

Tripura killings expose accountability gap

India must bring to justice those behind killing of three Bangladeshis

The gruesome killing of three Bangladeshis by a mob in India's Tripura state last week demands a response that goes beyond mere diplomatic formality. The foreign ministry in Dhaka is right to call for an immediate, impartial, and transparent investigation into this heinous act. Regardless of the alleged circumstances, an accusation of illegal activity can never justify vigilante justice. The sanctity of life and the rule of law must prevail over frontier vengeance.

The 4,096-kilometre-long India-Bangladesh border is among the most porous and complex boundaries in the world. Stretching across riverine landscapes, dense forests, and farmlands, it cuts through communities that have shared socioeconomic ties for generations. Every day, people cross this frontier—some to visit relatives and others to trade goods. Amid this flux, illicit cross-border activities, especially cattle smuggling and narcotics trafficking, have flourished. These operations are not random but sustained by intricate local networks, often involving people on both sides of the divide.

Against this backdrop, the Tripura killings highlight the precarious state of trust between the two nations. It may be recalled that just weeks before the incident, at a director-general-level conference between the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and India's Border Security Force (BSF), both sides pledged to halt cross-border killings, curb illegal intrusions, and repatriate detained nationals through lawful means rather than force. The conference also outlined broader steps: launching joint awareness programmes, advancing socio-economic development in vulnerable regions, and promoting mutual respect for border integrity. The BSF reaffirmed its commitment to adopting additional precautionary measures, including intensified night patrols in high-risk areas. For its part, the BGB voiced concern over recurring shootings of Bangladeshis by both BSF personnel and Indian civilians. Together, these exchanges were intended to mark a new phase of restraint and collaboration.

Yet, the killings in Tripura have rendered India's assurances hollow. India's official response—delivered through its external affairs ministry—appeared to prioritise rhetoric over responsibility. By emphasising Bangladesh's duty to "uphold the sanctity of the international boundary" and "support border fencing," New Delhi seemed to shift focus from justice to border management. Infrastructure improvements may be legitimate long-term goals, but invoking them in the immediate aftermath of a tragedy diverts attention from the core issue: accountability.

If India is genuinely committed to maintaining neighbourly goodwill, it must demonstrate that commitment through action. A thorough, independent, and transparent investigation must follow, culminating in the prosecution of all perpetrators. Anything less may further deepen mistrust and corrode the credibility of bilateral mechanisms built over the decades. At the same time, the Bangladesh government must continue to defend the right to life of its citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Even those who engage in illicit border trade deserve the protection of law and the dignity of due process.

Chemical warehouses must be made safer

Mirpur at grave risk as illegal chemical businesses mushroom

Last Tuesday's devastating fire in a chemical warehouse in Mirpur's Rupnagar area, which claimed the lives of at least 16 workers—including children—has once again exposed the grave risks faced daily by factory workers and residents across many parts of Dhaka. Reportedly, in densely populated areas like Mirpur, numerous chemical warehouses and small factories have been operating for years right under the authorities' watch, in defiance of laws and basic safety standards. Despite repeated tragedies, the authorities have done little to identify and relocate these hazardous businesses. According to a fire service official, they only learn about such warehouses when a fire breaks out. This speaks volumes about the lack of oversight and accountability on the part of the authorities.

Unfortunately, despite the Fire Prevention and Control Act, 2003, and the Environment Conservation Rules, 1997, which prohibit the storage of hazardous materials in residential zones, such activities continue openly. Reportedly, more than a hundred buildings in the Rupnagar residential area house chemical warehouses, along with small- and medium-sized garment factories and dyeing units. Landowners in this residential zone have been selling plots and buildings to industrial entrepreneurs, who then use them for garment production and chemical storage, according to locals. During a recent visit to Rupnagar's Shialbari area, where the latest tragedy occurred, our reporters found that residential buildings stand barely 14 metres from the site of the deadly fire. East Senpara is another neighbourhood that has become one of the city's most concentrated chemical trading hubs. Locally known as the "chemical colony," almost every ground floor in the area houses chemical shops or warehouses, while people live upstairs, risking their lives. Many traders conduct these hazardous businesses with nothing more than a trade licence. Such illegal practices cannot be allowed to continue.

Reportedly, after the tragic fire in Nimtoli, Old Dhaka, which killed over a hundred people, many hazardous businesses were relocated to the Mirpur area, while the government projects initiated at that time to relocate hazardous industries from Old Dhaka still remain incomplete or unimplemented even today. This is unacceptable. Moreover, after every such disaster, we see the authorities announcing relocation plans, only for illegal operations to resume once public outrage fades. We hope this time things will be different.

We urge the authorities to identify and shut down all chemical warehouses and hazardous factories operating within the capital's residential areas, including Mirpur. This must be done through coordinated efforts involving the fire service, the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, the Department of Explosives, and city corporations. Clear and enforceable boundaries between residential and industrial zones are also essential to prevent any future tragedies.

HIKE IN PORT TARIFFS

What's happening at Chattogram port?



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Chattogram port is the beating heart of Bangladesh's seaborne trade, handling over 90 percent of its international trade volume and 98 percent of its container traffic. So, when the Chattogram Port Authority (CPA) announced a 41 percent average hike in port service tariffs to be effective from October 14, 2025 onwards—after a one-month deferral—the shockwaves were not surprising.

This is the first comprehensive pricing update in nearly 40 years. Under the revised schedule, fees across 23 service categories—including container handling, pilotage, tug service, storage, and ancillary port operations—saw significant increases. For instance, the handling charge for a 20-foot container jumps from Tk 11,849 to Tk 16,243, a hike of 37 percent. Meanwhile, import containers will cost an additional Tk 5,720, and export containers Tk 3,045. On top of that, a newly imposed "container movement" charge adds around Tk 3,000 per container.

Officials justify the hike on grounds of inflation, rising costs, and the need to modernise infrastructure. If the port struggled financially, a drastic hike like that might have made sense. But the CPA's recent financials tell a different story: in FY2024-25, it reportedly generated Tk 5,228 crore (52.28 billion) in revenue, posting a record net profit of Tk 2,913 crore. So even before the tariff bump, the port was making strong returns. Many critics, therefore, argue that this was not a rescue exercise; it was more of a value extraction move.

Trade commentators note another factor: many CPA tariffs are denominated in US dollars. Over time, as the taka depreciated (from Tk 27 per dollar in 1986 to around Tk 122 now), the local-currency cost of port services has gradually climbed without formal revisions. That means many port users were already paying significantly higher local costs due to currency changes. Hence, some see the current move as an attempt to lock in a higher revenue base ahead of structural changes at the port. Amid this controversy, a major deal is in motion: the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT), which alone handles nearly 40 percent of Chattogram's total throughput, is slated for management takeover by DP World under a government-to-government PPP arrangement. In that arrangement, DP World would take over operations, collect terminal handling fees, and pay the CPA a royalty and fixed fees.

A key suspicion among industry stakeholders is that the tariff hike is timed to bolster the financial attractiveness of that and other terminal deals. In other words, the port is being re-priced just ahead of a transfer of operational control, ensuring that the incoming operator steps into a high-yield environment. As one BGMEA leader put it, "the tariff hike may have been designed to make port operations look more profitable for them [foreign operators]."

This could tilt the balance of future gains more heavily towards private

operators if the royalty or revenue-sharing terms are set against higher baseline fees. Some analysts also argue that the International Finance Corporation (IFC), acting as the government's transaction adviser, has influence over the tariff design, supposedly mirroring earlier models for terminal concessions. They also question whether its advisory role might bias it towards foreign operator interests.



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Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Shipping Agents Association (BSAA) has called the tariff increase commercially unsustainable, and urged that it be scaled down to 10-15 percent at most, to be gradually implemented over six to 12 months. Business groups in Chattogram have demanded postponement of implementation until full stakeholder consultation. Officials from BGMEA and local chambers have also said

for garment exporters, the impact would be double because raw materials and finished goods both pass through the port.

Another risk is that shipping lines could divert vessels. If cost-per-container rates become excessive, Chattogram port could lose relative competitiveness, resulting in some shipping principals favouring ports in neighbouring countries, thus marginalising Bangladesh's trade corridors.

Given these realities and the high stakes involved, a course correction is essential. Tariff increases should be rolled back or paused immediately, at least until stakeholder consultations conclude and a more moderate path is agreed upon. Any future adjustments should follow a phased implementation to ease the burden on port users and maintain confidence. Tariff increases must also be linked to

tangible service improvements, such as faster turnaround times, better infrastructure, and reduced delays, so that higher charges are justified. That said, a transparent process and public debate and hearings are also crucial before any major tariff or terminal management decisions are finalised.

Additionally, safeguards in PPP contracts are necessary to protect Bangladesh's interests should DP World or another operator take over, including clear royalty rules, performance benchmarks, audit rights, and limits on unilateral tariff hikes. Finally, the CPA and the higher authorities should consider local alternatives first, exploring ways to strengthen domestic public-private partnerships or upgrade local capacity rather than defaulting to foreign operator models.

The tariff hike at Chattogram port cannot be viewed as a simple price adjustment. It sits at the intersection of economics, governance, and

geopolitics. Yes, Bangladesh's ports need modernisation and better capacity, and sometimes tariff reform is part of that. But the how and when matter just as much as the how much. When you combine a 41 percent overnight jump with a pending foreign operator deal, without the much-needed transparency or stakeholder inclusion, the optics look like value extraction more than necessary reform. The trade sector, ordinary consumers, and our national interests deserve better than being swept aside in a rush to ink deals.

As Bangladesh moves beyond LDC status and seeks to boost its international trade footprint, strategic decisions in port infrastructure should be made with sufficient deliberation, consensus, and accountability. The port is a gateway not only for goods but also for trust. Let's not sacrifice one for the other.

What Bangladesh's fake news boom says about our information crisis



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Something curious is happening on Bangladeshi social media. Pages that look almost identical to our leading newspapers and TV channels are spreading exaggerated or entirely false stories. The logos are copied, the fonts are identical, and even the headlines sound familiar. Many users know these are fakes, yet they follow, share, and debate them daily. Why? The answer goes deeper than gullibility. It tells us something about our fractured media system, our politics of fear, and the psychology of belonging.

When mainstream news loses credibility, counterfeits rush in. Years of state control, legal threats, and corporate dependence have left the professional press cautious and predictable. The Digital Security Act, 2018, was revamped as the Cyber Security Act (CSA), 2023, but it held the same spirit. Journalists have learnt to avoid sensitive topics, while readers have developed the ability to read

between the lines. Over time, silence began to look like complicity. Many ordinary people came to believe that mainstream media could no longer tell the truth. In that vacuum, mirror pages emerged as rebellious alternatives—unverified, emotional, and fast.

Political communication theory helps explain this: when institutions restrict information, informal networks fill the gap. During the quota reform protests and the violent days of July 2024, internet shutdowns and censorship created what scholars call "information voids." People turned to whoever seemed to know more. Mirror pages, posing as bold truth-tellers, entered that void. They offered speed and certainty when official channels hesitated.

Psychology adds another layer to this. Human beings are not neutral processors of information; we believe what feels right, not necessarily what is true. Theories of cognitive bias show

that people are drawn to information that conforms to their emotions. Mirror pages thrive because they speak to anger, frustration, and hope. They say aloud what people already suspect. Each click and share becomes a small act of defiance—a way to signal belonging in a polarised society.

The social media environment amplifies this bias. Facebook remains the main news source for millions of Bangladeshis. Its algorithm rewards engagement, rather than accuracy. A sensational headline gets more visibility than a balanced report. Mirror pages have a structural advantage: they can shout louder, post faster, and never correct themselves.

However, blaming technology alone misses the point. The deeper crisis is moral and institutional. When political competition collapses into propaganda, citizens start trusting whatever sounds most convincing. What we are witnessing is not just a digital problem—it is a democratic one.

To fix it, we must rebuild credibility from the ground up. The first step is legal reform. Criminalising errors and opinions has only driven journalism underground. The newly approved Cyber Security Ordinance, 2025, must deliver clear protections for free expression. Without that, every journalist will continue to self-censor, and mirror pages will continue to fill

the vacuum created by silence.

Second, newsrooms must change how they communicate. Too many outlets still write for officials, not audiences. Transparency and plain language matter. Explain how stories are verified. Admit uncertainty when facts are unclear. Publish corrections promptly and visibly. Honesty about the process builds more trust than polished evasions.

Third, platforms must share responsibility. They know which pages impersonate legitimate outlets. They can verify original logos, restrict deceptive lookalikes, and promote fact-checked content in moments of crisis. Finally, we need civic education that treats media literacy as part of citizenship. Schools and universities should teach students how to verify claims, cross-check sources, and resist emotional baiting. Doubt should not be seen as disloyalty—it is the foundation of democracy.

Mirror pages are not merely parasites living off mainstream media. They are symptoms of a society struggling with trust. They thrive because truth has become uncertain and silence has become normal. The way to defeat them is not through censorship but by restoring confidence in real journalism and real accountability. Only then will people stop following the mirror and start looking for the light beyond it.