

# More on Dr Yunus and Nobel Prize

**Taj Hashmi**

The Nobel Peace Prize for Dr Yunus proves again the Goebblian dictum that a lie uttered a thousand times becomes more credible than the truth. This Nobel Peace Prize for Yunus and his bank, on a “Friday the 13th” is a slap in the face of those who have been trying to bring the Third World out of the strangling grip of the global hegemony—the IMF, World Bank and others—who hate to see the Third World slipping out of their grip to become self-reliant with good accountable governments, rule of law and respect for human rights.

This NGO business is the biggest business in the Third World. The IMF and World Bank, and most multi-nationals do not want too many Chinas, Taiwans, Malaysias, Thailand, Venezuelas, or even Singapores and South Koreas. They love countries like Bangladesh, Philippines, Egypt, Indonesia and Pakistan, who either buy arms, technology and expertise from the West, or do not build industrial infrastructure and good governance. There is NO substitute for good (honest and efficient) and accountable government. Why the Asian dragons and tigers did not adopt NGOs and micro-credit for development is the billion dollar question. True this Nobel Prize (given for the wrong reason though) will bring a good name for the country, which is unfortunately only known for its poverty and corruption.

The following questions to those who unnecessarily glorify Dr Yunus and his bank deserve serious attention.

Do you know in most cases it is the husband / father/ elder brother who controls the Grameen loan taken in the name of his wife/daughter/sister? Do you know the bank charges around 30% interest? Do you know that Grameen borrowers lend the borrowed money at 80% to 100% interest to fellow villagers? Do you know any other business where someone can still make a living by borrowing at 30% interest rate? Do you know in some villages (especially in Sylhet) men take three/four wives to get Grameen loan to run their lucrative money lending business? Do you know that the poorest of the poor (as touted by Yunus, Clintons and others) are not eligible to Grameen loan as they cannot repay their loans in 52 instalments at 30% interest? Do you know that only middle peasants (having some lands or assets) are eligible to the credit?

Had there been such business one would have borrowed thousands of dollars through credit cards to become rich overnight. It is better to recommend Nobel Peace Prize (why not the Economics prize?!) for all the credit card companies as they charge around 18-20% and nothing happens to the defaulters. There are many people in the lower income group who somehow survive through credit cards, by borrowing and paying off the debts. And there is no reason to celebrate the performance of the Amex, Visa or Masters Card companies for their “noble and humane” acts of “empowering the poor through credit”. It is a “shame” that credit card companies for charging less than 20% interest on the average are never considered for any prize anywhere in the world. While Grameen defaulters have to part with their ornaments, tin sheds, goats or cattle or even utensils, many credit card defaulters simply get away with by paying nothing. After staying four or five years in the state of bankruptcy, they again become creditable. All these assertions are buttressed by hard evidences from field work and personal experience in Bangladesh.

Why do you think Monsanto, the giant US corporation, engaged in marketing genetically modified seeds (disastrous in the long run as peasants will have to buy the seeds before every sowing season) is a big promoter of microcredit? Why does Grameen Bank pay NO income tax to Bangladesh? Why did Grameen Phone ( a joint Bangladesh-Norway cell phone company) pay any income tax till this year? This is the largest cell phone company in Bangladesh, charging for local incoming calls as well. Is there a link between this award and Grameen Phone’s (Dr Yunus’s cell phone company) partnership with the Norwegian telephone company, Nortel? Do you know that the Nortel has been siphoning off millions of dollars to Norway without paying any income tax to Bangladesh? And all of this money laundering is done in the name of charity? What a shame! What a disgrace!

Instead of jointly robbing Bangladesh through this Shylockian project of mega lending to rip off the poor in Bangladesh, in collaboration with the Grameen Bank, donor agencies (the real vultures in the production-growth-development arena), had they been really sincere in developing poor countries like Bangladesh, would have helped to modernize Bangladesh government run telecommunication system. But the Nortel, for the obvious reason, found it convenient to invest in the Grameen cell phone company in Bangladesh. And sadly, this happened through the active collaboration of Dr Muhammad Yunus.

Why did Dr Yunus try to introduce Monsanto seeds in Bangladesh? And finally he had to scrap this project due to opposition,

If micro-credit could alleviate poverty, why on earth hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis are going to Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or Singapore, borrowing hundreds of thousands of takas (two lakh per head on the average) to work as menials? If borrowing fifty or sixty dollars could alleviate poverty, why are they doing so? Are they stupid?