

Leave Professor Yunus alone

FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

HERE was a time, not so long ago, when Bangladesh's name was synonymous with disasters. The calamities were either natural (cyclones or floods), or manmade (political assassinations or coup de tats).

Former American Secretary of State, Dr. Henry Kissinger, labelled Bangladesh as "an international basket case" in 1974. Although Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman retorted, "Bangladesh is not an empty basket," the label somehow stuck.

Bangladesh's image, however, began to slowly improve in the 1980s when two of its illustrious and innovative sons decided to do something about Bangladesh's abject poverty -- Professor Muhammad Yunus through microcredit and Grameen Bank, and Mr. Fazle Hasan Abed through Brac.

The whole world now celebrates Yunus and Abed. Grameen and Brac are being emulated all over the world. Professor Muhammad Yunus won the ultimate honour the world bestows its citizens, the Nobel Prize, in 2006, and Fazle Hasan Abed won the inaugural Clinton Global Citizen Award in 2007 and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 2010.

Professor Yunus and Sir Fazle have won incredible number of most prestigious awards from foreign countries all over the world for their incredible achievements. What astonishes the writer is that neither of them has won any award from the government of Bangladesh! On the contrary, based on its recent actions, it appears that the government is going after possibly one of

the few honest public figures remaining in Bangladesh, Professor Muhammad Yunus!

Charged with defamation by a politician, Professor Yunus had to appear before a court in a Mymensingh recently for uttering in 2007 the perceived truth about Bangladeshi politicians: they are corrupt and after money. Wouldn't every non-politician Bangladeshi agree with that statement? Yet Professor Yunus was dragged before a court to assuage the hurt feelings of an aggrieved politician! How ridiculous! How silly!

It is extremely difficult to comprehend how one can be charged with defamation by a person who is not mentioned by name in the comment. If a politician says that all journalists are corrupt, I don't think that all journalists in Bangladesh will run to the courts to sue him! Have we completely discarded freedom of speech?

There are reports that the government wants to take over Grameen Bank. That will be a catastrophe. The government-run institutions are mostly failures in Bangladesh. One need not look beyond two failed Bangladeshi government-run institutions, Bangladesh Railway and Bangladesh Biman, as evidence.

Grameen Bank and Brac are world-renowned (Nobel Prize winning in case of Grameen) institutions because they have been conceived and run by brilliant Bangladeshi individuals.

One of the reasons why America is the most powerful nation in the world, politically, militarily and economically, is its emphasis on individual talent. Every world-changing invention that came out



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of America in the last 150 years was innovated by individuals: photography (Eastman), electric bulb, phonograph, and motion pictures (Edison), air-conditioning (Carrier), aircraft (Wright brothers), mass produced cars (Henry Ford), laser (Townes and Schawlow), personal computer (Jobs and Wozniak) and iPod/i Phone (Jobs.)

During national emergencies, such as World War II, the US government assembled the nation's best scientists, entrusted them with the

task of producing the atomic bomb, funded them and got out of the way. In the same way, America won the space race against the Soviet Union and sent a man to the moon, by the government mobilising its scientists, the Congress funding them, and the scientists delivering. And the US military's internal electronic communication system eventually evolved into the Internet.

For Bangladesh to prosper, it is imperative that the government gets out of the way, and lets the individuals innovate. The government should be promoting the creative genius of the likes of Professor Yunus and Sir Fazle, like America would have done, rather than attempting to discredit them.

The world is watching what is unfolding around Professor Yunus. They are upset. The New York Times' Pulitzer Prize winning columnist, Nicholas Kristof, wrote a blistering article on January 5, criticising the Bangladesh government's vendetta against Professor Yunus. Ordinary Americans are stunned, asking us: "Why are you demolishing your national icon?"

I was in a gathering of Bangladeshi Americans in New York last week, where every Bangladeshi expressed shock, disgust and anger at the comment that was made about Professor Yunus: that he is "a good man with a little heart." The consensus was that no person with a real education or any sense of decency can say something like that about a Nobel Prize-winning national treasure.

The charade against Professor Yunus is getting a lot of important and powerful people upset in America. Professor Yunus is an open book. The Nobel Committee thoroughly investigated his background, and made sure he had no skeleton in the closet before awarding him the Prize. They made certain they would not be embarrassed later.

Before President Barack Obama awarded America's highest civilian award, the "Presidential Medal of Freedom" to Professor Yunus in 2009, US intelligence agencies, too, carried out a thorough investigation of Professor Yunus's background, which was found to be

squeaky clean.

In light of the above, if the Bangladesh government were to try Professor Yunus on trumped up charges and put him in jail, the world would know that it is an absolute sham. That will have disastrous consequences for Bangladesh.

In all my years as a journalist, I have never done something I am about to do. I should like to make an appeal to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who I like, wish well and admire very much. I have always been a fan of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, played sports with Sheikh Kamal at Dhaka University playground, and was a teammate of his wife, Sultana (Khuki), on Bangladesh's Track and Field team from 1966 to 1971. (That's all the credibility I can muster!)

Madam Prime Minister: perhaps you are receiving bad advice, but for your sake and for the sake of Bangladesh it will be a big mistake and will prove to be counterproductive to go after Professor Yunus. Instead of wasting time investigating Professor Yunus, if we must investigate somebody, it will be far better to ask Bangladesh's intelligence agencies to investigate the background of some of those appointed to higher posts, especially their educational credentials and whether their allegiance lies solely with Bangladesh or elsewhere. We cannot run away from the fact that, if we take down Professor Muhammad Yunus, in the eyes of the Bangladeshis and foreigners alike, we also take down Bangladesh.

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The writer is a Rhodes Scholar.

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

The end of Qaddafi?

DANIEL BYMAN

AFTER more than 40 years in power, is the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, as Muammar Qaddafi's government is known, at its end? News from Libya is fragmentary and at times contradictory, but all signs point to a regime in crisis. Benghazi, Libya's second-largest city, is in the hands of the demonstrators -- many of them armed -- who are gleefully shouting anti-regime slogans. Tripoli, the capital, is in chaos, with buildings on fire and the police in hiding. Key military units are defecting, while once-

means it.

Indeed, Libya already seems to be descending into a civil war. Hundreds have died as the regime has mowed down demonstrators. How many are dead is impossible to tell, because the regime has imposed a media blackout and tried to restrict cell phone and Internet access. But clearly this regime does not plan to go gently.

A key question is whether the Qaddafi family can ensure the loyalty of the important tribes and military figures that have not yet declared for the opposition. The defections so far are encouraging signs that Qaddafi is failing.

the opposition if it is to end this tyranny. Qaddafi divided and ruled as well as coerced and co-opted, so Libyans are not used to working together politically. In Egypt and Tunisia, the militaries had a sense of institutional pride, and hatred of the regime kept disparate forces working together.

The Libyan military is far more politicised. Moreover, Libya has historically had less of a sense of national unity, making it harder for people in Benghazi to coordinate their activities with those in far-away Tripoli. Even more important, so far the regime has fought back hard -- and for the

demonstrators are trying to change their government -- the Obama administration has a disadvantage in Libya: a lack of influence. In Egypt, the close relationship between the U.S. and Egyptian militaries, to say nothing of the more than \$1 billion in aid every year, gave the Obama administration a say in events there.

Bahrain is a close U.S. ally, and Washington is also close to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain's neighbourhood big brother. In Libya, on the other hand, the United States has little or no ability to sway the regime. Denouncing Qaddafi means little, and there is no aid or serious cooperation to withhold.

Tribute to Shahed Noman

MAMUN RASHID

SHAHED Noman, the former Managing Director of Dhaka Bank Limited and Chairman, Financial Excellence Limited (Finexcel), died of a massive heart attack in the late evening of February 24, leaving his wife and two sons along with thousands of friends and well wishers behind.

He was not just a banker, that's why we saw so many people thronging to his home very late in the night, and so many people attending his Namaz e janaza next day. I was asking myself when and how this extremely calm and quite gentleman had won so many friends and well wishers to appreciate his fraternity, integrity, warmth and fellowship.

I came to know Shahed Noman when I joined ANZ Grindlays Bank. We never worked directly with each other, yet we were always in touch, even after my joining Standard Chartered, Citibank and his leaving ANZ, joining Merrill Lynch in Geneva and afterwards Dhaka Bank Ltd. However, we dreamt together to build up the country's first advocacy, advisory and organisational development institution dedicated to the financial sector -- FinExcel.

He was one of the most genuine people I have ever met. Even though he held many senior positions, he never showed any pride or snobbishness about it. He was a perfect gentleman, soft-spoken but with subtle humour. He was very loving and always full of life. He loved me a lot, and I mean it with all sincerity. He guided me during many crises in my corporate life.

Born in 1951, Shahed Noman completed his SSC and HSC exams with first division from St. Gregory's High School and Notre Dame College respectively. He graduated with a first class from University of Dhaka in Commerce. Having completed MBA from Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Dhaka, he joined Grindlays Bank as a Management Trainee in 1975.

During the period with Grindlays he held various senior positions including Country Operations Manager, Head of Corporate Banking, Regional Manager, etc. He also worked overseas with the bank at Kathmandu, Melbourne and Mumbai. Prior to leaving Grindlays in 1998, he was the Chief Risk Officer for Bangladesh. Between 1999 and 2003, he was with Merrill Lynch, Switzerland.

He joined Dhaka Bank Ltd in 2003 as Managing Director/CEO and continued



Shahed Noman

till 2008. Since 2009, he was involved in a garments export and manufacturing unit as the Chairman. He was also the Director of IIDFC Capital Ltd and was into agricultural product trading. In April 2010, with 5 leading local institutions and 9 distinguished individuals, he set up Financial Excellence Limited (FinExcel), of which he was the Chairman.

A man of few words, Noman bhai (many used to call him Shahed bhai and to his friends he was known as Sadi) never meant harm to anyone, and helped others silently without expecting any kind of reciprocity. He never fished for compliments or engage in ugly corporate confrontation, but he had a fantastic way of bypassing all that quietly, as if he did not understand anything. He may have suffered, but found his way out quietly, and knew when to stop.

He was a thorough gentleman with fine upbringing, a caring friend and brother without a loud presence. Enviably, he built a caring, well-knit successful family. I somehow thought this ever soft man had a suppressed emotion towards life and never expected, demanded or grabbed anything in life.

He will be missed by many including his ever crying friend (since his death), Wali Bhuiyan, Kaiser Chowdhury, along with the people who were benefited through him. I salute dearest Noman bhai, my silent well-wisher and mentor. May Almighty grant him eternal peace. My regards and condolences to his exemplary family -- most admired Ruma bhabi and two great sons. Shahed Noman will be greatly missed by all of us.

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The writer is a banker and economic analyst. He can be reached at: mamun1960@gmail.com



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loyal tribal figures and political elites are condemning the regime.

It's not over. In a speech on Sunday, Qaddafi's son and presumed dauphin, Saif al-Islam Qaddafi, declared that "We are not Tunisia or Egypt," and warned, "We will fight to the last minute, until the last bullet." Previously, Saif's role has been to present a respectable face of the regime to Western audiences, usually mouthing slogans about human rights and civil society. In other words, he's the nice one. So if he's warning of further violence to come, believe that the regime

Justice Minister Mustapha Abdul Jalil reportedly condemned the regime because of its "excessive use of violence," and various ambassadors have apparently abandoned Qaddafi.

While these individuals may truly be appalled by the bloodshed, you do not rise in Qaddafi's government if you suffer from excess morality. So their departure suggests that these key insiders believe the regime's days are numbered, and self-interest is driving them to desert the sinking ship.

Just as the regime struggles to unify to stay in power, so must

most part its outrages have been shielded from the scrutiny of the international media.

The opposition must stay united to prevent the regime from rallying its forces and defeating them piecemeal. For while the demonstrators have the numbers, Qaddafi loyalists have more firepower. If military defections become widespread, the balance of force will change. But too often in the Middle East a small but well-armed few has imposed its views on the many.

Unlike in Egypt or Tunisia in the last weeks, or more recently in Bahrain -- where peaceful

Daniel Byman is a Professor in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University and the research director of the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution.

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