

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

An independent police commission at last

It will hopefully free the police from politicisation, corruption

We welcome the government's finalisation of a draft ordinance for forming an independent police commission that aims to ensure accountability within the force and help make it more people-friendly. After decades of politicisation of the police by successive governments, particularly the Awami League regime, the prospect of having a truly professional force that upholds human rights gives us hope. In the wake of severely diminished public trust in the police, as well as low morale within the force itself, this is urgently needed.

According to our analysis of a copy of the draft Police Commission Ordinance 2025, one of the most important functions of the commission will be to investigate citizen complaints against police officers, determine responsibility, and take appropriate action, ensuring the confidentiality and safety of the complainants. It will also have the authority to prevent abuse of power by the police. The politicisation of police in Bangladesh has long been a serious concern as it led to clampdowns by successive governments to repress political opponents and dissenting voices. Among the tools used for that purpose were false cases, arbitrary incarceration, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, etc. Politicisation also created a culture of impunity within the force, providing the scope for unbridled corruption and crimes, including extortion and bribery.

This culture must end, and an independent commission represents a real opportunity to finally begin reversing it. According to the draft ordinance, the commission will have several units to ensure that complaints are handled properly. The police will be required to set up an internal system to handle complaints within 90 days. If a citizen still feels their case has not been handled fairly, they can appeal within 30 days to a divisional Police Accountability Unit, which must then resolve the complaint within 60 days. Another body will hear appeals against the unit's decisions within 30 days and will have the authority to initiate investigations, summon witnesses, and publish outcomes. A separate Police Grievance Redress Board will address complaints from police personnel regarding unfair treatment, transfers, promotions, or disciplinary actions.

Of course, the success of all this will ultimately depend on the political will of future governments and the sincerity of those in charge. The demand for such a commission has existed for many decades, but proposals have repeatedly been met with bureaucratic resistance. An ordinance can become law only after parliament passes it, and a law is meaningful only when the administration sincerely enforces it. We expect all political parties to commit themselves to upholding the mandate of this commission if elected to power. A professional police force, free of undue influence, is a basic requirement for good governance.

Halt the DAP amendment

Govt must heed expert advice to make Dhaka liveable

We are deeply concerned by the government's move to amend Dhaka's Detailed Area Plan (DAP), which experts say will further undermine the capital's liveability. At a recent press conference, urban planners, environmentalists, and civic groups urged the authorities to suspend the amendment process, warning that it would intensify overcrowding and strain the city's already fragile infrastructure. The proposed amendments would reportedly increase the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) across many neighbourhoods, doubling building heights and density in several areas. While this may benefit developers, it would allow taller, denser buildings without corresponding upgrades in transport, drainage, and utility systems. In a city already ranked as the third least liveable in the world, such decisions could push Dhaka to the brink of collapse.

The current DAP, gazetted in August 2022, was formulated to ensure balanced population distribution, promote transit-oriented development, and implement sustainable block-based planning. However, within a year, it was revised to favour commercial interests, violating its five-year review cycle. Yet, real estate developers and many architects continued to demand further revision after last year's political changeover. Clearly, real estate developers support a higher FAR because it allows them to build larger structures and earn greater profits. In contrast, urban planners and other experts see FAR as a crucial tool to control population density, ensure that construction aligns with available utilities and public services, protect residents' quality of life, and preserve the environment. Therefore, the government's apparent disregard for expert advice and yielding to pressure from real estate developers and architects is quite disappointing.

Dhaka is already struggling with a shortage of open spaces, walkways, water bodies, and basic utilities due to overpopulation and unplanned urbanisation. If the amendments are approved, developers could raise building heights by two to four additional storeys, pushing population density in some areas to 50,000 people per square kilometre, which is far beyond global standards for liveable megacities. Experts also opined that these repeated revisions to the DAP are self-destructive and undermine sound urban planning practices.

We, therefore, urge the government to resist the influence of real estate developers and prioritise the long-term well-being of Dhaka's residents. It should thoroughly review and address the concerns raised by urban planners and experts before finally approving the DAP amendments. Moreover, any city planning must be guided by expert knowledge and coordinated under the National Spatial Plan to manage population density and infrastructure effectively. Without such a responsible and forward-looking plan, any amendment to the DAP will only deepen Dhaka's crisis, further diminishing its liveability and jeopardising its future as a sustainable city.

Our ports are national assets, not bargaining chips



Anu Muhammad is a former professor of economics at Jahangirnagar University.

ANU MUHAMMAD

The interim government seems eager to hand over management of the New Mooring Terminal of the Chattogram port to a company called DP World from Abu Dhabi. Although no formal deal has been signed yet, newspapers report that officials of the company have been visiting the port regularly. In his June 6 speech this year, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus also urged people to resist those opposing this move.

It is no secret that Bangladesh is in a geographically advantageous position due to its seaports, both located in the southern part of the country, opening to the Bay of Bengal. Beyond the obvious benefits for international transport and communication, the Bay holds both known and untapped natural resources, including vast reserves of oil, gas, and minerals, which demand the presence of enhanced security in the area. Since Bangladesh lacks strong national capacity in this matter, many believe the presence of foreign operators in the ports might increase the security risk in the area. Yet, successive governments have continued their attempts to lease out the Chattogram port.

It first began around 1997. We were repeatedly told that the port's performance was very poor and that its future was at risk. The proposed "solution" was to lease out parts of the port to a US company to build and operate a new container terminal. Between 1997 and 1999, several foreign maritime companies submitted proposals to build a "private port" in the Chattogram area. Among them, the US company, Stevedoring Services of America Inc. (SSA), submitted its proposal on December 29, 1997. Meanwhile, local lobbying groups became active to accelerate the process.

The port authorities had their own development proposal, but it was ignored and buried in files. Meanwhile, the SSA company quickly moved ahead, even without a proper tender process, as the then government began direct negotiations with them.

The proposed terminal site was at the mouth of the Karnaphuli River—right where the port opens to the sea. The contract offered 20.97 acres of land at Patenga on a 99-year lease for the first phase, and another 99 years for later phases, making it effectively a 210-year licence, divided into seven

30-year terms. The proposed deal also stated that if the company wanted more land in the future, the shipping ministry would help secure ownership for them. This raised serious concerns.

A look at various official meetings, decisions, and committees from that time shows how ministries and "experts" shaped the process to suit the foreign companies' interests. Within a few months, the cabinet



FILE PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Bangladesh must strengthen management of its own ports through a vision rooted in national dignity and self-reliance.

approved SSA's proposal and sent it to the shipping ministry. By early 2000, the ministry engaged Infrastructure Investment Facilitation Centre (IIFC), a so-called government agency allegedly funded and guided by the World Bank, to provide "expert negotiation support" with SSA.

Although a new government took office in 2001, the port deal continued. A "secretaries committee", formed with six top bureaucrats, strongly recommended SSA's proposal in its report on April 30, 2002. Apparently, top US and World Bank officials in the country at that time pressed the then government to approve the deal urgently, claiming no tender was necessary since "all discussions were transparent" and the IIFC had given a favourable opinion.

What we see now with DP World

follows a similar pattern.

Back then, however, a strong public resistance grew against this destructive alliance of Bangladesh's two consecutive governments, foreign interests, and the bureaucratic elite. Alongside the movement by port workers, the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports organised a long march from Dhaka to Chattogram in 2002. Meanwhile, former port chairman Engineer Mahmud-ul-Islam and others filed a petition at the High Court, represented by Dr Kamal Hossain and Harisadhan Dev Brahma.

By the end of 2002, court hearings revealed the project was fraudulent. A newly created company had used the name of SSA to secure a massive loan

waters have drawn the attention of many powers, particularly the United States, followed by India and China. US diplomats, military or naval officials, or corporate lobbyists often show special interest in Bangladesh's maritime area and talk about "ensuring its security." Experiences from around the world show that foreign powers talking about a country's security or peace is often an ominous sign!

Those promoting foreign control over the ports often justify it by saying Bangladesh should become "like Singapore." But anyone can see that Singapore never supports handing over a strategically vital asset like a port to private or foreign companies. The Port of Singapore is run under full state authority by the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA). In 1997,

under the port deal, and both local and foreign forces were backing it. Thanks to the court verdict and public movement, the fraudulent project was finally cancelled.

After that plan was scrapped, their activities took a new turn, especially during the caretaker government of 2007, towards turning the Chattogram port into a shell under private capital control. At first, local businessmen were happy, but it later became clear that the policies were taken mainly to serve multinational interests. Now the interim government, to serve a foreign company's interest, did not hesitate to raise all port tariffs even at the risk of negatively affecting national economy and local businesses.

It is true that because of Bangladesh's strategic location, its

PSA was corporatised to allow greater commercial efficiency but it remained a national institution. Interestingly, DP World—the same company our government wants to lease the New Mooring Terminal to—is itself a state-owned enterprise.

No country has ever built a strong foundation by abandoning national pride and acting like a broker, as our governments often tend to do. To ensure national security, economic growth, and national capability, Bangladesh must strengthen management of its own ports—Chattogram and Mongla—as they are strategic national assets. This cannot be done with a corrupt, commission-seeking mindset, but through a vision rooted in national dignity and self-reliance.

How algorithms are fuelling a new wave of crimes



Fatema Jarrin Habiba is a student of law at Bangladesh University of Professionals.

FATEMA JARRIN HABIBA

In an era where algorithms dictate what we see, read, and believe, the distinction between digital influence and criminal manipulation is becoming increasingly blurred. Instances ranging from Facebook-fueled mob violence to artificial intelligence (AI) generated deepfakes that ruin reputations prove that a new form of crime is reshaping the criminological landscape in Bangladesh.

Algorithmic crimes refer to crimes that are either influenced or enabled by algorithms. Algorithms determine what we see online, influence transactions, and shape our digital interactions. Algorithmic crimes are not like regular cybercrimes, such as hacking or phishing; they're often indirect. It occurs when algorithms propagate false information, manipulate user behaviour, or cause biased decisions that lead to real-world harm. Criminologists around the world are realising that algorithmic crime is the "dark twin" of digital innovation. In Bangladesh, this phenomenon has started to manifest in alarming ways, from communal violence sparked by

viral posts to financial scams driven by AI bots.

However, the algorithmic crime's journey in Bangladesh began with the spread of misinformation through social media. Back in 2017, at the Thakupara village of Rangpur, communal violence erupted after a fake Facebook post supposedly hurting religious sentiments was circulated in the name of a Hindu youth. Within hours, mobs looted and set fire to Hindu homes. Later, investigations revealed that the post was fabricated, marking one of Bangladesh's first major cases where social media algorithms directly fueled real-world violence. Then, in 2019, Bhola's Borhanuddin upazilla witnessed serious clashes in which four people were killed and over a hundred were injured after screenshots of alleged blasphemous messages by a Facebook user went viral. It was later found that the man's Facebook account had been hacked. Algorithms prioritising sensational content accelerated the spread, reaching thousands within minutes.

Such algorithm driven misinformation demonstrates how digital systems can manipulate human psychology, triggering mass panic and violence. Besides physical violence, algorithmic manipulation has also entered Bangladesh's financial and political systems. In 2025, numerous cases of mobile banking fraud involving Bkash and Nagad were linked to automated bots capable of predicting and exploiting transactions. These bots tricked victims into sending cash to fake accounts using AI-generated voices and messages. Additionally, deepfakes—realistic fake videos or voices—have emerged as a new criminal weapon. We have seen how fake videos of politicians and journalists went around online, aiming to damage their reputations and influence public opinion.

This rise of algorithmic crimes can be analysed through three key theoretical lenses: sociological, psychological, and biological. Sociological theories propose that crime often arises from social inequalities and a lack of community cohesion. Bangladesh's online space mirrors this lack of cohesion. These echo chambers are exacerbated by algorithms, where opposing views are rarely heard and fake news spreads like wildfire.

Strain theory says that in a struggling economy, algorithmic scams such as fake loan ads or cryptocurrency schemes can exploit people trying to make a quick profit. Algorithms are designed to manipulate human psychology. Social media platforms

trigger dopamine-driven pleasure loops that keep users addicted to outrage and sensationalism. According to the frustration-aggression theory, people who are constantly exposed to digital content that makes them angry may become aggressive in real life.

Biological theories of criminology suggest that criminal behaviour may be inherited and physiologically determined, indicating that an individual's physical characteristics and genetic makeup can incline them towards deviant behaviour. These theories also shed light on how technology reshapes the human brain. Constant exposure to algorithm-driven content alters the human brain. It may hack the brain's reward system, making it hard to distinguish between moral responsibility and online simulation.

Algorithmic crime challenges the very foundation of criminology. It demonstrates that in this modern era, crime is no longer limited to the physical world; it is automated, coded, and often imperceptible until its effects erupt. For Bangladesh, the way forward lies in combining criminological insight with technological awareness. Policymakers, educationalists, and law enforcement must view algorithmic manipulation as a social and psychological phenomenon that influences behaviour and fuels violence—rather than as merely a cyber issue—and fashion their response accordingly. Given its persistent danger, the urgency of a firm policy response cannot be overstated.