

## **Rejoinder to a News Item on Grameen Telecom Published in the Dhaka Daily "The Bangladesh Pratidin"**

A news report under the caption "Allegations of Punishable Offences against Dr. Yunus" published on 25 June 2023 on the front page of the daily "The Bangladesh Pratidin" has come to our notice. We strongly object to this news report as it is completely false and baseless and creates confusion in the minds of the public. We state the facts below:

Grameen Telecom is a company registered under Section 28 of the Companies Act, 1994 of Bangladesh. Under the law, a Section 28 company cannot distribute dividends. This is a non-profit, non-dividend company limited by guarantee. This is the reason why Grameen Telecom did not distribute any dividends. The question of Grameen Telecom losing its licence for not distributing dividends does not arise

The news that Grameen Telecom has furnished false information in its annual returns to the RJSC is absolutely baseless. All accounts and transactions of Grameen Kalyan and Grameen Telecom, two non-profit organizations of the Grameen family, are audited by reputed and certified external auditors every year.

Grameen Telecom signed an Agreement with Grameen Kalyan to borrow money from Grameen Kalyan for equity investment in Grameen Phone. As per the terms of the Agreement, the dividends that Grameen Telecom will receive from Grameen Phone is to be proportionately shared with Grameen Kalyan. It is properly documented in the annual returns submitted to RJSC every year, and no false returns have ever been submitted. The question of being punished for making false statements under Section 397 of the Companies Act does not arise at all.

The allegation of bribery by Grameen Telecom for trying to get a judgement in its favour from the court, in a case that is still pending (sub judice) with the court,

is utterly baseless and unfounded. Such an allegation amounts to contempt of the Honourable Court.

The report accuses Dr. Yunus of oppressive labour practices that contravene labour rights and human rights. It should be noted that Grameen companies operate their activities strictly according to the laws of the land and rules and policies framed by companies based on those laws. These policies, as per the labour laws of the country, have been submitted to the concerned government authorities for their approval. Every company in the Grameen group has its own Service Rules, and each company is governed by its Service Rules. Salary and other benefits to the workers are regularly paid as per these Service Rules. These Service Rules provide more financial benefits to the workers than the benefits prescribed by the labour laws. There are no repressive or oppressive actions against labour within the Grameen companies. It may be recalled that none of these companies are operated to make personal profit for any individual/s. As a result there is no reason to cut labour costs to make more personal profits for anyone.

All the companies established by Dr. Yunus regularly pay income tax and VAT to the government. Ten leading companies, excluding Grameen Phone, established by Dr Yunus have so far paid more than Tk 5,000 crore as income tax and VAT.

Dr. Yunus does not receive any salary or remuneration or fee or any kind of financial benefit from any institution. Since he has no ownership in any company, he does not receive any dividend from them. Dr Yunus has said on many occasions that he does not wish to own anything. He wishes to live a life free from ownership of any kind. He does not own any house, car, land or shares within the country or overseas. The report states that he has laundered thousands of crores of taka abroad and is running lucrative businesses in different countries, including buying properties in his own name. If the reporter had specified even one or two such businesses or properties at home or abroad, Dr. Yunus's claim of being an ownership-free person would have fallen apart. The reporter missed such a great opportunity on this occasion.

The report states that a portion of it (the "thousands of crores of taka laundered by him") was used to hire lobbyists abroad to work against the national interest of Bangladesh. Leaving aside the amount of money paid to the lobbyists, if the reporter had taken the initiative to mention the names of at least one or two such lobbyists, every reader would have been impressed and appreciated that the reporter had made some serious effort in the task of gathering news.

Many organizations have been established in different countries of the world using the name of Dr. Yunus in their official identity. These organizations center around promoting and implementing his ideas and theories in practice. It is an ongoing process; more organizations and companies continue to be created around the world. He does not have any ownership in any of these institutions. He does not take any salary or remuneration from them for his time given to these institutions for his guidance and consultation. These institutions send a nominal fee to Yunus Centre every year for using his name.

The report says that Dr. Yunus has laundered thousands of crores of taka. If he is laundering money whose money is he laundering?

Not only has Dr. Yunus never laundered any money out of Bangladesh, rather he continues to bring money, lawfully earned abroad, into the country through proper banking channels.

The Government has all these information. It makes no sense why anyone would bring his money into the country, launder it back out again.

Did he launder thousands of crores of Grameen Bank's money abroad. If he did, it would be very easy to find out. The Grameen Bank is now under the direct control of the government, so it would be easy to obtain all the information from the bank. But even after more than a decade of Dr Yunus's departure from Grameen Bank, Grameen Bank has not disclosed any such information to the public so far. If Grameen Bank had ever laundered any money it would have been made known already with great publicity. If the money from Dr Yunus's other

companies had been laundered, that money would have disappeared from their accounts. The actual information could have been obtained by checking the annual accounts. All those distinguished auditors would have a field day uncovering such big holes in the accounts of these companies.

There has never been any case filed against the Chairman of Grameen Telecom or any responsible person of this organization for any offence under Section 397 of the Companies Act as claimed in this report.

All the companies in the Grameen group are run according to the existing laws of the country. There has been no violation of law. The reporter has tried to mislead the public by creating a fabricated report. The reporter has gone so far as to suggest in detail how many years Dr. Yunus would be sentenced for breaking various laws. He is in no mood to wait for the court to hear the case and give its judgement.

We are very sorry to see that such a report would be published in the newspaper with total disregard for facts on such important issues. Anyone reading this report would be shocked and horrified by the sad state of journalism in this country.

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