

Dr. Yunus' lone voice at Davos reverberates

Prepare bailout package for the world's poor

Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus, alone among all participants at the World Economic Forum in Davos, has spoken of the need for a safety net for the world's poor. His remarks, made against the backdrop of the on-going global recession, drive the point home that for all the bailouts that governments have been planning for global corporate business not much can be expected if the plight of the poor is ignored. We are of the opinion that by focusing on the issue, Yunus has in his own way drawn necessary attention to a crisis that just might be up ahead for the poor nations of the world. It should now be for the more prosperous, though gravely afflicted affluent societies, to refocus on the issue. With former US president Bill Clinton endorsing Yunus' suggestions, the shaping of a concerted approach here ought not to be a problem.

Indeed, the worldwide recession has revealed a number of factors that one did not quite anticipate in the last twenty years. The collapse of companies and financial institutions nearly everywhere has not only meant a loss of jobs but, more worryingly, has exposed their basic institutional weaknesses. Which is a good reason why at Davos this year, the corporate sector was conspicuously absent. For a change, the usually dominant, sometimes domineering, attitude the business sector adopted at the annual WEF year after year was absent. Instead, it was government leaders from Europe and elsewhere who were in charge. That did not much help matters, though, since the Davos conference failed to emerge with anything resembling hope for the world. The rich nations did not speak for the poor. Yunus did, to his credit. One will be forgiven for thinking that Davos this year was a meeting of desperate minds which eventually were left looking for ideas that were not there.

With the old razzmatazz of Davos now having dwindled to pale light, Dr. Yunus' emphasis on relief for the poor is a call of conscience that cannot be trivialised. Where Bangladesh is concerned, the bailout package idea for the poor that Yunus has suggested should now be picked up by our diplomatic establishment as a strategy. On its own and in association with other nations, Bangladesh can focus on the fallout of the recession on poorer societies and on how best the world's rich nations (their lifestyles will not change, as Yunus has pointedly noted) can contribute to the effort to keep them going. In this connection, Dhaka will need to bring a fresh perspective into its dealings with donor nations and organisations and *vice versa* in order to arrive at a respectable, acceptable solution to the problems of poverty lurking all around.

Ekushey book fair

Amilieu for all to mingle

THE book fair in February, commonly known as *Ekushey Boi Mela*, began with characteristic fervour on the premises of Bangla Academy early this month. The yearly event is organised to commemorate the sacrifices and achievements of the people of Bangladesh through a relentless struggle to uphold their mother tongue Bangla against stunning odds. This saga is known as 'Language Movement' of 1952, which laid the foundation of our historic War of Liberation in 1971. Since then the book fair has become a coveted feature in our cultural calendar.

The fair usually turns into a festive occasion for book-lovers to get a splendid opportunity to browse through thousands of quality publications offered by prominent publishers of the country in one place. Publications range from storybooks for children to serious novels and research books authored by eminent writers and litterateurs at home and abroad. The volume of sale in the book fair begins to climb upward as the closing day approaches thereby making its mark on the economic aspect of the event. The fair also creates a milieu for writers, poets, critics, buyers and visitors to mingle, exchange pleasantries and interact.

We understand the *boi mela* this year demanded more space because of wider participation by eager book publishers and sellers. As a result, structures had to be erected on the road in front of Bangla Academy to accommodate as many as 500 stalls. This feature only emphasises how popular the fair has become over the years among the people of the country.

Notably, writers and visitors also come from the neighbouring states of India in search of quality publications. The appeal of the fair and the good name of the organisers, therefore, go beyond the borders of the country. As such, we believe the standard of printing and content of the books must meet the demands of the present day readers who would not settle for anything substandard. This reality should make the writers more attentive in maintaining quality of their creative works and inspire them to strive for international recognition.

We wish all success for *Ekushey Boi Mela*.

Of dormitories and schools

The cause of the Jagannath students is, therefore, the cause of a nation. You will be doing grave damage to national self-esteem if you punish these young for the values they have been trying to uphold. Go after those transgressors of the law, take off their masks in public, and convince us that it is possible for us to reclaim the country.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

YOU cannot, you must not disagree with the students of Jagannath University. They have been demonstrating on the roads, they have been getting clubbed by the police and they have been hauled away to prison. As with all young men and women worried about their future, as also the future of education, they have tried to uphold a cause. It is a proper cause, a right cause.

They have only been asking that the twelve dormitories of the university, under unlawful and therefore immoral occupation by unscrupulous people, be returned to the university. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the cause. It is a principle that all citizens, holding fealty to law and decency, cannot but embrace as their own.

And then they should do more. As individuals and as a collective body of people, it now devolves on all of us to demand an explanation for all the sordid things that have been done over the years in the matter of the Jagannath University dormitories. Politicians have not held themselves back from occupying the dormitories and setting up their own business establishments there.

It is criminality of this kind that must now be made to face justice. Do not take away those young protesters to jail. Look for these politicians (and it does not matter which party they belong to) and haul them away to the courts of justice. That done, go to the city mayor's office and ask Sadek Hossain Khoka why his office has played an

equally sinister role in appropriating to itself a swathe of property that is properly the university's.

He has spoken of a return of that property to Jagannath University if that is the kind of solution arrived at. He misses the point; or he thinks we will be happy with his explanation. As the man running the show at Dhaka City Corporation, he owes us all an explanation: on what moral grounds did the corporation take control of those university dormitories?

It is corruption we are speaking of. And if Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury means business, the Anti-Corruption Commission should be going swiftly and ruthlessly after anyone and everyone who has been involved in the crime of laying claim to the dormitories. There are the corrupt policemen who have gleefully taken over some of the dormitories and turned them into living quarters for their families. These policemen should be publicly identified and made to answer for what is truly a crime of land grabbing. Meanwhile, have their families move out of those dormitories as fast as you possibly can.

There are scores of young students waiting out there, those who need to stay in those dormitories. Keep watch on those unruly elements of the Chhatra Dal and Chhatra League who have also savoured their own pieces of the dormitory pie down the years.

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From university dormitory to school.

values they have been trying to uphold. Go after those transgressors of the law, take off their masks in public, and convince us that it is possible for us to reclaim the country.

And reclaiming is also something you can do in Chittagong, through lending your voice and your weight to the struggle to save two old, reputed schools from falling prey to crass commercialism. Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury is determined to demolish those schools, build a business complex there (within which the schools will be built anew!!) and so give people an idea of the prosperity the city he presides over can bring forth and the revenues that will pour into the national coffers.

In an era where globalisation is all, where business education has been pushing liberal arts to the abyss, this stubborn search for money is understandable. But must that come at a price? You think nothing of history; you make a mockery of heritage when you think of two old schools as just dilapidated, out-of-touch buildings. Tradition, in case some of us have missed

out on the idea, is the claim of a people on their past.

Ask Binod Bihari Chowdhury. Nearly a centenarian, he has hauled himself out of his home, indeed out of a revolutionary past we have consistently taken pride in, to demand that the mayor rescind his plans of sending the schools into oblivion. Other men and women, all individuals who see life as something a little more profound than a shopping complex, have rallied behind the schools, behind Binod Bihari Chowdhury, behind Begum Mushtari Shafi, to demand that unabashed materialism be kept at bay, that history not go through the bulldozers the Chittagong City Corporation is these days sorely tempted to bring into play.

If the Jagannath University dormitories are not returned to their owners, if the Chittagong schools bite the dust, the consequential shame will be ours. O, what sad lives we lead!

Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star. E-mail: bahsantareq@yahoo.co.uk

American foreign policy: New direction

On January 27, the president, in his first interview with Dubai-based Arab TV Al Arabiya, said to the Muslim world: "The Americans are not your enemy." He offered a dialogue with Iran, and what he depicted was a new readiness to listen rather than dictate.

HARUN UR RASHID

PRESIDENT Obama's first few foreign policy moves have underscored what was missing in Bush's administration -- realism, dialogue and inclusiveness.

According to surveys in the US, nearly 70% of Americans believe that under the Bush presidency the US had headed in the wrong direction. As a result of pursuing ill-conceived or mismanaged policies, the Bush administration had unsettled US allies and emboldened its adversaries. America's national purpose, spirit, credibility and competence had been seriously compromised.

Dr. Aaron David Miller, who has played a central role in U.S. efforts to broker Arab-Israeli peace under both Republican and Democratic administrations, writes in his book, "The Much Too Promised Land," that the Bush team in eight years had managed to put America in a position in the Middle East where "it is not liked, not feared, and not respected...we stumbled for eight

years under George Bush over how to make war there," and the result is "an America that is trapped in a region which it cannot fix and it cannot abandon."

In order to break clearly with President George W. Bush's administration, which was accused of readily resorting to military force, President Barack Obama retold US foreign policy along three Ds: diplomacy, development and defence.

Matching words with deeds, the president, within days, outlined the new US priorities by naming three envoys: former senator George Mitchell for the Middle East; diplomat Richard Holbrooke for Afghanistan and Pakistan and Todd Stern, a former adviser of President Clinton to deal with climate change.

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Following President Obama's lead, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton set the tone for a "new era for America" marked by openness and dialogue.

Less than a week after taking over, Hillary Clinton has left her mark on the State Department with a new set of policies. In one week, the secretary of state has telephoned 37 presidents, Prime ministers or foreign ministers, according to State Department media officers.

She said that she sensed from such calls a feeling of relief that the Obama administration had replaced George W. Bush's team. "There is a great exhalation of breath going on around the world as people express their appreciation for the new direction that is being set and the team that is being put together by the president," said Hillary Clinton.

She went the next day to the US Agency for International Development where she promised employees extra funds for development in poorer countries.

On January 26, she took part in a meeting with the new president and Mitchell at the White House, just before the Mideast peace envoy left on his maiden trip to the region.

On January 27, she had breakfast with Vice-President Joe Biden, a former senator who takes a keen interest in foreign policy, someone she describes as an "old and dear friend."

In her first direct contact with the media, Clinton avoided a formal televised news

conference and chose instead to meet in person with more than a dozen journalists.

She adopted a diplomatic tone on China when she called for a "comprehensive" dialogue in line with its "important role" in the region and the world.

The power and prestige of the secretary of state comes from the perception that the secretary and the president share a common vision, and both having been candidates for president, Obama and Hillary have shown that they can unify the Democratic Party and cooperate for the service of the country. She has been careful to make sure that her former rivalry with Obama is over for good by insisting that the new administration forms a "team."

Effective foreign policy will play a significant role in restoring the positive image of America, and President Obama and Hillary Clinton have brought a breath of fresh air in shifting from hard power (military power) to soft power (diplomacy, aid in social work, health and education), winning the hearts and minds of people across the world.

Success of the new policy directions will depend on how the Obama administration engages in diplomacy with America's adversaries. The history of diplomacy makes it amply clear that long-standing rivalries require engagement, not isolation. Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be tough challenges for President Obama.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Bangladesh on the road to Copenhagen

While Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world when it comes to climate related hazards, I truly believe that Bangladesh -- partly for that very reason -- is internationally leading when it comes to know-how on climate adaptation. Bangladesh is truly a very important party in the coming negotiations. I feel convinced that Bangladesh is well on its way to Copenhagen.

CONNIE HEDEGAARD

THE consequences of climate change are dire. And they are already taking place. Like Bangladesh, many other regions in the world will be hit hard by climate changes. Floods are getting more common, storms are getting tougher, and land droughts are getting longer. The melting of the ice caps in Greenland and the Arctic is picking up pace and sea levels are rising. The habitats of plants and animals are threatened. Food production is under pressure. All over the world the weather is changing.

The respected English economist Lord

Nicholas Stern has predicted that millions, perhaps even hundreds of millions, of people could be climate fugitives by 2050, fleeing from flooding, water shortage, famine, and natural disasters.

As if that wasn't enough, climate change is on the verge of a tipping point. If left unbridled, the temperature rise may trigger effects that will increase the pace of changes dramatically and make the damages irreversible. According to Nobel Laureate and head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of the United Nations, Dr Pachauri, we have only ten years to turn the boat.

IPCC -- which consists of more than 2000 scientists and researchers -- has concluded that it is more than 90% certain that human activity has contributed to global warming. The temperature rise is caused by increased amounts of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, not least CO2. The emission of CO2 is mainly related to use of fossil fuels such as coal and oil.

Under any circumstance, we need to think smarter in the future: In 2050, we will be 9 billion people living on this earth, and 8 of these 9 billion will be living in areas that we today call the developing world. To me, this makes it obvious that the economic growth simply needs to be a sustainable growth. The resources in the world are scarce. Being as energy efficient as possible and finding new smarter energy solutions are imperatives of the years to come. And it underscores that tackling climate change is also a question of ensuring growth, development and security.

Not every aspect of the challenge of climate change will be overcome once and for all in Copenhagen. But if everything works out, the conference could go down in history as the moment where the lead-

ers of the world united and took a significant step towards stopping the dangerous and destructive climatic changes.

To host such an event is a great honour. In 2009, Denmark takes on this task humbly, and well aware that no matter how hard we try we have no guarantee for success. We will work for an ambitious result, and as hosts will listen and mediate. That is why a conference like "Bangladesh on the road to Copenhagen" in Dhaka is important to us. Together with the Honourable State Minister of Environment and Forests, Mr. Mostafizar Rahman and a group of both Bangladeshi and international key decision makers, we shall discuss the tasks ahead of us.

While Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world when it comes to climate related hazards, I truly believe that Bangladesh -- partly for that very reason -- is internationally leading when it comes to know-how on climate adaptation. Bangladesh is truly a very important party in the coming negotiations. I feel convinced that Bangladesh is well on its way to Copenhagen.

Ms. Connie Hedegaard is the Danish Minister for Climate and Energy and host of COP15.