

Where's your team, Professor Yunus?

There is a wonderful American folk-saying: "If you can get it all done by yourself, then you ain't got much ambition." Bangladesh has huge ambitions for the days ahead, and the nation needs the professor to rise up to the challenge. So, professor, my hero of a quarter of a century, don't try to do it all by yourself. Build a great team; listen and rely on them.

SYED S. KAISER KABIR

PROFESSOR Yunus has been my hero for nearly 25-years. He's a rare gem who not only thinks big, but also delivers spectacularly. So, when he threw his hat into the political arena, one expected a wave of support bordering on hysteria. Yet, the response has been distinctly tepid. Even my own reaction as the self-appointed president of his fan club has been far from euphoric. Why? To put it bluntly, the general perception is that the esteemed Nobel laureate is going about it the wrong way. For starters, Professor Yunus seems to be under the impression that his success as a chief executive officer (CEO) would be easily replicable to the political landscape. There is some merit in this belief. After all, his success is not limited to micro-credit only. Think telecom, textiles, and health foods. In each of these areas, he knew nothing about the respective

field when he started. So, the fact that he is a political novice is not an insurmountable obstacle, but just a temporary setback. But wait! In these other fields, the role of Yunus was primarily to ensure that right team took over at the helm. So he enlisted the help of companies such as Telenor and Danon who are experts in their respective fields. Where is his team in this political expedition? The professor must recognise that he is a novice in politics. His role during October 2006 to mid-January 2007 -- one of the darkest periods of this country's history was bewildering. His unthinking statements and acts of the time deserve no better than a capital F. His latest gaffe is the "Yunus Shomorthok Goshiti." At a time when the nation is seeking to move away from personality cults, this move of his is a public relations Hiroshima. Clearly, he's being badly advised, or more likely, not being advised at all. Also, how else can one explain the call to the general public form 20-

person committees at neighbourhood levels at their own initiative? How does one control for quality? Team building is the primary function of a leader. It cannot be taken lightly. Undoubtedly the Yunus brand has voter appeal. But it would be a monumental mistake to think that he could win on the celebrity card alone. He needs a strong team that devises and implements a winning strategy. What would a winning strategy look like? In business, a company rarely achieves greatness by taking its rivals head-on. Instead, it rewrites the rules of the industry through innovation or intelligent positioning. For Professor Yunus the strategy has to be similar. There are four key areas where his party should focus: First, demographically the largest segment of the electorate is under 35. To this group, Mujib and Zia are legendary figures in the history books. This group grew up with essentially no living

national heroes with whom to identify. All that changed of course when the professor won the Noble Peace Prize. Significantly, as numerous surveys have shown, this group is also politically apathetic mainly because of their disgust and disillusionment with the present menagerie of politicians. This group represents a natural constituency for Professor Yunus. In stark contrast to the political culture that mainstream politicians have fostered, Yunus is visionary, forward-looking, managerially competent, and honest. The key question here is does the professor know how to reach out to this young group? Does his team include bright young professionals who understand the youth and can communicate with them? Second, apart from a brief flirtation by General Ershad, the mainstream political parties have tended to marginalise local government despite promises to the contrary. Power has become increasingly concentrated in the centre. Decisions for local development are decided upon and funded by the centre. Yet, local government represents the biggest opportunity for Professor Yunus to deliver a googly to his opponents. The argument is simple: As power is concentrated in the

centre, the member of parliament (MP) becomes supremely important in a given constituency. However, if Professor Yunus can credibly promise to promote local government, meaning shifting power to local levels, then the role of the MP becomes less important. In other words, the history of the MP as a person who has worked on behalf on the constituency for many years becomes less important, making entry easier for a new political party. Credibly promising power to local governments requires specialised knowledge at the Upazilla level. Who are the professor's team members that are experts in local government? Third, there are about 12 million micro-credit borrowers. This group could conceivably lean towards the professor. However, it is not clear whether the micro-credit borrowers, especially non-Grameen members associate micro-credit with Professor Yunus. Even if they did so, their warm regards might waver once the professor sheds his banker's robes for those of a politician. Clearly, a major communication exercise has to take place between the professor's party and the borrowers. The question therefore is who are the public relations experts in his team that can deliver on this front?



Fourth, there are certain constituencies, mainly located in urban areas where voting largely represents the mood of the nation. In such areas, the role of the MP tends to be minor. As the mood of the nation is anti-mainstream political party at the moment, these constituencies should be relatively easy pickings for the professor. The key exercise is to identify

the right ones. Here the professor has to rely on electoral math wizards. Will these geniuses in the professor's team please stand up! There is a wonderful American folk-saying: "If you can get it all done by yourself, then you ain't got much ambition." Bangladesh has huge ambitions for the days ahead, and the nation needs the professor to rise up to the challenge.

So, professor, my hero of a quarter of a century, don't try to do it all by yourself. Build a great team; listen and rely on them.

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NOTES FROM HISTORY

What Dutta said, February 1948

EDITORIAL DESK

ON February 25, 1948, Dharendraanath Dutta, a lawmaker from East Bengal in the Constituent Assembly of the new state of Pakistan, rose in the House to move an amendment demanding that the Bengali language be adopted as a medium of expression, along with English and Urdu, in the assembly. Dutta argued that though Bengali was one of the provincial languages of Pakistan, it happened to be the mother tongue of the Bengalis, the majority segment of Pakistan's population. Dutta went beyond the proposition that Bengali should be a language of the legislature and suggested that it ought to be the language of the state itself. And this is how he put it: "Out of six crores and ninety lakhs of people inhabiting this state, four crores and forty lakhs of people speak the Bengali language. So, Sir, what should be the state language of the state? The state language of the State should be the language which is used by the majority of the people of the state, and for that, Sir, I consider that (the) Bengali language is a lingua franca of our state."

Dhirendranath Dutta's assertion of Bengali rights came within months of the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan. In those early stages of the new state, as also those that would come later, the governing classes of the country were essentially based in Pakistan's western part comprising Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier Province. Even so, men of authority such as the prime minister, Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, for want of parliamentary seats in western Pakistan, were deemed to be representing the Bengalis through being allocated seats from the East Bengal quota. Besides, Khwaja Nazimuddin, an influential non-Bengali Muslim Leaguer from East Bengal, occupied a position of privilege in Pakistan's political scheme of things. On February 25, 1948, Dharendraanath Dutta's statement in the Constituent Assembly was revealing for a whole lot more than a demand for Bengali to be accepted as the language of the state. He went on: "A poor cultivator who has got his son, Sir, as a student in the Dacca University and who wants to send money to him, goes to a village post office and he asks for

a money order form, finds that the money order form is printed in (the) Urdu language. He cannot send the money order but shall have to rush to a distant town and have this money order form translated for him and then the money order, Sir, that is necessary for his boy can be sent." Dutta's statement was supported by another lawmaker from East Bengal, Prem Hari Barm. He made it clear what objective Dutta had in mind: "Sir, this amendment does not seek to oust English or Urdu altogether but it seeks only to have Bengali as one of the media spoken in the Assembly by the Members of the Assembly." Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan rose once the Bengali member resumed his seat. His remarks turned out to be a clear hint of the language-related policy the government of Pakistan intended to follow in subsequent times. More ominously, they were an early sign of the subsequent "conspiracies" the political classes of western Pakistan would spot in all expressions of Bengali political aspirations. The following is part of what Pakistan's first prime minister said on the day: "I wish the Hon'ble Member had not moved his amendment



Dhirendranath Dutta

and tried to create misunderstanding between the different parts of Pakistan." Liaquat Ali Khan then moved on to accuse Dutta, in so many words, of questioning the very basis of the state of Pakistan: "He should realize that Pakistan has been created because of the demand of a hundred million Muslims in this subcontinent and the language of a hundred million Muslims is Urdu; and, therefore, it is wrong for him now to try and create the situation that as the majority of the people of Pakistan belongs to one part of Pakistan, therefore the language which is spoken there should become the state language of Pakistan. I never

heard in the central assembly for years and years any voice raised by the people of Bengal that Bengali should be the state language. I want to know why is (sic) this voice being raised today." The prime minister went on: "Urdu can be the only language which can keep the people of East Bengal or Eastern Zone and the people of Western Zone joined together. It is necessary for a nation to have one language and that language can only be Urdu and no other language." When Liaquat Ali Khan sat down, a clearly distressed Bhupendra Kumar Dutta, member from East Bengal, took the floor. This is how he began his remarks: "Sir, we press this amendment in no frivolous spirit of opposition. I am surprised at the speech the Honourable Leader of the House has just made. I wish he had not made some of the remarks he chose to make." And he added, in what now seems portentously: "They will have unfortunate repercussions elsewhere even in certain sections in Pakistan. Therefore, it is all the more necessary that this amendment should be pressed." Bhupendra Kumar Dutta then

went through a spate of interruption from other members before continuing: "But here we are adopting Urdu. Urdu is not the language of any of the provinces constituting the Dominion of Pakistan. It is the language of the upper few of western Pakistan. This opposition to the amendment proves an effort, a determined effort on the part of the upper few of western Pakistan at dominating the state of Pakistan." Dutta was followed by Khwaja Nazimuddin and Sris Kumar Chattopadhyaya. And then came in Moulvi Tamizuddin Khan, to say he could not accept Dharendraanath Dutta's amendment. The motion was rejected. **Postscript** Bengali was adopted as one of the state languages, the other being Urdu, of Pakistan eight years later. In April 1971, Dharendraanath Dutta, aged eighty five, was murdered along with his young son by the Pakistan army in Comilla.

George Harrison: A tribute



REZA KIBRIA

"It's easier to tell a lie than it is to tell the truth. It's easier to kill a fly than it is to turn it loose. It's easier to criticize somebody else Than to see yourself." "See Yourself," George Harrison (1976)

GEORGE Harrison's songs have been a part of my life for more than four decades. The sweet melancholy, generosity of spirit and introspection that were his hallmarks, always attracted me. Harrison is still best known for being a

"We were talking -- about the love that's gone so cold and the people, who gain the world and lose their soul -- they don't know -- they can't see -- are you one of them?" "Within you Without you," George Harrison (1976)

member of the Beatles in the 1960's. The Beatles were more than just a band of musicians -- for so many growing up in that era, they represented a whole new way of looking at things. I can still recall my wonderment as they trans-

formed themselves -- and popular music -- album by album. As I get older I find myself going back to Harrison's earlier songs, still beautiful in their verse and simplicity. Of all the Beatles, he was the one I had a particular soft spot for, long before the "Concert for Bangladesh" gave him a place in the hearts of so many people of our country. Incredibly gifted yet marked by a basic humility, he was regarded as the "Quiet Beatle," for many years, overshadowed by the more idolized duo of Lennon and McCartney. However, a number of his songs are now recognized as gems that will endure through the ages. Songs such as "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," "Here Comes the Sun," and "Something" (which Frank Sinatra once described as the greatest love song ever written) established him as one of the greatest lyricists of our age. He also wrote many beautiful songs in his post-Beatles career, including "What is Life," "All things Must Pass," and "Beware of Darkness." Quirky, thoughtful, and always ready to challenge the conventional wisdom, he was the one who seemed to be less than satisfied with just the adulation, fame and glamour of the rock and roll world. Harrison seemed to be more preoccupied with his own personal quest to find religious enlightenment. He was deeply attracted to Indian music and spiritualism. While learning to play the sitar in India he developed a close friendship with Ustad Ravi Shankar, who later came to him to help raise funds for the refugees during our Liberation War. Much has been written about the "Concert for Bangladesh" held in New York on August 1, 1971. In addition to Ravi Shankar, Harrison put together a stellar group of musicians (including Leon Russell,

Joan Baez, Ringo Starr, Bob Dylan and Eric Clapton) to perform together in a landmark charity concert. The concert and particularly Harrison's song entitled "Bangladesh" gave us publicity at a critical time, symbolizing the fight of an oppressed people against an evil adversary. It helped engender public support for our Liberation War throughout the West. It was not easy to arouse interest in such a distant war, particularly in the pre-satellite-television age. One writer noted: "The very fact that it took something like the Harrison concert to awaken many in America to the suffering in East Pakistan is an indication of how compassion dwindles with distance" ("Harrison," Robert Love (ed), Rolling Stone Press 2002, New York, p. 123). The concert was regarded as the first of its kind, with a large number of musicians joining to make a tangible contribution to an important cause. It was an incandescent moment for the popular music scene, and was regarded by many as a fitting finale to the glorious era of rebellion and creativity that had begun in the early 1960's. George Harrison died in 2001. I personally will forever regret that he was never officially invited to visit our country. He could have visited Bangladesh of his own accord, but it would have been a nice gesture to invite him and his family to visit the nation whose fight for freedom he supported so many years ago. The Greeks still remember with affection the sacrifice of Lord Byron, a passionate champion of Greek independence who died in Greece in 1824. Greece has commemorated Byron in various ways. Perhaps it is time that we considered some form of tribute to George Harrison and his friends who came together in support of our cause during those dark days of 1971.

Recent decrease in LC: Political or economic?

MD. ABUL BASHER

ACCORDING to all newspapers and media news, a sharp fall in the number of LC (letters of credit) opened was recorded in January. In plain words, it means a sharp reluctance among the importers to import goods from abroad was observed. It was big news in the media. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons why it received so much attention was the changed political environment. Most of the analysis attributes the reason to the activities of the new government. Nobody analyzes whether the reason was political or economic. According to most of the newspapers and other media, the importers were frightened because of the on-going drive against corruption. So they did not dare to open new LC to avoid any kind of possible hassles. But the fact is that the number of LC opened has increased and come back to its usual trend by mid-February even in the midst of the same drive, which is blamed to drive away the importers from opening the LC. Therefore, it cannot be explained entirely by the political factors, there must be some economic reasons too, but they did not surface sufficiently in the media coverage. This is one example where we fail to draw the borderline between economic and political phenomenon. It is enormously important to know the reason of such a downturn in the number of LC. For example, if the reason is entirely political, as it has been portrayed in the media, then the economic policy makers like the Bangladesh Bank has nothing to do about it. But if the reason is also economic (partly or entirely), then Bangladesh Bank can not only do something about it, but also prevent such a downturn in the future. If we pass the blame to politics even for something which is an economic development, the same thing will happen recurrently. As mentioned earlier, a decrease in the number of LC opened can be purely translated as an intention of the importers to import less. What it means is that the entrepreneurs, who supply the imported goods in the domestic market, decided to reduce the amount of supply. If importers anticipate any decrease in the demand for their imported goods, then it will be an appropriate response of instinct economics to curtail the total supply. So the fall in the number of LC opened will be an economic response of the importers if there is any reason for them to anticipate a sluggish demand for their imported goods. Was there any reason to anticipate a sluggish demand for

imported goods in January 2007 or after? It is a basic economic knowledge that demand for something depends on the price; increase in price means decrease in quantity demanded. Price for import depends on two things; the price of the good at the source country (in foreign currency), and the exchange rate. To make it simple, suppose the price of a computer in the US is \$1,000. If \$1 is equal to Tk 65, the price of this computer when imported in Bangladesh has to be at least Tk 65,000. But if the price of this computer remains unchanged in the US market but the exchange rate increases, so that \$1 becomes equal to Tk 70 and the price of the same computer when imported in Bangladesh has to be at least Tk 70,000. It does not require much effort to realize that if the value of the dollar in terms of taka increases, the demand for this computer will decrease. Following any increase in the value of the dollar, the importer of this computer will be likely to reduce the volume of imports, i.e., there will be a reduction in the number of LC opened. In late November and early December 2006, the exchange rate was highly volatile. Value of the dollar had even crossed Tk 74. Certainly, this increase in the value of the dollar was enough reason for the importer to anticipate a sluggish demand for their imported goods in January 2007 or after. During the same time period, the previous caretaker government was in power. The financial advisor at that time mentioned it clearly that the reason for such abnormal increase in the value of the dollar was an increase in the demand for dollars by the people who went for Hajj. Therefore, it is a temporary phenomenon. But no other independent scholars or the Bangladesh Bank emphasized this reason. Because of such increase in the value of the dollar, the importers must be inclined to import less in January 2007. This can be potentially one reason why the number of LC has decreased in January. But so far, this reason has been overlooked. This is important to recognize the economic reason for the observed decrease in LC. If it is not even recognized, how can the respective policymakers or institution act to prevent it in the future?

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