The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Ensure adequate resources for police

Reliance on donations for vital tasks risks compromising integrity

It is deeply troubling that the police force has become so under-resourced that it is getting increasingly reliant on private donations. An investigation by this paper has revealed that it is still a common practice for police stations to establish special funds to cover expenses, bridging the gap between official allocations and the actual costs of investigating crimes or even providing meals to suspects in custody. At a recent roundtable organised by this paper, a member of the Police Reform Commission also drew attention to the issue of resource shortages. He said, "At the thana level, if a police officer finds a dead body, they must cover transport costs themselves and are reimbursed a year later."

Reportedly, officers entrusted with investigating grave crimes—including murder or the recovery of an unidentified body—are often provided with as little as one-fifth of the necessary expenses. As a result, a practice has taken root of collecting money as "donations" from influential individuals, which risks compromising the force's integrity; one can imagine the outcome of an investigation if it involves one of those donors. Equally troubling is the practice of soliciting money to process or fast-track bail bonds to top up police stations' special funds, a method bordering on extortion in uniform. The authorities must review and prohibit such practices, ensuring that law enforcement operations are funded exclusively through legitimate public resources.

One may recall that infamous remark of the then AL state minister for information at the height of the 2024 July uprising that their stock of rubber bullets would not run out even if police continued firing at protesters non-stop for five years. This statement laid bare the misplaced budgetary priorities of the past, with more funds allocated to weaponry while ignoring investigative capacity and maintenance of police stations at an acceptable and decent standard. Our report also highlights that reimbursements for expenses incurred by officers to meet urgent investigative needs can take nearly a year. This absurd bureaucratic practice must be replaced, and necessary budgets must be made instantly available to duty bearers.

When the interim government announced its commitment to reform key state institutions, police reform was rightly listed as a priority. Yet, there has been little meaningful follow-up on the commission's report or its recommendations. While some civil society representatives have expressed reservations about certain proposals—such as the modalities of creating a permanent independent police commission as a watchdog—there should be no hesitation in adopting its recommendations to increase operational resources.

Providing financial independence to police superintendents for essential investigative expenses is not a luxury but a necessity. The government must ensure that the police have adequate, transparent, and accountable funding so that pursuing justice is not compromised by resource constraints or dependence on private generosity.

Regulators must start house cleaning

Liquidate, remove 'zombie' companies from stock exchanges

A silent, creeping malaise has infected the nation's key capital market for years. Dozens of companies—collectively referred to by analysts as "zombie firms"—have been languishing in the Dhaka Stock Exchange's (DSE) ignominious "Z" category for five years or more. This cannot be a mere administrative oversight; it reflects regulatory inaction threatening the integrity of the entire stock market. These firms have been plagued by years of losses, non-payment of dividends, negative net worth, and often a disregard for basic governance such as holding annual general meetings or even maintaining functional contact details. Despite such toxic fundamentals—accumulated losses for 27 of these firms stood at Tk 27,000 crore until June 2024—their shares continue to trade. This is a glaring example of dysfunction that fosters and rewards pure speculation.

The core of the problem lies in the regulatory philosophy adopted by both the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) and the DSE. Their long-held stance is one of non-intervention, arguing that the "Z" category label serves as a sufficient warning and that investors must bear responsibility for their speculative choices. However, this hands-off approach is ill-suited to the realities of Bangladesh's market, where financial literacy is often limited. Simply moving a failing company into a "junk" category and leaving it to fester creates a playground for market manipulation and allows financially distressed entities—which "owe more than they have"—to continue posing as legitimate investment vehicles.

We concur with industry experts who argue that allowing these financially deceased firms to operate is tantamount to "letting zombies roam the market." As one succinctly put it, if a regulator determines a firm has "no chance of being a going concern," it should be liquidated and delisted. Delisting, therefore, is a necessary process of market hygiene. The companies that have been in the red for a decade or more demonstrably fail the "going concern" criterion and have forfeited their right to access public capital. In this regard, the regulators' hesitation—that forced exit "ultimately" harms general investors—is misguided, as the greater harm lies in allowing failed firms to absorb retail investment that should be directed towards productive, healthy companies.

The solution is not complex. The DSE must enforce existing rules to remove companies failing to hold annual meetings for three consecutive years or pay dividends for five. For its part, the BSEC must proactively support any delisting moves initiated by the DSE. Regulators must also ensure accountability by penalising top executives where failure stems from malfeasance by sponsors and directors. We cannot build a trustworthy capital market without this long-overdue house cleaning.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Sadat and Menachem get peace prize

On this day in 1978, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin were awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace for negotiations that produced the Camp David Accords.

Why a logistics commission, not an authority, aligns with our realities

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AHAMEDUL KARIM CHOWDHURY

Last month, a private sector think tank proposed establishing a National Logistics Authority under the framework of the National Logistics Policy. The proposal initiates a discussion on the institutional framework best suited to serve Bangladesh's logistics future.

Recent developments illustrate the complex interactions within our logistics ecosystem. These include the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA)'s temporary suspension of permission for several French shipping giant CMA CGM's vessels following surcharge decisions, a warning to the Mediterranean Shipping Company for similar adjustments, and the brief truckers' strike that prompted CPA to review and postpone new entry fee measures. These skirmishes reflect the challenges of coordination among diverse actors in a fast-evolving trade environment. They underscore the need for a permanent, neutral platform that can align interests, mediate disputes, and uphold predictability across the entire logistics chain.

Bangladesh stands today on the threshold of a logistics transformation. The government's intent to reform policy, improve efficiency, and align infrastructure investment with trade facilitation remains a national priority. However, whether another "authority"—created within a single ministry—can truly manage such a multidimensional ecosystem remains a question. The word authority conveys decisiveness, but it also implies hierarchy. In a system as vast as logistics, which spans ports, customs, railways, roads, river transport, aviation, and private terminals, hierarchy without coordination may struggle to deliver results.

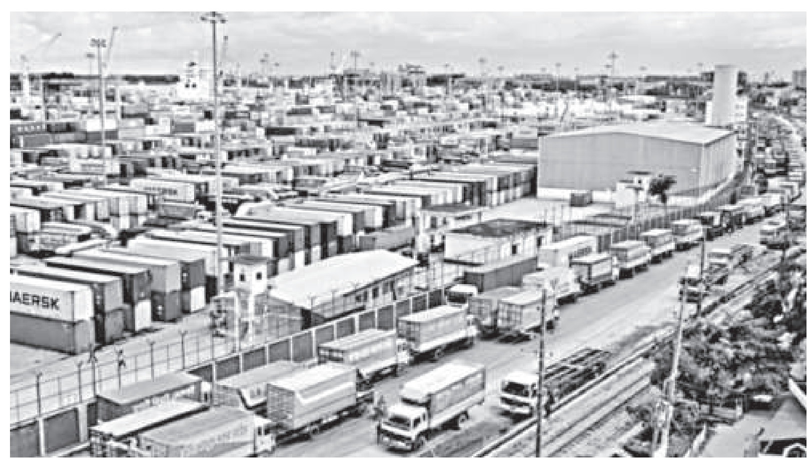
Logistics in Bangladesh is administered by a mosaic of agencies: National Board of Revenue (NBR), Bangladesh Railway, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), Roads and Highways Department (RHD), Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), and the Chittagong, Mongla and Payra port authorities, alongside hundreds of private logistics operators. Each has its own statute, budget, and administrative hierarchy. A ministry-led authority may coordinate some of these, but it cannot command them all. The outcome risks being partial compliance and parallel systems—the very fragmentation we hope to resolve.

This fragmentation already exacts a measurable economic toll. Bangladesh spends as much as 16 percent of its GDP on moving goods from factories to customers, far above the global average of 10 percent. The country thus ranks 88th of 139 countries in the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index. Exporters face costly port dwell times; importers endure unpredictable charges; truckers and freight forwarders confront multiple permits, inspections, and levies. The issue is not the absence of policy, but the absence of a single accountable body to oversee performance across the entire supply chain.

What Bangladesh needs now is not another authority, but a national logistics commission—an independent, statutory institution created by parliament and accountable to the nation. It would not replace existing agencies, but serve as a coordinating and regulatory platform that harmonises them. The precedent exists: US's Federal Maritime Commission that oversees competition and transparency in maritime transport without controlling the ports or the lines themselves. A similar model can guide Bangladesh, ensuring fairness, data-driven oversight, and strategic coherence.

A commission would unify the six pillars of the World Bank's performance framework—customs, infrastructure, international shipments, logistics competence, tracking and tracing, and timeliness—under one dashboard. Its first mandate could be to publish a national logistics performance index, updated quarterly, showing key indicators such as port dwell time, customs clearance hours, and corridor reliability. Transparency is the foundation of accountability; what gets measured, gets improved.

Another key reform should be licensing integration. Today, a logistics company must maintain separate licenses for terminal operator, berth operator, ship handling operator, shipping agency, freight forwarding, customs clearing and forwarding agent, trucking, and warehousing, each requiring different renewals and subject to overlapping inspections. This encourages inefficiency and rent-seeking. A single digital nationwide licence, administered by the commission and valid across all modes, would drastically reduce bureaucracy and encourage professionalism. This system would encompass terminal operators, shipping lines, shipping agents, non-vessel operating common carriers, freight forwarders, customs clearing and forwarding agents, cargo consolidators, trucking companies, barge operators, and off-dock or private inland container depots and inland container terminals.



FILE PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

'Logistics in Bangladesh is administered by a mosaic of agencies, each with its own statute, budget, and administrative hierarchy.'

A commission could also act as a neutral arbitrator in cases of dispute. The recent tariff and surcharge decisions by shipping lines, and CPA's subsequent administrative responses, demonstrate that these situations require structured mediation—not confrontation. A regulatory platform empowered to hear stakeholders, assess cost justifications, and issue transparent rulings would prevent disruptions while protecting both business interests and regulatory fairness.

Predictability, not price control, is what trade needs most. Businesses can plan around known costs; they cannot plan around uncertainty. The commission's role would not be to fix tariffs but to enforce advance notification, disclosure, and fair review of all charges—from port handling to emergency surcharges. Such oversight would replace reactive decision-making with institutional dialogue.

Bangladesh's infrastructure boom, from bridges, ports to upgraded highways and rail links, has expanded the country's physical logistics capacity. Yet, it lacks the rules, data, and accountability mechanisms to ensure efficiency. A national logistics commission would provide that missing layer of governance.

To make such a commission effective, collaboration between the public and private sectors is crucial. Key institutions such as the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) and NBR must coordinate with private sector stakeholders, including trade organisations and sector-wise associations. Think tanks, supported by development partners, can help draft the legislation and define measurable standards. This alignment would transform logistics governance from fragmented supervision into unified accountability.

The commission could also serve as a collaborative forum—a permanent roundtable where all logistics actors can deliberate before disputes arise. Before any tariff adjustment, for example, it could host consultative hearings among port authorities, shipping lines, and trade associations to ensure clarity and fairness.

Critics may worry that creating another body risks bureaucratic expansion. A well-designed commission would do the opposite: streamline oversight by consolidating overlapping functions, eliminating duplication, and publishing unified metrics. Its legitimacy would come not from coercive power but from credibility, transparency, and dialogue.

Ultimately, Bangladesh's logistics story is one of competitiveness. Every hour lost at a port gate, every redundant licence, and every conflicting directive erodes the nation's export potential. As the country aspires to become a regional manufacturing and trade hub, efficient logistics will determine whether it climbs or stalls in the global value chain.

A commission offers a pragmatic and forward-looking solution. Bangladesh already has the infrastructure, the enterprise, and the intent. What it needs now is a single institution that ensures coordination without confrontation, progress without disruption, and regulation without rigidity. The question is no longer whether Bangladesh can afford to establish such a commission, but whether it can afford not to.

Bangladesh must get the basics right to ride the AI wave

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There's a proverb that says, "When the winds of change blow, some build walls, others build windmills." As the global storm of technological transformation swirls ever faster, driven by AI, climate imperatives, and geopolitics, Bangladesh must decide what it wants to build, not metaphorically, but quite literally: infrastructure, institutions, and interoperability. These are essential to unlocking better jobs, resilient growth, and national relevance in a digitally reordered world.

Notably, the recent years have brought a wave of infrastructure and legislative developments in the country. Grameenphone and Robi switched on 5G in September 2025. The SEA-ME-WE6 cable system has a total design capacity of approximately 126 terabytes per second (Tbps) and is expected to be ready for service in 2026. The national operator, Bangladesh Submarine Cables PLC, crossed 4 Tbps of live international bandwidth in August 2025. Rooftop solar is finally scaling, reaching around 245 MW in June 2025. Bain's 2025 technology analysis underlines the stakes: the world is reorganising around AI agents, dependable compute, and data sovereignty. The question is no longer "Will this affect us?" but "How prepared are we to shape it into progress?"

Consider power. Bain estimates that AI compute alone could drive global electricity demand towards 200 GW by 2030, requiring nearly $500 billion a year in new data-centre investment. Bangladesh is laying small but meaningful bricks. Yet, the challenge lies in scale and smart integration. Can our energy strategy explicitly link AI power needs to renewables, efficiency benchmarks, and transparent performance reports? That is how we can move from promises to green computing.

Connectivity is evolving, strengthening the backbone of our digital infrastructure. But resilience requires redundancy, not just speed. We must ask: when one cable breaks, does our national bandwidth collapse with it? Thus, Bangladesh's digital future also depends on backup routes.

Inside companies, AI has become a system that thinks ahead and works across programmes. Bain cautions against chasing isolated wins; the bigger value lies in rewiring entire workflows. Controlled trials show developers using GitHub Copilot completed tasks 55.8 percent faster. Yet faster coding matters only if it shortens delivery timelines or improves quality. Procurement must evolve too with specifying outcome-based KPIs, such as time-to-cash and first-pass yield, and requiring open agent interfaces so that vendors can compete within the same workflow.

Then comes trust. The Cyber Security Ordinance, 2025, has been gazetted, and the draft Personal Data Protection Ordinance (PDPO) 2025 has been approved. A sensible middle path is needed where sensitive personal data will be stored within Bangladesh, while using global cloud services under clear rules and oversight. We must balance trust with connectivity, especially in healthcare, banking, and exports. Striking the balance is now a core policy design challenge.

Big systems need big funding. Citigroup projected that AI-related infrastructure spending by tech giants will surpass $2.8 trillion through 2029. Locally, Bangladesh secured $650 million from the World Bank for the Bay Terminal, part of an $850 million package signed in April 2025 to modernise trade and social protection. What is needed next is targeted seed funding—public-private investment in backup cable stations, efficient data centres, and AI-powered export ventures—to signal seriousness and attract private capital.

Technical standards may sound dull, but they form the backbone of the digital economy. Whoever controls the connections controls the value. Google and Anthropic are developing systems that let different AI tools work together, while Microsoft is building such capability into Windows 11, and Google is expanding it to payments. This is relevant for Bangladesh because our work spans banks, ports, factories, and government offices. To avoid dependency on single vendors, major buyers and public agencies must demand interoperable systems—ones we can swap out when better options arise.

Finally, exports. Competing on "cheap code" no longer works when software can write software. The consultancy McKinsey & Company estimates the global generative-AI impact at $2.6-4.4 trillion a year. The winners will not sell labour hours—they will encode domain insight into agent workflows. With 5G live, a third subsea route pending, Bay Terminal financed, and rooftop solar scaling, Bangladesh can tell a credible story if it aligns energy, networks, and regulation to how agentic systems actually function.

Experts suggest the need for a nationwide, accelerated "AI skills for export" bootcamp that covers prompt engineering, AI-assisted moderation, curation, and data stewardship. It will help workers move from data entry to higher-value, AI-augmented services. Freelancers are already advancing into 3D modelling and complex writing. The infrastructure already exists; what is missing is the execution muscle to turn intent into export earnings.

Many companies might abandon AI experiments within two years for lack of returns. That must not be a reason to wait. If we become known for steady power, resilient networks, and trustworthy governance, we will not just ride this wave; we can help steer it.

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