An attempt to impede free journalism

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GOLAM MORTOZA

Police walking Prothom Alo reporter Samsuzzaman Shams to a courtroom from a prison cell on the premises of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

In today's Bangladesh, issues come, issues go. Arav Khan stole the spotlight with a lot of noise, but his issue got buried soon. Then came Sultana Jasmine. She died in the custody of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in Naogaon. She was picked up even though there was no case or allegation against her. A case was filed against her under the Digital Security Act (DSA) more than a day after she was picked up.

The current trending issue is about *Prothom Alo* journalist Samsuzzaman Shams. Five days after being picked up and then shown arrested under the DSA, Shams was released on bail on April 3. *Prothom Alo* Editor Matiur Rahman, who was also sued under the DSA, received six week's anticipatory bail.

What kind of a crime did Shams engage in that warranted three microbuses full of law enforcement members to show up at his doorstep at four in the morning?

While picking him up, some of the law enforcement members, who identified themselves as officials of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), told Shams' landlord, "The state has an objection about a report prepared by Shams, and hence he is being taken for questioning."

Shams prepared the report by talking to children, day labourers and others around the National Martyrs' Memorial in Savar. He wanted to know how the low-income groups were faring amid the rising costs of essentials. He asked the questions just a day before our Independence Day.

In his report, day labourer Zakir Hossain was quoted as saying, "I want (the) freedom (right) of (enjoying) fish, meat and rice." Nine-year-old boy Sabuj Miah, who sells flowers around the Martyrs' Memorial, was quoted as saying, "I cannot enter the memorial now. Tomorrow I will be able to enter and sell a lot of flowers."

On *Prothom Alo*'s Facebook page, Zakir's quote was published along with Sabuj's photograph in a post. *Prothom Alo* promptly addressed the issue, and within 17 minutes, the post was removed and the online report's title was updated.

Prothom Alo issued a disclaimer saying it was a mismatch, and made corrections accordingly. In journalistic terms, should we accept this as a "mismatch," or should we term it a "mistake" or a "crime"? If it was a crime, how severe was it?

It is evident that the government considered the post as a major crime. "Picking up" the reporter proves this.

On the other hand, the foreign ministry issued a statement on this issue, saying, "The said journalist was arrested because of child abuse and child exploitation, as he offered ten taka to a 9-year-old boy and then expressed his own views in the name of that child.

"Secondly, he tried to undermine the independence of Bangladesh on the great Independence Day." the statement adds.

As per the statement, the main allegation against Shams is "child abuse" and "child exploitation." The second complaint is he tried to undermine our "independence" on Independence Day. Notably, as per the statement, "he tried to undermine," instead of "he undermined."

Here are some observations about how the event(s) unfolded:

1. When Shams was "picked up," the reason was "the state has objections regarding his report."

2. This allegation contradicts with the statement issued by the foreign ministry.

3. An accused of child abuse should have been brought under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, which didn't happen.

4. In the early hours of March 29, the first DSA case against Shams was lodged by Jubo League leader Syed Md Golam Kibria with Tejgaon police station at around 2am. The rapid pace of the proceedings to pick Shams up raises a lot of questions. Later on, another DSA case was filed under the DSA against Shams, Matiur Rahman, and others with Ramna police station.

5. How could Shams be accused of child abuse? Firstly, the child's face is not fully visible in the photo. Secondly, he gave him Tk 10 as a token gesture. How can this paltry donation be compared with exploitation?

6. Allegedly, Shams "used" the child for his own purpose. The social media post in question was removed within 17 minutes of its upload. How can it "serve" someone's "purpose" in such a short window of time?

7. The foreign ministry said that as a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the government would not tolerate any act of child abuse. How realistic is this statement?

Private organisation Drik published a report on the DSA (based on media reports), which says a total of 4,657 cases were filed under the DSA within three years of its inception. Among them, 20 children aged 13 to 17 years old from 12 districts were accused in 18 cases. *Prothom Alo* spoke to people connected with the 18 cases and found out that most of these cases were filed by the police, local Awami League leaders and activists.

8. Bangladesh achieved independence through a lot of sacrifice, resilience, blood and sweat. This independence is not so shallow that a simple act of publishing a photo or mentioning that someone demands the right to enjoy rice, fish and meat can demean it. In spite of a lot of challenges, Bangladesh has moved ahead, but some of its citizens are still suffering. Shams' objective in his report was to highlight that. From this perspective, the allegation of our independence being demeaned on Independence Day is totally irrelevant. The country belongs to the poor, too.

9. After being picked up, Shams' whereabouts were unknown for almost 20 hours. This is clearly a case of enforced disappearance. Some members of the law enforcement force and at least two ministers said they did not know anything. Then who picked Shams up? What mystery lies behind the midnight call from Shams' mobile phone?

Evidently, a negative propaganda is in circulation against *Prothom Alo*. Participants in this propaganda are trying to prove *Prothom Alo* and the report as "anti-independence" elements. They are portraying a mismatched photo and a very simple error as a "major crime." Though the foreign ministry clarified that Shams had been detained for child abuse, they continued to slam the report and *Prothom Alo* on the basis of some imaginary anti-independence allegations. Their stance regarding "picking up" a journalist and his 20-hour-long "enforced disappearance" is not transparent.

Even if the state has an objection against a citizen's activity, can they legally pick up that person? Almost every lawyer in the country has mentioned that there's no scope for that. Why did the government indulge in such an unlawful act, then? Such acts are creating a culture of fear, which is adversely affecting freedom of speech, as well as the scope of free journalism – and yet, none of this is being covered in those discussions.

It is said that when one can't win a competition fair and square, then an all-out effort to bring it down ensues. We are seeing this trend with *Prothom Alo*.

Translated by **Mohammed Ishtiaque Khan.**

THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE PROJECT

Pessimism, indecisiveness: A worrisome state of university students

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SYED SAAD ANDALEEB *and* FATIMA NAFSIA TASLIM

Two of the characteristics of successful individuals are optimism and decisiveness. How does our youth population – the university students – fare on these two attributes?

A constant fear that there will be a negative outcome for any decision is pessimism, which, in turn, induces indecisiveness and leads to feelings of worthlessness and despair. No matter what the decision may be, fear of a negative outcome hinders the decision-making process.

Experts see pessimism and indecisiveness as part of a larger set of indicators that signify mental illness such as anxiety, stress, and depression. Our recent study of a sample of 586 university students revealed a rate of pessimism and indecisiveness in them that is alarming.

In Bangladesh's conventional and impaired educational system, mental illness continues to be disregarded and ignored by those at the helm of affairs. Our research found that 54.6 percent of students are somewhat pessimistic, if not entirely negative. What's more disturbing is that 28.7 percent of students said either they don't expect things to work out for them, or they feel that their future is hopeless. Success requires confidence and positivity – two traits that need to be strengthened in our student body.

The tendency of indecisiveness among the present generation of university students is also very high. According to our study, 61.3 percent of students are suffering somewhat from indecisiveness, 12 percent said that they have much greater difficulties in making decisions than they used to, and 19.5 percent said they struggle to make any kind of decisions, reflecting a form of psychological vulnerability.

Where does all this negativity come from? Poor academic experiences, failure in exams, and the inability to build relationships with peers play a large role. Faculty members also earn the dubious distinction of impairing students' mental health: they display an appalling spirit of marginalisation and discouragement of students through offensive and humiliating behaviour while heaping vitriol. In the traditional academic environment, where the teacher is the "all-knowing" and "all powerful" supremo in an authoritarian role, they control many aspects of a student's life. Unethical and illicit behaviour is also not unheard of as teachers take advantage of their positions.

One can imagine what all this does to a student's enthusiasm and spirit of learning. And where rote learning still reigns supreme in determining one's success or failure, it ignores many other promising dimensions of an individual's potential.

Besides, lack of recognition and support of the institution leave the students grasping for straws in an ocean of neglect. Especially unfortunate is the educational institutions' failure to recognise the diverse talents of their students; instead of letting them flourish, students are kept leashed to a bookish environment, bereft of the joy of discovery.

Peer pressure can also misguide the students, prodding them into the realms of the unconventional, including drugs. Then there are accommodation and boarding difficulties, intimidation by peers in politics, and financial woes.

Being constantly surrounded by negativity elicits violence, human rights abuses, abysmal treatment of women, political strife, and dwindling job opportunities among other consequences. It needs a strong spirit for an aspiring student to stay positive.

Families also generally discourage young students from pursuing their preferred academic subjects or professions. Oppressive pressure is felt when the family decides not only "what" their progeny will study, but also the "grades" they are expected to deliver. Overbearing parents are often extremely negligent about the mental health of their children.

Oftentimes, students feel that they simply don't fit in their educational institutions or even in society. They hardly find anyone who might listen to them and guide them. What does all this negativity portend for the next generation when they hold the reins of decision-making?

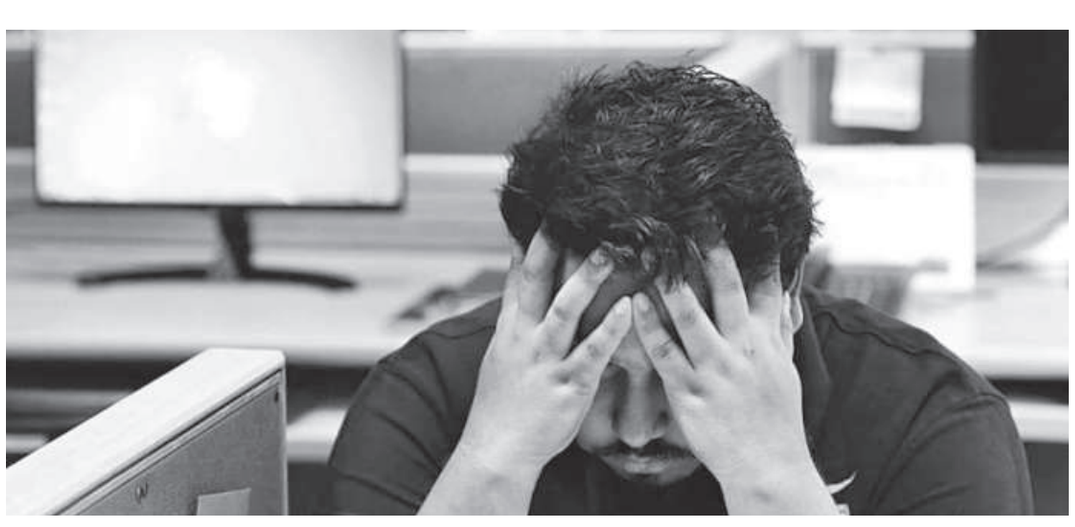
Fear of failure and negative thoughts affect a student's life, academics, and career prospects immensely. It damages one's confidence, imagination, and determination to achieve life's goals when thoughts creep in that s/he will not succeed. Thousands of students drop out or leave the country every year to escape this cynical cycle. Even a student of high calibre can fall into the trap of cynicism, eventually feeling worthless.

It is time for our educational institutions to change. With proper and enlightened thinking and decisive action, change is possible. A first step is to deal with those (administrators, teachers, and students) who have held academia hostage for far too long.

People's perspectives on what success means must also change. Obsession with conventional career paths (e.g. civil service or medicine) is not what success is about for many students, draining their positive energy and determination silently and resolutely. They should be able to follow their heart instead of having someone else's decision imposed on them – a terrible burden to carry for a lifetime.

A generation full of pessimism and indecisiveness will not a nation make. It is time to focus thinking in our educational institutions on how to create a generation of confident, positive, and equipped youth ready to take on the emerging world.

This op-ed, the third of a four-part series, is the result of faculty-student collaboration designed to impact higher education in Bangladesh.



Pessimism and indecisiveness are highly prevalent among the present generation of university students in Bangladesh. FILE PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry Of Health and Family Welfare
Health Service Division
Directorate General of Health Services
Office of the Director MIS and Line Director HIS & e-Health
Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212.
www.dghs.gov.bd

Memo No.: DGHS-MIS/e-GP/2022-23/2302 Date: 03/04/2023

Corrigendum / Amendment Notice

Sl. No.	Tender ID no./Ref. no.	Name of Tender
01	786424, DGHS-MIS/e-GP/2022-23/OP-GD-07/05/1	Procurement of Laptop Computer
02	785198, DGHS-MIS/e-GP/2022-23/OP-GD-06/04/1	Procurement of All-in-One Desktop Computer

Corrigendum/Amendment Given for above mentioned Tenders. Please Visit National e-GP portal for details. (https://www.eprocure.gov.bd). Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System portal and from e-GP help desk.

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House no: 124/90/3, Block-B, Road No: 02, West Dhanmondi, Bosila, Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1231
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Invitation for Tender

01	Ministry		Ministry of Education	
02	Agency		Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka	
03	Procuring Entity Name		Deputy-Registrar, Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka	
04	Procuring Entity Code		Not Applicable	
05	Procuring Entity District		Dhaka	
06	Invitation for		Procurement of Stationary Items.	
07	Invitation Ref. No. & Date		IAU/Reg/Purchase/Stationary/2022-2023/ 400 Date :30/03/2023	
Key Information				
08	Procurement Method		Open Tendering Method	
Funding Information				
09	Budget and Source of Funds		Own Source of Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka	
Particular Information				
10	Tender Publication Date		04-04-2023	
11	Tender Last Selling Date		02-05-2023	
12	Tender Closing Date & Time		03-05-2023 Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka: 12:00 pm	
13	Tender Opening Date & Time		03-05-2023 Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka: 12:30 pm	
14	Selling Tender Documents		Director Office (Finance & Accounts), Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka & Registrar Office, Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka.	
15	Receiving Tender Documents		Office of the Registrar, Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka	
16	Place of Opening Tender Documents		Conference Room, Bhaban 03, Islamic Arabic University, Bochila, Dhaka.	
Information for Tenderer				
17	Eligibility of Tenderer		1. The Tenderer will have a minimum of 03 (Three) years of overall experience in the supply of goods and related services. 2. The Tenderer will have a minimum of 01 (One) Year of specific experience in the supply of related goods.	
18	Brief Description of Work		Procurement of Stationary Items.	
19	Brief Description of Related Services		Not Applicable	
20	Price of Tender Documents (Non Refundable)		Tk. 500/= on-refundable, only payable in the form of Cash/DD/Pay order amount In favor of Registrar, Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka from any Branch of Agrani Bank Limited .	
21	Lot No Identification of	Location	Tender Security Amount (Tk.)	Duration of Contract time
22	Procurement of Stationary Items	Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka	34,000/- (Thirty four thousand) Only In favor of Registrar, Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka	120 (One hundred and twenty days) days
23	Name of Official Inviting Tender		Dr. Md. Abu Hanifa	
24	Designation of Official Inviting Tender		Deputy-Registrar	
25	Address of Official Inviting Tender		House no: 124/90/3, Block-B, Road No: 02, West Dhanmondi, Bosila, Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1231	
26	Contact Details of Official Inviting Tender		Mobile: 01705408004, 01705408005, 01676505008 E-mail: purchase@iau.edu.bd	
27	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders			

By order of the Vice-Chancellor (In-charge)
Dr. Md. Abu Hanifa
Deputy-Registrar
Islamic Arabic University

GD-620