

A tribute to Samad Bhai



ONCE, I told Samad Bhai should I outlive him, I would write his epitaph. What I had in mind was not quite a memo-

Samad Bhai's interview with BBC's Sabir Mostafa on the occasion of the famed media corporation's celebration of its seventy years, Samad Bhai recalled an incident with me. A devastating cyclone struck Bangladesh in 1991, and Samad Bhai as the BBC correspondent in Dhaka was anxious to get the news out to London. The Betunia communication tower had collapsed cutting off all communication links with the outside world. Samad Bhai was frantic but to his relief he soon discovered that a VHF opening to Delhi was available. Much that he tried to phone BBC Delhi office he could not reach anybody. At once he thought of me -- I was then Press Minister at the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi -- he caught me on phone, had me take down three sentences, gave me a code number and asked me to deliver the message to BBC Bush House. Which I did.

I had basically forgotten the incident but he recalled it in affectionate terms when I returned to Dhaka. Going even beyond this, I carry a debt of his gratitude for mentioning my name to millions of BBC listeners at the end of his interview. The interview was replayed over BBC Bangla Service the day he died and into the following morning

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as well. So my name like thousands of other names now belongs to the archives of BBC.

Between Samad Bhai and myself, we would always have serious conversations and exchanges of ideas, engaging and rewarding whenever we met or called each other. He used to modestly say: "I am a perpetual learner;" but truly he was a teacher -- a natural disseminator of information. He believed knowledge and skill are a responsibility to be shared, not something to be kept to oneself or be boastful or arrogant about.

He carved his niche principally as



Ataus Samad

a reporter and narrator of events at various turning points of our national history, enjoying a lot of credence for the reliability of information he presented. His years in BBC made him a household name.

In hindsight I recall Samad Bhai's experience in the sequel to March 25 Pak army's crackdown on Bangladesh. He was then East Pakistan bureau chief of Karachi-based The Sun newspaper. As pre-censorship was very tight, Karachi was not receiving any information from Dhaka end. Samad Bhai was told to send news by the parent office anyway. He started sending

news circumventing pre-censorship by phrasing the bomb blasts by Mukti Bahini as "explosions were heard" at such and such place. The farcical by-election held by the then military appointed Governor of East Pakistan was unmasked by reporting the opening of Pakistan People's Party office in Dhaka on the same day that the PPP nominated its candidates for by-elections.

Samad Bhai covered some of the most important events such as the Agartala conspiracy case, education movement, movement for autonomy leading to freedom struggle, water sharing talks with India since the Farakka days, to name the obvious few. He accompanied Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his famous journey from London via New Delhi to Dhaka after his release from Pakistani incarceration.

He had a rare knack for detail, a probing mind, a sharp intellect, a repertoire of facts that he would constantly update, and, above all, a sculptor's chiseling of whatever he crafted and delivered as a journalist or a conversationalist.

Socially committed, politically liberal, he was a relentless fighter against bigotry in all its forms. In one word, Samad Bhai was an enlightened person with a luminous

modernist temper. He was a complete journalist, from head to toe, with an abiding commitment to professionalism and journalistic ethos.

He had an endless repository of sources he could commandeer at a very short notice. He was among the most tenacious of journalists one would ever come across. Samad Bhai never believed in relayed secondary information, he would always go to the root, to the spot or the venue of any occurrence and get unalloyed facts at firsthand. He was a great facts checker constantly tapping in on various sources for corroboration, synthesis and assimilation before writing out any story.

Let me recall two of his insightful remarks. He told me during his stint with *The Bangladesh Times* that as a junior reporter he was so persistent in the task he would be assigned that he would have to endure annoyance from diffident officials; still he would press on till he could obtain the information he was seeking.

His second remark still rings in my ear: "Imam Shaheb, Dhaka has been taken over by people we are not familiar with. This is not the Bangladesh we knew."

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rial plaque inscribed with praise on this tomb that an epitaph is, rather what I actually wanted to convey to him was my sincere desire to write an obituary to a journalist par excellence. Though a man given to piety, and he would have been a staunch believer in destiny, he somehow nodded at my idea.

This was a rather unusual proposition -- given that none can be prescient about dying later or earlier between any pair of friends. But it sprang from a profound personal realisation of an indelible imprint he had made on my mind as a senior colleague during a reasonably long association with him. We had worked together in *The Bangladesh Times* during closing years of the '70s and into a couple of years of the '80s.

By a strange coincidence I am writing a tribute to him awash with an extra bit of personal emotion in the humble knowledge that during

Underwriting social enterprise: A comparative advantage approach

LUTFEY SIDDIQ

SPENDING time at a World Economic Forum event -- with members of its communities of shapers, leaders and social entrepreneurs -- always forces me to think about the effectiveness of "doing good" from first principles.

Typically, I bump into two groups of people: Domain-experts (doctors, engineers etc.) who deliver their expertise directly to disadvantaged societies on the ground; and Those that have switched careers mid-stream to offer their organisational expertise in the furtherance of a cause. Both groups are inspiring not least because they approach their calling full-time and at the expense of alternative careers in main-stream arenas.

Then there are those like me. Not quite ready to give it all up, yet keen to give back in any way that we can.

Paying a small percentage of one's regular income by direct debit into some charity ticks the basic box but it is impersonal and often doesn't provide a sense of contribution. Selfishly for the donor, there needs to be effort, sacrifice of personal time in order to provide the psychic rewards of giving.

This is the reason that people brave a challenge, conquer a fear or run a marathon to raise funds. This is also the reason that people volunteer time, on weekends for example, in the direct delivery of some charitable service.

There is yet another alternative -- what I call the "Comparative Advantage Approach" (CoAd for short) to doing good.

It didn't take long for me to realise that any habitat that I build with my own hands would likely not be fit for humanity. Similar to other professions, delivery of social outcomes is a specialised job that takes specialist skills. For me to step into that role for a few hours on a weekend and expect to make meaningful impact is delusional.

For anyone else in similar shoes to mine, I'd recommend a two-step approach:

• First, do something that productively employs your core skills (outside of the day-job and outside normal working hours) at a fully-professional level of competence. For this, you should expect to get paid a full commercial wage; and

• Then, hand over the money to those who specialise in the disbursement of charitable services.

Teach at an evening-college, vocational training institute, write a book, give a concert, provide accounting services on weekends -- whatever gives you the highest earning power for a finite number of hours. The result of your money and your personal time will now stretch that much farther.

For several years now, I have followed this approach and as a result, each hour of my volunteer work has reached significantly more end-users than would otherwise have been the case. This is just another manifestation of Ricardo's theory of international trade.

Now, social enterprise -- especially as it applies to the base of the pyramid -- can be classified into three categories.

• At its widest definition, it generates an identifiable social benefit together with a stream of income that is self-sustaining beyond an incubation period. As long as the social benefit is measurable, the company can operate like any other for-profit organi-

zation,

• A narrower definition is offered by Nobel Laureate Professor Mohammed Yunus. He believes that a social business should return the investor's capital -- but no more. Once the original investment is redeemed, there should be no further claim on dividends;

• Then there are those who believe that an enterprise approach can crowd out funds from the abject poor. For some objectives, outright philanthropy may be the only realistic option.

I believe that there need not be a conflict between the three alternatives. It should be possible for a given project to access funds in any or all of the three tranches:

If, for example, the enterprise is seeking to raise \$100, it is possible for \$50 to come in the form of "pure charity," \$30 from investors who are driven by the Yunus motivation and the remaining \$20 from traditional, for-profit investors.

However, it is a fact that, in spite of good intentions and much attention, the amount of funds actually disbursed to social enterprises that operate at the base of the pyramid remains dramatically low.

According to a Credit Suisse report published in January 2012, using the widest definition of social enterprise across developed and developing worlds, the total amount is less than one percent of global stock market capitalisation.

If we were to narrow the definition to projects in Asia, Africa and Latin America targeting those that stand the best chance of weaning themselves from charity, the amount of funds delivered thus far is infinitesimal.

I personally believe that this is what needs to be done:

I would like the CEOs of the top ten globally-active investment banks to sign up to the following charter:

1. Actively encourage deployment of their origination and distribution machinery for social enterprises as part of their employee-volunteering programme,
2. In addition, each must commit capital for the purpose of underwriting a finite number of these transactions. A commitment to back-stop \$100 million each should provide the thrust for lift-off.

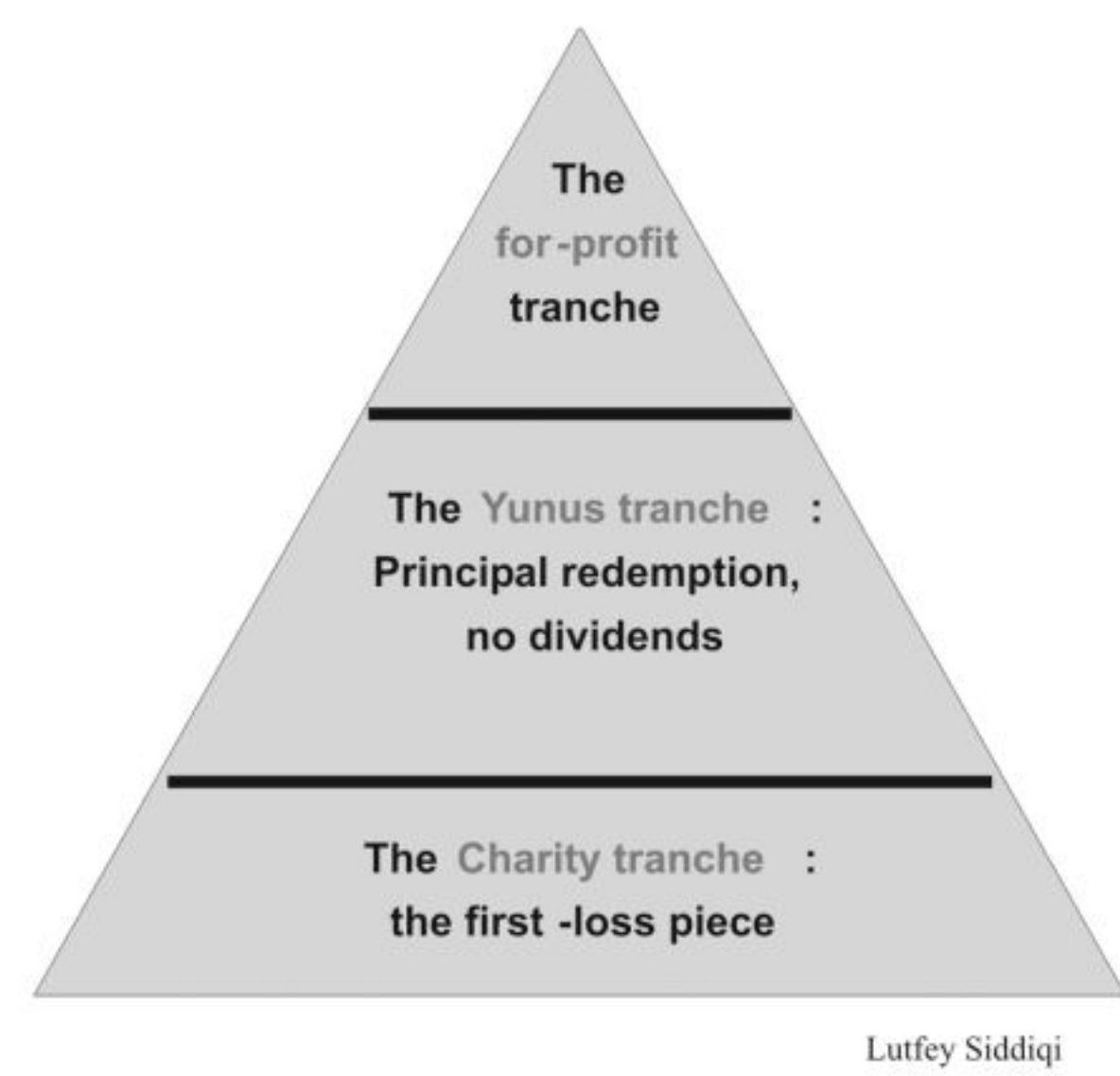
It should also be possible to construct annual "league tables" of social financing in the same way that league tables of traditional issuances are published and fought over by investment banks.

This is essentially the Comparative Advantage approach now applied at the level of the institution!

The top-down messaging and the commitment to allocate capital (no matter how small) would send a strong signal. Externally, this will help attract first-time investors while internally, staff across organisational divisions will be galvanised -- in spite of its limited profit opportunity.

While the modalities can be refined, it should be possible to obtain this commitment at a gathering such as Davos -- at least from the banks that are partners to the World Economic Forum. I believe that the monetary cost to banks would be minimal. On the other hand, the bandwagon effect of launching this as a top-down, coordinated yet competitive campaign amongst banks may well prove to be the thrust that enables a much-needed step change in the financing of social enterprise.

The writer is a member of the Young Global Leaders Community at the World Economic Forum -- writing in a personal capacity



Lutfey Siddiqi

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WORLD RABIES DAY

Eliminating the scourge

ZIAUDDIN AHMAD

RABIES is not a new problem. In fact, evidence of rabies dates back about 4,000 years to Babylonia. It was reported in Europe in the Middle Ages. The first record of rabies in North America was in Virginia in the mid-1700s. But it was not until late 19th century that Louis Pasteur and his assistant Emile Roux developed the first rabies vaccine. Rabies is a zoonotic disease, which means it can spread from animal to human. The virus can attach itself to the brain and nervous system and is fatal, especially without prompt treatment, unless the victim has been vaccinated against the disease.

Though the vaccine has been available since 1885, more than 55,000 people, mostly in Africa and Asia, die from rabies every year -- a rate of one person every ten minutes. The most widespread source of rabies in humans is uncontrolled rabies in dogs. Children are often at greatest risk from rabies. They are more likely to be bitten by dogs, and are also more likely to be severely exposed through multiple bites in high-risk sites on the body. Severe exposures make it more difficult to prevent rabies unless access to good medical care is immediately available. This major source of rabies in humans can be eliminated through ensuring adequate animal vaccination and control, educating those at risk, and enhancing access of those bitten to appropriate medical care.

The mission of World Rabies Day is to raise awareness about the impact of human and animal rabies, how easy it is to prevent it, and how to eliminate the main global sources. Even though the major impact of rabies occurs in regions of the world where many needs are present, rabies should no longer be neglected. The tools and technology for prevention of human rabies and elimination of dog rabies are available.

In 2006, a group of researchers and professionals formed "Global Alliance for Rabies Control." They started the World Rabies Day and invited partners to join. World Rabies Day now involves every major human and animal health partner at the international, national, state/provincial, and local levels as well as veterinary, medical and other specialised professional and student organisations, and corporate and non-profit partners. The goal of this outreach is to mobilise awareness and resources in support of human rabies prevention and animal rabies control.

With the initial goal of engaging 55,000 people to take action, one for each person who dies each year from rabies, the inaugural campaign in September 2007 saw participation from nearly 400,000 people in 74 countries! This overwhelming response was an important step forward for rabies prevention and control and

further illustrates the widespread recognition of the need for action to control this easily preventable disease. Since the inaugural campaign in 2007, World Rabies Day events have been held in 150 countries; educating 182 million people and vaccinating 7.7 million dogs.

Bangladesh is fortunate to be one of the 150 countries. Directorate of disease control under directorate general of health

The lesson of World Rabies Day is that rabies elimination is possible and easily achievable, but requires united efforts by the health sector, LGRD, livestock services, international organisations, NGOs and the community itself.

services, with other NGOs like Rabies in Asia Foundation (RIAF), Bangladesh, APCRIB, Avoy aronnya etc., has been observing World Rabies Day in a befitting manner since its inception.

Rabies is one of the most neglected diseases. Every year more than 2,000 people die of rabies in Bangladesh, of which most are children. Rabies in humans is 100% preventable through prompt, appropriate medical care. Few countries in the world have been declared as rabies free country. Taking this into account, the government of Bangladesh has taken initiatives to eliminate rabies. The directorate general of health services has undertaken rabies elimination programmes since 2010 with tremendous effort.

Post exposure treatment centres have been established in all district hospitals and in infectious diseases hospitals. Peoples are getting treatment free of cost. The ways for elimination of rabies adopted by the government are (i) advocacy, communication and social mobilisation (ii) appropriate post-exposure management free of cost (iii) mass dog vaccination; and (iv) dog population management.

The number of rabies cases in infectious diseases hospitals in Dhaka has fallen by at least 50% and mass dog vaccination has already ended in 35 municipalities of Rangpur division. Mass dog vaccination will be done in other municipalities also. If this programme runs unhampered, the target of elimination of rabies will be achieved soon.

The lesson of World Rabies Day is that rabies elimination is possible and easily achievable, but requires united efforts by the health sector, LGRD, livestock services, international organisations, NGOs and the community itself.

The writer is Chairman, Rabies in Asia Foundation, Bangladesh.