

Bangladesh Government strongly reacts to an open letter by international personalities about Nobel Laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus

Press Release

It has come to the attention of the Government of Bangladesh that a group of international personalities, including political leaders, and some Bangladesh nationals have written an Open Letter to the Hon'ble Prime Minister regarding the ongoing judicial proceedings against Dr. Muhammad Yunus.

The Open Letter is marked by obvious gap of information and amounts to an affront to Bangladesh's independent judicial system. It comes as a surprise to the Government that the signatories to the letter already reached their own conclusion about the merit of the sub-judice cases as well as the outcome of the judicial proceedings.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) of Bangladesh filed one such case under specific provisions of the Bangladesh Penal Code and Anti-Money Laundering Act, 2012. The case was filed based on investigations concerning allegations of misappropriation of profits due to the workers and employees of Grameen Telecom Ltd. The ACC investigation team had found that Dr. Muhammad Yunus, Chairman of Grameen Telecom Ltd. along with the Managing Director and other Board members forged settlement agreement to misappropriate and illicitly transfer Tk. 252 million.

Further, the Department of Inspection of Factories and Establishments, Dhaka had filed a case under Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006. The case was filed for multiple breaches, including for not setting up Workers' Contributory Fund and Welfare Fund as well as for not depositing 5 percent share of net profits to the concerned workers' welfare funds since 2006.

Again, in one of the tax evasion cases, Dr. Muhammad Yunus having lost in the High Court Division of the Supreme Court filed a petition at the Appellate Division, the highest court of the country. The Appellate Division having found no infirmity and illegality in the order of the High Court Division rejected the petition, resulting in Dr. Yunus' paying the overdue tax amount to the National Board of Revenue (NBR). There are now a few more pending tax evasion cases against him.

In the cases of depriving the workers of their rightful profit, Dr. Muhammad Yunus went to the highest courts on two occasions, one challenging maintainability and another challenging framing of charge by the trial court. The highest court on hearing his lawyers passed judgments affirming that the first case had been properly initiated, and in the other, declared the framing of charge legal, proper and correct.

It is regrettable that the signatories to the letter requested the Hon'ble Prime Minister to exercise extra-judicial authorities to suspend the sub-judice cases. They have also recommended an alternative process of review of the charges against Dr. Muhammad Yunus and his cohorts in a manner that is incompatible with Bangladesh's established judicial system.

This is not the first time that Dr. Muhammad Yunus and his aides have resorted to international lobbying in the face of legal consequences for their alleged or proven violation of law. It had been his decision to file a lawsuit against the government for terminating his contract as Managing Director of Grameen Bank way beyond the age of retirement stipulated in the Grameen Bank Service Rules, 1993.

It is unacceptable for a citizen of a sovereign country to repeatedly seek external interventions presumably based on his perception of being above the law of the land. It has now become evident to the people of Bangladesh that having evaded corporate and income taxes and having deprived workers over the years, Dr. Muhammad Yunus – a salaried employee of Grameen Bank – invested large sums of supposedly misappropriated and laundered money in commercial ventures.

The allegations of 'persecution or harassment' seem to follow a pattern that stems from a victim mentality using human rights and democracy as an expedient cover. The signatories to the letter would be well advised to counsel Dr. Muhammad Yunus to operate within the bounds of law in lieu of making unjustified insinuations about Bangladesh's democratic and electoral processes. The Government would like to reiterate that no amount of veiled threats under the pretext of promoting democracy and human rights would detract the people of Bangladesh from upholding the rule of law.