

Transcription of the report

FROM PAGE 1
company that Norwegians have never heard of.

Burn-point documentary "Caught in the micro-debt" shows a completely different side than the microcredit Muhammad Yunus and his bank Prize-winning Grameen Bank portrays in public.

In the spring of 1998 was a very stormy period in the relationship between peace prize winner Muhammad Yunus and Grameen Bank on the one hand, and the Norwegian authorities on the other. The relationship has until now been unknown to the public and hidden in the confidential documents in Norad archive.

But in Burn-point documentary "Caught in the micro-debt" now revealed how the 608 million kroner issued by Norway, Sweden and other countries with a stroke of the pen was transferred from the Grameen Bank to a newly established company with a completely different purpose than to provide poor women micro loans.

The transaction's purpose was, according to saute Laureate among other things, that Grameen Bank would not have to pay taxes and to raise funds for the clean-profit corporations.

While NORAD tried to push the Nobel Peace Prize winner Yunus to reverse the transaction, selected Swedish aid authorities to sit still as a mouse to prevent the Grameen Bank's reputation was soiled.

HISTORY OF MONEY
Here is the detailed history of the conflict, based on a folder of secret stamped documents that Focal Point has been given access to the Norad archive.

5 November 1997
NOK 32.2 million transferred from Norad to the Grameen Bank, as the final figure, according to a series of agreements between the two parties.

This gives Norway a total of 400 million allocated to the "bank for the poor" in the period 1986-1997. Norway is one of the largest bistandstytterne the Grameen Bank and Muhammad Yunus, both of which ten years later in 2006 will be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Later in the month discovers Officer Einar Landmark at the Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka, Bangladesh by chance a footnote to the accounts of Grameen Bank's annual report for 1996.

In the footnote it says that it made a deal to transfer hundreds of millions of aid compared with the Grameen Bank Grameen Kalyan, a company embassy never heard about.

The substantial amount involved in the transaction include Norad and other donor support to the Grameen Bank over many years.

3 December 1997
The Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka called Muhammad Yunus to a meeting where the Prize winner will be asked to explain the transactions and the reasons for it.

Ambassador Hans Fredrik Lehne writes later in a confidential memo to Norad Director that peace award winner explanations and rationale for the transaction is not "clarifying and compelling." The ambassador pointed out the following:

"Yunus said that the main purpose of the transaction was to reduce tax liabilities, and to secure funds for the members (...) of the Grameen Bank."

15 December 1997
Embassy in Dhaka send a letter to the Grameen Bank in which they ask for more ufyldene information and explanations. Again embassy a brief response "in a manner that was neither clarification or particularly trustworthy."

8 January 1998
A letter signed Peace Prize winner Yunus, with various attachments, sent to the embassy in Dhaka. The letter reveals the scope and background to the transaction that the embassy by chance discovered.

A total of NOK 608 million assistance has been transferred from the Grameen Bank Grameen Kalyan, a company embassy never heard about.

The money is taken from the so-called revolving funds of the Grameen Bank. These are funds that are created by development funds from Norad and other donors to provide mortgages and other types of micro loans to poor people in Bangladesh.

The agreement between Grameen Bank and Grameen Kalyan -- both companies led by Nobel Peace prize winner Muhammad Yunus -- was signed on 7 May 1997 and came into force with effect from 31 December 1996. On the same date as the transfer occurred, the same amount granted as a loan back from Grameen Kalyan Grameen Bank -- the bank for the poor.

10 February 1998
Embassy in Dhaka, by Ambassador Hans Fredrik

Lehne, turn the alarm about Grameen Kalyan case in a confidential memo to Norad's then director Tove Strand Gerhardsen. The paper summarized the transaction as follows by the ambassador and officer Einar Landmark:

"It has thus been made a bookkeeping transaction where the Grameen Bank has donated funds made available from donors and then to borrow them again. Ownership of the funds has thus shifted from the Grameen Bank to Grameen Kalyan..."

In the secret memo makes it explicit that the Norwegian assistance has disappeared from the Grameen Bank is about 300 million.

The Norwegian branch represents almost half of the total on 608 million. Other donors who have been affected by the transaction, nobody knew about are SIDA, Ford Foundation, IFAD, CIDA, KfW and GTZ.

But not enough. Embassy finds out that the purpose of Grameen Kalyan, among other things is to make loans and invest in companies both inside and outside the Grameen family. Through the agreement, Grameen Kalyan received income from interest payable by the Grameen Bank, and had the opportunity to demand repayment of the loan.

Drain money from the Grameen Bank has already come multinationals to good, turn Lehne and Landmark stuck in his note to the Strand Gerhardsen:

"Grameen Kalyan (have) been able to pull funds out of the Grameen Bank and using them for purposes other than they have been allocated by donors, and for other purposes than the Grameen Bank has an opportunity to provide these loans. Grameen Kalyan has already granted BDT 300 million (approximately NOK 50 million) from these funds (...) to partially finance the project to the cellular Grameen Telecom/GrameenPhone."

DIVIDENDS TO TELENOR
50 million words had already gone to the GrameenPhone case officer at the embassy when the transaction is discovered in a footnote in the 1997. The same year, GrameenPhone was launched with great fanfare on the National Day of Bangladesh on 26 March.

The company, owned by Norwegian Telenor and Yunus, Grameen Telecom Company, has since been a tremendous success and the money machine for Telenor.

According to the Norwegian telecom giant Telenor, GrammenPhone has given a dividend of NOK 855 million over the past eight years.

In the note other than the public to Norad director, the Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka is clear in its ruling:

"Through the agreement with Grameen Kalyan, Grameen Bank transferred outline, and the ownership of these funds for Grameen Kalyan, and the revolving fund for mortgage ceased to exist. This is not acceptable."

Ambassador Lehne and Officer Landmark is not impressed or convinced by the arguments Muhammad Yunus provides for the establishment of the agreement between Grameen Bank and Grameen Kalyan.

CONSTRUCTION TAX
In the letter dated 8 January 1998 Yunus writes in part that the Grameen Bank in 1998 no longer enjoy tax exemption, and that the bank would have paid 40% tax on profits if not agreement with Grameen Kalyan had been signed in 1997.

The tax argument commented as follows in the secret note to Norad Director:

"At the time, support was granted a wild one from the Norwegian side hardly have accepted organisational structures to prevent the ordinary taxation of possible future economic gains..."

The embassy also writes that Yunus leaves "a confusing impression of the Grameen Bank's management's view of itself." The reason is as follows:

"Grameen Bank's management says that it is possible that they will not exercise sufficient financial discipline to demand loans granted by the Grameen Bank (to the poor, ed REF note) to be repaid."

Consequently, they have found it expedient to give up the funds, and borrow them again, so that Grameen Kalyan that they borrow from, which is controlled by themselves, can exert the necessary force on themselves as leaders of Grameen Bank to be responsible in handling of loans. The argument may leave a question about repayment of loans of Grameen Bank is about to develop into a problem for management. When the need for the agreement is justified in terms of repayments of loans from Grameen Bank, can also be tempted to ask: Takes place in the reorganisation as an easy,

almost selvbedragerisk diversion to create the illusion of them even though it has been done about a big problem that requires a very different labor-intensive approach?"

Finally, concludes the note from the embassy in Dhaka to Norad Director Strand Gerhardsen that Norway should demand that the agreement between Grameen Bank and Grameen Kalyan void, that the amounts in the hundreds of millions returned to the Grameen Bank and that a revolving fund for mortgage restored.

3 March 1998
Legal department in Norad write a memo -- stamped except public -- about the Grameen Kalyan case. Head of Section Sverre Melsom expresses his disbelief over the embassy has narrated in his note to Norad Director:

"Like the embassy, we are very surprised that no submission in advance for Norad (and any other donors) and also without the following information has been such significant change (...). It is outrageous that Norad even have to read to such changes by Century Studies in the audited financial statements that were first received long after the changes had taken place."

Section leader writes that the Legal Section supports the embassy's conclusions and claims to the Grameen Bank:

"However, one must not forget that the agreements regarding the assistance is between Norway and Bangladesh, so we consider it very important that the Ministry and the Finance, Economic Relations Division, will be appraised of and involved in the case at an early stage, and that collect their comments on the changes in management and organisational structure that Grameen Bank seems to have unilaterally implemented."

16 March 1998
In line with the recommendation from the Legal Department held a meeting between the Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka and representatives from the Ministry of Finance in Bangladesh. In the confidential minutes from the meeting concludes Embassy with the following:

"After the presentation of the case of the embassy and in-depth discussion it was agreed that the agreement between Grameen Bank and Grameen Kalyan was in breach of the agreements between Bangladesh and Norway for support to the Grameen Bank."

Meanwhile, the embassy also warned the Swedish aid agencies (SIDA) on Grameen Kalyan case and asked Sweden to be with the requirement that all money should be returned from Grameen Kalyan Grameen Bank.

17 March 1998
In a fax from Franck Rasmussen at the Swedish Embassy in Dhaka makes it explicit that Swedish aid agencies (SIDA) has supported a total of Grameen Bank with 210 million SEK during the period 1989 to 1993.

Of these, 190 million earmarked for the revolving funds, and consequently transferred from the Grameen Bank Grameen Kalyan with Norad money and other international support.

Rasmussen writes, however, that SIDA is not going to support Norad's claim that it could damage the reputation of the Grameen Bank and the good thing:

"No one wants to make a big thing of this as it might anger the credibility of the Grameen family and pray that would be detrimental to the whole cause."

18 March 1998
The Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka writes a confidential letter to the Ministry of Finance in Bangladesh, where they maintain the criticism of the agreement between Grameen Bank and Grameen Kalyan.

Ambassador Hans Fredrik Lehne concludes by asking the authorities take the necessary steps for the return of the 608 million crowns were transferred to Grameen Kalyan.

1 April 1998
A new meeting will be held in Dhaka between the embassy and Yunus and other leaders of Grameen Bank. The meeting is being held on the initiative of the Grameen Bank, which a week earlier learned about the embassy's letter to the Ministry of Finance in Bangladesh.

Nobel Laureate Yunus disagrees that Grameen Kalyan case represents a breach of the agreement between Norway and Bangladesh, while the embassy maintains its view.

According to the confidential meeting minutes, however, the embassy stressed "the long-term and good cooperation between the Embassy/NORAD and the Grameen Bank, and maintained that the matter should be resolved as soon as possible so that it would not be known and used to damage the

Grameen Bank":

"It was underscored by the embassy site that consideration for confidential treatment had also been underlined in a meeting with Secretary, ERD (in Bangladesh, ed. REF note)."

Muhammad Yunus is now so worried about Grameen Kalyan case that same day he sends a personal letter to NORAD director begins as follows: "Dear ... Greetings from Grameen. I need your help."

In the letter, Yunus writes that there is confusion between Norad/the Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka and the Grameen Bank, and that he hopes Strand Gerhardsen can meet him when he is going to Oslo later this month.

Otherwise, Yunus most concerned that the Embassy has informed the authorities of Bangladesh on the matter, and that this can create major problems for the Grameen Bank if the case is known:

"This allegation goodwill Create Object a lot of misunderstanding within the Government of Bangladesh. If the people, within and outside government, WHO are not supportive of Grameen, get hold of this letter We'll face the real problem in Bangladesh."

The letter ends with Yunus apologize for taking up these issues with NORAD director, but that he no longer has other way out.

Norad and held tight. The letter from Yunus to Strand Gerhardsen, and virtually all other documents in the case that Focal Point has found in Norad's archives, is stamped "made public."

29 April 1998
A note from the Acting Director of Norad, Kjell Storlokken, referring from the meeting with Muhammad Yunus, who is on a visit to Oslo.

NORAD maintains still that there is a breach of the agreement between Norway and Bangladesh, and that money must be returned from Grameen Kalyan Grameen Bank.

Yunus, who, according to the note is accompanied by Arne Fjortoft in the World View and Helge Dietrichson, Telenor will not respond to the request "above board."

Instead orients Peace Prize winner and his entourage of "their plans/ ideas related to the opportunities for continuing and further developing the technology as the mobile technologies introduced in Bangladesh."

5 May 1998
A few days after Yunus was in Oslo and the situation was totally stuck, something has happened. In an urgent letter from the Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka to Norad -- even excluding the public -- write ambassador Lehne that one of Muhammad Yunus's close associates have contacted the embassy with a proposal for compromise:

"He has asked whether it can be accepted as a final solution that the funds that Norway put into the revolving fund for mortgages under the two agreements of 1993 and 1994 (...) be traced back to the Grameen Bank, against the remaining funds allocated to the Grameen Bank for further loans and revolving funds remain in the Grameen Kalyan own."

The Ambassador requested authorization to accept the compromise and justify it that it is not legally possible to claim that all Norad money of 300 million will be reversed:

26 May 1998
Embassy in Dhaka write letters to the Nobel Peace Prize winner Yunus where the embassy confirming that they accept the compromise proposal. It is that 170 million is returned from Grameen Kalyan Grameen Bank.

The remaining approximately 130 million kroner of Norway's total support to the Grameen Bank of 400 million, which also demanded that Norway should be returned shall be in accordance with the current compromise of Grameen Kalyan.

Embassy concludes his letter to Yunus as follows:
"The Embassy look forward two continued good cooperation in futures."

Thus, buried the case and the secret documents in the case filed by Norad in Oslo.

In 1999 Norad created a team together with Grameen Bank to evaluate the total Norwegian aid to the bank for many years. In the evaluation report (the Grameen Bank 20: Impact and Future Challenges) is not a word about Grameen Kalyan case and the conflict between the Norwegian aid authorities and Nobel Peace Prize winner Yunus.

AUTUMN 2010
Neither SIDA and other donors has since Brennpunkt knowledge demanded the return of aid funds that were transferred from the Grameen Bank Grameen Kalyan.

Dhaka by chance discovered that had been drained from Grameen Bank, was in other words, only 170 million returned to the Grameen Bank, after pressure from Norway.

The remaining NOK 438 million remained in Grameen Kalyan, the company that the Norwegians had not even heard of. Three-quarters of the amount, which really was given as assistance to the revolving fund of the Grameen Bank for lending to the poor, has thus remained in Grameen Kalyan, a company that has a completely different purpose.

No responsible within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Norad -- neither those who worked on it the time or management today -- have been willing to comment

22 August 2010
Grameen Bank has been detailed questions from the Focal Point of the transaction which, according to Norwegian and Bangladeshi authorities were in violation of the assistance agreement between Norway and Bangladesh. Grameen Bank responds cards in the form of two points in an e-mail dated 22 August this year:

Grameen Bank established Grameen Kalyan to engage in welfare activities of the bank employees and borrowers, subject to approval by the Board of Directors. However, in agreement with the Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka has become the means back to the Grameen Bank.

Grameen Bank never transferred the money to the Grameen Kalyan to avoid paying tax. The Bank has since its establishment in 1983 been exempt from the requirement to pay tax.

Santu

FROM PAGE 16
People's Democratic Front (UPDF) a terrorist organisation and demanded that the government ban it. UPDF opposes PCJSS.

He strongly criticised State Minister for CHT Affairs Dipankar Talukder and the ministry officials. "They are not sincere so far as the development of indigenous people and the protection of their rights are concerned."

He reiterated the demands for constitutional recognition of the indigenous people, removal of the current CHT Land Commission chairman and review of the Land Commission Act.

Workers Party of Bangladesh President Rashed Khan Menon stressed the need for transforming the movement into a demand for constitutional recognition of the indigenous people, adding, the implementation of CHT peace accord should be turned into a democratic movement.

The leftist leader, now in the government, also gave assurance to discuss the issue in the meeting of the special committee on constitution amendment.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) President Manjurul Ahsan Khan said unity among indigenous communities is the key to establishing equal rights of all in the hills.

PCJSS placed a five-point demand including stopping of illegal land grabbing in the region and withdrawal of all army camps from there.

Bangladeshi Adibashi Odhikar Andolon General Secretary Prof Mesbah Kamal, Shikhabarta Editor AN Rasheda and Ekpakkha Editor Masuda Bharti, among others, spoke on the occasion.

Hospital fees

FROM PAGE 16
treatment in government hospitals.

The court directives came after the Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh filed a writ petition yesterday challenging the government decisions to increase user fees in September last year and distribute half of it among doctors, nurses and employees of government hospitals in July.

An HC bench ordered the government to form a committee with representatives from the health and finance ministries, and experts within 15 days to prepare a guideline for providing patients with better treatment in government hospitals.

The court also laid down the functions of the committee, saying it must prepare a list of necessary medical equipment for better treatment and submit the list to the court within four weeks into its inception.

Humayun Kabir, secretary at the health ministry, said not all, but some selected government hospitals are charging user fees.

"But we will surely comply with the High Court's stay order," he headed.

Conflicting

FROM PAGE 1
House-6 of Shaheed Moinal Road on Wednesday, right after receiving the judgment copy.

They claimed that they did not get any response from Khaleda and that is why they started moving some of the goods to a secure store in the cantonment from where she could collect them at her convenience.

However, Asim claimed that they even sought just half an hour's time yesterday to take all that was left behind but the cantonment board did not comply to their request.

"I talked to the executive officer of the cantonment board over the phone and requested him to give us half an hour for removing madam's [Khaleda's] belongings," he said.

He said Khaleda's brother Shamim Iskander's wife wanted to collect the stuff yesterday.

"Not today, you will be given 72 hours from tomorrow to collect them," Asim quoted the cantonment board officer as saying.

Asim said he went to the house around 11:00am yesterday but military police prevented him from entering the house. "But some of them [military police] admitted off the records that they already started to move the chairperson's goods from the house... which later the officials concerned denied," Asim claimed.

He also said the authorities concerned has started demolishing the house from quarters for guards but army sources refuted it too.

An army source said they cannot wait for an uncertain period of time so that Khaleda can collect her things as the authorities will have to eventually demolish the present structures there.

Sources said the army has a primary plan to build a high-rise that would serve as quarters for officers.

During a visit to the house on November 14, a day after Khaleda 'left' the house, journalists found at least 64 cartons, suitcases and boxes stuffed with household items.

Meanwhile, Rafiqul Islam Mian, member of BNP standing committee and a lawyer of Khaleda, at a press briefing said he and a few other lawyers wanted to visit the house and see for themselves if her stuff were removed but the authorities did not allow them in.

A Supreme Court verdict on November 29 confirmed that Khaleda lost the legal battle for the house where she had been living since 1972.

All's not well

FROM PAGE 1
Jafar Ahmed, director of Chittagong DoE, yesterday said they have been visiting the ship-breaking yards time to time and are happy with the progress made so far. He mentioned about cranes, fire fighting equipment, pressure rooms and some other equipment the ship breakers are arranging at their yards.

Asked about the mechanism of cleaning of toxic materials of the vessels, he defended the ship breakers saying, "Cleaning of inbuilt hazardous materials of a ship is very costly. We will manage the hazardous materials like asbestos by dumping it underground or sell it to China."

There are different other inbuilt toxic substances including polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), lead, chromates, mercury, organic liquids (benzene etc) barium, cadmium etc used in most of the ships, especially the oil tankers dismantled in these yards.

"Cleaning these toxins is very costly. So the rich countries are enthusiastic about sending ships to poor country like Bangladesh without cleaning them," said Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of the Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (BELA).

Rizwana Hasan has filed several petitions against the ship breakers.

The conditions given to the scrappers say that the ship-breakers must build a "negative pressure closed system room" equipped with HEPA filter to handle the hazardous material like asbestos, glass wool and others.

The process of giving the yards clearance and the go-ahead nod to import 16 toxic ships were done bypassing the aforementioned HC order.

Some of the industrialists and officials concerned tipped off saying that the yard owners have not yet fulfilled many conditions like installing Oil Water Separator (API Separator) although most of these ship-yards have imported ships, which are now waiting to be dismantled at Sitakunda shore.

According to the existing environmental law, the ship-breaking industry is identified as category Red [extremely dangerous] and environmental clearance certificate is mandatory for the sector though the ship-breaking yards had been operating without any clearance certificate for long.

"The conditions have to be implemented within three months from obtaining the clearance and if the yards fail to comply with that, their clearance certificates would be forfeited," said Md Shajahan, convener of the environmental management committee.

He said they had taken the decision based on the suggestion from the DoE officials in Chittagong.

The Chittagong committee recommended MAC Corporation (Shipyards), KRL Shipbreaking, Kabir Steel Ltd, Ratanpur Steel Re-rolling Mills Ltd, Jamuna Steel, PHP Ship breaking and Re-cycling Industries, Prime Ship, SN Corporation, BBC Steel, KSB Steel, Achhadi Steel Enterprise, S Trading, SK Shipbreaker, Peninsula Steel Mills, SH Enterprise, Sico Steel Ltd for the clearance.

Legal experts say the DoE has bypassed the HC order by providing temporary clearance, as the Supreme Court directed the government to ensure that all ship-breaking yards secured clearance from the department.

"The department has taken

this decision to bring the ship-yards hurriedly in operation as most of them were closed for a few months failing to comply with the court order," said an employee of a development organisation who has been working on ship-breaking yard for a long time.

As per the HC order, the government also has to ensure that ships are dismantled only when a safe work environment is guaranteed for the workers and the shipyards have appropriate disposal arrangement for hazardous waste.

However, the director of Chittagong DoE claimed that they are doing everything as per the High Court direction.

The first condition given to the ship-breakers for the clearance was that the yards are not to pollute earth, water or air in anyway, which is already in the environment conservation law.

The yards also have to obtain clearance for every vessel they intend to dismantle.

"Some of the conditions for the yards, like oil-spillage control, cannot be implemented now as this hazard is difficult to determine until a vessel is brought ashore and dismantled," said Jafar Ahmed to justify the non-compliance of the conditions given to the selected 16 shipyards.

Around 50 out of over 100 ship-breaking yards have applied for clearance certificates. But none of the yards are equipped with proper structures or modern facilities for dismantlingships.

Almost all of them toe scrap vessels in open beach and dismantle them manually, which is extremely risky for the workers. Each year many die and scores more sustain injury in this industry.

The HC on March 17 2009 directed the government to close operation of all ship-breaking yards in two weeks, as they were running without environmental clearance. Later the Supreme Court stayed the HC direction of closing the yards while all other verdicts were sustained.

The court also directed the Ministry of Environment and Forest to frame necessary rules on ship-breaking within three months pursuant to the obligations of Bangladesh under the Basel Convention, 1989, the Environment Conservation Act, 1995 and the Environment Conservation Rules, 1997.

In the last 18 months at least 24 workers were killed in accidents, mostly due to explosions and coming in contact with toxic materials in ships, while 17 others were injured in 14 accidents in 14 shipyards as the HC order was not followed.

When the HC directions came there were only 36 ship-breaking yards in operation. The number has now shot up to over 100 although the court directed the government not to sanction any new yards without clearance certificates.

In 2008, a total of 84 vessels were scrapped in Sitakunda. The scrapping of a ship takes one to one and a half months depending on its size.

Globally some 700 ships are scrapped a year, mainly in five countries -- China, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Vietnam -- and a few in Turkey, says a Greenpeace source.

The global fleet is growing fast, from 15,000 ships annually in the 1960s to 62,000 in 2000. With the ships built before 1970 being sorted out for decommissioning, the number of ships to be condemned for scrapping will also rise in future.

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