

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The winning of the Grainger Challenge Prize for 2007 by Professor Abul Hussam and Dr. A. K. M. Munir carries very special significance.

You have learnt from today's souvenir that for several years now arsenic contamination in water has assumed frightening proportions in countries like Bangladesh, India, Nepal and China, and this poison has started surfacing even in the United States of America. Particularly in Bangladesh this menace assumed proportions of a serious epidemic in the nineties, and the World Health Organization declared this as a major natural disaster. It is particularly significant that this epidemic has especially been ravaging low-income people, since the rich have the means of avoiding use of arsenic-contaminated water by paying for non-contaminated water, and if they are somehow attacked by arsenic poison they have the means also of undergoing necessary treatment and choose appropriate food to handle this hazard. The social impact of this menace upon womenfolk of low-income families is also immensely devastating. While the indifference in the country's growth and poverty statistics to the impact of this epidemic including its impact on women is very deplorable, it is one of the three brothers of the Hussam family who have been involved in arsenic-resistant research and who belongs to the mainstream economics profession, Professor Abul Barkat, who has called for developing an indigenous concept of poverty for the nation. And it is under his leadership that the Kushtia-based NGO "Manab Shakti Unnayan Kendra" (Centre for Development of Human Strength) has been taking a leading role in the practical application of the technology for arsenic resistance - a centre which has conceptualized development not as growth of GDP but as the "opportunity for flowering of the infinite latent strength of the Human species". Taken all these together, the social and development philosophy of the Hussam brothers and their

dedication to service to society are immensely inspiring for all in this country.

Professor Abul Hussam and Dr. A. K. M. Munir started their scientific and technological research in response to the challenge of arsenic poisoning quite some years back, and to meet this challenge they searched for such technology that would be within the means of the principal prey of this menace – the low income populace. The Sono Filter is the result of very dedicated and extraordinarily competent research which fully purifies arsenic-contaminated water. This filter is being used for several years in about 100 villages in Bangladesh in eleven of its districts in a programme of Manab Shakti Unnayan Kendra and also in those of a number of other NGOs, as a result of which there has been no victim of arsenic poisoning in these villages over the last three years. The Government of Bangladesh with the technical assistance of the Environment Testing Programme for Arsenic Mitigation examined this technology [please check the Bengali version where the phrase “examined this technology” has been missed – it should be “ei projuktiti porikhkha korey onumodan karey” in the Bengali version] and approved it in 2001, and the World Health Organisation also approved this in 2002 declaring that it exceeds the standard of the Organisation for uncontaminated water.

The Sono filter can be produced with local material in any country, needing no imports whatsoever. One Sono filter costs around two-and-a-half-thousand taka which can serve the needs of purification of water for drinking and cooking of two average-sized families. People of low income can if necessary form their own group saving *samities* and take loans from such *samiti* if needed to buy this life-saving filter if they need such finance, like the self-help group saving and loan programmes that many low-income families have formed in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. And the technology is completely environment-friendly. Such instance of a response to

a threat to human lives of such a major proportion that is so simple in its application and so inexpensive to produce, is rare in the history of applying science and technology for the welfare of humankind in human civilization.

For the Hussam brothers, the greatest prize they have earned is the successful ground response itself that they have discovered to a menacing threat to human lives. Winning the Greinger Challenge Prize has added a major institutional dimension on a world scale to their outstanding contribution. There are many international prizes in the world all of which are not above controversy; in particular there are allegations of the working of questionable ideology behind some of them. Many scientific and technological discoveries and inventions are also taking place including treatments of deadly diseases, which are beyond the reach of low-income people and which are bringing benefit rather to national and international business interests, and many of such inventions are also not environment-friendly. You have heard that the Greinger Challenge Prize for finding an answer to arsenic contamination in water was announced for devising a technology for clearly benefiting humanity, the expenses for which would be within the means of low-income families, which would be reliable and whose benefit would be sustainable, which would be consistent with the life style of low-income people, which would not be dependent on constant use of electricity, which the arsenic-affected countries can easily produce with their own materials, and which would not contaminate water in any way that would be difficult or expensive to remove. The Hussam family had on their own tirelessly dedicated themselves for devising such technology from out of their sense of service to humanity whose success had also been acknowledged quite some time past. The Sono filter that they devised has won the Greinger Challenge prize precisely because the ideology of this prize has also been genuinely humanitarian, and by winning this prize their invention has legitimized and fulfilled the ideology of the prize itself. This by

itself, in my view, is also a significant contribution of their outstanding invention.

Another major significance of this achievement is the brilliance of the pride sons of this so-called poor country that this demonstrates, and the application of this brilliance in genuine humanitarian work that is bringing world recognition. This can serve as a great inspiration to the youth of this country. It is my fervent wish that honouring this achievement on the premises of the leading seat of learning of the country will invite the higher learning-seeking youth of our country to strive to give similar accounts of themselves inspired by the brilliance and service to humanity demonstrated by the feat of the Hussam brothers.

Professor Hussam and Dr. Munir have demonstrated further their unflinching dedication to the service of humanity by donating the greater portion of their prize money toward producing Sono filter in Bangladesh and in neighbouring countries and toward further research with this work.

Taking all together, this achievement is a great event for Bangladesh. Thousand hats off on behalf of our countrymen to Professor Hussam and Dr. Munir. Your great achievement has not only created a weapon to slay a formidable enemy of humankind; in the context of globalization today which is by and large enabling the powerful within and outside the country to further exploit the underprivileged by the very use of science and technology, your invention stands out as a shining exception by its character that is unambiguously applying science and technology for the welfare of greater humankind. I wish you long and continuously creative life so that your exceptional talents and love for humankind may continue to be applied for the good of world humanity.

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