

Yunus may sue Telenor

Allegations of violating deal, money-laundering, breach of laws

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

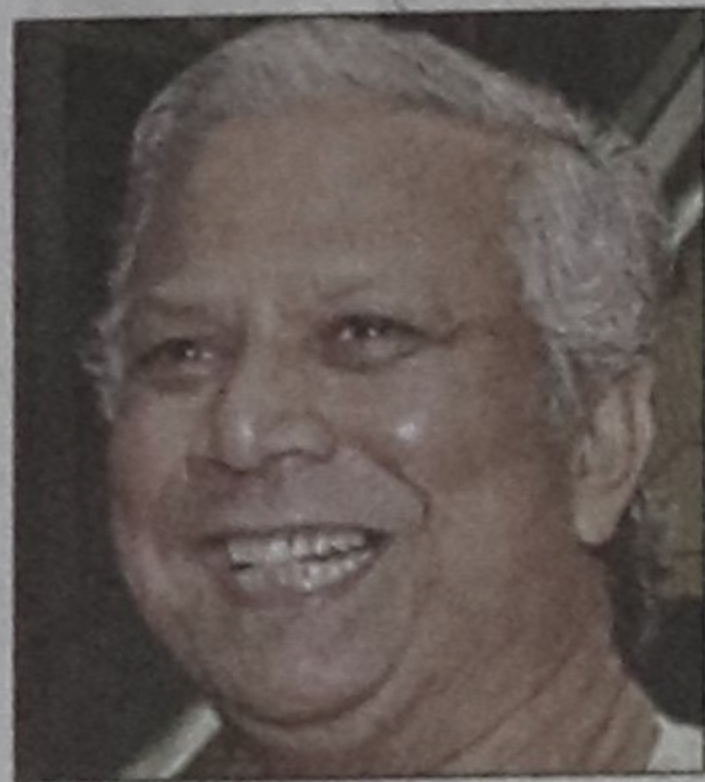
Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus might take legal actions against Telenor to force the Norwegian telecom operator to honour a deal concerning their joint subsidiary in Bangladesh.

Telenor owns 62 percent shares while Yunus' Grameen Telecom holds the remaining stakes in GrameenPhone, launched in 1996.

Pointing out Telenor's alleged involvement in illegal internet telephony services and allegations of violating environmental law and employment of underage workers by its subcontractors, the 'banker of the poor' demanded that Telenor authorities complete transparency in the matters, making public the investigation reports and shareholders' agreement.

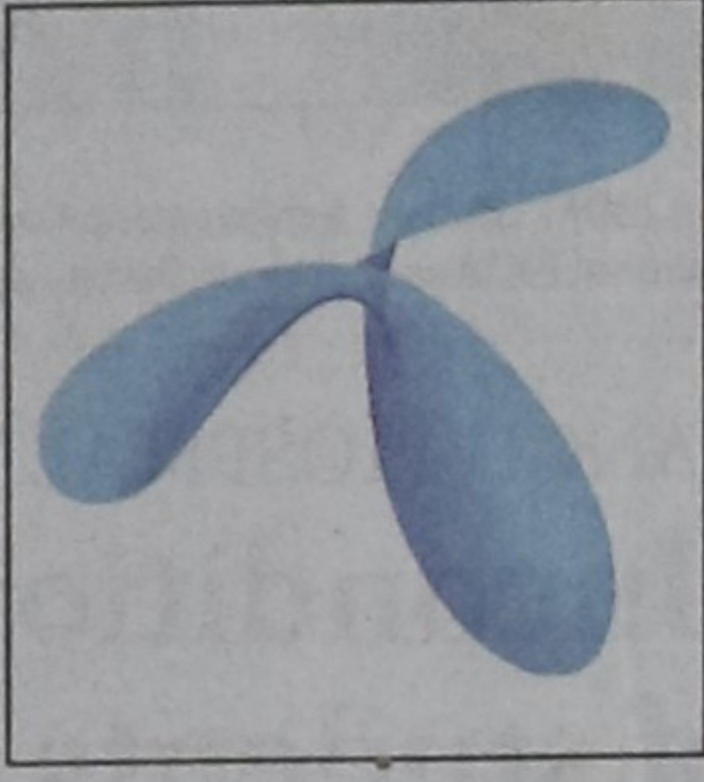
"We cannot allow the name of Grameen to be tarnished directly or indirectly by inappropriate operations," Yunus said in a statement distributed through PR Newswire yesterday.

Telenor, meantime, said yesterday



day that it hopes for an amicable solution to the row with Muhammad Yunus over GrameenPhone which it aims to list on the Dhaka bourse, according to wire services.

The Nobel laureate also hoped that legal actions might not be needed after all because the owners of Telenor will require the company to honour the intention it had expressed in 1996 for transferring ownership and control of GrameenPhone to the poor of



Bangladesh, adding that the transfer should take place at the earliest before the reputation of Grameen is damaged further.

"I am very optimistic about the eventual outcome of this controversy because it is really in the hands of the people of Norway, whom I have come to know and trust. Norwegians set a very high standard for business ethics, and they are the majority owners of Telenor," Yunus said in the statement released in response to media

interviews.

Referring to the 1996 deal, Yunus said Telenor and Grameen Telecom agreed that the joint company should become a locally operated company within six years with Bangladeshi management and majority Bangladeshi ownership.

"This has not happened. Telenor is unwilling to let go control of the company," complained Yunus adding, "We now are being told that the words of the written agreement in a legal sense are non-committing statements. We relied on the words of the agreement."

Saying that Grameen Telecom believed in the agreed intentions of the parties, business ethics, and generally accepted company government rules of conduct, believing that the Norwegian public listed company would do as agreed, Yunus wrote, "Telenor now tells me that it was a mistake to rely on their words."

Yunus' statement about a possible lawsuit surprised and disappointed the Telenor authorities, SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

SQ Chowdhury, Obaidul Qader freed on bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detained former premier Khaleda Zia's parliamentary adviser and BNP leader Salauddin Quader Chowdhury and former Awami League (AL) state minister Obaidul Qader were released from jail on bail yesterday.

SQ Chowdhury was released from Kashimpur Jail in Gazipur at about 11:45am after 19 months of his arrest by the joint forces at his Dhammondi residence on February 31st year.

Salauddin is accused in six cases including those filed for extortion and amassing illegal wealth. He was granted his sixth bail on August 28.

According to sources, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) filed a case against him on charges of amassing illegal wealth worth Tk 9.46 crore and concealing information of wealth worth Tk 91 lakh in his statement submitted to the commission.

The caretaker government published a list of 50 top graft suspects on February 18, asking them to submit their wealth statements. Salauddin's name was on



Salauddin Quader Chowdhury



Obaidul Qader

thelist.

Upon getting released, Salauddin demanded unconditional release of detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Meanwhile, former state minister for sports and AL joint general secretary Obaidul Qader was released from the prison cell of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) at 12:15pm. Upon release, Qader was, however, admitted to BSMMU again as he was ill.

The joint forces arrested Qader raiding another AL leader's house in the city's Khilgaon area on March 9 last year. He is accused in six cases filed on charges of tax evasion, bribery and concealing information on illegally acquired assets, among others.

Deputy Inspector General of Prisons (DIG-Prisons) Maj Shamsul Haider Siddique told The Daily Star that the papers regarding the bails of SQ Chowdhury and Obaidul Qader reached the jail authorities on Thursday but they took one day's time

NATIONAL ELECTION EU may not send full mission if basic rights not restored

ASHEFA WARES KHAN

The European Union (EU) might not send a full election observation mission if the government does not restore people's 'basic freedoms' at least six weeks before the national polls planned for December, said EU officials.

However, if fundamental rights such as freedom of movement, assembly, association, and speech are reinstated, it would send observers even under the state of emergency, they added.

In the event of a no to restoration of the civil liberties, the EU will confine itself to sending a technical assistance team.

The union has recently said its rules of procedures based on the UN election observation standards do not permit it to monitor elections under a state of emergency.

In an email to The Daily Star, an official from EU headquarters in Brussels said a 'flexible approach' to the standards would enable them to send observers with the state of emergency still in force.

But for that to happen, the

Tarique likely to stay abroad during parliamentary poll

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tarique Rahman, recently released from detention, is likely to leave the country this week for treatment abroad and might not return before the parliamentary election slated for the third week of December, BNP and family sources said.

Many junior leaders of BNP, who threw their weight behind the young senior joint secretary general hoping to enjoy his blessings in the party and ahead of the poll, will however desperately try to bring him back as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is also expected to be released on bail this

week as lawyers of the former prime minister decided to file bail petitions in two of the graft cases against her.

Out of the four cases filed against the BNP chief, she already got bail in two -- Zia Orphanage Trust graft case and Barapukuria coal mine scam case. But she has yet to petition for bail in Niko and Gato graft cases.

"We will move the petitions on Sunday seeking bail in the two cases," Barrister Nasiruddin Asim told The Daily Star yesterday.

He hoped that Khaleda will be released through the same judicial process which had set free her elder

AL to press EC for holding both polls as per 'roadmap'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At second round talks with the Election Commission this week, Awami League will press hard for national election before upazila polls, full withdrawal of the state of emergency and changes in some new electoral provisions.

"We want both the parliamentary and upazila polls, but they should be held as per the roadmap," AL Presidium member Suranjit Sengupta told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the EC must hold the general election first if it is to avoid "breaching its own electoral

roadmap".

In the EC roadmap announced last year, the time marked down for national election is June 15 to December 31 and that for upazila polls is between November 3 and December 31. The commission has lately announced it plans to hold first-phase upazila polls on October 23.

Suranjit said they would seek a consensus with the EC at the talks on September 9. But if the commission refuses to change its plan, his party would resort to street agitation to press home its demand for national election first.



The Padma flows over a road near Balasur intersection at Srinagar in Munshiganj yesterday as the river water crossed the danger level there.

Low-lying areas in city's eastern part flooded

STAR REPORT

Many low-lying areas in the eastern part of the capital went under floodwater yesterday and more areas are likely to be inundated in the next couple of days as rivers around the city started flowing over danger levels from Thursday.

"Low-lying Areas in Dohar and Nawabganj are already under water. More areas are likely to be inundated if the Balu, the Shitalakhyia, the Turag, the Dhaleswari and the Tongi canal keep swelling," said Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) Assistant Engineer Arifuzzaman last evening.

Fed with water from upstream, water levels of all major rivers—the Padma, the Brahmaputra-Jamuna and the Meghna—started to inflate yesterday inundating fresh areas

mainly in the northern and central part of the country. This marooned thousands and affected Aman crops.

Rivers will continue to swell for the next two-three days and more areas in Bogra, Jamalpur, Sirajganj, Tangail, Munshiganj, Manikganj, Rajbari, Faridpur, Madaripur, Shariatpur, Chandpur and Dohar and Nawabganj of Dhaka, Shibganj and Sadar upazilas of Chapainawabganj are likely to be inundated by the next 48 hours, FFWC reports said.

"The water level will eventually come down and the flooding will not last long," Arifuzzaman said.

Meanwhile, two children—Seraj, 9, and Mehedi, 7—drowned in floodwater at Chalanbeel under Tarash upazila in Sirajganj yesterday.

Many flood-affected people took shelters on embankments and

are suffering due to scarcity of food and drinking water, our correspondents reported.

Fresh areas in Gaibandha town went under floodwater as gushing water breached a flood-protection embankment at Kuthipara.

A large crack has developed on the Brahmaputra flood-control embankment at Kathalmari, reports our correspondent in Gaibandha. Water Development Board (WDB) is trying to stop the seepage by dumping sandbags.

At least 10,000 dwellings went under knee- and waist-deep water. The marooned people took shelter on flood-control embankments at Syedpur and Balashi in Fulchari upazila.

Our correspondent in Sirajganj reports: The Jamuna was flowing 54cm above the danger mark yes

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Liakat freed on bail after 5 yrs in detention

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Top criminal and Jubo League leader Liakat Hossain was released on bail on Thursday.

Liakat, one of the 23 listed criminals, was under detention for five years and granted bail in all the cases filed against him.

Jail sources said he was granted bail on Wednesday and released from Dhaka Central Jail Thursday noon, as the government did not extend his detention.

Police said Liakat was arrested in Dhanmondi area by the then Rapid Action team (Rat) on October 1, 2003. He is accused in nine cases including for murder. Four general diaries were also filed against him.

Earlier on December 25 in 2001, the government declared Tk one

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EC opens third round dialogue today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) begins talks with political parties today in an effort to minimise differences between the EC and political parties about their registration with the commission, which was made mandatory for taking part in the general elections.

The EC will sit in the third round of dialogue with 16 political parties.

In the wake of changes in the political arena, the EC has invited for talks the BNP faction loyal to ex-premier Khaleda Zia, which is led by BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain.

BNP Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan, however, told The Daily Star last night that they are yet to make the final decision on joining the talks with the EC.

On the first day of the third round of talks, the EC will sit with Bangladesh Workers Party at 10:30am, Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal at 11:30am, Ganotantri Party at 12:30pm and Jatiya Party (Ershad) at 2:00pm.

The commission has formally invited political parties to attend the dialogue by giving appointments to BNP on September 7, Jatiya Party (JP-Manju) and Jamaat-e-Islami on September 8 and Awami League on September 9.

Workers Party General Secretary Bimal Biswas told The Daily Star that they would raise different issues concerning inconsistencies in the registration process.

"We will speak against the Election Commission's decision to allow religion-based parties to register with the EC," Bimal said.

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Rubina's moan of agony

Tale of a victim of obstetric fistula

SHAMIM ASHRAF and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

It does not make any sense to Rubina Begum that she is being ostracised for something she is not responsible for at all.

"You can't call it a life," the 30-year-old obstetric fistula patient, who became a persona non grata among her family and neighbours, said with a sigh.

Her silence, her posture and hopeless utterances give her a demeanour of someone who has lost everything.

Her husband left her after she had developed the condition, nobody would marry her because of it, and her peace of mind has been gone for many years now, said Rubina who

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Fistula patient Rubina Begum became a virtual outcast for no fault of her own. She developed the condition during childbirth 16 years ago.

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Rab website hacked

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The website of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) has been hacked by a person who claimed himself a genius and 10 times better than Rab IT experts.

Contacted, Inspector General of Police Nur Mohammad declined to make any comment about the incident.

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