

INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION DAY

Why bringing the laundered money back may not be easy



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December 9 is observed worldwide as the annual International Anti-Corruption Day (IACD). No country is free from corruption; it is as much a national problem as international. Corrupt practices and failure to prevent and control it in one country facilitates corruption in another, especially high-level corruption including money laundering.

What often fails to draw sufficient attention are the systemic loopholes that drive high-level corruption and illicit international financial transfers on both supply and demand sides. Ironically, the suppliers are most of the worst ranked countries in global corruption indices, while some of the “best performers” are the beneficiaries. The latter group is also regarded as the global leaders of the fight against corruption, financial crime and money laundering. For every dollar received by developing countries as ODA, at least 10 dollars are lost through money laundering.

IACD is a reminder that nearly all countries in both categories who have ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), have pledged to take concrete and collective action against corruption at both national and international levels. This year’s theme for IACD is “Uniting with Youth Against Corruption: Shaping Tomorrow’s Integrity.” The idea is to amplify voices of the young integrity

leaders to express their concerns and aspirations, with the hope that their call will be heard and acted upon.

IACD is being observed this year in Bangladesh against a backdrop scripted in golden letters about the youth’s invincible courage and power that led to the fall of one of the world’s worst kleptocratic-authoritarian regimes, at an extremely high cost of deaths, injuries and multi-dimensional and multi-level violation of human rights. The youth’s vision of a new Bangladesh is anchored in the total rejection of long years of state capture that facilitated and provided impunity to corruption, especially at high level, creating floodgates of money laundering.

The humiliating defeat of the authoritarian regime opened unprecedented opportunities for transition towards a “new Bangladesh” that’s free from abuse of power, institutionalised corruption, kleptocracy and unbridled money laundering. Mandated by people power, the interim government has rightly attached top priority to the state reform agenda with specific emphasis on corruption control as well as repatriation of stolen assets.

Public expectation is high that the bulk of the billions of dollars laundered out of the country over the years may be brought back. The governments and relevant agencies of the leading host countries of

Bangladesh’s laundered assets appear willing to provide legal and technical support in a spirit of goodwill to the transition opportunity led by the interim government and solidarity with the youth-led people’s uprising.

However, the outcome of this goodwill and solidarity in the form of actual return of stolen assets is easier to be expected than realised.

to act and appear on course to fast-track reforms and practical action towards mobilising the necessary capacity to proceed with the due process consistent with national and international legal standards and practices.

However, the process of repatriation of laundered assets is long and complex, requiring multi-

estate agents, accountants, regulators and banking and financial services counsels facilitate deals in a manner that the dirty money is welcomed quite conveniently and becomes “clean” until proven otherwise in a complex and long-drawn process.

Before every laundered penny is returned, it must be proven in the host country in the due process that

nothing wrong to expect that in “new Bangladesh,” it may not necessarily take that long.

While it is our responsibility, host countries also have the burden not only to assist the repatriation process, but also ensure due diligence and accountability of the syndicates of enablers to prevent further flow of funds. Unfortunately, the track record in most cases is far from encouraging. There is much to be desired about their compliance with the standards set by the Paris-based global money laundering watchdog, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

FATF reports that most of the host countries of Bangladesh’s laundered money have a well-developed regime to control money laundering. But almost all are also reported to be short or inconsistent of supervision and accountability across various relevant sectors. There are weaknesses in reporting and investigation of suspicious transactions. Some are even found to have less than desired levels of understanding of money laundering risks. Lack of effective mitigation measures against vulnerabilities of the high end real estate agents, lawyers, accountants, trustees and investment advisers also persist.

This is not to underestimate the importance of stronger legal, institutional and policy reforms and actions at our end. However, of equal if not more importance, is greater control and compliance at the demand side. No real progress in prevention of money laundering can be expected without more concrete actions against welcoming the flow of illicit financial transfers in host countries. Concerted and collective action at both ends of money laundering are long overdue not only for repatriation, but more importantly for effective prevention.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

There is no denying that our laws and policies were not enforced, relevant institutions like the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU), Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and Attorney General’s Office were captured, rendered dysfunctional and professionally bankrupt. The good news is that, unlike its predecessors, the interim government has the will

stage collaboration and cooperation between our relevant institutions and those of the countries who have let our laundered money and assets to land there. As illicit as these are, laundered money from Bangladesh has been invested in host economies. Although such transfers and investments are *de jure* illegal in every such country, syndicates of consultants including law firms, trust experts, offshore specialists, real

estate agents, accountants, regulators and banking and financial services counsels facilitate deals in a manner that the dirty money is welcomed quite conveniently and becomes “clean” until proven otherwise in a complex and long-drawn process. Before every laundered penny is returned, it must be proven in the host country in the due process that

BEGUM ROKEYA DAY

How significant is Begum Rokeya today?



Niaz Zaman is a retired academic, writer and translator.

NIAZ ZAMAN

Recently, near Shamsun Nahar Hall, the second women’s hall of the University of Dhaka, a resident student defaced graffiti depicting Roquiah Sakhawat Hossein—popularly called Begum Rokeya. Black paint was used to smear her eyes and her mouth. Later, the student apologised for her action and promised to restore the image.

I do not know what upset the young woman. The picture is not offensive. The woman has her hair modestly covered; however, the manner of the defacing is troubling. The eyes have been painted over so that the woman cannot see; the mouth has been painted over so that the woman cannot speak. Why was the young woman denying the rights that Begum Rokeya fought for, that women of my generation demanded as fundamental rights, and that the young women of today take for granted? Why was the young woman who defaced the picture denying the rights that the students against

discrimination were claiming?

But, then to my surprise, I learned that this was not the only picture of Rokeya’s that had been defaced after August 5. In one instance she had been given a beard and the derogatory word “*magi*” written across it. What had Rokeya done to be dishonoured? Why is this generation denying the changes that Rokeya brought though sheer perseverance and strength of will?

On October 1, 1909, only four months after her husband’s death, Begum Rokeya started a school in his name at Bhagalpur where she had been residing. It was with great difficulty that she was able to persuade two families to send their daughters to her school, of the five students, four were sisters. Forced to leave Bhagalpur for personal reasons, she moved to Kolkata. However, she did not give up her dream and, two years later, on March 16, 1911, she re-started Sakhawat Memorial Girls’ School with eight students. At the time of

her death on December 9, 1932, there were more than 100 girls studying at the school. Apart from teaching, the school encouraged girls to take part in sports and cultural activities. In recognition of her contribution to women’s education, the first women’s hall of the University of Dhaka was renamed after Begum Rokeya in 1964. More than a century has passed

Many people are frightened of the word feminism and believe it means a radicalism that would destroy society. But in reality, feminism is a call for equality and justice. Yes, Rokeya was a feminist, who saw the positive side of Islam and decried the absurdity and injustices of society.

since Rokeya’s “*Sultana’s Dream*” was first published in the *Indian Ladies’ Magazine* in 1905. In Bangladesh today, more than half of SSC graduates are girls, and in recent years they have consistently outperformed boys. However, while the female-to-male ratio declines at the university level, women are making their mark across various professions. Despite these advancements, the dangers

to women that once led to the institutionalisation of purdah—and its extremes—remain prevalent. Rokeya criticised and decried these practices for their often-fatal consequences, and in *Sultana’s Dream*, she boldly reverses the roles, confining men to the “murdana.” Yet, the struggles she illuminated continue to resonate in contemporary society.

According to the UN, “Violence against women and girls remains one of the most prevalent and pervasive human rights violations in the world.” It is estimated that almost one in three women has been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once in her life. A 2023 report by UN Women and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes reveal that a woman was killed every 10 minutes. Sadly, many of the killings are within the immediate family—who have internalised the concept of honour and allow their daughters to be killed by those who should protect them.

Neither education nor empowerment is proof against violence. Had Rokeya been here today she would have been surprised to see so many young women wearing jeans but also hijabs—very different from the all-enveloping burqas of her times. Perhaps she would have been happy to see that the young women in the crowded streets were not afraid of the

young men, and that, in August, when the traffic police were absent, they were confidently directing traffic. She would have been happy to see that the burqa had changed—as she had once suggested.

She had believed in education, believed that it was the answer to improving lives. She has strived to educate girls believing that it would change their lives for the better. However, it is not enough to educate women and to empower them. Perhaps what is important then is to realise as Rokeya did that one must have proper values. In “Educational Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl,” she stressed that India must retain what is best about its traditions. Acquiring education did not mean that Indian women should discard their familial roles or forget their cultural values.

Though in this essay Rokeya emphasised traditional roles for women, she also believed that women had roles outside the family. Thus, in a letter to the *Mussulman*, dated December 6, 1921, she noted that four of the Muslim girls’ schools in Calcutta had headmistresses who had studied at Sakhawat Memorial Girls’ School.

Rokeya has been an icon for the generation of early feminists in East Pakistan/Bangladesh, many of whom like Shamsun Nahar Mahmud and Sufia Kamal were inspired by her and others like Nurunnahar Fyzenessa and

Sultana Sarwat Ara who had studied at her school. She was one of the heroines of the generation of women activists of the mid-1970’s who made her call for emancipation their rallying cry. Women for Women, a research and study group, has a poster which quotes lines from Rokeya’s essay, Subeh Sadek: “*Buk thukiya bolo ma! Amra poshu noi. Bolo bhogini! Amra Asbab noi ... Shokole shomobeshe bolo, amra manush.*” (Proclaim, daughter, we are not animals. Proclaim, sister, we are not inanimate objects ... Proclaim it together, we are human beings.)

Many people are frightened of the word feminism and believe it means a radicalism that would destroy society. But in reality, feminism is a call for equality and justice. Yes, Rokeya was a feminist, who saw the positive side of Islam and decried the absurdity and injustices of society. Rokeya would not have radically changed gender relationships but in both *Sultana’s Dream* and her novel *Padmarag* (1924), she suggests that women can have identities that are not dependent on their relationships to men. Yes, she was bound by her times, but the courage with which she lived her life—refusing to be shattered by personal tragedies and trying to make the world better for others—is still relevant today. As is the rationality that she always stressed.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS  
1 Hawaiian greeting  
6 Uttered  
11 Seasonal song  
12 Not dozing  
13 School paper  
14 Old photo tint  
15 Historic periods  
17 Finish  
18 Nonsense  
22 Corridor  
23 Forces in the water  
27 Hitter’s turn  
29 Razor sharpener  
30 Tidy up  
32 Moreno of movies  
33 Typographical face  
35 Vault part

- 38 Spur on  
39 Perfect  
41 Brother’s daughter  
45 Distress signal  
46 Mosque faith  
47 Scout shelters  
48 Poker stacks

- DOWN  
1 Play division  
2 — -di-dah  
3 Smelter supply  
4 Diamond feature  
5 Watchful  
6 Feudal toilers  
7 Need to pay  
8 Matador’s need  
9 Related  
10 Main role

- 16 Pound sound  
18 Action star Jackie  
19 Tardy  
20 Jessica of “Sin City”  
21 Culture setting  
24 Rocker Clapton  
25 Dorothy’s dog  
26 Reach across  
28 Places of worship  
31 Neither follower  
34 Bar mixer  
35 Schism  
36 Not busy  
37 Noggin  
40 Gallery fill  
42 Quarterback Manning  
43 Beanie or beret  
44 Print units



FRIDAY’S ANSWERS

S	E	R	I	F		R	A	S	P	S
L	L	A	N	O		I	D	E	A	L
A	M	I	G	O		M	A	N	T	A
M	O	D	E	L	T			D	E	N
O	R	E		H	E	F	T	I	N	G
N	E	D		A	N	O	I	N	T	
			A	R	S	O	N			
	H	A	N	D	E	L		M	A	C
M	U	D	D	Y	U	P		A	T	L
E	M	O			P	R	E	S	T	O
L	A	N	G	E			O	L	S	E
O	N	I	O	N			O	B	E	S
N	E	S	T	S			F	A	S	T