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### 1. Why a Bangladesh court has sentenced Nobel prize winner Muhammad Yunus to jail

#### What happened?

Nobel prize winner Muhammad Yunus was sentenced to six months in jail by a court in Bangladesh for violating the country's labour laws. The 83-year-old, credited with pioneering the system of micro-finance loans to help impoverished people, was granted bail pending appeal.



While Yunus called the judgement "contrary to all legal precedent and logic", his supporters said the case was politically motivated. The professor shares a frosty relationship with Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who once accused him of "sucking blood" from the poor.

Currently, Yunus is facing a wide array of other charges involving alleged corruption and fund embezzlement.

#### Who is Muhammad Yunus?

Born in 1940 in Chittagong, Yunus received his PhD in economics from Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, USA, in 1969 and subsequently, became an assistant professor

at Middle Tennessee State University. After Bangladesh was formed in 1972, he returned to his homeland and was appointed head of the economics department at Chittagong University.

As Bangladesh struggled to stabilise its economy and tackle poverty in the post-independence years, Yunus came up with a unique idea to help the impoverished. He decided to provide small loans to entrepreneurs who wouldn't normally qualify for bank loans, on terms suitable to them.

Following the success of an initial local experiment, Professor Yunus became confident that the model could work on a broader scale and went to set up microcredit projects in other parts of the country. Within seven years, the initiative took formal shape as the Grameen Bank in 1983.

Grameen Bank is credited with lifting millions from poverty — it has disbursed collateral-free loans of \$34.01 billion among 9.55 million people since its inception. The recovery rate of loans is 97.22%.

Owing to the grand success of Grameen Bank, banks based on this model operate in more than 100 countries today.

In 2006, Yunus and Grameen Bank jointly received the Nobel Prize in Peace “for their efforts to create economic and social development from below.” The professor came to be known as the “Banker to the Poor”.

### **Why does Yunus share a tumultuous relationship with Sheikh Hasina?**

Soon after winning the Nobel Prize, Yunus began to flirt with the idea of forming his own political party. This didn't sit well with Hasina, who was in jail at the time under the charges of extortion.

In the following months, Yunus abandoned his plans, saying there wasn't enough support for his new political movement. Nonetheless, once Hasina returned to power in 2009, her government opened a host of investigations into Yunus' activities. The prime minister accused him of using force and other means to recover loans from poor rural women as the head of Grameen Bank.

### **Why has Yunus been sentenced to jail?**

The Third Court of Dhaka on Monday found Yunus' company, Grameen Telecom, which he founded as a non-profit, guilty of violating labour laws. According to the judgement, 67 of the company employees were supposed to be made permanent, which they were not, and the employees' participation and welfare funds were not created. Moreover, as per company policy, 5% of the company's dividends were supposed to be distributed to staff, which was not done.

The court convicted Yunus, as chairman of Grameen Telecom, and three other company directors, sentencing each to six months in jail. Grameen Telecom owns 34% of Bangladesh's largest mobile phone company, Grameenphone, a subsidiary of Norway's telecom giant Telenor.

### **What are the other cases against Yunus?**

Yunus is said to be facing more than 150 cases. In 2015, he was summoned by Bangladesh's revenue authorities over non-payment of taxes amounting to \$1.51 million. Two years before that, he was put on trial for allegedly receiving money without government permission, including his Nobel Prize award and royalties from a book.

In 2011, Yunus was removed as managing director of Grameen Bank for allegedly violating government retirement regulations.

The mounting litany of cases against Yunus has garnered concern globally. In August last year, 160 international figures, including former US President Barack Obama and ex-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, signed a joint letter denouncing the "continuous judicial harassment" of Yunus.

The signatories, including more than 100 of his fellow Nobel laureates, said they feared for "his safety and freedom".

In response, Hasina said she welcomed international experts to assess the ongoing legal proceedings against Yunus.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: The Indian Express

## **2. Why truck drivers across states are protesting against new law for hit-and-run cases**

### **Introduction**

The nationwide transportation strike entered its second day on January 2 with long queues at petrol pumps as fuel supply took a hit across the country. The three-day strike was launched by truck, bus and tanker drivers to protest against the stringent jail and fine regulations under the newly implemented Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS) for hit-and-run cases.



### **What does the new law on hit-and-run cases say?**

Under the new law, which replaced the colonial era Indian Penal Code, drivers who cause a serious road accident by negligent driving and run away without informing the police or any official from the administration can face punishment of up to 10 years or a fine of Rs 7 lakh.

### **Why are truck, bus and tanker drivers protesting against it?**

Private transport operators have claimed that the law discourages drivers and may lead to unjust punishments. They also claim that the drivers could be subject to mob violence when they attempt to transport the injured to hospitals and demand the repeal of the law.

### **What has been the impact of the strike?**

Since January 1, protestors have blockaded roads and highways across states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh. This has affected vehicle movement and fuel supply.

For instance, a transporters' body claimed that the strike had impacted the movement of nearly five lakh vehicles in Madhya Pradesh. Lengthy queues formed at petrol pumps across states, including Himachal Pradesh and Maharashtra.

On Monday, protesters obstructed highways in several districts of Gujarat, including Kheda, Valsad, Gir Somnath, Bharuch, and Mehsana, by parking vehicles and setting up blockades.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Indian Express

## **3. Baloch March to Islamabad: A Protest Escalation**





Figure 1 Yearning faces: Baloch activists hold portraits of their missing family members during their sit-in protest, in Islamabad

### **Why in news?**

In December 2023, Baloch activists marched to Islamabad, protesting enforced disappearances and killings in Balochistan. The death of Balaach Mola Baksh played a pivotal role in escalating the protest.

### **Balaach Mola Baksh's Death and Protest Expansion**

Balaach Mola Baksh's death in October 2023 triggered the protest. Despite initial demands for an FIR and an impartial inquiry, the protest expanded to address broader issues like ending enforced disappearances and seeking justice for victims.

### **Enforced Disappearances in Balochistan**

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reported numerous cases of enforced disappearances in Balochistan. Discrepancies between state and civil society numbers highlight the gravity of the issue.

### **Symbolism of Marching to Islamabad**

Protestors choose Islamabad as a symbolic venue to address the power dynamics between the federal and provincial governments. The capital represents the seat of

power, conveying a message to the authorities while emphasizing their commitment to the federation.

### **Weak Political Representation in Balochistan**

Balochistan's weak political parties, divided along tribal lines, lack a strong voice in both provincial and national assemblies. The absence of influential leaders exacerbates the challenges faced by the Baloch people in seeking political representation.

### **The Larger Baloch Problem**

Enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and protests are manifestations of a deeper conflict between the federal government and Balochistan. The struggle involves resource exploitation, manipulation, repression, and attempts to undermine Baloch identity using religion.

### **Challenges and Prospects**

In the short term, the state aims to silence dissent, manipulate leadership, and neutralize militants in Balochistan. However, civil society activism and growing societal resistance, fueled by women's participation, suggest potential shifts in Balochistan's political landscape.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: The Hindu