

We need a separate police commission

Home ministry’s refusal to acknowledge this is baffling

We are baffled by the position taken by the Ministry of Home Affairs regarding the formation of an independent commission to ensure transparency and accountability in police conduct. According to a report by this daily, the ministry claimed there was no need for such a commission as it already performs this role. Given the police's track records over the past years—especially during Awami League's 15 plus-year rule, and particularly during the July mass uprising—we fail to understand what made the ministry so confident about its own oversight role or capacity.

The proposal to establish this independent body was put forth in January by the Police Reform Commission—one of many extensive measures proposed to the interim government to overhaul the police force. These measures also include regulating police use of force against civilians in line with UN peacekeepers’ rules of engagement, combating custodial torture, extortion, legal harassment, arbitrary arrests, and enforced disappearances through modern and technologically advanced means, and amending existing police laws. The goal is to make the force pro-people, accountable, and neutral—not to mention freeing it from the undue influence wielded by the government of the day. Such influence never bodes well, as we know from our experience under the previous regime, when the force was blatantly misused to serve its political interests.

Why, then, is the ministry opposed to independent oversight when one of the interim administration's core goals is to introduce reforms that eliminate past failures in governance, law enforcement, and justice? Why—when the government claims to be establishing a just, modern system—does the ministry insist on retaining the Police Act, formulated in 1861, or the Code of Criminal Procedure, enacted in 1898? Why is it refusing to acknowledge that drastic—rather than cosmetic—measures are necessary to restore police image and credibility?

We fail to see the logic behind the home ministry's position. Most of the reform measures, including the establishment of an independent police commission, were suggested not just by the Police Reform Commission, but also by experts over time and even by the UN. More importantly, the people demand a complete overhaul of the force. So we urge the home ministry to reassess its position and make decisions that align with public interests, which, in this instance, lie in the formation of an independent police commission.

Collapsed bridges signal issues

Plight of Barguna commuters must be addressed

We are concerned to learn that at least 10 iron bridges, built over different canals in Barguna's Amtali upazila in 2008, have collapsed within the last eight months. This is disrupting the daily lives of thousands of residents, as they have to struggle to commute within the upazila and to Barguna district headquarters. Students, patients, and the elderly are being particularly affected. The question is: how could these bridges collapse within just 16 to 17 years of their construction? Who is responsible for such poor-quality work?

According to locals, the Local Government Engineering Department in Amtali upazila awarded Shahidul—the then chairman of Haldia Union Parishad—a tender to construct 21 iron bridges in Haldia and Chawra unions during the 2007-08 fiscal year, with an allocation of Tk 2 crore per bridge. Shahidul allegedly used his influence to secure the contract, and completed the construction using substandard materials. Reportedly, while the bridges were supposed to be built using iron beams and angle plates, he used lower-quality materials, leading to their rapid deterioration.

Sadly, when it comes to anomalies in public construction projects, Amtali is not an isolated case. A recent report revealed that the construction of a bridge over a canal in Patuakhali's Galachipa upazila has remained stalled for two years. Moreover, lack of maintenance and neglect by the authorities have led to severe deterioration of at least 242 iron bridges in the same district, posing an imminent risk of collapse. Thus, over the past decades, corruption and irregularities in construction projects have become prevalent. While large-scale corruption in megaprojects under the Awami League government has been widely reported, smaller projects like bridges, culverts, and roads—crucial for local communities—often escaped scrutiny. Substantial public funds were squandered on those poorly executed projects.

We urge the government to act urgently to rebuild the collapsed bridges and repair those at risk. Investigating these incidents and holding those responsible to account is imperative. More importantly, future construction projects must be closely monitored to prevent similar irregularities. Public funds must not be wasted due to the corruption of government officials and local political leaders. Infrastructure projects at the local level should prioritise durability and long-term benefits for the people.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



State-run TV and radio in Dhaka renamed

On this day in 1971, the state-run Pakistan Television and Radio Pakistan in Dhaka were renamed Dhaka Television and Dhaka Betar Kendra, respectively, by employees and staff in allegiance with the non-cooperation movement.

Climate-vulnerable nations at risk amid geopolitical tensions



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Climate change has become intricately linked to geopolitics as the world grapples with rising temperatures, severe weather events, and environmental instability. For the climate-vulnerable least developed and developing countries, the intersection of climate change and geopolitics presents immediate and long-term challenges.

For many years, climate diplomacy focused mainly on environmental concerns, bringing countries together to create agreements to slow climate change. However, political shifts around the world are making it harder to reach these agreements. As the world becomes increasingly divided along political, economic, and ideological lines, these divisions are often reflected in climate negotiations and international cooperation.

Climate change efforts often face resistance from political leaders who focus more on issues like job creation, energy independence, and security. The withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement is a case in point, even though its contribution to global emissions is significant. The EU is trying to balance ambitious climate goals with the economic pressures from its member countries—some of whom depend heavily on fossil fuels, making it difficult for them to support aggressive climate policies. China, the largest producer of greenhouse gases (GHG), is also a key player in global climate actions. While China is investing heavily in renewable energy, it faces challenges due to its growing demand for energy and its strong push for global influence. For instance, China has become a global leader in solar panel production, but its rapid industrial growth still makes it one of the top polluters in the world. The latest available data indicate that in 2021, China's share of global GHG emissions was the highest at 25.81 percent. In comparison, the US emitted 11.23 percent, and the EU emitted 6.34 percent of total global GHG (Climate Watch).

For climate-vulnerable low-income countries, the challenge of addressing climate change is not just about

adapting to its impact and mitigating its effects but also about navigating the increasingly complex web of global geopolitics. In many ways, these countries are on the front lines of a global crisis, bearing the brunt of environmental destruction while simultaneously being marginalised in global decision-making processes. As climate-induced disasters worsen, geopolitical dynamics—such as competition for resources, shifting alliances, and national security



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PHOTO: REUTERS

concerns—complicate these countries' ability to secure the support and resources necessary to adapt to and mitigate climate change impacts. As a result, they find it increasingly difficult to pursue sustainable development.

One of the ways geopolitical tensions affect climate change is through competition for resources. Climate change is driving countries to compete for critical resources, such as water, energy, and food, all of which are essential for survival. Countries that are already facing resource scarcity due to climate change, such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, find themselves locked in a struggle for resources that are becoming increasingly limited.

In the case of Bangladesh, the competition for water is particularly critical. The country relies on freshwater flow from rivers like the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna. However, these rivers are shared with neighbouring countries like India and China. Hence, any change in the natural flow of water has significant implications for agriculture, food security, and water supply in Bangladesh. The geopolitical tensions between Bangladesh and its neighbours over shared water resources have the potential to escalate as climate change exacerbates water scarcity.

Additionally, as nations pursue their climate goals, there is a growing tendency to prioritise national interests over global cooperation. These tensions undermine the effectiveness of international climate agreements. For countries like Bangladesh, this fractured global response to climate

resilient energy system.

Vulnerable countries must focus on both adaptation and mitigation strategies. However, the geopolitical environment complicates their efforts in these areas. Adaptation to climate change is a critical priority for Bangladesh, as the country must build resilience to the impacts of rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and other climate-related disasters. The government has implemented various initiatives to address these challenges, including the construction of embankments, flood shelters, and cyclone-resistant infrastructure. However, these efforts require substantial financial investment, which is increasingly difficult to secure due to the complex global political and economic landscape.

International support, particularly from wealthier nations, is vital for the climate adaptation efforts of climate-vulnerable countries, including Bangladesh. However, this support is often slow, inconsistent, and inadequate. The \$100 billion annual climate finance target set in 2009 at the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP15) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Copenhagen, Denmark, was achieved in 2022—two years after the target year of 2020 (OECD, 2022). At the 29th meeting of COP29 held in Baku, Azerbaijan, in December 2024, a target of \$300 billion annually by 2035 was set for developing countries for climate action (UNFCCC). This is insufficient to address the scale of the climate crisis.

Another key challenge is the displacement of people in the least developed and developing countries due to climate change. For example, due to rising sea levels, coastal areas will become increasingly uninhabitable, and millions of Bangladeshis risk losing their homes. The government has plans to relocate people from vulnerable areas to safer regions. However, these efforts are complicated by limited resources and a lack of international support.

As global tensions rise and national interests dominate, climate-vulnerable countries risk being left behind in the struggle for resources and international support. To address these challenges, the global community must prioritise cooperation over competition and work together to ensure that climate-vulnerable countries have the resources and support they need to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

How female employment can be diversified

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In Bangladesh, 96.6 percent of all employed females are engaged in informal jobs. Although women's participation in the labour force has increased from 36.3 percent in 2016-17 to 42.7 percent in 2022, it still lags far behind the male labour force participation rate of 80 percent. Female participation in formal and technical jobs remains significantly lower. Most employed female are engaged in agriculture (74.1 percent), while only 8.7 percent work in industry and 17.2 percent in the service sector. Representation of women in managerial positions is also significantly lower, even in industries such as ready-made garment (RMG), where women constitute the majority of the workforce. Additionally, the RMG sector's employability of women is at risk due to the increasing trend of automation, the Fourth Revolution (4IR) and rising demand for skilled labour. Besides, Bangladesh's LDC graduation by 2026 may unfavourably impact the RMG sector, leading to reduced exports and diminished opportunities for women in the sector.

In this context, creating more opportunities and exploring untapped sectors, apart from agriculture and RMG, is essential to employ more female workers. Much of the existing research on this topic are focused on

supply-side factors, leading towards a biased result. In a SANEM study, “What Drives Female Employment in Contemporary Sectors? Evidence from Bangladesh’s Agro-Processing, Jute, and IT Industries,” we identified this gap and explored demand-side factors impacting female employment and managerial representation in Bangladesh's agro-processing, jute, and IT sectors.

Two questions were addressed in the study: i) what are the demand-side factors attributing a higher percentage of female employees and how do their effects vary across the sectors?; ii) does ownership type affect gender-based recruitment both in overall employment and employment in higher-tier jobs? The SANEM-UNDP BIDA Enterprise Survey 2024 dataset, which comprises 972 firms—with 228 in agro-processing, 412 in IT and IT services, and 332 in jute and jute products—has been used. The sectors were identified from a pool of 29 sectors based on various parameters, such as domestic and international market size, sector readiness, SME linkage possibility, job creation and job quality.

The study revealed several key insights. Female-owned firms employed significantly more women at both general and managerial levels, which underscores the importance of promoting female entrepreneurship. Larger firms tend to employ more women overall, but size alone does not translate into greater female representation in leadership. While big firms may offer more jobs, cultural and structural barriers often limit women's access to managerial roles. Agro-processing and jute industries showed higher levels of female employment compared to IT. Technical skill requirements,

ingrained gender biases, patriarchal attitudes and perceptions of women's limited technical capabilities create significant barriers for women in the IT sector.

The study highlighted that firms with a higher share of female employees were more likely to have women in managerial roles. This indicates that fostering an inclusive workforce can lead to cultural shifts that support women's advancement into leadership positions. However, joint ventures and foreign-owned firms showed a reluctance to promote women to managerial levels, despite hiring them in general roles. This discrepancy calls for targeted efforts to break structural barriers within such organisations. Interestingly, factors like exporter status and international certification—often associated with formalisation—did not significantly boost female employment. This anomaly might stem from the limited export contributions of the analysed sectors compared to RMG, which dominates Bangladesh's export basket. Nonetheless, it implies that the emerging export-oriented firms face structural challenges or business models less conducive to gender diversity.

The study also found that firms with requirements for a higher share of low-skilled workers are more likely to hire women, which highlights that a lack of skills often pushes women into lower-wage jobs, which tend to have limited upward mobility. In contrast, firms that require a higher share of high-skilled workers slightly increase opportunities for women in leadership positions, as high-skill sectors exhibit fewer gender biases and are more conducive to promoting women.

The findings underline the urgency

of strategic interventions to enhance female employment and leadership in Bangladesh. Key recommendations include promoting female entrepreneurship by providing access to credit, mentorship, and training tailored for female entrepreneurs. Addressing the skill gap is crucial, particularly in STEM fields and technical roles. Policies should focus on training programmes that equip women with industry-specific skills, enabling them to participate in high-demand sectors like IT. Tackling patriarchal attitudes and male-centric hiring practices is essential, especially in the IT sector. Awareness campaigns and gender-sensitivity training for employers can help create a more inclusive workplace culture.

Firms should be incentivised to adopt hiring strategies that prioritise gender diversity. For instance, tax benefits or recognition programmes could motivate businesses to employ and promote more women. Encouraging women's representation in managerial positions is critical for driving workplace inclusivity. Policies should mandate gender diversity at leadership levels, particularly in larger firms and joint ventures. Agro-processing and jute sectors have demonstrated their potential for employing women. Strengthening these industries through investments and supportive policies can further increase female participation.

By addressing structural barriers, challenging gender biases, and fostering skill development, Bangladesh can pave the way for women to thrive in its evolving economy. This transformation will benefit women and also contribute to the vision of sustainable and inclusive development.