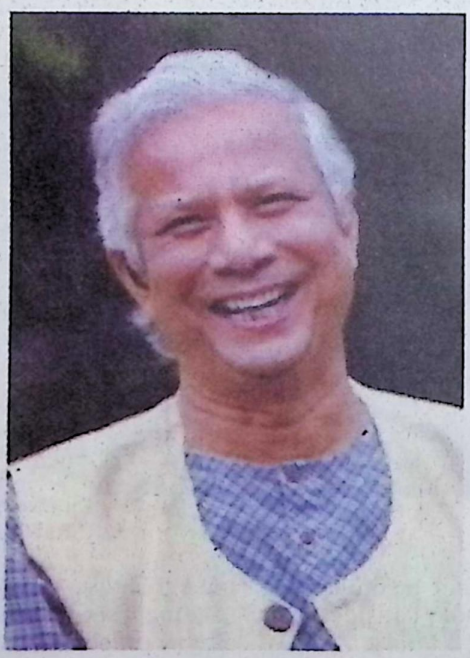
Our Nation's Conscience

AHMEDE HUSSAIN

For the last 37 years, since he took the initiative to give a few hundred taka loan to some women in a remote village in Chittagong, Muhammad Yunus is slowly but steadily changing the face of global capitalism that was otherwise synonymous with its brutal inhuman principles and crass commercialism. Yunus's idea of microfinance has saved millions of women, the poorest of the poor, from the dungeon of poverty. In the new millennium, Yunus is the byword for freedom and liberty.

Unlike John Maynard Keynes, Milton Friedman and Paul Samuelson, three of his famous predecessors, Yunus has applied his theory first-hand into the lives of ordinary individuals, has got enriched from its application, only to get better and better over the years. When the world economy is going through a tempestuous phase, he has come up with social business, an idea that is going to change the way the world makes profit. Yunus wants to send poverty to the museum, saying human beings are much bigger than making money. There is no doubt that Muhammad Yunus is one of the foremost intellectuals in today's world, and this month he has been conferred with this year's US Congressional Gold Medal, one of the rare occasions where the medal is honoured more than its recipient.



Muhammad Yunus

Things are however not at all rosy at home. Grameen Bank, which Yunus has painstakingly founded to become one of the leading business establishments in the world, is in disarray. The Noble laureate had been humiliated, ousted from Grameen and dragged to the court. Time and again senior members of the Awami League made comments about the banker to the poor that were no less than mean, unnecessary and perverse. The reason however is clear. The AL leadership is not happy with Yunus's political venture during the Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed-led government that ruled the country for two years. At the beginning of the Fakhruddin regime Yunus declared his intention to float a political party fashioned Nagorik Shakti. Even though the venture drew huge attention from the urban middle class, who had grown weary of both the major parties, Yunus mysteriously shelved the project.

The present government's treatment of Yunus and Grameen Bank is borne out of fear, and it has been haunting the government since it took power in an electoral landslide four and a half years ago. It is small wonder then that no one from the government or the ruling Awami League has congratulated the founder of Grameen Bank for winning the US's highest civilian honour, an award no Bangladeshi has ever been given.

There is no denying that the government's mistreatment of the Nobel laureate has severely dented the country's image abroad. From Nelson