

Will Islamic scholar get fair trial

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The unjust incarceration of Dr Tariq Ramadan, professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at Oxford University, demeans and disgraces the French legal system.

Ramadan has been detained in a solitary cell at Paris's Fleury-Mérogis Prison since Feb 2.

It is alleged that he raped two women in Lyon and Paris in 2009 and 2012. A criminal investigation is being carried out to build a case against him.

He has no access to his family and is not allowed to communicate with them through the phone.

It should be emphasised that it was he who went to the police in Paris on Jan31 to answer the allegations against him. He has cooperated with the investigating authorities. And, yet, he has been treated harshly.

The way he has been treated should be weighed against the scurrilous allegations hurled at him.

In the Lyon incident, the accuser alleges that she was raped in a hotel in the afternoon of Oct 9, 2009.

Ramadan's attorney has provided the prosecution with evidence that shows that his flight from London did not arrive in Lyon until 6.35pm and that he was in a hall by 8.30pm to deliver a lecture to hundreds of attendees.

The French police, which confirmed receiving this piece of evidence, later "claimed that it was "missing" from the case file because it had been "lost". This in itself is a travesty of justice.

What makes it even more suspicious is a meeting between the accuser and high-ranking French magistrate Michel Debacq, in 2009 with the apparent intention of bringing a case against Ramadan, with the assistance of Islamophobes Caroline Fourest and Antoine Sfeir.

Debacq would thus appear to have unethically colluded with Fourest and "Christelle" (the accuser) against Ramadannine years ago.

Debacq, who serves in France's Court of Cassation, did not disclose his involvement either with "Christelle" or the current case, which is illegal, according to French law.

The Paris incident, which allegedly took place in April 2012, further undermines the veracity of the claims made by Ramadan's accusers. The accuser, one Hendra Ayari, "sent Ramadan no fewer than 280 messages via Facebook between June and August 2014", more than two years after the alleged rape.

It has been disclosed that "Ayari recently admitted to French media that she did send these messages through a second Facebook account she had created after Ramadan blocked her first account because she was harassing him in the hope that she could seduce and entrap him".

These revelations may be the reason why Ayari did not appear when French police summoned her last week.

Though allegations from both women appear baseless, the prosecution continues to detain Ramadan with the aim of dragging him to court.

The French media has been complicit in this. Not only does it present ludicrous allegations as facts, it has repeated lies about Ramadan to discredit him.

For instance, media outlets had reported that “Prof Ramadan has an Egyptian passport, which he might attempt to use to flee to Egypt”. Prof Ramadan does not have an Egyptian passport, and is a citizen of Switzerland only.

The French media’s smearing of Ramadan and the legal system’s skewed attitude reflect a larger problem.

Dominant French society does not take kindly to those who have the courage to criticise its bias against Islam and its followers.

This is what Ramadan has been doing for a long while. He has been forthright about how French state and society have discriminated against Muslims.

Islamophobia in Europe and the increasing marginalisation of the poor and powerless in the continent have also been abiding concerns of the man.

He has been vocal about the dogmatism of ultra-conservative Muslims and the authoritarianism of Muslim regimes.

In other words, there are different groups that would want to nail Ramadan to the wall.

This is why his persecution in France is not just about antagonism towards Islam and Muslims, and the drive to stifle rational voices that seek to expose French prejudice and bigotry.

It reveals the hypocrisy that surrounds the noble French and European ideal of the right to dissent, especially when it comes to certain fundamental issues.

Or, is Ramadan’s ordeal also related to Muslim authoritarianism and its ability to reach far beyond its own shores?

Given all these forces at work, how can we expect a fair and just trial for Ramadan? Hence the demand of the “Free Tariq Ramadan” campaign and civil society groups and people for his immediate and unconditional release.

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