

Dr Yunus and the future of Bangladesh



Dr Yunus's work with the Grameen Bank has shown his ability to organize and mobilize the poorest sections. For example, about 6.5 million poor rural women -- one of the most marginalized sections of the country -- account for more than 97% of the clients of Grameen Bank. Dr Yunus has shown, unlike many urban oriented leaders, a consistent and sincere commitment towards the poorest sections of both the urban and rural population.



ABDULLAH MOMEN

THE Bangladesh political culture is at a historic turning point. The seizure of the ill-gotten wealth of the professional corrupt politicians is a welcome signal to all corrupt politicians and bureaucrats that there is some form of accountability left in an otherwise completely lawless political environment.

To complement the elimination of the corrupt and looter politicians and bureaucrats the country desperately needs positive minded and honest leaders and politicians to come forth and take up the onerous and glorious task of building the country to the brink of disaster.

"Professional" politicians stand discredited and disgraced in the eyes of the people. They have ruined the country uninterruptedly for the last 15 years and have brought the country to the brink of disaster.

Dr Yunus's entry into politics is a major development for Bangladesh. Dr Yunus is an outstanding person who has created one of the most successful banks for the poor and which has culminated in a Nobel Prize. His decision to join politics has been widely

welcomed by Bangladeshis across the nation; he brings to politics a level of achievement and wisdom that is sorely missing amongst the professional politicians.

Many patriotic and progressive people support Dr Yunus's entry into politics as the only way of breaking the stranglehold of the BNP and AL on the political life of the country. Others are a bit more circumspect, taking a wait and see attitude. There has been some concern whether Dr Yunus represents the same forces that currently hold sway in Bangladesh, namely Western capital internationally and domestically corrupt officials who collaborate with corrupt politicians.

There is also concern whether Dr Yunus has the staying power to survive in the country's rough political climate. Dr Yunus needs to demonstrate his staying power, spell out his vision for Bangladesh and state his principles and political beliefs before this group will decide on whether to support him or not.

Is Dr Yunus a front man of Western capital?

In the last week of February 2007 a book was launched in Dhaka with a lot of fanfare that claimed to expose

Dr Yunus as a conduit of international capital and a blatant promoter of "capitalism." One would indeed like to know the relationship of a new political aspirant like Dr Yunus with international capital and with our neighbour. A cursory investigation shows that Dr Yunus is in fact a product of Bangladesh and is a patriot driven by a vision of removing poverty from Bangladesh.

A number of questions have been raised about the source of the asset base of Grameen Bank and whether this is mostly drawn from Western capital. As of 2002 Grameen Bank had assets worth \$3 billion of which 93% was from local depositors. Much has been made by the detractors of Dr Yunus of World Bank's loan of \$100 million to Grameen Bank given in 1996; such loans from multi-lateral lending agencies constitute less than 5% of Grameen Bank's assets. Hence, to claim that Grameen Bank is a creation of Western capital simply does not tally with the facts.

Is Dr Yunus promoting 'capitalism'?

A major criticism of Dr Yunus is that he is promoting "capitalism" and which, in the eyes of some people, cannot provide a solution to the

problems of Bangladesh. What these critics fail to understand is that the term "capitalism" is too vague and needs to be understood more precisely. In Bangladesh today there are three main forms of capital, namely state capital, private capital, and non-profit private capital, which we henceforth call NGOs (non-government organizations). State capital includes the so-called public sector industries, banks, and other corporations dealing with electricity, gas, the infrastructure, and so on. In Bangladesh, state capital is the most pernicious and destructive form of capital. What the critics of capitalism have in mind is most probably Bangladeshi state capital. One should not confuse private capital with state capital.

In Bangladesh, private capital is further divided into productive capital and looter capital. In advanced capitalist countries looter capital is marginal and is part of the criminal underworld. In contrast, in a developing country like Bangladesh, since private capital has only started to form over the last three decades, looter private capital is unfortunately a major component. Private looter capital is composed of businessmen who are mostly themselves either corrupt politicians, or else form a nexus with corrupt politicians and corrupt bureaucrats to loot the country's wealth.

The present caretaker government is playing a positive role in arresting leading elements of looter capital and making them accountable to the law of the land.

In Bangladesh productive private capital begins only in 1975 and has since then created many new industries. For example, in 2006 the private sector employed almost 3 million workers and exports from only the garments industry amounted to almost \$7 billion. Productive private capital is the main engine of economic growth in Bangladesh today and should be strongly supported in an all round manner. In the 21st century all countries of the world, including self-declared socialist countries like China and Vietnam, have realized that private entrepreneurs are a valuable national asset. The ability and willingness of entrepreneur to take great personal financial risks in launching new ventures is a crucial ingredient in the expansion of a country's economy.

In developing countries the private sector of the economy needs to be led by a powerful political leadership that formulates comprehensive policies for economic development and ensures that the looter section of private capital does not gain the upper hand. As has been seen in country

after country in East Asia, explosive social and economic growth is a very realistic goal that can be achieved with a competent leadership at the helm of affairs.

The concept of social business enterprise that Dr Yunus has proposed is a powerful means for developing a healthy and productive private sector. A social business enterprise has two criteria for its success namely: a) how much profit it makes, and b) how much social progress it brings. To succeed, such an enterprise needs competent and dynamic leadership.

The concept of social business enterprise is a proposal for reforming world capitalism and is being seriously discussed in the West; it is being taught in universities in France and the UK and there is talk of even setting up a stock market for such businesses. The concept of a social business enterprise would provide a useful framework for eliminating looter capital in Bangladesh and evolve a form of productive private capital that is both profitable and socially responsible.

Some critics of Dr Yunus point out that the idea of social business enterprise is simply a re-packaging of the concept of corporate social responsibility. Although there is an element of truth in this statement it misses the main point. Just as Al Gore provides a focal point, a human face, to the global need for addressing environmental problems, Dr Yunus provides an international icon for the much needed reform of international capital from a purely profit seeking organization to a social business enterprise, where social benefits are also a major consideration.

Far from being a negative factor, the fact that Dr Yunus will foster the growth of the productive private capital is one of his strongest points. Being himself accountable for all his capital investments, Dr Yunus understands the nature of productive private capital. Furthermore, his exposure to foreign private NGOs and other forms of capital has had a modernizing effect on him, making it clear to him that in this globalized world Bangladesh has to perform and measure up to international standards if it is to survive and prosper.

Can Dr Yunus provide

good governance for

Bangladesh?

The main purpose for supporting a democratic system is because it provides a mechanism for electing leaders into power who can provide good governance and thus lead the country towards prosperity. So the question that needs to be

addressed is whether Dr Yunus can provide good governance. Can he make a difference in eliminating corrupt politics and corruption in the bureaucracy needed for good governance?

Dr Yunus does not have any political experience and hence many people are unsure whether he can bring about good governance. Lack of experience is a negative factor but this is also a positive feature since Dr Yunus is a fresh and uncorrupted force in what is otherwise a dishonest and crooked political environment. Dr Yunus brings a level of competence and quality that is currently absent in the political leaders of Bangladesh.

The Grameen Bank is part of the larger effort of the NGOs, which in Bangladesh have spread far and wide; they have created networks, mostly in the villages, that reach the poorest elements. Religion based NGOs are also active and mostly concentrated in religious schools. Whether one likes it or not, the NGOs have over the last 30 years matured into a significant social force, and it is necessary to take them into account to understand the political landscape of Bangladesh.

There are many reasons why Dr Yunus has the potential to succeed as a national leader. He has shown immense organizational abilities and creativity in building a vast institution such as Grameen Bank in a matter of only 30 years. Dr Yunus has shown that development cannot take place through handouts but instead needs the people to take charge of their own lives. Dr Yunus has the international stature and vision needed for leading Bangladesh into the global economy. And most importantly, Dr Yunus has grown and developed as an institution independent of government control and without subordinating himself to, or colluding with, corrupt bureaucrats.

The main obstruction that Dr Yunus will face in modernizing Bangladesh is from the entrenched powers, which consists primarily of the nexus of corrupt bureaucrats and officials, corrupt politicians and corrupt businessmen. Corrupt officials make impossible the implementation of the best of policies. Corrupt officials are like a cancer in the governance of Bangladesh and are easily the chief domestic obstacle to national development and to the country's modernization.

Some critics have raised the questions on the connection of Grameen Bank to the bureaucracy and to corrupt officials in general. One can see from the cross-section of officials of Grameen Bank that there are no corrupt ex-bureaucrats holding important posts and those personnel who are ex-civil servants

occupying the higher echelons of the bank are persons of high integrity and honesty.

A pre-condition for good governance is to make the government machinery a positive force that facilitates national development. Political parties for the last 15 years have grown and come to power by colluding with corrupt officials and so were never in a position to reform and curtail the corruption of government officials. In contrast, one of the most important positive factors about Dr Yunus and the Grameen Bank is that they have grown as an institution independent of bureaucratic patronage and hence Dr Yunus is not beholden to corrupt officials.

It is fair and accurate to conclude that Dr Yunus is neither beholden to Western capital nor to the nexus of corrupt professional politicians, corrupt civil servants, and corrupt businessmen. Dr Yunus is the only person on the political scene who has the potential of carrying out the historic task of reforming the government machinery and transforming it into a positive factor contributing to the growth of the country. One can only hope, for the sake of the very survival of the country, that he does so.

Dr Yunus made a significant statement on February 23 in which he declared his entry into politics by floating his party called Nagorik Shakti and expressed patriotic and progressive principles. Dr Yunus's experience in working with the poor and uneducated masses will prove invaluable if he has the opportunity of leading the task of modernizing Bangladesh.

Dr Yunus represents a breed of honest and patriotic Bangladeshis; it is vital that all right thinking people of the country lend him wholehearted support. Only if Dr Yunus succeeds will many other honest and patriotic individuals -- who have so far kept away from politics due to the fear of the money politics as well as fear of the musclemen, gangsters, and thugs of the major political parties -- take heart and find the courage to join politics and contribute to the task of nation building.

Abdullah Momen is a social scientist.

[We invite our readers to comment on the contents of this article. -Editor]

Can we take on the challenge of human rights?



Needless to say, the principles of the UDHR need to be given wide publicity in bangla to promote public awareness of their rights, and members of the HRC will do well to widely tour the country to fathom the depth of the denial of human rights to the bulk of the nation's populace.

Md ANISUR RAHMAN

THE decision of the CG to form a National Human Rights Commission (HRC) is a very welcome one. This should be the time to understand the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) toward social and economic conduct of the nation, which would be the tasks of the HRC to oversee.

In particular, little has been discussed of the profound implications of the UDHR for the notion of poverty, the task of poverty alleviation and for the very philosophy of development. The relevant provisions in the UDHR are:

Article 25: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Article 26: Education shall be directed to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Article 29: Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

Article 25 implies a definition of poverty deeper than the conventional "dollar-a-day" kind of view, which I have termed the "live-

stock" notion of poverty befitting only a "cheap labour ideology" of development. Article 25 of UDHR asserted decades before such view became the norm in poverty discourse, that every person must as a human being have much more than the minimum necessary for bare subsistence. Respect for human rights ordains that the notion of poverty and hence the calculus of poverty counts be revised accordingly.

The Paris-based "International Movement ATD Fourth World" which has consultative status in the UN Commission of Human Rights, submitted in its report to the commission in 2003, "it is not acceptable to give priority to... the necessary and essential minimum for survival... Human rights encompass more than the right to survival: their aim is that all human beings live in dignity."

The founder of the ATD Movement, late Father Wresinski, was perhaps the one to first point out also, in a report to the French Economic and Social Council in 1987 which the council adopted, that human rights have no priorities and are indivisible, being a comprehensive notion whose components cannot be lined up along a scale of priorities.

With Bangladesh wanting now to take human rights seriously I would urge that our poverty watchers -- both the academics and the government -- come out of the kind of "basic survival needs" thinking that degrades human beings to the status of livestock, that has so far won the

day seemingly under the influence of the World Bank.

We need all to join in asking for the needed socio-economic reforms toward attainment of human rights for all called for in Article 25, which is a call for raising the status of all men and women to a status of dignity. This calls for socio-economic reforms toward "economic democracy" on which I wrote in this paper on March 5.

Coming to the question of philosophy of social life and development, Article 29 of the UDHR directly opposes the philosophy of development espoused by no other than Amartya Sen -- vide his famous treatise: Development as Freedom -- that calls for the expansion of individual freedom as the foundational view of development, unless it is very clearly required that individual freedom be enlightened by the highest ideals of humanity as represented by the UDHR. Such ideals of humanity are not necessarily ensured by attaining "participatory democracy" in a society, which is as far as Sen goes in his treatise -- these ideals stand above national consensus as a mandate from humanity as a whole.

The principle of service to others represented in UDHR's Article 29 is of course inherent in enlightened quarters and persons in every nation. In Bangladesh also such persons are not rare who are engaged in inspiring community service, which the

state is also recognizing by way of national awards. But in view of the nation's newly reaffirmed commitment to human rights it is time to review the meaning of development to ensure that this ideal of the human mission is enshrined in this notion as well.

It is hoped that BIDS, the principal development research centre of the country inspired by our liberation war, will seek to give technical leadership in this direction. The need for incorporating this outlook in the work of the government's planning commission is also obvious.

All this points naturally also to the content of our education system. The UDHR itself has not only articulated this link in its Article 26 quoted above -- it has actually given supreme importance to teaching and education in its very preamble, for its principles "to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions," and that "every individual and every organ of society, keeping this declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms."

The education system of Bangladesh has become by and large a "capability" -- raising mechanism for qualifying in the job market. We no longer "waste"

many pages in our textbooks nor time in the classrooms on the subject of service to society, nor do we include in them accounts of outstanding acts of social service that dedicated persons, including students and youth groups, are a mandate from humanity as a whole.

With the renewed allegiance of the nation to human rights as enunciated in the UDHR we should take a fresh look at the teaching curricula and teaching culture of the nation to give purposeful orientation in this direction to our boys and girls as an integral part of their education.

It should be clear that human rights is not just a matter of law and order. Apart from its implication toward economic democracy on which the commission for human rights being formed has to constantly prod the powers that be, it should also want to work in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education toward designing school curricula and text-books for fulfillment of the desired mission.

Needless to say, the principles of the UDHR need to be given wide publicity in bangla to promote public awareness of their rights, and members of the HRC will do well to widely tour the country to fathom the depth of the denial of human rights to the bulk of the nation's populace.

Md. Anisur Rahman is ex-Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka, and member of the first Planning Commission.

FIRST up in the Tigers' Super Eight campaign, the big guns: Australia. The bookee's favourite to win the cup by miles, a position further cemented by their comfortable win over the West Indies yesterday. Loaded with big names and all of them stuffed full of confidence. Yet am I alone in feeling the Green and Golds could well be derailed somewhere along the line in this World Cup? Or is this just wishful thinking?

As my friend Keith who hails from St. Vincent is fond of saying: "Aussie'll put up a total -- make your stomach turn." And he's right. One look at their batting line up is enough to make any bowler jittery. Gilchrist, Hayden, Ponting, Clarke, Symonds, Hussey -- there is no armoury among the Super Eights to match it.

But how good are they at defending one? Consider this: the four highest successful run chases in ODI history have all come against the Australians, and all within the last two years. Two of them came in one week during the last Chappell-Hadlee series, which Australia lost 3-0 at the hands of the Black Caps.

In those games they ran out of answers and capitulated, allowing New Zealand to score 340 and 350 batting second. Their other defeat in that series was by a ten-wicket margin. The post match interviews were a joy to watch.

Another indication of this vulnerability came in their group match against South Africa in this World Cup. Australia again managed to set a high target, yet it was only the inspired run-out of A.B. de Villiers (bordering on divine intervention) and cramp getting the better of Smith that turned the game.

Up until that point the Aussie bowlers were getting a good past-

ing, and weren't sure what to do about it. Once the Proteas lost the momentum, the Australians were able to regain control, and admittedly did well.

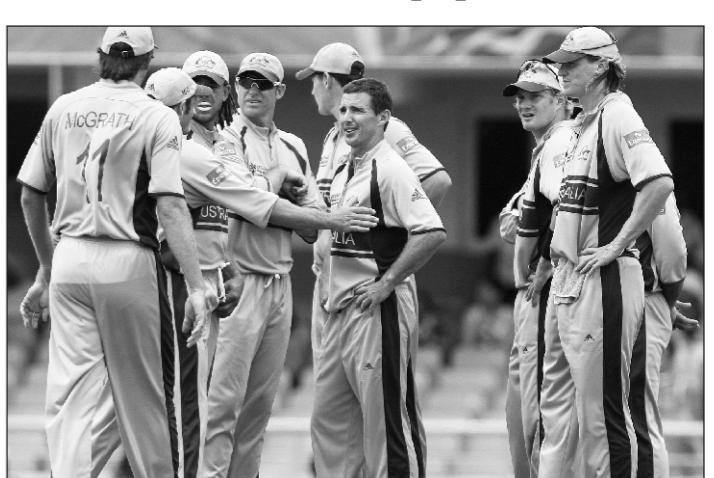
Secondly, the Tigers have beaten quality sides before, including Australia, Pakistan, India, and New Zealand, and the aura of invincibility that these teams once held over the Tigers no longer exists. A key point in my view.

Lastly with the average age of 22, many of the current Tiger line-up know that even if things don't go according to plan this time, they will be around to present a stronger prospect in the next tournament, and possibly even the one after that. Time is on their side. Whatmore has told the squad to go out and enjoy themselves, and relish the experience of being in the second round. If they can worry the favourites while doing so, so much the better. Down here we have a T-Shirt that reads: "I support two teams: New Zealand, and anyone playing Australia." Time to get out that green and red face paint.

IN FRONT OF THE BOX

Are the Aussies unstoppable?

PAUL MASON



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