

Sexual harassment in sports must end

Probe allegations by former cricket skipper properly

We are deeply concerned by the recent allegations of sexual harassment made by former Bangladesh women's cricket team skipper Jahanara Alam against some senior members of the then team management. Allegations include inappropriate touching and remarks. Members of the sports community have rightly called for an independent inquiry and decisive action against the alleged culprits if found guilty. Meanwhile, the adviser of the youth and sports ministry has stated that the government will treat these allegations seriously and ensure "exemplary punishment" of those proven guilty, should the victim choose to pursue legal action.

It is commendable that both the sports community and the government are showing their concern on the issue, but it must be acknowledged that these reactions come after Jahanara's widely publicised interview on a YouTube channel. Male chauvinism in sports is hardly a secret in the country, where discrimination against women athletes, despite their stellar performances, has often been blatant. Recent media reports have highlighted stark disparities in pay between male and female athletes. Female athletes, moreover, often face intense misogyny from certain segments of society, as seen in the horrific cyberbullying incidents and attacks on players during matches.

Fear of repercussions, such as being dropped from the national team, and hostile behaviour from management, are key reasons why players feel hesitant to lodge complaints, which only emboldens the perpetrators. A former general secretary of the Women's Sports Association has emphasised that increasing the presence of women in coaching and management roles could help prevent such harassment. She has also suggested that female players should be accompanied only by women managers and officials during travel.

Beyond hiring and training more women for senior posts, all sports federations must take immediate steps to ensure the safety of female athletes. In addition to establishing proper official complaint mechanisms—as mandated by High Court's directives about forming complaints committees across workplaces and educational institutions—sports bodies must issue strict guidelines to members of the management and other staff regarding the code of conduct towards women athletes, with severe penalties for violations. Gender-sensitivity training should also be prioritised across all organisations.

Despite the barriers they face, women athletes—particularly in cricket and football—have demonstrated that, given the chance, they can excel and bring accolades to the country. It is about time we as a nation recognise their worth by eliminating all discriminatory practices within the sports federations and ensuring that players feel safe and supported at all times.

Razing of hills in Ctg, elsewhere must stop

Rampant hill cutting exposes deep-rooted corruption, weak enforcement

Recent media reports have revealed how illegal razing of hills continues unabated across the country, stripping it of its natural defences and ecological balance. Despite clear legal prohibitions under Sections 6(a) and 6(b) of the Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, 1995, state agencies and private actors alike are destroying hills, often without clearance from the authorities and in full public view. A recent report by this daily revealed that the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) flattened nine hills and removed over 10.14 lakh cubic feet of soil in the Ramgarh-Sitakunda reserve forest to expand a 38-kilometre road, without obtaining the environmental clearance. By the time the Department of Environment (DoE) intervened, 40 percent of the Tk 1,107 crore project was already complete. The project, occupying 90 acres of reserve forest land, is part of an initiative to facilitate cross-border trade, easing transport of goods from Chattogram port to India via the Ramgarh land port in Khagrachhari. However, it has come at the expense of a forest that shelters more than 120 species of birds and 25 species of mammals.

Similar disregard was found in Cox's Bazar's Ukhia, where the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) allegedly razed several hills for roadwork, and in Bandarban, where hill cutting near a primary school endangered students and residents alike. Furthermore, the private sector's role in environmental degradation is no less alarming. A *Prothom Alo* report found rampant hill cutting across Sylhet, with 45 percent of the district's hills now fully or partially razed. The surge is linked to administrative inaction following the political transition of August 2024, when local enforcement effectively collapsed. Another report detailed how Chattogram's Ruposhi Hill was cut and divided into plots, sold for up to Tk 30 lakh per katha.

Such activities have caused severe soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, disrupted rainfall patterns, and frequent landslides that have claimed at least 15 lives since 2022. Meanwhile, local politicians and influential businessmen, shielded by bureaucratic loopholes and shifting land classifications, have turned hill cutting into a profitable enterprise. This crisis reflects not just environmental degradation but a deep nexus of power, profit, and impunity. Without strong political will and accountability, mere legal provisions mean little.

The DoE and local administrations must halt all ongoing hill cutting, prosecute violators, and restore damaged sites through reforestation. Land classification loopholes allowing "shankholu" (barren land) misuse must be reformed, and receipt of environmental clearance must be made mandatory and publicly accessible. Bangladesh must treat hill conservation as a national priority. Satellite monitoring, inter-agency coordination, community reporting, and exemplary punishment for offenders are essential. Without enforcement and ecological restoration, the cost of each razed hill will continue to be paid in loss of living beings and the environment.

EDITORIAL

A false binary at the heart of the Chattogram port debate



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The debate surrounding the management of the Chattogram port's New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) is one of the more consequential ones in our current national discourse. On one side we have the sovereignty brigade, arguing that leasing critical national infrastructure to a foreign state-owned enterprise poses unacceptable risks to national security, strategic autonomy, and economic independence, not to mention the nation's pride and dignity. On the other, we have the efficiency technocrats, including interim government officials and international financial advisers, contending that this arrangement is critical to overcoming domestic inefficiency and corruption, attracting vital foreign direct investment, and elevating the port to global standards.

There is no denying that Chattogram port is congested, slow, and uncompetitive, imposing a direct cost on the economy. The problem is, neither of these factions is addressing the real problem. Speak to exporters, freight forwarders, or logistics managers, and a consistent picture emerges: that containers do not sit idle because the port cannot unload them, but rather because clearance is slow, discretionary, and frequently opaque. The bottleneck is not port operations; it is the Customs clearance process under the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

And so, at the risk of stating the obvious, let me put out my argument plainly. The debate surrounding NCT is fundamentally flawed. It is not a simple binary choice between inefficient public management and efficient private operation. At the heart of the matter lies the crippling bureaucratic dysfunction of Customs, which is separate from port operations. We need not rely on hypotheticals to make this point clearer. We already have a live comparison between a disciplined state operator and a foreign private operator inside the port—and the results are telling.

The Navy-run Chittagong Dry Dock Limited (CDDL) has, over the past year, delivered record performance at the port: achieving over 122,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) in a single month (August 2025), improving berth productivity, and reducing ship turnaround time to around two days. Its management approach has been characterised by clear lines of authority, predictable

operational discipline, and an absence of discretionary interference. In other words, when given operational autonomy, a state-owned operator has demonstrated that high performance is not only possible; it is already happening.

By contrast, the foreign-operated Red Sea Gateway Terminal (RSGT) has struggled to meet expectations. The promised equipment has been delayed, throughput has remained modest, and operations have been repeatedly hampered by the absence of a working Customs scanner, an issue entirely

beyond simple port operations and offers a technological, private sector solution to the very NBR-driven paralysis that is inherent in our system.

So, if this debate of sovereignty vs privatised efficiency is a false binary, what is the third alternative? The "gold standard" for an efficient, state-led port management model is the Port of Singapore, where the answer was not privatisation, but corporatisation.

In 1996, Singapore separated the Port of Singapore Authority's regulatory and commercial roles, creating the Maritime and Port Authority (MPA) as a regulator and corporatising port operations under PSA Corporation Ltd, which remains state-owned. PSA was structured to operate as a competitive, efficiency-driven enterprise, supported by business-centric IT investment, alignment between technology and strategy, flexible infrastructure, and a culture of innovation. This approach produced PORTNET, a logistics

predictable complications. The International Finance Corporation (IFC) is simultaneously advising the government on the concession while having recommended substantial tariff increases that make the port more financially attractive to foreign operators, an arrangement that raises conflict-of-interest concerns. Meanwhile, pursuing the lease through a government-to-government process rather than an open tender echoes the same procedural flaws that had led the Supreme Court to strike down a Stevedoring Services of America (SSA) bid for Patenga container terminal management as "arbitrary." Legal challenges have already begun.

This is not about ideology or foreign involvement. Bangladesh has welcomed foreign investment across sectors and should continue to do so. But a decision of this magnitude, affecting the country's principal trade artery, must be grounded in a clear diagnosis and a sustainable institutional design,



Containers at the Ctg port do not sit idle because the port cannot unload them, but rather because clearance is slow, discretionary, and frequently opaque.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

outside the operator's control.

The lesson from this comparison is not that foreign operators are incapable. It is that no operator, foreign or domestic, can perform effectively if Customs systems, clearance infrastructure, and decision-making remain opaque and unintegrated. The bottleneck is systemic, not managerial.

DP World's proposal for NCT seems to reflect a clear understanding of this reality. While meeting with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus in Davos in late January, DP World's CEO stated the company wants to invest in NCT to "reduce congestion" and "increase efficiency", but specifically proposed to "introduce a digital online Customs system" to "reduce corruption." This proposal moves

platform that became central to port efficiency. Singapore now handles over 41 million TEUs annually, and PSA has grown into a leading global terminal operator competing with the largest private firms.

This model demonstrates that state ownership can coexist with world-class commercial performance. The numbers produced by our Navy-run CDDL suggest that this strategy could be viable for us, and merits exploration at the very least. The irony here is that for a regime mandated with bringing state reform, the incumbents seem to be actively eschewing reform and targeting quick fixes. This approach is fraught with risk.

The current proposal to lease NCT to DP World is already facing sovereignty.

not based on pressure to demonstrate quick wins. Bangladesh needs a port system that supports export growth, reduces cost of trade, and competes with regional peers. That requires Customs modernisation, digital integration, and operational autonomy. Simply changing the operator addresses none of this.

So, in my view, the path forward is neither to outsource control nor to continue protecting inefficiency. It is to restructure and modernise the port system from within, learning from a model that has proven successful in precisely the context we now face. If we choose the right reforms, NCT can become a catalyst for competitiveness rather than a symbol of contested sovereignty.

How disinformation is shaping global politics



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Despite how it sounds, the "war on truth" is not a fringe claim but an existential threat to democratic governance worldwide. Looking back at 2024's over 60 general elections across the globe, it is evident that disinformation—deliberately propagated lies—has become arguably the world's single greatest threat that countries remain least equipped to address, as per the UN's 2024 Global Risk Report.

The core claim is straightforward: our current system prioritises profit over safety, enabling foreign manipulation and interference to flourish as the capacity to fake becomes ever more realistic and cheap.

The information ecosystem has been designed for engagement, not truth. Social media algorithms prioritise terrifying or provocative content for more clicks, opting for profit over anything else. This has accelerated polarisation and entrenched echo chambers.

Geopolitical weaponisation is now routine. Countries like Russia are actively intervening in democratic systems of rivals. Organised efforts, for instance, targeted the 2024 United States election. Earlier this year, the US sanctioned the Moscow-based Centre for Geopolitical Expertise—linked to the GRU—for deploying AI to rapidly disseminate disinformation and for blending a video to insult a 2024 US vice-presidential candidate.

The pursuit of profit over people has had disastrous impacts. The threat's magnitude is stark: false political news travels 70 percent faster than factual news, and false stories get six times more "impressions" than verified information. Fueling this imbalance

well-organised groups the power to selectively shape narratives, and further emboldens malicious actors who already profit from exposure-based monetisation and weak moderation.

Given how often these campaigns are state-sponsored, the response must also be systemic and global, focusing on structural reform.

Countries, therefore, must

Since disinformation is engineered for manipulation, the best defence is psychological. We need strong digital literacy and critical thinking programmes. One of the most effective proactive strategies is pre-bunking, rooted in psychological inoculation, which involves warning people in advance about common manipulative tactics (fearmongering, scapegoating, etc) before they encounter false narratives.

example, imposes fines of up to six percent of a very large online platform's annual global revenue if obligations are breached—an essential incentive given current profit models.

Disrupting foreign interference also requires dismantling the infrastructure that supports it; first, by cutting funding pathways, including crypto-based money laundering. Second, logistical platforms used for covert coordination, like Telegram and Yandex, should be scrutinised and regulated.

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Responding to the intentional degradation of truth must be a collective project led by governments, the private sector, and citizens. We cannot allow ourselves to be paralysed by the false argument that regulating digital harms equates to prohibiting free speech. Safeguarding and restoring democracy now requires us to recognise and respond to disinformation so that an informed public can choose to reject it. The time to act and demand global accountability from the systems that spread lies is now.