

# People to decide whether Yunus succeeds in politics

Says US Congressman Steve Chabot

UNB, Dhaka

US Congressman Steve Chabot, who left for Washington early yesterday ending his one-day whirlwind tour, said the people of Bangladesh are to determine whether or not micro-finance pioneer Professor Muhammad Yunus will make a good political leader as well.

Talking to reporters at the Radisson Hotel on Thursday evening – much the same time as Yunus floated his party – he noted that the Nobel laureate has been successful in his arena of micro-credit, but it is to be seen if he is equally successful in politics. Prof Yunus has brought honour and prestige for Bangladesh by winning the Nobel for peace.

Recalling his first meeting with Yunus back in 1989, he said the professor made tremendous success in helping people to have their own business through micro-credit, and the practice has been a model around the world. "But whether or not that leadership in his arena will transform into a political leadership remains to be seen," Chabot said.

Asked for his opinion about some perception that the western countries support Prof Yunus in trying his luck in politics to bring about a qualitative change in Bangladesh's political culture, he said, "US will be an observer. We support democracy, free election and human rights. We like to

see those continue in Bangladesh."

The leading American Congressman further said Washington would not determine which party to go to power or how many parties will be here in this country.

With regard to the Nobel laureate economics professor's debut in politics he drew a regal analogy, saying that in the United States, some people had thought that an actor should not get into politics. However, Ronald Reagan became a good president of the United States.

"And ultimately the professor's success will be determined on whether or not he will be able to draw people's support to make him a good political leader," said Chabot, who had nearly an hour-long meeting with Prof Yunus over the lunch Thursday.

"We are not pushing our policy on your government... our role is to encourage to hold election sooner," the American lawmaker said about the much-debated election matters here.

During his shuttle mission through Dhaka's sociopolitical circles, the Congressman met with Chief Adviser Dr Fakhrudin Ahmed, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Awami League President Sheikh Hasina and business leaders. All his talk focused on the current political situation and the matter of holding the stalled parliamentary elections.

Chabot said the United States likes

to see the elections sooner than later, as Bangladesh, after all, is a democracy and democracies have elections. "We won't like to see drag on the election for long period of time," he told the reporters.

About his meeting with Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina – the two paramount leaders of the two rival political camps – the Congressman said both the leaders now preferred elections in the near future without specifying the time.

In this context, he observed that the incumbent caretaker government is now cracking down on corruption and undertaking some reforms that are also important. But he felt that these should be addressed in a short period of time.

Asked if foreign investors could feel discouraged in the event of a long absence of an elected government, the US lawmaker said, "I think one of the things that speak highly about Bangladesh is that it is a democracy and it has elected leaders, which is respected by the United States and countries around the world."

If Bangladesh has no elected government year after year, it would give the wrong signal to those countries, the people and companies who might be interested in making investment in this country, he observed.

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