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Yunus' debut in politics

In the absence of honest and quality people in politics, a vested quarter has occupied the arena. Hearing the news of Professor Yunus' formation of a new political party 'Nagorik Shakti' I have been really delighted. Yunus has been a man of vision and he has been striving to change the fate of millions of people over the last three decades. I personally consider his decision wise, albeit professor Anisur Rahman expressed his opinion from a different angle. Many people may contemplate this matter from a negative perspective, but I personally think that his formation of a political party may bring fortunes for us. We have seen unbridled greed of politicians leading to rampant corruption. Since the liberation war in 1971 this nation has failed to produce any leader who could be at the helm during the transition period. Cheating the common masses our politicians have

lived.

Union Parishad and Upazila are the backbones of local government system. They should be given enough power so that all government jobs are put under them. There should be no compromise on empowerment of local institutions.

Reforms in power or staff members will not yield any fruit unless present system of voting centres at ward level is dismantled. Instead of present ward level centre for 5-7 thousand voters, voting centres for three to four hundred people should be introduced at different localities. If that is done female voters' turnout will be almost hundred percent.

The voter list should remain under UP chairman for omission and addition, which should go all round the year. The Election Commission may ask for an updated voter list from the UP any time.

will come from many quarters. Dr. Yunus will be a common enemy of both the AL and the BNP because one of the parties would have been in power to follow the same old politics. Another group who will oppose Dr. Yunus is mediocre people who always attack excellence.

Dr. Yunus is a prudent person. He has a proven track record. We have taken chances with our politicians who neither had credentials nor had the track record of achieving anything. Putting the future of Bangladesh in the hands of Dr. Yunus and his team will be thousand times better than leaving the country in the hands of professional politicians.

Good luck, Dr. Yunus. People of Bangladesh are with you. You will be the pilot to steer the country in the right direction. We are looking forward to a paradigm shift in Bangladesh politics.

Ekrum Bela
Look-East Club

responding to the wishes of their grassroots supporters, rather than the political cattle-trading at the top. Imagine that.

Thirdly, we should consider the religious element, which is strong in Bangladesh regardless of how we feel about it. Even though Prof. Yunus has not announced any political agenda, look at what Grameen Bank, the institution he has built, represents; a secular institution relying on interest, which is nonetheless accomplishing the work of improving the human condition that everyone always claims is the goal of Islam. We need someone to stand up and say that concepts such as interest-free banking are not important, and be able to show more examples of how the relevant religious principles of uplifting the poor can be upheld in a secular framework. Yunus is the only political figure in Bangladesh capable of countering the religious paradigm in this way, and we need someone to do that.

Unfortunately, he has already made a misstep by proposing that his party's local committees be called "Yunus Samarthak Goshthi", which seems to be creating another personality cult.

Zeeshan Hasan
Phiriye Ano Bangladesh

I had a very high expectation of you. None became more pleased than me when I heard of your selection for Nobel Peace Prize 2006. It was sometime in September 2006 when I was listening to BBC Bangla news in a remote village of Ethiopia along with some Indian and Somali/Ethiopian friends. I jumped from my chair with joy and told them that a Bangladeshi named Dr. Yunus had been awarded Nobel Prize. I told them that it was our second victory after our war of independence in 1971.

I have been working in an American NGO since 1994 as an expatriate, and most people with whom I work know you very well from my discussions or from other sources. You are the pride of our Bengali nation, but you broke my heart when I heard about your plan to join politics. It contradicts your own statements that you made earlier in different forums regarding the politicians of Bangladesh.

Most recently, in an interview with a foreign journalist, you commented that the main motto of the Bangladeshi politicians is to make money. In general, I do not disagree with your comment regarding this, but I am shocked to see that a person of your stature could make such a comment about all of our politicians. You did not find any of the Bengali politicians who made significant contributions to the creation of our dear land "Bangladesh". Yes, I agree with you that a good number of our current politicians are greedy and corrupt. This does not mean that everybody is corrupt. I would have been delighted if you would have courageously pointed out your finger at those who became millionaires since our war of independence through illegal means. You could have done it showing facts and figures against those criminals from both the large political parties-- BNP and AL.

I cannot support a person who has no respect for the great national leaders like the late Fazlul Haque, Suhrawardy, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Moulana Bhashani, Comrade Moni Singh, etc.

Remember one thing-- we would still be under the boots of the Punjabis had there been no Sk. Mujib.

An expatriate Bangladeshi
Ethiopia

With the special and timely drive by the government against the corrupt bigwigs in the country, we notice that the whole country has been perforated by a small number of people with wealth obtained through a sea of corruption. They are the people on whom the innocent people relied on. Corruption has engulfed the whole country at all levels of our life that ranges from the foods to all other things.

We lament our intake of adulterated foods that we were forced to take by the people we call businessmen. They have poisoned us; few corrupt politicians have crippled our national life. We, in this glorious month of February, urge the government to keep up their holy drive against corruption and the corrupt to salvage the sinking nation. At this point, we should not lose sight of the corrupt customs and income tax officials who had a lot to do with the economic crimes committed by the politicians and top bureaucrats.

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

We really appreciate some of the good steps being taken by the present caretaker government and its advisers. This includes all the steps to identify the corrupt and crooked politicians and businessmen. It is also encouraging that some of the suspected persons have been asked to submit their personal wealth statements within 72 hours. Some buildings are being demolished because they did not have the proper structure or parking spaces. And many other great things are happening that many of us were hoping for.

But don't you think that in their haste they have not heard the voices of the slum dwellers who have no other place to go? The small trader running a shop at the street corner is so badly affected that he may never recover from this loss - but is he wrong to ask, where can I go to sit and earn an honest living? Solutions which cause

Pilot

Dropping Khaled Mashud from the World Cup Squad was a shocking mistake by our national team selectors. Leaving out an experienced campaigner like Mashud, who would have been playing his third consecutive World Cup, will cost the Bangladesh team dearly.

I can understand keeping Mushfiqur Rahim in the squad as a batsman, but the added pressure of wicket keeping is likely to be too much for him.

Taharat
On e-mail

For economic development...

1. Build double track highways between Dhaka - Chittagong, Dhaka - Khulna, Dhaka- Rajshahi, Dhaka-Sylhet.
2. Build Padma bridge with railway tracks.
3. Build a deep seaport in Sandwip or in Khulna.
4. Build tram-routes (skylines) between Dhaka- Savar, Dhaka-Tongi, Dhaka- Narayanganj.
5. Build tram-routes (skylines) within Dhaka city.
6. Introduce electric train connections between Dhaka - Chittagong, Dhaka - Khulna, Dhaka - Rajshahi, Dhaka Sylhet.

All these projects should be done by private companies. There are lots of foreign companies who are ready to invest in these sectors.

We have heard a lot about these projects in the last few years but nothing has been done.

Lots of private companies (from Thailand, Malaysia, USA, India, EU) were in Bangladesh to invest but corrupt ministers/officials demanded 10 to 20% of the invested money for okaying the projects. Things should change now.

Dr. Farid Majumder
Germany

Prevailing situation and some thoughts

I applaud the government move to bring the corrupt to justice. It has asked many people to submit statements of wealth and more people will be served with notices. Personally, I would prefer that people lead by example, and therefore, starting with the president, advisers, high officials in civil and military administration should all be asked to submit statements of wealth in person within the time allowed to others. Secondly, the due legal process must be upheld and thus people should be convicted of serious crimes (not to be mixed up with petty ones). The latter does matter, but when one speaks of crimes in millions and billions, it is expected, and required by the law, that such statements will be supported with facts.

As for Dr. Yunus, he is most welcome to join politics. Being one, whose opinion he has sought through an open letter - my response is that one should join politics out of personal conviction and beliefs not based on responses to an open letter. Let the people pass the judgment in proper polls in due course of time. Should he join politics, I hope he will be able to bring completely new faces. Should there be even one member with past political affiliations, he would be eating his words about politics of corruption and would be adding his name to the list of those he is accusing now.

It is absolutely necessary to be intellectually honest.

A. Haq
USA

The army and voter ID

Separation of powers (judiciary, legislative and executive) within a state puts in the checks and balances that prevent the types of excess and corruption we have seen (in the past). While the pres-



ent caretaker government is making progress, it should avoid involving the army in the civilian affairs of the country. The army has expressed its willingness to prepare countrywide voter ID cards. This is not the job of the army. The centralised database required for such an effort should be under civilian authorities.

While a centralised database may sound very convincing, it may create the possibility of manipulation of voter list at one single point. A better way to confront this challenge would be through multiple competitive bids in the private sector. One such approach would be to articulate voter ID card specifications and open them up to private companies. Issuing cards in this manner throughout the six divisions of Bangladesh would effectively prevent any single organisation from influencing national elections without accountability. Those who feel disenfranchised can register complaints with an independent commission set up by the government.

Joy Alamgir
EVP, Consilience Software
Cambridge, MA, USA

Impending power crisis
I do not believe that power can be saved through reduction of "non-technical systems loss", as this non-revenue load will only become regular connected load. Further, one cannot accept the fact that this technical loss will give us

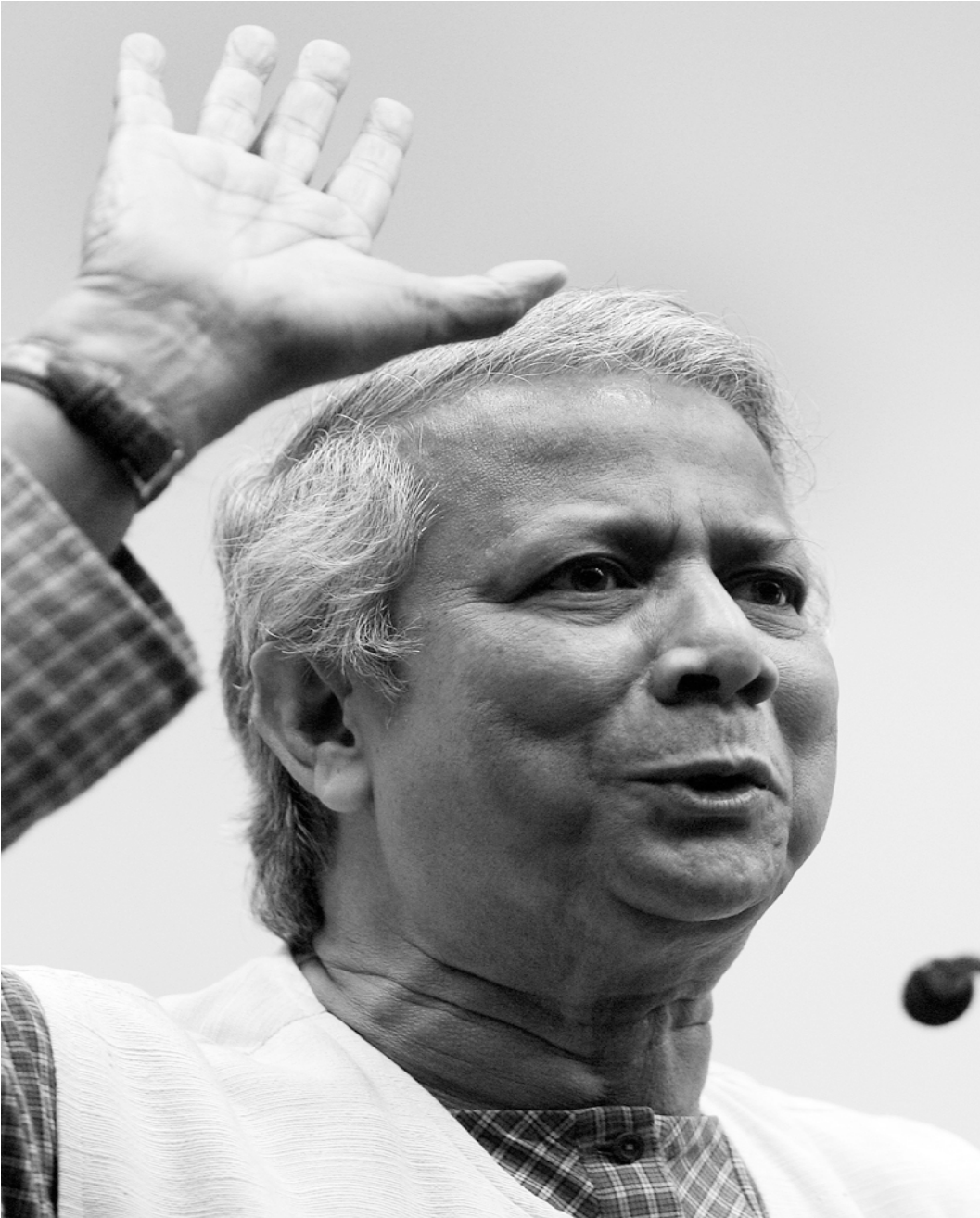
around 200mw of power. If this axiom is accepted, then only changing over to CFLs by replacing incandescent lamps could save about 500mw if not more, particularly during maximum demand period. However, rational load management, particularly eliminating illumination of advertising boards at maximum demand period, should be mandatory. The advertising boards are there throughout the

day to be seen, why light it up in evening hours when everyone is trying to get back home; and household demand for power is maximum! This is rational and logical; and lighting for advertising should be banned from 6:00 to 10:00pm; with severe fines for violation of this directive. Another way is to set up AC unit's thermostats at a higher range; say at a minimum of 29degreeC and not below. This will need education and voluntary persuasion; as it cannot be verified. However, for large central AC plants, it may be possible to monitor and ensure a minimum temperature cut-off. This has been practised in a few countries. As a matter of record load reduction by using CFLs and load rationalisation has shown outstanding results in South Africa which is passing through a phase of power shortage now.

A citizen
On e-mail

Another sure way is to integrate all standby power units (on top priority basis) to the distribution network for mitigating power shortage during the coming summer. The generation capacity is already there, and if there is the will I wonder why we do not do it in Bangladesh (NOW) on a priority basis. California had been doing it even three years back when I was there, and may still be doing it today. This crash programme should be taken up today. If need be I volunteer my know-how to the concerned Hon. Adviser to maximise power mobilisation in Bangladesh; with very little capital investment. The investment will be in switchgear and safety interlocks, small components that can be easily air freighted! The interconnecting cables are locally produced.

S.A. Mansoor
Gulshan, Dhaka



amassed huge assets. How can we tolerate this injustice? Replying to a comment of Sheikh Hasina-'No difference between bribe-taker and interest taker'- I want to say that Grameen Bank is a micro-finance institution. It is not a charitable institution that it could give voluntary service to poor people. When the traditional banking institutions failed to give loan to poor people on the conventional collateral ground, Grameen Bank came forward. It ensured accountability and transparency among its members.

Bazlur Rahman, MBA
Dhaka University

I hail from Hathazari of Chittagong. I am a specialist medical practitioner. Regarding your political venture I have the following to say.

Rule of honest people and good governance are not absolutely needed terms in political science. Institutes run by towering personalities like Stalin, Marshal Tito or Naser collapsed despite presence of good people or good governance. What was lacking was system and accountability. So you should campaign for citizen-friendly system and accountability. Right from the Union Parishad to the very top, all should be made accountable to some nominated bodies comprising people from different walks of

Party president and secretaries should not be allowed to be elected for two consecutive terms.

Dr. Yunus, as a teacher you know it better than anybody that personal achievement through any intellectual venture is possible but for transforming a country into a dreamland you need collective effort. So you need to disclose your way of running our country. That is, you should publish the manifesto of your new party.

Dr. Q. M.Ohidul Alam
Chittagong

Dr. Yunus is not a politician, but who needs a politician? After all they failed miserably in the past. The people of Bangladesh need a visionary who can look into future and can make the decisions on the basis of what lies ahead of us. Dr. Yunus is a visionary and a leader of the world for the under privileged. The world is at crossroads of shifting economic power from North America and Europe to South-east Asia and the rest of Asia. We need a leader who can pilot us through this shifting wind. We cannot be left out of it. We have to get onboard the running train of economic growth and prosperity.

We have to appreciate Dr. Yunus for his courage of getting into politics. Many of us ran away from that bold move.

The opposition to Dr. Yunus



Hidden US agenda

It is least surprising that the US-Israel combine has rejected the "unity government formula" arrived at in Mecca under the auspices of Saudi King Abdullah and being carried out by the Fatah-Hamas factions in Palestine. It is quite obvious that as a loose ally of the US, Saudi Arabia was

expected to leave the unity government formation to the US for final decision in consultation with its so-called strategic partners fighting wars in the Middle East.

The US certainly desires that any action in West Asia should take into account the Pentagon-CIA manipulations

for a quick invasion of Iran so as to ensure full control over its energy resources, which according to US descriptions, is the establishment of a "Democratic New Middle East". Invasion of Iran could be disastrous not only for the US-Israel combine plus the other US-led forces there, but also for the

entire Middle East. Instability would be the eventual permanent feature of the region and escalation of violence would go unabated.

Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal
JNU, New Delhi