

What message has journalist Rozina Islam's imprisonment sent us?



ROUNAQ JAHAN

It has been nearly two weeks since the shocking news about journalist Rozina Islam's harassment and imprisonment jolted our conscience. I have earlier written an op-ed published in the *Prothom Alo* on May 25, 2021 titled, "Sangbadik Rozina Islamer Karabash Amader Ki Barta Dilo?", where I tried to highlight how the whole incident might have played out in the minds of ordinary citizens by illustrating my own reaction to it. Rozina Islam first entered into my consciousness on April 10, 2021 when I read her report titled, "Ekhon Ek Koti, Pore Aro Paben" (Take 10 million now, will pay more later), published in the *Prothom Alo*. I was impressed with the professional quality of her writing and thought if we had a prize like the Pulitzer Prize in the US, this report deserved it. I contemplated drawing the attention of my colleagues at Columbia University to the report to showcase the quality of our investigative journalists.

Written with objectivity and supported by evidence, Rozina cited the statements of both those who had brought allegations of corruption as well as those who were being accused of corruption. What struck me after reading the report was not that corruption is taking place in the health ministry—we all know it does—but that there are still some honest officials working in the ministry who had rejected the lure of crores of taka

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in bribes and had the courage to seek action against the corrupt. And indeed as a result some of the corrupt officials were transferred. I felt somewhat assured that side by side with the corrupt, there are also many honest officials and perhaps it is because of the latter that the country is moving ahead. On April 20 and 30 I read two

other reports by Rozina. These too dealt with the irregularities and lack of coordination in the health ministry. Her sources were officials within the ministry. Rozina and her sources were not promoting their own interests or the interests of a handful of people. The exposure of these incidents served public interest. I had hoped that the problems Rozina had so painstakingly exposed, would soon be addressed.

But two weeks later on the night of May 17 I saw on the TV news that Rozina Islam, the journalist who I felt

professionalism. She has received several awards, local and international. All her reports indicate that she had always collected information from her sources within various ministries. This is a standard practice of all investigative reporters. In an article titled, "khurte khurte gorom khabar", published in the *Prothom Alo* on November 14, 2014, she wrote about the challenges she faced in collecting such information, particularly as a woman journalist. She narrates how she unearthed two incidents of corruption in the Ministry

and researchers frequently collect information from official sources which some officials may consider as a breach of official "secrecy". I remember back in 1968 when I came to Dhaka to collect data for my PhD thesis at Harvard, some high ranking government officials gave me documents stamped "Secret and Confidential". These documents only contained data on economic disparities between East and West Pakistan which I used in my thesis, later published as a book titled, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration*,

high ranking government official who told me that he received a long police complaint against me and my research which he dismissed and hadn't even felt the need to apprise me about! In recent years I had a mixed experience. One Chief Election Commissioner shared with me information and documents, but his successor refused to provide me the same kind of information. Many times an individual government official decides what she/he considers as "secret and confidential".

On May 23, 2021 Rozina Islam was finally granted interim bail with some conditions and released from prison. We still do not know what action has been taken against the officials who took the law into their hands and detained her in the ministry. We all hope the case against Rozina would be withdrawn soon so that it does not hang over her head like the sword of Damocles as has happened with many editors and journalists.

What messages are the citizens getting from the Rozina Islam incident? When a journalist with a track record of exposing corruption is harassed and imprisoned, does it convey the message of "zero tolerance" against corruption? When we feel assured only after several ministers give us assurance about fair treatment and justice for Rozina what does it indicate about the state of due process of law?

The journalists and civil society activists have long been agitating against the Digital Security Act and other laws and clauses in various laws that limit freedom of expression. We hope that the government will finally repeal these laws and clauses rather than just making promises that they will not be abused to harass journalists and others. The citizens of a democratic state should not have to depend on the assurance of ministers, nor should they have to agitate on the streets seeking protection of their fundamental rights which they should take for granted under the constitution.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of our health sector, particularly in management, implementation and utilisation of allocated resources. By identifying these weaknesses the media is playing a helpful role so that the sector can improve its efficiency and integrity to rise to the challenges posed by the pandemic. The media should be encouraged and supported both by the state and the citizens in carrying out its important function of bringing transparency and accountability to the actions of the state.

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On the night of May 17 I saw on the TV news that Rozina Islam, the journalist who I felt deserved a Pulitzer Prize, had been detained for five or six hours in the health ministry and was being handed over to Shahbagh Thana.

PHOTO: MUNTAKIM SAAD

deserved a Pulitzer Prize, had been detained for five or six hours in the health ministry and was being handed over to Shahbagh Thana. The events of the next few days unfolded like a Kafkaish nightmare. Rozina spent the whole night at the police station and a case was filed against her for "stealing" official documents. The next morning she was taken to the court and instead of getting bail she was sent to Kashimpur prison. She was not granted bail in her next court hearing and continued to stay in prison. I was stunned. I kept thinking, why was the journalist, who had dug out information on corruption, not being rewarded by the state, but was sent to prison instead?

I have never met Rozina. After doing an internet search I found that in the past she had published investigative reports on corruption in various ministries. Each report reflected her

of Liberation War Affairs, one on fake Mukhti Joddha certificates and another on adulteration of gold crests which were awarded to foreign friends who helped our Liberation War in 1971. She discusses the painstaking processes of digging out such information with proper evidence and the minute scrutiny by her editors before a decision is taken on publication of such reports.

We have only a limited number of investigative journalists in our country. There are even a few number of newspapers that continue to publish such reports. *Prothom Alo* for many years has been publishing high quality investigative reports. Perhaps that is the reason it has become the most popular newspaper in the country.

Rozina Islam is accused of the crime of stealing official documents under the Official Secrets Act of 1923, a law enacted by the British colonial administration. Journalists

published by Columbia University Press in 1972. I never felt at that time or even now that I was "stealing" secret state papers. My book has been a standard text for students of political science for the last 50 years. Many official documents are unnecessarily stamped with the words "SECRET", but they do not actually contain any information which should not be disclosed in the public domain. In fact, disclosure of correct information prevents rumours and misinformation and serves the national interest.

Government officials also differ among themselves as to what can be shared with journalists and researchers and what cannot. After all, Rozina's sources were always government officials and they felt that public interest would be served if the information on corruption was exposed. When I was doing research on the elections in the 1970s, quite accidentally I met a

We need new ways to measure business success



RMG NOTES
WHAT makes a successful year for a business? The traditional way we define business success is through financials. With public companies, each quarter we receive an update, as well as an annual update. This tells us about revenues

and profits as well as dividends payable to shareholders.

Increased revenues equal good. Increased profits also equal good. These things are black and white. Any divergence from the expectations of investors around these issues will cause the share price to fall. The only way to prevent share prices from falling is to increase profitability by either cutting costs or increasing revenues, or a combination of both.

All this is obvious, but it is worth pointing out that this has been the way of business pretty much since the dawn of publicly listed companies. Growth and profitability—these are the only benchmarks of success. In fact, if anything, the obsession with these two metrics is becoming more pronounced as market scrutiny increases—thanks to social media—and we all have better access to information.

There is a huge problem here, a nettle which none of us dare yet grasp. An obsession with growth is simply not compatible with sustainability. If we are all growing more, we are placing more pressure on the planet (and this even includes those using renewable energy and cleaner production techniques).

As a business owner, one is judged by growth and nothing else. Try running a major multinational and telling shareholders you are going to stop targeting growth and instead focus on investing in sustainability for the next five years. For one, your share price would plummet, and investors would drop your business like a stone. In a dog-eat-dog corporate world, growth is the only solution. It's the only way to survive, and the cards are stacked completely in favour of those who go for growth at all costs.

Where does this leave sustainability? To be clear, major corporations are investing in sustainability, albeit to a greater or lesser degree. But their investments are in many cases a drop in the ocean in terms of where we need to be. And their investments always have an eye on how growth and profitability will be impacted.

Even investments in sustainability projects are expected to have some kind of financial pay-off or ROI.

I repeat: businesses are still judged almost entirely on growth. They might receive some nice plaudits on social media and in the press for sustainability work, but the only thing investors are interested in is growth.

Attempts are being made to tackle this issue, with some investors suggesting they are monitoring their clients to see how they are



tackling long term sustainability challenges. For instance, we are seeing the growth of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) and there is some evidence to suggest ESG factors, when integrated into investment analysis and portfolio construction, may offer investors potential long-term performance advantages.

The theory here is that we can have it both ways—that ESG strategies promote the greater good AND provide superior long-term financial performance.

In other words, we can have our cake and eat it.

I can see the truth in this argument, but only from a long-term perspective. There is a quote which goes something like this: "There can be no business on a planet left uninhabitable by climate change." So, yes, an ultra-long-term investment which focused on sustainable growth—zero growth, even—would probably be a successful one.

But we all know that's not how investments are made. One might more normally invest over a 20-30 year time-frame, often less. Over that time, one expects returns—and the only way to those returns is growth, if we are operating in the current business paradigm.

How can we shift the dynamics here? How

can we make it so that it actually pays to grow slowly or not at all or to only grow responsibly (i.e. in a way that is completely carbon neutral, for instance)?

I've pondered this question many times, including with my own business.

I believe one way is through stronger regulation. The regulatory authorities globally need to get their creative hats on—and quickly. At the moment, it pays to grow quickly and recklessly, so why would any large business do otherwise?

Where are the financial incentives for those doing right by the planet? I hear a lot of brands are focusing on producing less clothing but making it more durable. The US denim brand, Levi's, recently said it would focus on slow fashion, for instance. Levi's itself actually admitted this was a difficult balancing act in an industry obsessed with growth. Could the regulators reward Levi's in some way? Tax breaks? Grants?

If a brand takes a stand in the way Levi's has, it should be incentivised and held up as champion, for Levi's approach is surely the only

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realistic way forward for the planet.

Likewise, regulators need to look at wanton growth and ask what can be done about it. Are huge mergers and acquisitions really the best way forward for the planet? They might lead to higher growth and profits but who else benefits apart from shareholders?

Businesses won't police themselves on this. At present, growth is the only metric that matters. Regulators must build a framework in which the targeting of other metrics is incentivised. If they cannot, it's hard to see businesses making the changes our planet so urgently needs.

Mostafiz Uddin is the Managing Director of Denim Expert Limited. He is also the Founder and CEO of Bangladesh Apparel Exchange (BAE) and Bangladesh Denim Expo.

রাঙ্গামাটি বিজ্ঞান ও প্রযুক্তি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়	
অস্থায়ী প্রধান কার্যালয়, ভেদেভেদী, রাঙ্গামাটি পার্বত্য জেলা	
স্মারক নং: রাবিপ্রবি/বাজস্ব/পওউ/কস্পিঃ/ল্যা/২০২০/১১৬	
তারিখঃ ০৭/০৬/২০২১খ্রিঃ	
Invitation for Tenders (IFT)	
Rangamati Science and Technology University	
1. Ministry/Division	Ministry of Education.
2. Agency	University Grants Commission of Bangladesh/Rangamati Science and Technology University.
3. Procuring entity name	Professor Dr. Pradanendu Bikash Chakma, Vice Chancellor, Rangamati Science and Technology University.
4. Procuring entity district	Rangamati.
5. Invitation for	Supply and Installation of Lab Equipment's for Forestry and Environmental Science.
KEY INFORMATION	
6. Procurement method	Open Tender Method (OTM).
7. Budget and source of fund	GoB.
PARTICULAR INFORMATION	
8. Project/programme name	Not applicable.
9. Tender package No.	--
10. Tender publication date	07/06/2021
11. Tender last collection date	22/06/2021 (office hours).
12. Tender closing date and time	23/06/2021; 12:00pm.
13. Tender opening date and time	23/06/2021; 12:30pm.
14. Name & address of the offices	
-Collection of quotation/ tender document	Planning & Development Department, 2nd Floor, Admin Building, Rangamati Science and Technology University, Vedvedi, Rangamati-4500.
-Receiving tender document	Planning & Development Department, 2nd Floor, Admin Building, Rangamati Science and Technology University, Vedvedi, Rangamati-4500.
15. Place of opening tender document	Conference Room (2nd Floor), Admin Building, Rangamati Science and Technology University, Vedvedi, Rangamati-4500.
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER	
16. Brief eligibility and qualification of tenderer	a). Updated trade license, b). TIN certificate, c) VAT registration certificate, d). Bank solvency certificate; and e). Experience in relevant work and other qualifications (as mentioned in tender documents/schedule).
17. Brief description of works	As per schedule.
18. Price of tender document	Non-refundable of taka 1,000/- (Taka one thousand) only.
19. Tender security	Taka 15,000/- (Taka fifteen thousand only) payable in the form of Pay Order/Bank Draft of any schedule bank of Bangladesh in favor of "Vice-Chancellor, Rangamati Science and Technology University."
PROCUREMENT ENTITY DETAILS	
20. Name of official inviting tender	Abdul Gafur.
21. Designation of official inviting tender	Assistant Director (P&D).
22. Address of official inviting tender	Rangamati Science and Technology University, Vedvedi, Rangamati-4500.
23. Contact details of official inviting tender	Phone: 0351-62139
24. Special instructions	a) Any tender received after deadline for submission of tender, shall be declared late, will be rejected and returned unopened to the tenderer. b) The procuring entity reserves the right to accept any tender to annul the tender process or to reject any or all tenders at any time prior to award of contract.
25. The tender will be performed according to	"The Public Procurement Rules".
//Signed//	
Assistant Director (P&D)	
Rangamati Science and Technology University	
GD-1139	