

Rejoinder to Honourable Prime Minister's comments on Professor Muhammad Yunus

SEVERAL newspapers have reported that the Honourable Prime Minister made some comments about Nobel Peace Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus on July 11, 2013 during a high level meeting at Ganabhaban with the leadership of her party, Members of Parliament, and ministers. The Honourable Prime Minister raised a number of complaints about Professor Muhammad Yunus. The complaints are completely false.

The people of the country have been shocked by the comments of the Honourable Prime Minister. We had hoped that the Prime Minister would have disowned the reports in the newspapers, and say that she did not say anything of this kind. But five days have passed, and she has not disowned these reports. We are, therefore, compelled to give our rejoinder.

There are important implications of Honourable Prime Minister's comments for the country and personally for Professor Yunus, which create wrong impressions about him in the minds of people. We are protesting against these comments for this reason.

Below are responses from Yunus Centre to the Prime Minister's allegations:

1) Honourable Prime Minister: Professor Yunus is a selfish person, who can do anything for his own sake.

Our response: Professor Yunus has worked his entire life for the poor people. He has never worked for his own sake. He does not personally own any business or enterprise. He does not own a single share of any company. Professor Yunus has been involved in creating a movement to spread the idea of social business to bring change in the profit-centered world. Does the Prime Minister of the country that he belongs to suggest that he is a selfish person? How can Professor Yunus be called selfish, when the main idea of social business is "selflessness." Would Honourable Prime Minister give just one example of Professor Yunus' selfishness? Has he become owner of Grameen Bank? Has he made himself owner of any of the companies that he created? Has he become a rich man by receiving bribes from the more than 100,000 young boys and girls who have been hired in the companies he created? Is he being called selfish for not giving any chunk of shares to

anyone from the businesses he created to enable them to make a personal fortune?

2) Honourable Prime Minister: Telenor lobbied for Professor Yunus and has given a huge sum of money to the Clinton Foundation so that they can get him the Nobel Prize.

Our response: Since Honourable Prime Minister has not protested the news published in the newspapers, we have to take her comments seriously. These comments are damaging for the country. There should be enough evidence to prove these comments, otherwise it will create serious negative impact on our relations with two friendly countries. Through these comments, complaints of serious corruption have been brought by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh against three world known institutions. No one will take this lightly. These three institutions are: Clinton Foundation, which was created by President Clinton, and which he manages himself. His wife Hillary Clinton is also actively involved with this institution. It is speculated that she will run for office in the next US Presidential elections. It will not be possible for her to compete in these elections if it is proved that her institution is involved in corruption. If this cannot be proved, the allegation against these individuals will create a lot of negative reaction towards Bangladesh among their followers.

The second institution is Telenor: This is an institution owned and run by the Norwegian government. This allegation of corruption is therefore made against the Norwegian government. Norway is our development partner. We have to carefully assess what evidence we have in our hands before bringing such an allegation against the country. Otherwise, it will be seen as a negative stance against a friendly country.

The third institution is the Norwegian Nobel Peace Prize Committee: If it can be proved with adequate evidence that the Nobel Peace Prize can be "purchased" through lobbying, the prize will lose all its credibility in the future. If the allegation cannot be proved, it will create a distance in relations between Bangladesh and the government and people of Norway, especially since the Norwegian people take great national pride about the Nobel Peace Prize. Bringing allegations without

proof will hurt their feelings very deeply.

3) Honourable Prime Minister: Grameen Bank was formed for lending money to the poor. But this bank diverted funds to Grameen Shakti and other similar personal institutions, which it was not supposed to do.

Our response: Grameen Bank used the money given by the donor organisations, in compliance with the conditions that they set, and in accordance with Grameen Bank rules and regulations, and always with the approval of Grameen Bank's Board of Directors. Professor Yunus did not divert or remove any money to any of his personal institutions. He does not have any personal institutions so there should be no question of diverting the money to personal institutions.

4) Honourable Prime Minister: Professor Yunus even set up Yunus Centre with Grameen Bank's money, and his brothers and relatives made money from the bank's associated institutions.

Our response: This allegation is completely false. Grameen Bank has never given any money to Yunus Centre. It is totally unimaginable that the respected Prime Minister of a country would make a false statement about a respected citizen of that country. If she cannot prove her comments, then the most respectable thing to do would be to withdraw those comments.

Yunus Centre runs entirely on Professor Yunus's own earnings. He donates to Yunus Centre from his own money. The costs of running Yunus Centre can be covered through a small part of the money Professor Yunus earns by making speeches each year at different conferences. Every year he makes many speeches and receives a very large amount as honorarium for each speech. The amount he receives from one or two speeches is enough to cover all costs related to running Yunus Centre each year.

Yunus Centre office is located in the Grameen Bank building. The board of Grameen Bank created a trust named Grameen Nobel Laureate Trust. The Bank leased one of its floors to this Trust for 25 years at no cost. This Trust in turn has leased this floor to Yunus Centre for a

nominal amount.

Professor Yunus has already talked about his brothers before. Two of his brothers live in Dhaka. They are Professor Muhammad Ibrahim and Mr. Muhammad Jahangir. Muhammad Jahangir has no connection with any of the Grameen-named companies. Professor Ibrahim is a member of the board of directors of 4 not-for-profit Grameen-named companies, by virtue of his knowledge and experience. Board members of such companies cannot receive any financial benefits; they only participate in the board meetings.

None of Professor Yunus' other brothers are involved in any way with the Grameen-named institutions. No other relative of Professor Yunus is connected in any way with institutions carrying the Grameen name. Honourable Prime Minister made false allegations in this respect.

5) Honourable Prime Minister: A powerful country has been backing Professor Yunus. The day is not far away when the people of that country will learn all about him and ask their government to withdraw its support for him. When that country turns him away, what will happen to him?

Our response: Professor Yunus does not work on the basis of the support of one or more countries. He does what he thinks is best for the poor people. People in this country love him deeply for the work that he does, people of other countries love him in the same deep way for the work he does all over the world.

This government has tried in many ways to make people believe fabricated stories about Professor Yunus, even to the extent of using its Foreign Ministry and its website to circulate false allegations about Professor Yunus "corruption" and for "ignoring the law of the land." It has succeeded neither in making the people of this country nor the people of other countries believe these stories about Professor Yunus. The government is spending resources and efforts to prove a citizen of its country as an impostor. But in effect, it is proving itself ridiculous before the world. Instead of bringing respect for Bangladesh, it activities against Professor Yunus are pushing the country away from its position of respect in the world to one of ridicule.

Ghulam Azam verdict: Has justice been served?

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

FOOLISH men imagine that because judgment for an evil thing is delayed, there is no justice; but only accident here below. Judgment for an evil thing is many times delayed some day or two, some century or two, but it is sure as life, it is sure as death". Thomas Carlyle

The Ghulam Azam case has finally come to an end after forty two long and painful years of waiting. The verdict may not be perfect fitting the crimes, and it may have been sad for some. But as far as the legal system is concerned, it has been able to successfully try and convict the perpetrator of some of the most heinous crimes against the nation. But has justice been served by this verdict?

The trial of Ghulam Azam and others charged with war crimes began only two years ago. This is a trial that the country had waited for since its inception. But it hobbled for years. It hobbled because the politics that dominated the country following 1975 mayhem gave birth to a set of actors in the political scene who sought alliances with the very forces who would be the primary candidates in a war crimes trial. The new alliances gave platforms for rebirth and rejuvenation of the old order that had not only opposed the creation of Bangladesh but had provided support -- both moral and physical -- to a war that was launched by a ruthless junta on innocent Bangladeshis. All this was done in the name of religion and preservation of an ideology that the majority of us Bangladeshis could not relate to. Sadder of all is that the collaboration and active help for the junta's slaughter in Bangladesh came from fellow Bangladeshis, led by Ghulam Azam. But the worst was yet to come.

The war crimes trial of the Pakistan junta collaborators and their ideological acolytes would not only be shelved post 1975; these elements would turn into a political force who would also be power brokers in the new politics of the country. In this new game the hunted would become the hunters; the raiders of the nation would become the new saviours. The patrons of these elements would use them in forming new political parties and custom-fit their pseudo ideologies to bring these elements in their fold. A war crimes trial of these elements would gradually become a lunatic's dream,



The verdicts may not please us all, but they need not. The most important aspects of these trials are the due process, weight of evidences, and judicious application of the law. The court has been transparent, the arguments persuasive, and the verdicts lawful. And there is the rub. Not all verdicts are pleasing for everyone. Yet we need to accept them.

when these power brokers became power sharers later. What has happened in last few months in war crimes trial is that the lunatic dream of a few years ago has become a reality. Four cases have come to closure, the most significant having been concluded last Monday. The verdicts may not please us all, but they need not. The most important aspects of these trials are the due process,

weight of evidences, and judicious application of the law. The court has been transparent, the arguments persuasive, and the verdicts lawful. And there is the rub. Not all verdicts are pleasing for everyone. Yet we need to accept them.

The verdict of 35 years of prison sentence given to Kaing Guek Eav, also known as Duch, a few years ago by

the Cambodian Court of War Crimes stunned everybody. His party, under his leadership, was responsible for deaths of about 1.7 million in Cambodia in a blood bath between April 1975 and January 1979. The world was amazed at such a seemingly lenient sentence to a mass murderer. What the court stated in its verdict was that Duch was penitent for his conduct and also it was taking his age into consideration. More importantly, the court stated that it wanted a closure of the sordid chapter in Cambodian history from that verdict. Cambodians finally accepted the verdict.

Is death sentence really needed for all cases? In the Ghulam Azam verdict the court has not noted any penitence from the defendant, but it recognised his geriatric conditions in not awarding him capital punishment. Some of us may not be pleased with this dispensation from the court, but we must recognise that the defendant was found guilty of all the charges that were brought against him. The death sentence was not awarded for reasons of age, and not because the defendant could not disprove any of the charges.

What Ghulam Azam and his disciples stood and fought for does not live any more. His death sentence would not revive the country that he once lived in. More unfortunately, his death would not bring back the millions who we lost during the War of Liberation. In his defense, Ghulam Azam may not have shown any penitence, and with a death sentence he may have gone without remorse. With life in prison he will be well reminded by a saying from Martin Luther King: "Justice is temporary things that must at last come to an end; but the conscience is eternal and will never die." He would have his conscience to remind him of the pain and suffering he and his acolytes had caused to millions for the rest of his life.

The writer is US based writer and political analyst.

CORRECTION

In the article "Does planet X exist?" (printed on July 16) the name of the writer was mistakenly given as Shameema Nasrin. It should actually be Sharmeen Rahman. The error is regretted.

CROSSWORD puzzle grid with clues for 1-37. Clues include: 1 Drink heartily, 5 Coffee, in slang, 8 Snatch, 12 Maze, 13 Possess, 14 Elderly, 15 Not all one kind, 17 Clinton's Arkansas hometown, 18 Delivery co., 19 Source, 21 Song of praise, 24 "East of Eden" character, 25 Charged bits, 26 Lit into letters, 31 External, 32 Eisenhower, 33 Lent a hand, 35 Appear, 36 Dud, 37 Familiar form of address. Down clues include: 1 Hot tub for The Crew-Cuts, 4 Grave robbers, 5 Writes quickly, 6 Have bills, 7 Backed ending abbr., 9 Quite eager, 10 Military visored hat, 11 Paradise, 16 Spinning stat, 20 Bellow, 21 Pocket bread, 22 Half of the offspring, 23 Picnic invaders, 24 in the right direction, 26 Convert to computers, 27 Told a tale out (supplemented), 29 Show-room sample, 31 Norway's capital, 34 "I wish", 35 Prolonged attacks, 37 Japanese pond carp, 38 Caraway, for one, 39 Loathe, 40 Cereal choice, 41 Despot, 44 Vast expanse, 45 Sister, 46 Mound stat, 47 Pooch.

CRYPTOQUIP

JWGCQRSD XRYG SA OCSSWPU, R UVTTAUW YGCV WVPATWCS FAXJPAX NPAO UANRC RU C JVFDPCRS QVFDPCRS.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: THAT LONDON JOCKEY'S HORSE IS JUST BEING TREMENDOUSLY BAD. IT KEEPS CHOMPING AT THE BRIT.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: U equals S

BEETLE BAILY cartoon by Mort Walker. Baily asks a woman if she got everything done before leaving on vacation. She replies she's still working on it. He asks if she's writing postcards now. She replies she never has time when she's at the beach.

HENRY cartoon by Don Trachte. Henry is sitting in a bathtub. A woman says to bathe his feet in hot water. Henry replies dinner is ready, dear.

QUOTABLE Quotes

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Maya Angelou