

O HERALDO

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Yunus's dance with the dragon, and lessons for India

It may not have the blood and gore of 'Game of Thrones', but the diplomatic drama involving the dragon, the elephant and the tiger, playing on a news channel near you is no less riveting. The latest salvo involves the elephant, or India, as it suspended transshipment facilities for export cargo from Bangladesh, a move that is expected to have significant implications for trade across the region. This decision was made just days after Bangladesh's interim leader, Muhammad Yunus, made provocative remarks regarding India's north-eastern States and their strategic vulnerability. His comments, coupled with Bangladesh's growing engagement with China, signal a shift in Dhaka's foreign policy that raises questions about the future of India-Bangladesh relations.

The Indian government's decision to revoke the 2020 circular that allowed Bangladesh to use Indian Land Customs Stations for the transshipment of goods to third countries is likely to disrupt the flow of goods from Bangladesh to Bhutan, Nepal, and Myanmar. The cancellation came swiftly, leaving little room for negotiation, and will undoubtedly cause logistical delays and increase costs for Bangladeshi exporters. While the Indian authorities have clarified that cargo already in transit will not be affected, the broader implications of this move point to an escalating diplomatic rift between the two countries.

What makes this decision even more noteworthy is the timing. Just days before India's move, Yunus made controversial statements during his visit to China, where he referred to Bangladesh as the "only guardian of the ocean" for the region, alluding to the "Seven Sisters" of India's north-eastern States.

What makes this decision even more noteworthy is the timing. Just days before India's move, Yunus made controversial statements during his visit to China, where he referred to Bangladesh as the "only guardian of the ocean" for the region, alluding to the "Seven Sisters" of India's north-eastern States. This statement is an implicit invitation for China to extend its economic influence in the region. Yunus's rhetoric, including his assertion that the north-eastern Indian States, along with Bhutan and Nepal, could become part of an "extension of the Chinese economy," has stoked fears in New Delhi about Bangladesh's growing alignment with China.

For India, these remarks are alarming, as India's north-eastern States, particularly those connected by the Siliguri Corridor, are of immense strategic importance to New Delhi. The potential for a Chinese military or economic foothold near this critical corridor would be seen as a direct threat to India's security. Yunus's comments suggest Bangladesh is beginning to distance itself from India while seeking closer ties with China. This is underscored by Yunus's visit to China, where he signed agreements aimed at modernising Mongla Port with Chinese financial backing. China's \$400 million investment in the port expansion could potentially increase its influence in the Bay of Bengal, further complicating India's strategic landscape. These developments are not merely economic - they are part of a larger, long-term strategic game in which China seeks to extend its reach in South Asia.

China has already established a significant presence in South Asia through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with projects such as the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka and the Gwadar Port in Pakistan. Bangladesh, with its strategic location and growing ties with China, is at risk of falling into a similar debt-trap diplomacy. By allowing China to expand its influence, Bangladesh could find itself increasingly dependent on Beijing, potentially at the expense of its traditional ties with India.

However, Yunus's government, which came to power after the ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last year, is in a fragile position, both politically and diplomatically. Yunus's controversial statements, made during his first visit to China, may be part of an attempt to shore up support from Beijing, given the domestic challenges his government faces. The diplomatic fallout from Yunus's comments has been swift. Indian political leaders, including Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, have condemned the remarks, calling them "offensive" and "strongly condemnable". Even regional leaders have expressed concern about the potential implications of Bangladesh's growing proximity to China. For India, the risk of a destabilised and weakened regional order is too great to ignore. India has long been a key partner in Bangladesh's development, contributing to infrastructure, power, and energy sectors. Yet, this partnership is now under strain.

Both nations must also recognise the dangers of allowing external powers to gain too much influence in their backyard. Bangladesh's growing ties with China could create a regional power imbalance that neither country can afford. The coming months will be crucial in determining whether India and Bangladesh can find a path back to cooperation or whether they will continue to drift further apart. While Yunus's remarks reflect a broader geopolitical shift, they also reveal the growing complexities of South Asian regional relationships, which are anyway intertwined through shared colonial histories. Caution and pragmatism should be the order of the day, or else instability fuelled by power games can engulf the region. 'Game of Thrones' has enough pointers to how that can unfold.

comment



SAMIR NAZARETH

The authenticity and vulnerability conundrum

Today, one is accosted with enigmatic responses like 'living my best life' and 'loving myself' to prosaic questions such as 'how are you?' It is hard not to notice that though such replies are couched in comparative and superlative terms, they are opaque, revealing nothing of the individual. They also appear to invite further enquiry, but the listener is satisfied and is able to relate to the speaker gleaming more than what the words seemingly portray. Human connections are formed on the basis of this.

There is no attempt to explain or delve further into these statements as a way to get to know the person. For example, no one is curious enough to ascertain what 'living my best life' is being compared with - another person, the past or the future. Nor does the speaker explain the rationale behind the claim - life being lived currently is the best. Similarly, 'loving myself' doesn't lead to explanations or queries such as 'why now?', 'how?', and 'why weren't you loving yourself earlier?'

The only difference between 'I am living my best life' and 'I am happy' or 'I am enjoying my life' is the former's comparativeness and superlativeness. Similarly, 'loving myself' is no different from 'finding time for myself', 'finding balance in life', 'me time' and so-on. However, 'loving myself' exudes an intensity and gravitas that other efforts do not evoke.



'Living my best life' and 'loving myself' communicate exuberant positivity and control. Interestingly, such terms are part of the new age focus on, and demand for, authenticity and vulnerability in self-expression. Today, these are considered desirable virtues in business and personal relationships.

Cambridge dictionary defines authenticity as 'the quality of being real or true'. Psychologically speaking, authenticity is linked to human identity. It 'expresses the degree of a person's self-identity and, at the same time, it shows how much his behaviour towards his surround-

ings is connected with his self-concept'. It includes behaving congruently to one's values, beliefs, motives and personality.

Vulnerability, means a weakness that is therefore open to attack. But in today's world it connotes willingness to show one's emotions, thoughts and beliefs.

Before the era of authenticity and vulnerability, there was the epoch of 'be true to who you are' aka 'be yourself', and before that was the 'be truthful' age. The former idea was about the individual accepting who s/he was, while the latter inculcated the value of honesty. Though truthfulness and honesty are personal traits they have societal implications.

It is said, authenticity and vulnerability facilitate and enrich human interaction. But they are audience focussed and driven. Unfortunately, as there is no everyday scale to measure authenticity and vulnerability, listeners and viewers become judge, jury and executioner.

The demand for authenticity and vulnerability fulfils a basic human desire of inquisitiveness and relatability and storytelling. Wanting to know 'what makes a person tick', 'their strengths and weaknesses', 'what the individual is struggling with' then becomes ways to find common ground. They also build a mirror in which the audience sees the speaker as their reflection. If one perceives the other as no different from ones' self, then individuals become relatable, accessible and their actions become understandable, acceptable and on occasion forgivable. A consequence of making others relatable is that it quenches any curiosity.

Is it any wonder that everyone from CEO's and those in management to everyday people are receiving training on authentic and vulnerable self-expression?

Here are some ways to exude authenticity and vulnerability - sharing personal experiences, maintaining eye contact, admitting uncertainty, apologising sans justifications, seeking support, giving undivided attention during conversations. Surprisingly, these are not new behaviours.

Probably, today's world of short attention spans makes honesty, truthfulness and integrity no longer easy to accept and live by. Therefore, someone had to come up with an alternative that could cater and satisfy diverse audiences in a way that suggested they were being

focussed on. Authenticity and vulnerability are digestible as they are communication techniques that cater to specific audiences to attract and disarm them. Could authenticity and vulnerability be tarnished synonyms for honesty, truthfulness and integrity?

Would one want a shopkeeper to sell a product at the correct price, or would a marked-up price be acceptable if he shares his personal problems? Authenticity and vulnerability may evoke empathy however, honesty ensures fairness. Does communicating authenticity and vulnerability ensure integrity?

Which brings us back to 'living my best life' and 'loving myself'. Arguably, these are confidence boosting self-affirming statements. In today's context, are these very loud attempts at being authentic and vulnerable? While this may be an attempt to make oneself relatable, the subconscious wants the self to stand out. Thus, a differentiator is created by using the term 'best' which is superlative and comparative. Similarly, 'loving myself' connotes high levels of self-awareness - something not everyone may have. Therefore, they become potentially aspirational and not necessarily relatable. Is it any wonder then 'inspiring' is the much-abused response to such sharing? This is not surprising when one lives in a fast-moving world of distractions, and the individual desire to make the most of each moment is glorified and motivated by the scary truth of You Only Live Once (YOLO).

As there is no one kind of human connection and human space, does one size of authenticity and vulnerability fit all? I think not, as these are motive and audience driven. If so, how authentic and vulnerable are authenticity and vulnerability? One is reminded of Shakespeare's 'As You Like It' where Jaques says 'All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts...'. While Jaques speaks of life's stages, the acceptance of the performative relatability of authenticity and vulnerability asks whether the desire to make connections makes us actors playing roles expected of us? If this is a way to hold or get attention where does truth lie?

(Samir Nazareth is an author and writes on socio-economic and environmental issues)

people's edit

DIGITAL TRUST BETRAYED

ANANTHA PADMANABHAN

My friend, Dr M's, 65th birthday was a joyous occasion, his home filled with children and friends.

He was clearly delighted, serving homemade treats and tea/juice to everyone. Amidst the flurry of calls and cheerful greetings, a WhatsApp message arrived from an unknown number. He thanked and then another message requested a Rs 5,000 donation to a 'child care institution', claiming it would help feed needy children with three meals a day. Moved, Dr M consulted his wife and promptly transferred the money online.

Little did Dr M know, this act of generosity was the beginning of a calculated deception, rooted in a seemingly innocent event from two weeks prior. He recalled a neighbour's invitation to a mall birthday celebration for his six-year-old son, an evening they had readily agreed to, despite the long travel.

Dr M and his wife, respected figures in our neighbourhood, though childless, were beloved by the children and never missed a birthday party.

He remembered the mall birthday vividly: the games, the laughter, dancing with the children, and sharing a late dinner. For about three hours, they immersed themselves in the joyful celebrations.

But the joy of those memories was quickly overshadowed by the reality of the present. The initial donation request was followed by daily WhatsApp messages, desperate pleas claiming a lack of donors and the imminent threat of children going hungry. His suspicion deepened, compounded by abusive calls and the unsettling discovery of a photograph from the mall birthday, showing him and his wife dancing with the children. Alongside the image was a message alleging their public merriment as a 'violation of the peaceful atmosphere' and a potential 'public annoyance', with implied threats of legal repercussions.

Seeking clarity, Dr M made discreet enquiries. The discovery was unsettling: the 'child care institution' was a complete fabrication. He then changed his phone number, cutting off all contact, to end the intrusion.

Dr M's digital deceit is a calculated manipulation of his kindness and trust, beyond simple data theft. The scammers used a children's birthday to lower his guard. Appealing to his empathy for vulnerable children, they bypassed his caution. The birthday photograph validated their fraudulent requests, while the escalating demands, hidden behind digital anonymity, eroded his security, leaving him violated and trapped. He wondered how they had obtained his personal information, and began to make inquiries.

It's a common, yet unsettling, question in our digital age: how do our personal details, like phone numbers and ID copies, end up in the wrong hands? Often, it's through seemingly innocuous interactions. Forms filled out at events, online sign-ups, or even routine procedures at establishments can become points of vulnerability. Sometimes, data breaches at larger companies or institutions expose vast amounts of personal information. In other cases, it's the less obvious, seemingly harmless actions that lead to a compromise.

When asked how his number might have been obtained, he indicated that a mall staff member had recorded their contact details and photocopied their IDs, claiming it was 'routine procedure'.

A possible sequence emerged: a birthday party list with names and contact details, a confirming photograph, and the transfer of IDs and phone number, purportedly for 'routine procedure', which ultimately placed them in the hands of exploiters. This setup deliberately eroded Dr M's trust and generosity. Despite the financial loss being only Rs 5,000, the incident serves as a powerful reminder.

This situation underscores the urgent need for vigilance: even innocent moments can be exploited in the digital age. We must verify requests, guard our data, and share this knowledge, especially with vulnerable individuals.

Balancing empathy with verification is vital to navigate the digital landscape. Collective awareness and vigilance are our strongest defences against digital identity theft.

Floating solar project stopped

Goa had planned to generate 197 megawatt of renewable energy through floating solar panels (FSP) in Selaulim, Amthane, Anjunem and Chapoli.

The proposal was submitted in Jan 2024 by the Centre's SJVN Green Energy Ltd (SGEL) and it had asked the State to invest Rs 1,300 crore. The SGEL and Goa Energy Development Agency (GEDA) had carried out the feasibility studies and conducted preliminary investigations. Recently, the Water Resources Department (WRD) held back the funds citing "ecological risks" (TGE April 3).

These pertained to the effect on water surface, reduced penetration of sunlight into the water, possible contamination, etc. For the last issue, the SGEL had suggested using FSP of high-density polyethylene as it is inert, non-toxic resistant to ultraviolet rays and withstands harsh environmental conditions. The GEDA had asked the WRD to carry out environmental studies through any national institute and check the impact, if any, but the WRD refused!

Goa's WRD should be aware of the world's largest 600 MW FSP project in Omkareshwar Reser-

voir, Madhya Pradesh and FSP in Telangana (100 MW), Andhra Pradesh (25 MW), Kerala (92 MW), Jharkhand (100 MW) and Uttar Pradesh (150 MW). The SGEL would be commissioning a 15 MW project at Nangal Dam Reservoir (Punjab).

On April 1, the Supreme Court admonished an NGO that objected to an FSP project at Jayakwadi Dam (Sambhaji Nagar district, Maharashtra), a bird sanctuary and an eco-sensitive zone, by the Tehri Hydro Development Corporation. The NGO approached the National Green Tribunal (NGT) claiming that the project would affect the birds, the biodiversity and pollute the water. The NGT rejected the petition as the NGO could not show any law that barred installing FSP in an eco-sensitive zone. The SC bench supported the NGT and said that nowadays it has become a practice to challenge projects on the grounds of "irreparable harm to the environment".

Considering the above cases and because RNE is Centre's mandate and crucial, Goa's Chief Minister and the Minis-

ter for New and RNE should direct the WRD to soon release the funds for the prestigious project that would also create jobs. Some bureaucrats cannot hold the State to ransom under the pretext of "ecological risks," and throw a spanner in the works. Mining, fishing, agriculture etc, do involve environmental changes, but these have never stopped developments or occupations in any State or country.

Sridhar D'Iyer, Caranzalem

Dangerous open drains

It was a tragedy waiting to happen. A two-year boy from Rumbadam-Davorlim was reportedly found dead in a storm water drain after he allegedly fell into it, while playing near his residence on Monday evening.

The body was found floating in the drain which was overflowing with wastewater. The boy was the only child of the parents. An inquest panchanama was conducted by the police and the body was subsequently referred for post-mortem examination.

The question that arises is

who should be held accountable for the tragedy? It must be said that open drains pose an open danger to public health as it can spread water-borne disease and also vector-borne diseases through breeding of mosquitoes. However, open drains also pose danger as people can fall into them, especially little children and elderly persons. Open drains are a common sight across the State be it in the cities and villages. During heavy showers in the monsoon season the roads get flooded as a result of which these open drains cannot be detected. The civic bodies and village panchayats should see to it that all the open gutters are covered by concrete slabs before the onset of the monsoon.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Declining bird population

Birds are facing a steady decline in their population due to various factors, such as exposed electrical wires, mobile towers, and poor management by the authorities concerned, in several

parts of the world.

In India, one of the primary reasons for bird fatalities is exposed electrical wires that can cause fatal injuries to birds due to high voltage and lack of protective measures. Additionally, mobile towers pose a significant threat to birds flying at high altitudes, as they can collide with the high-voltage machinery near these towers.

Developed countries such as Germany and the Netherlands have implemented underground electrical systems, significantly reducing the risk of harm to any living creature. India must also take strict action against exposed wires, internet towers, and poor management by authorities.

We must collectively work towards safeguarding nature's beauty and preserving the existence of these magnificent creatures. We can also help by keeping small pots filled with water outside our homes and leaving out some grains daily on our terraces for birds flying long distances, especially during summer when the heat is unbearable.

We can also keep pots for them to build small nests which will help in increasing the bird population.

Jubel D'Cruz, Mumbai