



Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus meets with a UNDP delegation to discuss comprehensive institutional reforms in Bangladesh. The meeting took place at the State Guest House Jamuna in Dhaka. PHOTO:UNDP

Balancing diplomacy, reform and competitiveness



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Bangladesh is one of the youngest nations on the planet. The recent political changes in the country have offered us an opportunity to rethink, revisit, reevaluate, and rebrand the competitiveness of Bangladesh. This is highlighted by the Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's visit to the Summit of the Future 2024 in New York. The support of the world leaders to an 84-year-old statesman who needed no introduction at the UN was overwhelming. His speeches, handshakes, hugs, presentations, meetings, receptions, and photo sessions were good public relations for a two-month-old government. Perhaps, we are entering a new era of diplomacy.

As we bring stability, restructure governance, and work towards an impartial election, let us add another task to the list—enhancing Bangladesh's global competitiveness. It is a long-term venture guided by clear goals, pragmatic policies, persistent efforts, and patriotic leadership. The contemporary competitiveness of China is an outcome of the policies laid by Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai 75 years ago. Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore and Mahathir Muhammad's Malaysia took 30 years to get to where they are now. Even Nelson Mandela did not live to see the outcomes of his policies in South Africa.

The ultimate goal of national competitiveness is the wellbeing (both material and spiritual) of its citizens achieved through a dynamic process of wealth creation and distribution that delivers reasonable income/prosperity to its people. This can be attained by addressing the following factors: (i) understanding the core competitiveness of a nation; (ii) evaluating its geopolitical positioning; (iii) building appropriate institutions; (iv) attaining resource synergy; and (v) providing dynamic leadership. A model competitive country does not have to be rich or powerful—fulfilling the basic needs of the people should be a reasonable goal for success.

Understanding core competitiveness

The core competitiveness of Bangladesh is tied to our culture. It is the unique story of organic growth grounded on the survival spirit of the people. Apparently chaotic, it is actually a harmonious evolution. Time and again, through unity and cooperation, the people of Bangladesh have been able to rise above all odds, be it during cyclones/floods or against tyrants who have tried to subdue our aspirations. A desperately optimistic and patriotic survival spirit is our innate core. This makes us a very blessed nation.

I am convinced that tyranny in any form is not sustainable in Bangladesh. Every time we have despaired about a tyranny, a resilient survival spirit for freedom has resurfaced, a united natural leadership crystallised from the street, and a divine intervention has occurred. Our youth have spearheaded these movements in 1952, 1969, 1971, and many a times during the post-liberation period, including 2024.

The absolute power grabbing attempts and divisive politics have hurt us but could not destroy our spirit. The fall of Awami League, BNP,

and Ershad regimes should be good learning for our ambitious political and military leaders. The spirit of the nation should be allowed to blossom through a democratic process; that should be the moral imperative of this government.

Geopolitical position of Bangladesh

Bangladesh's geopolitical situation is complex. The country, home to 170 million people, is situated in the low-lying Ganges delta, which presents significant geographical challenges. Moreover, India controls most of the rivers flowing south into Bangladesh, and our short border with Myanmar, has led to a significant Rohingya refugee crisis. These challenges have forced us to become pragmatic, resilient, and creative.

Evaluating the geopolitical position of Bangladesh begins with our neighbours. So far, we have maintained a good relationship with SAARC members and should continue to do so. The Modi government's support to dictatorial regimes like Hasina goes against the Gandhi/Nehru doctrines. Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi's maiden speech in the parliament indicates that his policies are failing. There were demonstrations in support of our 2024 student led movement in India.

Bangladesh is perceived as a young, friendly, and peace-loving nation. It is observable in the UN peace missions, international trade/investment engagements, and NGO participations. We should continue to maintain this positive image, ensuring that foreigners feel safe here for both trade and travel.

On the diplomatic front, we should maintain good relationships with our Asian neighbours including China, Korea, and ASEAN countries. The good PR of the Yunus government has enhanced our image in the West/European Union. We should continue to promote good business relationships with them. We should continue to maintain a good relationship with Russia—a country that has built our only nuclear power plant and filled our military hardware—and other countries of the world. Bangladesh can augment its peace-loving image/position by proactively engaging in Global South diplomacy via SAARC and other platforms. Yunus and future leaders can join the non-aligned movements following the footsteps of Maulana Bhashani.

Building appropriate institutions Building institutions for competitiveness is a cultural phenomenon. It evolves over time through an educative process that offers market efficiency, human freedom, and good governance. It facilitates the process of wealth creation and wealth distribution. The current reform and restructuring efforts of the government are positive endeavours in institution building.

In assessing the institutional efficacy for national competitiveness, one can consider the six elements of the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) of the World Bank as follows: voice and accountability; political stability and absence of violence; government effectiveness; regulatory quality; rule of law; and control of corruption. A country

that scores well in these indicators is perceived to be better grounded for international trade, investment, and competitiveness. Most developing countries in the world seriously lag behind in these indicators. Bangladesh is no exception.

To score better on WGI, our first step would be to make electoral democracy work. We almost succeeded in establishing our style of democracy through a caretaker system until Hasina abandoned it. Dynasty politics, like many developing countries, is an institutionalised phenomenon. It is a reality in Bangladesh. A recent poll after the 2024 uprising indicates that common people would welcome a new party. In India, a new Aam Aadmi Party, an anti-corruption force, was able to gain a good foothold because of the integrity of India's electoral process. We are yet to develop such a system/culture. This is where we need reform.

Attaining resource synergy

Resources are finite and tied to the geography of a nation. Resources are given, and they can also be created. In a globalised world, a country's resources are tied to an international value chain defined by a broader core-periphery economic relationship. Developed countries benefit most from this network because of their colonial past, currency, political arrangement (UN, WTO, IMF, WB, etc.), and military power. Developing countries do not have much choice under the current system.

Attaining resource synergy is a long-term proposition. It is a work-in-progress. Bangladesh shall have to carve a niche to compete in a globally interdependent economic system. Specifically, synergy should be attained by implementing the following policies that: (i) favour value-added industries and investments; (ii) benefit international reserve; (iii) enhance appropriate technology; (iv) develop skills and educate people; and (v) build institutions and infrastructure enhancing competitiveness. Additionally, we must invest in education—this is our natural competitive advantage.

Providing dynamic leadership

Dynamism in leadership is espoused by a symbiotic relationship between the leader and its citizens. Everything comes to life when the right leader arrives. The leader can galvanise the competitive spirit of the nation by determining its geopolitical position, building appropriate institutions, and attaining resource synergy. Education and the democratic process can develop such leaders.

As a young nation, Bangladesh shows great promise in becoming one of the top competing countries in the world. It is geographically well-positioned as a peace-loving nation. Its rich homogenous culture with liberal attitude and values is commendable. It has favourable demographics—its large young population that can be trained/educated. The female participation in the labour force contributes to our competitiveness.

Attaining national competitiveness is a journey, not a destination. Government reforms can make that journey conducive.

At this time, bringing stability precedes all discussions. Our neighbours, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Maldives are facing harsh political and economic realities, partly emanating from foreign interventions. We must ensure that we do not fall into such situations. Our patriotism should be paramount in protecting the nation and in attaining competitiveness.

UNITED NATIONS DAY

The United Nations needs reforms



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SELIM JAHAN

Today is October 24, the day the United Nations (UN) came into being in 1945. From the ashes of World War II, the UN was established to rebuild the war-ravaged world and to ensure for humankind the freedom from fear and the freedom from want. For more than eighty years, this global organisation has been working for world peace and global development. Yet, whenever the issue of the UN is raised, everyone talks of its failures, which definitely overshadow its successes.

The limitations of the UN are often presented from political angles. However, the role and the relevance of this entity are aptly justified when the question of what would have happened to the war-torn, conflict-ridden world in the absence of the UN is raised. In different parts of the world, in wars and conflicts, the UN has not only been active during the talks and discussions to reach compromises, but also served as a catalyst in achieving positive results. During various regional and inter-state conflicts, the work of the UN Peacekeeping to restore peace and minimise violence has been highly appreciated in all quarters. UN officials have relentlessly been working to help refugees from wars and conflicts.

In the area of economic and human development, the work and the achievements of various UN agencies are well-known. The activities of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have raised issues of global development to new heights and significantly contributed to poverty eradication and ending the hunger in many countries. There is no denying the fact that the UN was at the forefront of formulating and implementing the global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Overcoming many obstacles, the WFP, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR) have been constantly active in many countries to fight famines, to protect and ensure human rights and to help millions of refugees. For their work, the UN itself and its different agencies have received the Nobel Prize on different occasions.

Despite all its successes and achievements, the list of UN failures is not short either. Because of its structural framework and nature, the interventions, controls and regulations of its affairs by big

powers, and UN's limited autonomy in its arena of work, the relevance and the effectiveness of the UN have long been questioned. Nevertheless, the UN's birth, at a specific time in the context of a global reality, should be considered from a historical perspective. During the last eight decades, the world has changed, and the background in which the UN was established has shifted. As a result, this organisation is now incapable of meeting the demands of the present day, not to speak of the expectations of the future. Under such circumstances, a structural reform of the UN has become inevitable and such reforms may be effective in at least five areas.

The first area is of course the UN Security Council. While the ethical foundation of the UN follows a democratic method as in "one country, one vote," the constitution and the work modalities of the present Security Council are inconsistent with that democratic value. Reforms are needed in two fundamental areas—the structure of the Security Council and the nature of its operational modalities. First, the system of having permanent members at the Security Council and their "veto" powers must be abolished. Compared to 1945, the number of states in the world today has more than doubled. So, the number of Security Council members must be increased from its current level and the members would be elected by the General Assembly for a five-year term. Every Security Council member will have one vote and no member will enjoy the permanent member status or the veto power.

In terms of its scope of work, all global political affairs will come under the mandate of the Security Council. The name of the reconstituted Security Council may be changed to "Political Security Council" and it will not have its deliberations in a closed-door setting, which is the norm now. The meetings, debates and decisions of the Security Council should be open to the public. These changes are necessary for the democratisation of the Council.

The second reform pertains to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In the present world, economic security is as important as political security. With the reconstitution of the current 54-member Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), an "Economic Security Council" can be formed. The council's main focus will be to tackle the threats of global economic insecurity and the relevant crises. This council will also oversee the work on and achievements of the SDGs at the global level. The

membership of the reconstituted Economic Security Council can be reduced to 25 from its current level of 54. The General Assembly would select ECOSOC members and the council's work would be based on the principle of "one member, one vote."

The third reform may be in the combined arena of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Since both these organisations are part of the broader UN family, the two institutions can be combined to form a "World Central Bank." The main tasks of this organisation would be to ensure the stability of the global economic activities, stabilise the international financial markets, influence and regulate global financial institutions, and maintain liquidity at the global level. Taking the UN as the base, the institutional framework and the activities of the proposed organisation may be decided through discussions and negotiations.

The fourth reform may be in the area of existing UN councils and agencies. For example, what is the role of the UN Trusteeship Council in the modern world? There was a need for this body in the aftermath of World War II, in light of the geopolitical realities of that time. But given the realities of the present-day world, the Trusteeship Council has lost its utility since all the trust territories have either attained self-governance or independence. It can now be scrapped. Similarly, how many of us know about the UN organisation for outer space or what it does? This body should also be shuttered. There are too many UN agencies and many are characterised by duplication of functions and hugely uncoordinated activities. There should be an evaluation of the UN agencies, followed by an immediate restructuring of the overall framework. In the process, some agencies should be closed and some should be merged with others.

The fifth reform should be in the area of financing the UN. In the current organisational structure of the UN, big powers do not let it work effectively and influence its activities because they control the resource envelope of the UN. The United Nations has become a financial hostage of the richest nations, from which the institution must be freed. To do that the developing world would need to take a different financial role. Financial contributions to the UN by big and powerful developing countries like China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria and the oil-rich countries of the Middle East must increase so that the developing world has a solid voice and a stronger handle on the workings of the UN system. Thus, the financial structure of the UN needs to be overhauled.

For the last eight decades, the UN as an institution, has played a meaningful role at the global level. The value and relevance of a concept like the United Nations has not diminished at all, rather it has increased. In that changed context, reforms of that institution have become inevitable. Time demands it.



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স্বচ্ছতার চর্চা করি
সমৃদ্ধ সোনার বাংলা গড়ি

বিনা কারণে গ্যাসের চুলা জ্বালিয়ে রাখা আর বিপদকে ডাকা একই বিষয়

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02.	Tender ID : 1026626 Package No : CCD-CCM-RDO-Kulaura-Jury-005 Date of publishing: 22-Oct 2024, 12.00	Repair & Maintenance Works of Office Building, Boundary Wall and Area Lighting of RDO-Kulaura with Maintenance Works of Boundary Wall of RDO-Jury at Moulovibazar, Sylhet.	Last Selling: 12-Nov 2024, 16.00 Closing Date & Time: 13-Nov 2024, 16.00 Opening Date & Time: 13-Nov 2024, 16.00
03.	Tender ID : 1026098 Package No: CCD-CDS-Kuchai DRS-003 Date of publishing: 22-Oct-2024, 12.00	Raising of RCC Road, Repair & Maintenance Works & Ancillary Works at Kuchai DRS, Sylhet	Last Selling: 12-Nov 2024, 17.00 Closing Date & Time: 13-Nov 2024, 16.30 Opening Date & Time: 13-Nov 2024, 16.30

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