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[Rubana Huq](#)

The precariat vs. www.shortcut.gov

September 26, 2012



A German Pastor Martin Niemöller, who was imprisoned from 1941 to 1945 at Dachau concentration camp once cautioned:

They came first for the Communists,

and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist.

Then they came for the trade unionists,

and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews,

and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.

Then they came for me

and by that time no one was left to speak up.

This warning has its ground. There are neo-fascists all over the map. There are hemorrhaging votes deciding the future of our nation whereas the precariat, the insecured and the marginalized continue to observe, lament and survive, in the form of victims.

The precariat is just a lot of us put together. Now, what can the precariats do?

As supposedly “free” people, all of us suffer from the Kierkegaardian anxiety. All of us, in some form or the other, have rational and irrational fears, and at the end, all of us develop a coherent narrative for survival. For our own interests, we moderate our anxiety and at the end of the day, look forward to a certain, minimum degree of security, stability and control in governance. Is that too much to ask of a democratically elected position and a responsible opposition? Yes, it is...

It was just the other day when a certain advisor rambled in his incomprehensible Bangla and explained the difficulties of Teesta treaty. We called him names.

Just a couple of weeks back, a minister apologized for underplaying a financial scam. And we wanted him to resign.

A few days ago, we heard an advisor not wanting to go on leave or resign and a minister accused of graft laughed off the accusations.

A few months ago, The Bank said no to us. And we said, ‘Alas!’

Only yesterday did we find breaking news alert in our cell phones announcing a few



people being dropped off from the Purchase Committee. We said, "Ahem...at last."

And today, we are looking back at "Timeline: Bangladesh" and noticing a pattern of steady corrections in governance. In spite of the defiant attitude of the prime minister and the infinitely lengthy list of suckers who suck their way up to the parliament and power, changes have indeed taken place and quite a few of us are happy to hop on to the next train of development.

On a separate note, the same old (literally) apologetic minister possibly has pulled the right plugs with The Bank and has made it possible for the Bridge to be refinanced. It was possibly the same rambling, non-Bangla speaking advisor who has contributed to the deal being brought to the table.

Things and perceptions change all the time. It's just the way things are. Public perceptions change with time and might.

But at the end of the day, the public is the easiest target for a government. The public is like an oppressed partner, hurt when the husband's caught cheating and yet happy when he's back home early. In fact, it takes very little to make a South Asian wife happy. Similarly, we, the public in Bangladesh, are a bunch of complicit, non-complaining South Asian wives who easily fall prey to a few changes here and there and are reconciled to the fact that we couldn't have had better. Unfortunately, all along the way, most of our politicians remain pragmatically popular by practicing the wrong. In Bangladesh's history, not one businessperson has been punished after having royally raped the stock market. Not one soul has been taken to task for land grabbing; not one has languished in jail for a Ponzi scheme. Businesses investing in candidates and political parties, and expecting a return on their investment is not uncommon. Initiatives that are adverse to business as a whole don't ever make it on the public agenda. That's the truth. And that is how Bangladesh has truly become a land of unthinkable opportunities where commercial officers become multi billionaires in less than eight years. Doing business in Bangladesh has somewhat become like sprinting in a magical speed without ever having stepped on the tracks.

We talk about branding the country? The best possible tagline could very well be: Bangladesh? www.shortcut.gov

Has any political party ever supported a measure adverse to a business or corporate interest, unless there was some other business or corporate interest behind it? No. Not here or anywhere, actually. Bill Clinton too sounded just like George H. W. Bush when he prioritized and brought the federal deficit budget down as he couldn't afford to antagonize Wall Street financial institutions.

Like it or not, campaigns are all about money. Rahm Emanuel, the current Mayor of Chicago once reportedly told his staff:

The first third of a campaign is money, money and money.

The second third is money, money and press.

And the last third is votes, press and money.

By this account, then is money six times more important than votes?

Unfortunately, it is. The corporate influence seeps through campaign contributions, electronic media, research institutions and even advocacy groups.

Where does this endless greed stem from? In how many more ways shall we give in to the extreme route of capitalism? A quick review will define how the world looks and smells a lot different than it was, even a few years ago. Think about carbon offsets. One can pay and neutralize one's personal contribution to global warming. For a payment of USD 16.73, one can neutralize one's share of greenhouse gases produced in a flight between New York and London operated by British Airways. In a world that's heavily commodified; what can one do but put price tags on even our morality? In Kenya, one could pay USD 150,000.00 and kill a black rhino. Justification is simple: one kills a rhino and pays that huge amount and in return the ranchers receiving the money use the fund to raise rhinos and protect them. Ecotourism has an ultimate twist here. Market reasoning remains ever strong and morality is hardly ever trafficked in.

After all, there are things that money cannot buy. And of course there are things that money can. In 2001, New York Times ran a story on a Tianjin Apology Company in China. This company offered unusual services: if one needed to apologize to someone and if one couldn't bring one's own self to do so, one could hire this company to say sorry for you. The Tianjin Apology Company officials wore somber suits and had the verbal ability to convey the regret to the beneficiary. This is a perfect example of a bought apology.

Players who smash the dreams of the small investors in the stock market, loot banks with no trace of conscience, own tall buildings and long trail of cars...all in the name of industry and growth...perhaps need to be more creative and float new companies like the one mentioned above and issue a mass apology to the precariats of this land, who just try and live by regular norms of survival and are not plagued by greed.



[Rubana Huq](#) is a poet, researcher and an entrepreneur.



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5 Responses to “The precariat vs. www.shortcut.gov”



Golam Arshad on September 26, 2012 at 4:26 pm

Great piece!

Like or Dislike: 0 0

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russel on September 26, 2012 at 11:01 am

A bold piece by Rubana Huq. Thank you.

Like or Dislike: 0 0

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GOLAM ARSHAD on September 26, 2012 at 10:05 am

Rubana: Can't agree more! Me asking you, How to join this “CHEESY CLUB” of “MONEY SMARTS FOR FEW”! Poor BEATLES still ranting in the dark, “MONEY CAN'T BUY ME LOVE”. It can buy Votes, it can buy Love and Trust (?) Money be-gets POWER, and POWER be-gets MONEY. Please post me for ever to “The Dungeon of Idle and Ideals” Good job as always.

Like or Dislike: 0 0

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munia on September 26, 2012 at 7:15 am

You just spoke my mind...so true.
In the name of rewarding the talent...capitalism have created talented looter.

Like or Dislike: 0 0

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akhtar shah on September 26, 2012 at 3:06 am

Delicious.

Like or Dislike: 0 0

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