

Why the DU student harasser got bail



Taqbir Huda
is a human rights lawyer, currently pursuing graduate studies at Harvard Law School. He can be reached at taqbirhuda@gmail.com.

TAQBIR HUDA

There is a lot to say about the recent case making headlines in Bangladesh, whereby a man who has been accused of harassing a female student over her clothing choices was then treated as a hero by a mob of other men. Taking stock of the legal provisions a victim of harassment can rely on in such situations is a good place to start.

Section 509 of the Penal Code, 1860 criminalises acts, words and gestures intended to “outrage the modesty of a woman” with a prison sentence that may extend to one year along with fines. Additionally, Section 10 of the Nari-O-Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain, 2000 introduced an offence termed *jounopiron* (commonly translated as “sexual oppression”) to criminalise the act of someone who touches a woman or child (with any part of their body or with an object) or “violates a woman’s modesty” (*narirshilitotahanikoron*) in order to “illegally satisfy their sexual desires.”

As one can see, Section 10 is substantially similar to Section 509 since female “modesty” is still a point of focus. The punishment prescribed in Section 10, however, is imprisonment between two to 10 years, which is much higher than the maximum one year under Section 509. This is yet another example of our legislators’ tendency to implement legal reform on violence against women by simply increasing the penalty while preserving the archaic substance and definition of the offence itself.

The law’s continued reliance on the concept of “modesty”—the very notion the accused harasser in this case sought to invoke—creates a perverse irony: a provision meant to protect women from harassment is rooted in the same misogynistic logic that enables moral policing. From the road where a woman is harassed to the courtroom where she seeks justice, the focus remains on the woman’s “modesty” rather than the alleged harasser’s actions.

Beyond the law, this case also reveals something more insidious and all too familiar—the way self-appointed enforcers of morality manipulate religious virtue to exert control over women. At the risk of sounding trite, if the man was truly committed to the principles of the religion he claims to uphold, he would have followed its most fundamental tenet of modesty—lowering his own gaze, which would have stopped him from noticing what a woman is wearing (much less the

placement of her orna) in the first place. Such men weaponise the rhetoric of morality and religious virtue not out of faith, but to police and suppress women whose autonomy unsettles their fragile sense of control. They are not just a threat to women—they are a threat to the very faith they claim to defend.

Worse still, the glorification of such figures is nothing new. We have seen this before, in far graver contexts. Let us not forget Nusrat Jahan Rafi, the madrasa student who was burned alive after reporting sexual harassment by her principal, Siraj ud Dowla. Even after her brutal murder, there were those—including women and children—who framed her killer as a religious martyr and marched for his release. As long as impunity is draped in garlands, righteousness is measured by how loudly men can silence women, and the law itself remains fixated on women’s “modesty” rather than the violence they experience, justice can never stand a chance.

If courts bend to mob intimidation, justice is dictated by force, not law. But equally dangerous is the expectation that courts should deny bail simply to ease public outrage, which only strengthens the state’s power to arbitrarily deprive people of their liberty.

Going beyond impunity and the law’s fixation on “modesty,” this case has also sparked another debate—one that reveals deeper tensions within our legal system and feminist movements alike: the question of bail. Many are outraged that the judge—a woman herself—granted bail to the man accused of sexually harassing a woman by telling her how she should dress “decently.” But before rushing to condemn the judge, we must ask: did she even have legal grounds to deny bail?

Under basic principles of due process, bail is a constitutional right because the state should normally only imprison someone after a trial has taken place and a court has determined their guilt. Pretrial detention is

an exceptional measure, not the default, and can only be imposed if specific conditions are met—if the accused is a flight risk, poses a threat to public safety, or could tamper with evidence or intimidate witnesses. If none of these conditions apply, then denying bail would have been an abuse of judicial power.

Much of the outrage stems from the belief that the judge granted bail due to pressure from the angry mob that surrounded the

police station. But while mob coercion is deeply concerning, it does not change the fundamental principle that bail cannot be denied outside these restrictive conditions. If these conditions did not exist, then the judge was bound to grant bail—not because of public pressure, but because the law requires it. The danger here is twofold. If courts bend to mob intimidation, justice is dictated by force, not law. But equally dangerous is the expectation that courts should deny bail simply to ease public outrage, which only strengthens the state’s power to arbitrarily deprive people of their liberty.

But this case isn’t just about one man’s bail

or one woman’s harassment. It also exposes the dangers of what many critics have called “carceral feminism”—the belief that gender-based violence should primarily be addressed through criminalisation and incarceration. While this instinct is understandable, especially in contexts where impunity thrives, carceral feminism does more to expand authoritarian state power than it does to secure justice for women. It does little to

dismantle the conditions that enable sexual harassment. We’ve seen how past regimes, particularly the Awami League, weaponised pretrial detention to jail journalists, dissidents, and opposition members. A state that imprisons people without due process isn’t feminist—it’s authoritarian.

So what should the role of the law be? In 2009, the Supreme Court issued 11 directives on preventing sexual harassment in workplaces and educational institutions. These directives impose a legal duty on employers and universities to set up Sexual Harassment Complaint Committees that can independently investigate complaints. If guilt

is found, it can impose disciplinary action within 30 days, including suspension or dismissal of the harasser. If the case is serious enough to constitute a criminal offense, only then should it be referred to court.

This approach aligns with recommendations by UN human rights bodies and global best practices, where harassment is treated as an institutional matter—not just a criminal offense. These much-celebrated

directives have largely remained on paper, with weak or non-existent enforcement. Instead of demanding more arrests, we should be demanding that universities and workplaces enforce these directives. Hold your institutions accountable if they fail to act.

When punitive instincts masquerade as feminist justice and the obsession with imprisonment overshadows real solutions, we do not protect victims as much as we legitimise authoritarian power. And a movement that pursues justice only through retribution can never achieve transformation.



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Echoes of Tulip Mania in our economy



AKM Sayedad Hossain
is executive director of National Institute of Global Studies (NIGS). He can be reached at Shehab0172@gmail.com.

AKM SAYEDAD HOSSAIN

The tale of Tulip Mania in 17th century Netherlands remains one of the most infamous examples of speculative excess in economic history. At its peak, the price of a single tulip bulb reached astronomical levels—equivalent to the value of an entire house—only for the market to collapse abruptly, leaving thousands financially ruined. While centuries apart, the underlying causes and consequences of Tulip Mania find striking parallels in Bangladesh’s current economic landscape.

In this analysis, we explore how Bangladesh’s stock market volatility, real estate boom, and rising foreign debt reflect patterns reminiscent of Tulip Mania. This will help to assess whether the Bangladeshi economy is at risk of a similar speculative collapse and explore strategies for ensuring long-term economic stability.

Tulip Mania, which unfolded between 1633 and 1637, was fuelled by a speculative frenzy surrounding rare tulip bulbs in the Netherlands. What began as a fascination among the elite quickly spread to ordinary citizens, with people from all walks of life buying tulip bulbs in hopes of making a fortune. At its height, the most coveted tulip bulbs sold for more than 10 times the average annual wage of a skilled worker.

This speculative boom was characterised by key factors such as the overvaluation of assets, market illiquidity, and a sudden collapse. Prices were driven by investor speculation rather than the intrinsic value of tulip bulbs. Many transactions occurred through futures contracts, where buyers and sellers traded on promises rather than physical goods. When confidence in the market evaporated in February 1637, prices plummeted, leaving investors bankrupt. This episode revealed how greed, herd mentality, and poor regulation can create and burst economic bubbles—an enduring lesson for modern economies.

Bangladesh has emerged as a rising economic force in South Asia, achieving impressive GDP growth and industrial expansion. However, beneath this growth lies a fragile foundation marked by overleveraged sectors and speculative behaviours. Three

areas in particular—the stock market, real estate, and foreign debt—exhibit symptoms of a speculative bubble akin to Tulip Mania.

Stock market volatility

Bangladesh’s stock market, particularly the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), is similar to the structure of Tulip Mania in several ways. The DSE has experienced dramatic fluctuations, most notably the 2010-2011 stock market crash, which saw share prices surge by 62 percent before collapsing by 50 percent, wiping out billions of taka in investor wealth. Similar to Tulip Mania, overvalued assets and rampant speculation fuelled these booms and busts.

Much like the “wind trade” of tulip futures, the stock boom in Bangladesh is often driven by borrowed money through margin trading, amplifying risks if market sentiment shifts. The concentration of investment in a handful of blue-chip stocks further increases market vulnerability. Regulatory lapses, including weak enforcement against insider trading and price manipulation, undermine market confidence. If political turmoil or global economic shifts trigger a sudden shock, the resulting collapse could devastate small investors.

The real estate bubble

The real estate sector in Bangladesh, especially in urban centres like Dhaka and Chattogram, has experienced staggering price increases over the past decade. Land prices in Dhaka alone, rose by 2700 percent between 2000 and 2021, making housing unaffordable for many middle-class families. This boom is reminiscent of the speculative excesses of Tulip Mania.

Luxury housing developments dominate the market, while affordable housing remains neglected. Many property purchases are financed through loans, increasing the risk of default if prices decline. If the real estate bubble bursts, it could destabilise the financial system by increasing non-performing loans (NPLs) and causing a credit crunch, echoing the collapse of tulip prices in 1637.

Foreign debt and currency devaluation

Bangladesh’s external debt exceeds \$100

billion, with the burden increasing due to the depreciation of the Bangladeshi Taka. Rising global interest rates further escalate the cost of debt repayment, posing a significant challenge for the economy. As with the Dutch economy during Tulip Mania, the heavy reliance on external borrowing creates vulnerabilities that could lead to a systemic crisis.

The Taka’s depreciation against the US dollar

Both Tulip Mania and Bangladesh’s current economic risks are fuelled by emotional investing. In both cases, investors chase unrealistic returns, believing that prices will continue to rise indefinitely. Herd mentality drives people to follow the crowd rather than conduct rational analysis, while overconfidence fosters the belief that “this time is different.”

pushes up inflation and erodes purchasing power, increasing economic uncertainty. Overdependence on remittances and textile exports leaves Bangladesh susceptible to external shocks. A sudden withdrawal of foreign investment could trigger a balance-of-payments crisis, pushing the economy into deeper turmoil.

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Strengthening financial regulation is crucial to prevent manipulation and excessive speculation. Diversifying the economy by reducing reliance on the garment sector and promoting tech innovation, pharmaceuticals, and agriculture can create a more resilient economic foundation. Enhancing financial literacy will empower retail investors to make informed decisions and reduce speculative behaviour. Sustainable debt management,

including limiting external borrowing and improving foreign reserve management, is essential to withstand global shocks.

While Bangladesh’s economy is stronger than 17th century Holland, the dangers of a speculative bubble—particularly in the stock market and real estate sector—are impossible to ignore. Without proactive policy intervention

and prudent economic management, the country risks a modern-day replay of Tulip Mania’s tragic end.

By learning from the mistakes of history and embracing sustainable growth strategies, Bangladesh can preserve its economic progress and avoid the devastating consequences of unchecked speculation.

বাংলাদেশ পল্লী বিদ্যুতায়ন বোর্ড	
নিবন্ধ-২, বিলকেন্দ্র, ঢাকা-১২২৯।	
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১১	দরপত্র উন্মুক্তকরণের তারিখ, সময় ও ঠিকানা : ২৫/০৩/২০২৫ খ্রি. দুপুর ১২:৩০ ঘটিকা। সাধারণ প্রশাসন বিভাগ, (২য় তলা), বাপবিবো, নিকুঞ্জ-২, ঢাকা-১২২৯।
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পরিচালক সম্পত্তি ও লজিস্টিক পরিদপ্তর বঙ্গ পল্লী বিদ্যুতায়ন বোর্ড নিকুঞ্জ-২, বিলকেন্দ্র, ঢাকা-১২২৯	
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GD-621	