. One can only agree with the comments of the Jatiyo Sramik League that the new minimum wage in the proposed salary structure is a 'farce', given the fact that the minimum wage for workers of a

I feel that the workers have genuine reasons to feel cheated. My participation in several seminars has persuaded me to believe that the wage structure offered has not been enough. The minimum wages should be living wages. It should also reflect and satisfy, if possible, a minimum calorie indicator. Otherwise, the wage structure can only be considered as irrational.

There is also another aspect within the RMG sector that needs to be addressed. These are the associated benefits that are considered as obligatory in any civilised country. They include basic and universally accepted provisions like — a weekly holiday, maternity leave, appointment letters without exception and as a matter of rule, overtime payment on time, observing an eight hour work

Policeman's death on the street and unappreciated facts



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE cynics amongst us may very justifiably say that the police in Bangladesh have become consummate villains with whom the society, willy-nilly, has to put up. Indeed many affected citizens might feel that like other unmitigated miseries of our social existence we have to bear police malfeasance and misfeasance. Under such conditions and attitudinal frame it is only natural that the hardships of policemen or for that matter any predicament of them would ever strike a sympathetic chord in any segment of our society. It was, therefore, quite unusual, to witness an editorial cognizance of the rigours of our policemen in *The Daily Star* on 1st September last. The subject was very briefly but effectively dealt with from a politico-administrative angle although the psychological aspect did not figure adequately. As a former law-enforcement practitioner I intend to venture into that area, in addition to narrating experiences peculiar to our situation.

The historical perspective and the continuity

Our policing methods developed over time from very rough and ready origins. The first purpose of our police force is to support the State and thus the primary role is a political one. The State, rather than the law, is supreme and the major enemy of the police is the so-called political subversive rather than the ordinary criminal. Our police have been more accountable to the superior officers than the public opinion or the law. Duties are tabulated and there is little or no room for discretion. Such traditions or practices would dictate a very different relationship between police and society.

The role of police in our country have made them appear as an agency more to implement and enforce the objectives of the government in power and to help the affluent sections of the society. The police is not looked at as an independent and impartial agency for encouragement of law and order. Many policemen suffer from egocentricity and self-opinionated

ideas and often act contrary to public interests and expectations. A good many policemen feel that people should acknowledge their authority with abject submission and remain ever-ready to oblige them in every possible way.

Somehow policemen in our parlance feel that the enrolment in police force automatically gives them the right to enjoy many rights and privileges. Since police are armed with coercive authority, the policemen get the idea that people must fear them and oblige. They exercise

conditions and with such rigour that the glamorous exterior image of the force overshadows the challenges encountered in role enactment which are often life threatening and endanger the personnel on duty and also off-duty. The functions of the police encompass preservation of law and order to safeguard people from attack and to protect property, among others. The society expects the cop to play the varied roles with equal alacrity. He helps and saves but also backs and makes arrest. This

vulnerability of the police as an occupational group to job stress and burnout deserves recognition with a view to looking for the solutions to the problems. The search may impact on operational procedures and future training and illustrate the potential dangers of certain physical and psychological responses which may be amenable to modification through training and other interventions.

On the street level, the police job is fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies. The duties of the police

to children deprive the policeman of the feel of family life. Absence of reasonable vacation coupled with increasing task pressures drive policeman to do wrong things. A little bit of sadism also creeps in as he is made to sacrifice all he has and receive public condemnation as a reward.

Most of us in Bangladesh are familiar with the sloppy, discourteous, rude, aggressive and bully figure in police uniform but we do not seem to realise that policemen are largely unappreciated,

and procedures; provide adequate support and organisational intervention to the management of stress within the law enforcement agency. Our policemen are truly a stressed lot. Psychological services and trained psychologist must be made an integral part of the organisational setup.

The role of stress management training and intervention strategies in handling police stress should be an area of study. Longitudinal studies may be suitable to investigate the impact of police work on the individual's life and its impact on health, social and psychological well-being.

The endearment process of our police to the community has to be consciously divorced from past traditions. The police have to get closer to the people and at the same time deal with the challenges to the authority which is inherent in a pluralist society. So, the ruling politicians and the courts have to ensure the right use of authority. Instances are plenty where political interference with the administration and work of police has caused serious management and image problems. Our policemen need support from the guardians to minimise suffering.

Lack of sensitisation

Our politicians have failed to sensitise our policemen in correctly understanding the rising expectations and aspirations of the people which result from the enunciation of national goals in the political sphere. Our policemen are not made to understand that any gap between the promise of constitutional ideal and the reality leads to strains and tensions which are mobilised for the 'politics of agitation'. There is still not adequate appreciation that the resultant politicisation of the masses and the development among them of a greater awareness of their rights and methods of achievement intensify the ferment and lead to confrontations with authority. Thus our policemen often come into conflict with the forces generated by the political system which they are intended not only to serve but also preserve. This delicacy and complexity is not adequately understood and misapprehended.

The net result of such a scenario is that the police is cast into a rigid adversarial relationship. Under such circumstances, the hallowed talks of endearing the police to the community and the lofty ideas of community policing sound hollow. In any venture of promotional efforts the real stakeholders are conspicuously absent. The outcome remains less than desirable.

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STRAIGHT LINE

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discretion by becoming indiscriminate all too often.

Political behaviour and aberrations

Our politicians betray a pathetic lack of appreciation of the imperative that the foundation of a civilised society depends upon the effective and impartial working of some corrective institutions, prominent among which is the public service. They appear to be perilously oblivious to the reality that the regulatory outfit of police must be demonstrably impartial to ensure public confidence in the government ability of the ruling class. The ruling parties in their misplaced exuberance forget that the police was the dominant visible symbol of repressive imperial alien power and that de-colonisation requires large scale behavioural and attitudinal changes of the political masters and the public servants belonging to this vital organ of the state. Thus while admonitions from the pulpit come in plenty for rational behaviour on the part of enforcement officials, in reality, unhealthy pressures are regularly exerted to carry out the wishes of the ruling coteries in the most expeditious manner. It is the continuance of such regressive mentality that has brought us to the present lamentable scenario wherein the police outfit has been described a lackey of the political government. Nothing could be more sad and frustrating than that.

Real life policing
Law enforcement in Bangladesh entails upon the police to perform in the worst of

roller-coaster ride is a process difficult to understand functionally and incomprehensible emotionally.

The rigours of working for long hours without rest, meagre remuneration and inadequate living conditions and rotating shifts make it clear why policing is a high stress occupation. The police are expected to accomplish mood swings from loving father, understanding spouse to a lathi-wielding defender of law combating a riotous mob. The job makes great demand on the mental, emotional and physical capabilities of the officer, demands that are all too often so stressful that they begin to destroy the individual.

Law enforcement tends to impose a higher degree of stress and a multiplicity of stressful situations on the individual than do most other professions. In the course of his duty, the cop encounters the dark side of human nature and thus with the growing incidence of crime and widening role expectations, the mental and physical health of policemen assumes greater significance than before. In Bangladesh, stresses are frequently triggered from social change, economic conditions, police organisation, the total criminal justice system and the demands made on policeman's time and of his family.

The organisational culture and the impact

It is a sad commentary that until now for a policeman in Bangladesh the focus is always on the job to be done. People have to last a lifetime and strenuous tasks such as policing eventually become too arduous and exacting. Therefore, the special

factor depend upon such diverse factors as the law, court decisions, political climate, community pressures and personality of the commander amongst others. The consequent role ambiguity is associated with high job-related tension.

A police officer's role in contemporary Bangladesh is rather paradoxical in nature. He comes across conflicting situations when he finds that he has to enforce directives which are not strictly legal and which the public wishes that the police would discreetly ignore. Fulfilling the expectations of the public and obligation to his organisational role poses a very difficult situation causing stress to individual officer. This role conflict occurs when simultaneous advent of two or more sets of pressures are such that compliance with the one would make more difficult compliance with the other. Therefore, the greatly increased conflicts of role expectations, organisational and institutional constraints, unrealistic demands and dilemmas of the cop in uniform need to be examined explicitly.

The work situation and the image

Looking into the travails of the police one would find that police work is arduous, often dirty and unpleasant and sometimes dangerous. Night work is a standard feature of their life. They are not paid for overtime work. They too often work on holidays and during festivals. While illustrating the process of dehumanisation in the department culture of the police, it has been observed that prolonged absence of any family life and absence of nearness

overworked, demoralised, inadequately trained and equipped and subject to political interference, feared as a persecutor rather than respected as a protector, often callous and corrupt. Analysts have found that the police unrest is a cumulative result of managerial mismanagement, absence of a sense of accomplishment and growth, neglect of basic physiological and psychological needs, absence of effective grievance redress machinery, emasculated leadership, absence of participative management and unsatisfactory working and living conditions.

From brutalisation to endearment

Police organisation in Bangladesh needs to sit up and take note of the crucial problem of job stress. A comprehensive plan for the recognition, diagnosis and management of stress and stress control programmes for police personnel might help resolve the problem. The subordinate officials who are the most stressed groups should be given counseling for better coping. Both the individuals and the organisation must participate in the stress resolution process.

The police organisation should engage the services of psychologist at the time of selection and placement and choose individuals more suitable to perform the job effectively. Right job redesigning may help reduce the stress levels. Clarifying the organisational goal in consonance with law may reduce stressful situations. The police organisation must look beyond the military model; reorient its structure, policies

Reform proposal -- visualising the end

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

AT long last perhaps the ice is melting. Over the past couple of months, before September 29, there had been hectic activities involving the FBCCI President Mir Nasir Hossain and his colleagues, and leaders of BGMEA and behind the scene parleys pursued by some distinguished personalities in the cultural arena, for effecting a dialogue between the government and the opposition. Indeed, all of them displayed dogged tenacity to persuade the two opposing political entities to come to the table. The agenda had, of course, been the reform proposal of Awami League led 14-party alliance. The progress had never been encouraging till September 29, when Mr. Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, BNP Secretary General and Mr. Abdul Jalil,

General Secretary of Awami League and coordinator of 14-party alliance made categorical public statements.

Almost at the same time, at least two representative bodies, from the United States of America and the EC countries, visited Bangladesh. They had a common objective. It was to make an in-depth survey of the prospects and possibilities of a free and fair election in January 2007. Both the teams had met and talked to the government and opposition leaders, business leaders, social service activists and others who matter to get an unprejudiced report on the political scenario of the country. Concurrently, they tried in their own way to gauge public sentiment about the opposition's reform proposal. Eventually, they were able to measure the popular support in favour of the reform proposition, with particular reference to that of the

To thrash out a uniform line of thinking towards a common plan of understanding between the two contesting entities shall indeed be a very difficult exercise. More so, when the time for reaching a mutually acceptable agreement is running out fast. Still then, a divinely blessed goodwill on the part of both parties can, and will, bring the whole nation the blissful, most desired results eventually. It needs a sort of robust optimism to fight back the spectre of failure in this case.

Election Commission. Some off-hand comments from some of the members of the two representative bodies could tantamount to their support for this issue. About the induction of Mr KM Hasan as the chief of the caretaker government one member of NDI observed that being an office-bearer of BNP long time ago couldn't be a strong ground for his disqualification. Such a comment on the part of a foreigner was considered both unsolicited and uncalled for.

Between all these exercises the

nation had also watched some effort by individuals for bringing the two sides to the table for a dialogue. The new US Ambassador, Patricia A. Butenis, has been a forerunner in this case. Like her European friends she, too, has been expressing her concern for the worsening political situation here. Practically, she was seen moving back and forth, and making personal contacts with the leaders of the government and the opposition political parties. On Monday, October 2 she invited Mr Abdul Mannan

Bhuiyan, BNP Secretary General and Mr Abdul Jalil, Awami League General Secretary to tea at her official residence on Tuesday, October 3. Mannan Bhuiyan expressed his inability to attend while Abdul Jalil accepted the invitation. Hence her effort fell through.

But thanks to their good sense the clouds of uncertainty were removed. The dissension was evidently all due to 'venue controversy.' It was, however, good to see that they agreed on a place -- our Jatiya

Sangsad Building -- most suited to such an important dialogue, and the first session took place at 11:30am on Thursday, October 05, for a little over one hour. A large crowd was seen waiting eagerly outside the cabinet room, and across the JS courtyard. The two leaders came out in jovial mood, expressed their satisfaction with the initial dialogue and said that they would sit again on Friday at 11:00am on October 06. We had a replication of the scene of the first day, a large crowd thronging around

the meeting place to know the progress. It was made known to the press that things were running smoothly. They were in the process of understanding and explaining the reform proposal point by point. The next sitting was held on Sunday, October 8, at 7:30 in the evening. Their joint press briefing again was an expression of total satisfaction, the light of hope for a consensus seemingly lit. It was followed by another session on October 10, Tuesday, again to be followed by a further sitting on October 16. However, to spell out the ultimate outcome will be premature, but it can be said with utmost certainty that both will have to be mentally prepared to offer concessions without being rigid and stubborn in any manner.

The process involves reporting back to their respective alliances, which is, in

itself, a very intriguing and arduous task. Intriguing I say, because the alliance level scrutiny shall have many brains at work. To thrash out a uniform line of thinking towards a common plan of understanding between the two contesting entities shall indeed be a very difficult exercise. More so, when the time for reaching a mutually acceptable agreement is running out fast. Still then, a divinely blessed goodwill on the part of both parties can, and will, bring the whole nation the blissful, most desired results eventually. It needs a sort of robust optimism to fight back the spectre of failure in this case.

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