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[Rubana Huq](#)

Project: Public Eye Wash

October 11, 2012



Photo: bdnews24.com

While arrests happen, while bails are denied, while ministers brief the press, and while Anti Corruption Commission clears suspects, regular people like us simply sit and wonder if we are actually being subjected to hypnosis or if a bad spell of black magic has been cast on us. Just sharing, I have never believed in hypnosis. Yet I have always believed in black magic. Tanvir Mahmud, the Hallmark MD, had recited his own 'loot mantra', had stirred the evil potions in his bowl and had fooled many. While the administration has been busy trying to assuage the dent in people's psyche.

Ten years from today, Tanvir Mahmud will walk free and become a hero. And he will not be an exception in any form or manner. Hallmarks have happened in our history for the last 30 years and Hallmarks will continue. The strangest thing is that with time, we the people tend to forget the past. The only thing we remember is what had directly affected us. If our own houses had once been burnt, we remember; if our own children had been abused, we remember; if our own lockers had ever been looted, we remember. Public memory is most effective when it comes to individual experiences. Most of the time, we tend to forget what happens to others. As a nation, we have stopped subscribing to emotional generality. And that is why pseudo entrepreneurs like Tanvir have slipped through the occasional lapses in our surveillance system and have become active players in the field.

Tanvir has amassed more than three thousand and five hundred crore taka, has built factories without any product running through his lines, has employed over 300 security personnel to protect him, yet has exported only a little over Tk 50 million in total over the last three years. I spoke to a New York based young importer the other day who had approached Hallmark with an order of 100000 pieces of T-shirts. The young man is known for his frugality and he usually squeezes his vendors for every cent worth of orders he places with them. Surprisingly, Tanvir Mahmud's representatives had told him that price wasn't an issue and that he just needed to give them the LC at any unit price he wished to pay. The young man was taken aback and was shocked at the novel approach. Much to Hallmark's surprise, he did not place the order. I was happy with the incident. As much as the young Sikh businessman had learnt not to strangle the vendors, Hallmark too had lost yet another opportunity of swindling yet another victim.

Now, what will it take for Tanvir to rise to fame in less than ten years? Simple. Besides spending a few hundred crore taka on a few corrupt politicians and a few corrupt bank officials, he will have to resort to another new bend on the road. Tanvir this time will



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have to venture an extra couple of miles. Perhaps ten crore to a charity, another ten for music, a couple of crore more for sponsoring literary or cultural event and Voila! Tanvir will be all set. Oh I forgot, a foundation too would help a lot. Tanvir will also have to set up an art foundation to enrich his profile.

As I firmly believe on market morals of the society having changed for good, I sense that many of us get away with a messy slate packed with chalky traces just because of money and time. With time, we are able to cover our shame. It is like wearing a hijab to bury the bruises.

In reality, the political, social scandals and the financial scams are nothing beyond a 9 o'clock headliner for us with a polite print reminder the next morning. We work our frenzy up to a point where we follow the news developments up in news sites, in print and in talk shows. We become overnight analysts. Yet, when the news gradually dies with time, after a few years, we sit and dine with the same protagonists on the same table, forgetting what had happened a few winters ago. With time, the villain washes the poison down with power. And we all fall prey to that cleansing.

Let's talk about land grabbing. A friend of mine took me down to a scenic place just the other day. I stood right by the water and looked at a surreal picture — a beautifully designed, colonial structure stood guarded by high walls. Upon enquiring, I was informed that it was the "club". I wondered about who the members were and how their families looked like. With time, that particular group has acquired land beyond common imagination and today exercises adequate influence over the administration.

But how many of us have shunned their company, their newspapers, their channels and their products? Barely any. In no time, members of their families will rise to power, and buy their ticket to the parliament. Before we know it, we will be attributing new titles to them and will speak of them with the fullest possible respect.

The peculiarity of our psyche lies in our ability to forgive. A common sentence is: "He must have done some good in his life to have risen to such heights. Don't you see how much he donates, how good he is towards his employees, how humble he is?" Morons like us fall for their small gestures where they are heavily covered in honourable fund raising campaigns or are sponsoring a noble cause. Little do we realize that it takes almost nothing for these corrupt businessmen, land-grabbers to spend a few hundred crores on the project called: "Public Eye Wash." The worst is the media is often chosen as a partner. The same media, which had once run exposes on these corrupt entities, carries the Public Eye Washing stories with equal spirit. After all, there are always beneficial exchanges that take place behind the public curtain or morality...

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



Tags: [Bangladesh](#), [Hallmark](#), [Tanvir Mahmud](#)

This entry was posted on October 11, 2012 at 9:00 pm and is filed under [corruption](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed.

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14 Responses to "Project: Public Eye Wash"



Julhas on October 14, 2012 at 2:26 pm

This is very complex. You call yourself honest. Honesty? You have your own definition to define it. I call myself honest. Huh! I have my own definition too! Let's live in a complex world. Bangladesh is no exception. Corruption? Bangladesh is often declared champion but a new generation corporate guy with a global outlook just told me the other day that this is nothing (in Bangladesh) in compared to what single US multinational company does. So why blame only Bangladesh, Bangladeshi politicians? The mighty people, especially the allmighty businessmen and businesswomen around me are corrupt. They make money through cheating, evading tax, but I can't reject them fully, they have contribution to build this nation, to push it ahead. Please don't generalise it.

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[Taj Hashmi](#) on October 13, 2012 at 1:22 am

My two cents — I can tell one thing: Nothing will happen to the Hallmark people, the bank officials involved in the corruption and their political / business partners — all of them will be proven innocent. Money talks where (almost) everyone is corrupt, especially judges, police, politicians. And most importantly, where people in general envy not hate corrupt people – Bangladeshis in general consider honest people having all the opportunity to loot and plunder as freaks of nature or stupid. I would be extremely happy if I am proven wrong this time.

Like or Dislike: 1 0

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A Ahmd on October 19, 2012 at 4:12 am

Sir I like the word used hypnotised, i always thought that since the liberation of Bangladesh our blood has changed into black blood. Why black because, having earned 99% on corruption, bribe, stolen, that's all black money, what would you expect from me, if i am fed, clothed, educated with black money?

I believe there are still a lot of honest people left and 1% can make a lot of difference. do you not think so?

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Akhtar Shah on October 12, 2012 at 9:31 pm

Sublime! Rubana.

“Déjà vu” for sure (multiple times). Perhaps it is worth mentioning that these “in training Legends” or Übermensch would also donate money for a madrassa or two, may be perform Hajj/Umrah, donate money to flood victims, build a bridge in his home village, then presto! One's been cleansed! Purer than the driven snow!

License renewed to carry on with more of the same (possibly to lower depths, as if it were at all possible!)

Like or Dislike: 1 0

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Sajjad on October 12, 2012 at 5:36 pm

Thanks once again.

Hope the author realizes that the expectation is building, and she may need to go beyond scratching the surface.

For now, a wonderful piece to keep our antenna high.

Like or Dislike: 0 0

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Rezaul Islam Reza on October 12, 2012 at 4:35 pm

The best writing punching different areas with the sharp nib to open the eyes of the eye washer, eyes of the people but I am afraid the policymakers might take it as midnight birds crowing overlooking all the hidden truth.

With the reference to your writing, whoever cheat, suck the blood of people, hoard with manifold enthusiasm with the collaboration of top to bottom of the decision making areas of gov. authorities become the heroes afterward likewise the so-called “Darbesh” becomes the authority of what he grabbed earlier. Stock market is the vivid example like many.

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Riyadh on October 12, 2012 at 3:56 pm

I agree with you fully. We, as a nation, are gullible creatures. The promise of a little charity, which almost goes unfulfilled, makes us see the donor as a benevolent person. But with time, when promises are not met, cars and buses are burnt, shops are destroyed and the ultimate victim is always the general public while the corrupt stand proud and laugh thinking how easy it all was.

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Golam Arshad on October 12, 2012 at 12:43 pm

Rubana: As always, you have demonstrated that ethics and professionalism be glorified and recognized. Unfortunately, we live in a time, where, "The Knotty Knot of Doosra (As in Cricket), stifles the Tower of Morality, to the utter dismay and we as a witness or bystander had to swallow the "The Bitter Pill of Disgrace". Keep up your ink stroke, and de clutter the hazy, confused people like us. Good job and Thank you!

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Syed Imtiaz Ali on October 12, 2012 at 3:50 am

Written with passion and purpose. Passion because the reader is taken 'around' hand held (as it were) with a narration that really engages one to reflect. Purpose because it would perhaps raise a few, only few, eyebrows to fathom the magnitude and scope of the 'net' that is cast. This may have a remote role in bringing about corrective actions and measures.

Simply beautiful literature!

The name Hallmark is so very appropriate that it would really leave behind an indelible mark on matters of bank loan and all that follows in our country.

Well, nothing more to add really as all our thoughts and reflections as well as AWE element have been scripted with insight and its analysis. the reality is, 'investigations' conducted by specialists remain so long as it is in the media; but soon another incident occupies the headlines and the chapter gets closed; and we move on to the next. Because there is no dearth of getting awe struck. One supersedes the other in innovativeness and novelty.

The common denominator is that it takes d-a-y-s, even weeks to nab the culprits. Yet we don't know what happens eventually.

As if Sonali Bank management wants to wash their hands off the pretext that documents submitted were false and doctored. Well, whose DUTY is it to check the authenticity?

The banking sector's trust has really eroded with this mega-swindling. the nNtion is waiting to know who are the other parties to share the cake.

Welcome back Ms Rubana Huq.

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Ekram on October 12, 2012 at 3:15 am

In my eyes, the newsmen and writers (not all, but most of them) are worse than these corrupt businessmen and the corrupt politicians. When they do not get any piece of the pie, they write good things (like this writing), but as soon they get a piece, they are pretty efficient and quick to change the version of the story and try washing the character of the corrupt with their tricky writings.

However, Dudok (ACC) is more efficient in performing their duty of cleaning the corrupt politicians by providing Character Certificate (like ABC vaier choritro, Fuler moto pobitro).

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Leone Rahman on October 12, 2012 at 2:42 am

...I'm not talking about Hallmark or the MD...
...I'm talking about DESTINY.

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Leone Rahman on October 12, 2012 at 2:37 am

Dear Rubana Huq,

I can't agree with you more. Just today 3 directors of a company were jailed, for what? I can vouch for you this company can do more for Bangladesh & its people more than any politician, businessman or government could ever do.

Only because of greed of the mighty few (powerful) people, with a plight to devour whatever they can...publicly stating that they will change the law just so they can do it?

I am not a Bangladeshi, but, I feel so sorry for you all.

You are killing the son of Bangladesh and you don't even know it...

Absolutely pathetic...

As for the news media...right you are! They have been well taken care of to write and say what they are paid to do....

I feel sorry for you and anyone in journalism in Bangladesh.

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Robert Imam on October 12, 2012 at 12:54 am

It's been written and talked about, this memory problem of ours. We do need to start every political term with some standardized table where we can jot down issues, how it progresses and where it gets stymied or concluded. It's also overwhelming, a young boy gets shot in the leg, then a reporter couple dies, WB refuses us a loan, then Destiny, what... the stocks crashed? Then hate crimes in Ramu? See how complicated a tally this is?

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NA on October 11, 2012 at 11:17 pm

Regular people like you????!!!! Wife of the former president of the BGMEA and FBCCI can hardly claim to be a regular person in Bangladesh (although I am doing you an injustice by defining you simply through your husband and not your own achievements).

The point is you are part of the elite and part of the problem (sadly I am part of it too). Your article hints at the problem of how successful businesses are almost always set up through nepotism, bribes, etc. (the effect of each varies but is hardly ever non-existent).

For example, if the tax-benefit (and social welfare system overall) were reformed (which Bangladesh needs) you would be one of the first people to complain. None of the elite really believe in redistribution (or proper taxes for that matter!).

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