

What’s happening at Dhaka airport is a symptom of deeper rot



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There are few places in a country that so completely represent its image as an airport. It is both a threshold and a mirror, reflecting not just the physical state of a nation but the moral tone of its institutions. For Bangladesh, Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) has long stood as that symbolic gateway—the first and last impression for millions who travel in and out of the country each year. Yet, what should have been a showcase of national pride has instead turned into a gallery of recurring scandals, thefts, fires, and failures. The latest wave of incidents exposes a deeper truth: the crisis at HSIA is not merely about stolen luggage or lapses in vigilance, but about the systemic rot corroding Bangladesh's culture of public accountability.

The cargo village fire, the theft of firearms from a strongroom, the Ansar member stealing 15 mobile phones, the pillering of foreign currency from passengers, and the daily reports of missing baggage are not isolated incidents. They form part of a broader continuum of decay. According to data from the airport's lost and found department, an average of three luggage thefts are reported every day, amounting to over 500 incidents in six months. If we include unreported cases, the real figure could be significantly higher. Each missing suitcase tells a story not just of loss, but of a system unable or unwilling to protect its own citizens and guests.

For an airport handling over 80 lakh passengers annually, the issue is



FILE PHOTO: COLLECTED

‘Every act of theft, every fire, every lost suitcase at the HSIA erodes the fragile bond between citizen and state.’

not just about individual delinquency but institutional dysfunction. A place that should operate with the precision of clockwork instead runs on improvisation, patronage, and opportunism. The most alarming aspect of these crimes is that they are often committed by those entrusted to prevent them. When custodians of order turn into predators, the problem ceases to be about law

enforcement—it becomes a moral epidemic.

Every airport has its share of human error, but when thefts occur with such regularity and within high-security zones under surveillance cameras, it indicates complicity across multiple layers. The term “syndicate” is not used lightly. These are organised rings, enabled

But such denial misses the point. Individual dishonesty thrives only where collective indifference permits it.

The airport, by its nature, concentrates multiple agencies, such as customs, security forces, airlines, immigration, and logistics. Where responsibilities overlap without coordination, accountability

at the cargo village revealed even darker layers. The breaking of the strongroom and the disappearance of firearms after the blaze showed not merely opportunism but audacity. It raised an alarming question: if weapons can be stolen from a high-security storage area, what assurance remains for passengers and foreign airlines about the safety of cargo and personnel?

Globally, airport thefts are treated as serious breaches of national security. Singapore's Changi or Dubai International—handling many times HSIA's traffic—maintain near-zero tolerance policies backed by real-time surveillance, centralised accountability, and immediate suspension protocols. In Bangladesh, by contrast, the issue often descends into reactive measures: suspensions after media coverage, arrests after political pressure, and cosmetic reforms following public outcry. The absence of sustained institutional correction ensures that scandals repeat with seasonal regularity.

Underlying all this is a culture of low consequence. Suppose, if a passenger loses luggage worth Tk 70,000, the individual receives compensation capped by outdated international conventions that barely cover the loss. When employees are caught stealing, they are dismissed or briefly detained, but the chain behind them remains untouched. The same officers reappear in new uniforms, new departments, or under new titles. In such a cycle, wrongdoing becomes routine.

The economic implications are no less significant. Every lost bag and stolen item diminishes confidence among foreign travellers, expatriate workers, and airlines. Reputational damage, though intangible, carries heavy costs. Foreign carriers are increasingly cautious about ground handling at HSIA. Insurance premiums for freight and cargo rise when risk perception grows. Tourists, investors, and development

partners—all interpret such chaos as a reflection of broader governance challenges. An airport is often a nation's first impression, but for Bangladesh, it risks becoming a cautionary tale.

Fixing this crisis demands more than cosmetic reform. Surveillance cameras and uniformed guards cannot replace institutional integrity. The solution must begin with depoliticising airport management and professionalising its workforce. Recruitment should prioritise merit and ethics over connections. Each incident must trigger not just disciplinary but systemic review. Equally vital is inter-agency accountability. The division of duties among the Civil Aviation Authority, Biman Bangladesh Airlines, and law enforcement must be redefined with measurable outcomes. The baggage-handling process should be fully traceable from check-in to claim, using modern digital tagging systems as practised in most international airports. Independent audits of cargo and security operations should be mandatory, and findings made public. Only through transparency can public confidence be rebuilt.

Yet perhaps the greatest reform lies not in machinery but in mindset. For decades, public service in Bangladesh has been treated as an entitlement rather than a responsibility. Changing this culture will require moral leadership. The stain at the nation's gateway is not indelible, but it will not vanish through denial or temporary punishment. It demands an admission that the problem is systemic, not sporadic. Every act of theft, every fire, every lost suitcase erodes the fragile bond between citizen and state. Restoring that bond will take more than policy directives. It will take courage, vigilance, and the will to confront the ghosts within the mustard—those entrenched interests feeding off the nation's carelessness.

Old habits die hard? BNP’s response

Prof Dr Moudud Hossain Alamgir Pavel is convener of the media cell of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Dr Abdullah Al Mamun is chairman of Democracy Dias Bangladesh.

MOUDUD HOSSAIN ALAMGIR PAVEL and ABDULLAH AL-MAMUN

An opinion piece titled “BNP’s notes of dissent show that old habits die hard,” published on October 29, 2025, in *The Daily Star*, has caught our attention. We appreciate the author’s attempt; however, it could be construed as if BNP has outright opposed state reforms by the interim government. The fact remains that the party has submitted notes of dissent to some proposals in July National Charter that it deems exaggerated and amendable in BNP’s terms. Moreover, as BNP stated, it would include its entire reform proposals in its election manifesto so that voters could understand the length and breadth of the reform package and give their verdict. Therefore, we do not see how BNP’s “old habits die hard.”

In the article, the author has apparently discussed four issues to justify his claim about BNP. It would have been better if the author had also presented the party’s arguments supporting its decisions. In this article, we have tried to summarise BNP’s position on those four issues.

Upper house formation and PR concerns

BNP had proposed forming an upper house to enrich the nation with the input of experienced citizens in its 31-point reform plan on the basis of proportionate seats in the lower house of parliament. Nonetheless, the party objects to the proposal for creating an upper house via PR based on national vote share. BNP doubts this upper house formation because it thinks that if the formation follows the PR system, this process can be used as a political weapon. Furthermore, BNP thinks that this institution of a PR-based upper chamber would just create a “sitting duck” or threat for the lower chamber, only delaying the lower chamber’s work.

Prime minister’s tenure

BNP supports the proposal of limiting a person’s tenure as prime minister to a maximum of 10 years in their lifetime, but expressed reservations about the proposed constitutional appointment committee, or National Constitutional Council (NCC). According to BNP, it may significantly disrupt the executive power in an irregular way, and also reduce the prime minister’s power, which is not a healthy exercise for a democratic country. Another reason is that the transparency and accountability of this constitutional committee cannot be determined so easily. If they are corrupt, and if executive power is not the source of all powers, then it will be a big threat to the country’s political stability. Here, BNP wants reforms in the existing laws regarding the appointments of constitutional institutions. These laws must include provisions for determining search committees to ensure that executive influence is avoided in the appointment process. To address this issue, BNP suggests that for institutions without existing laws, new laws should be enacted. For those with existing laws, amendments should be made. This will help ensure the checks and balances of power in the state.

Formation of National Constitutional Council (NCC)

According to BNP, the NCC would have created a diarchy, and the power of the prime minister would have been reduced, threatening the democratic system. Apart from that, BNP pointed out that under the NCC, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) cannot exercise its highest power. Also, BNP doubted that if NCC were implemented, then the judiciary would be crippled, and the implementation of the rule of law would not be easy.

Article 70

BNP proposes that members of parliament can independently exercise their voting power, even if it is not aligned with their party, except in instances of national security, fiscal legislation, no-confidence motions and constitutional amendments. BNP believes that the proposed amendment in July charter would overpower the

opposition party and significantly increase the risk of an unstable government, the cost of which the country cannot bear.

Does BNP not want the execution of the charter? The party has signed the charter in compliance with the government’s proposals. But it believes the February election issue should be at the forefront to elect a government that will implement the provisions of the charter duly, including major constitutional matters, to ensure the government’s accountability. BNP has even accepted the government’s move to hold a referendum on the July National Charter issue. Tarique Rahman, in his recent interviews with global media, has made it clear that the party, if voted to power, will do the needful to materialise the July charter as agreed. Moreover, many aspects of the charter align with BNP’s 31-point of reform. So, those will easily be implemented.

We believe that the biggest “reform” the nation needs is a credible election, which has already been delayed, causing economic and social stagnation, and ordinary people of the country are paying the price. Surprisingly, though, this underlying issue at this defining moment is being ignored and bypassed. People’s desire was well-reflected in a survey of Innovision Consulting published in February 2025. The survey results revealed that 58.1 percent of voters wanted the next national election before the end of 2025. Out of that 58.1 percent, 31.6 percent wanted it in June 2025, and 26.5 percent wanted the election in December 2025. Therefore, it is important for us to take a careful position and not to fuel a narrative that BNP is an anti-reformist party and only wants elections, when a democratic transition through a credible election has become very critical for the country.

We believe BNP will remain fully committed to implementing the July National Charter with a dream of fulfilling its own 31 well-knit points. Besides, BNP’s political history and previous terms as a ruling party reveal a proven track record of working for democracy and people’s welfare. It is BNP’s “old habits” to work for the people, and those habits definitely die hard.

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND PUBLIC WORKS
URBAN DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE
82, SEGUNBAGICHA, DHAKA-1000
Website: www.udd.gov.bd

Memo No. 25.45.00000.000.002.14.0006.25-03Date: 12 November 25

Request for Expression of Interest (Eoi) for Services of
Image Acquisition, Processing and Interpretation for "Strategic Plan for Munshiganj District Project"

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH				
1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Housing and Public Works (MoHPW).		
2	Agency	Urban Development Directorate (UDD)		
3	Procuring Entity Name	Project Director, Preparation of Strategic Plan for Munshiganj District		
4	Procuring Entity Code	1320401		
5	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka		
6	Expression of Interest for Selection of	Consulting Firm	Assignment based	
7	Eoi Ref No	25.45.00000.000.002.14.0006.25 Note 14.0		
8	Date	12 November 25		
KEY INFORMATION				
9	Procurement Method	Selection under a Fixed Budget (SFB)		
FUNDING INFORMATION				
10	Budget and Source of Funds	Development Budget	GoB	
11	Development Partners	N/A		
PARTICULAR INFORMATION				
12	Project/Program Code	222020300		
13	Project/Program Name	Preparation of Strategic Plan for Munshiganj District		
14	Eoi Closing Date and Time	27 November 25; Time: 10:30 AM		
INFORMATION FOR APPLICANT				
16	Brief Description of Assignment	Image Acquisition, Processing and Interpretation for "Strategic Plan for Munshiganj District Project": (1) Procurement of satellite image (0.3 m Resolution) 3_D Satellite Image new Acquisition, Image Processing and Geo-referencing, (2) TBM installation, (3) Stereo (3D) Urban area digitization, (4) Stereo (3D) Rural settlement digitization, (5) Stereo (3D) digitization: Agriculture, wetland and forest, (6) DEM preparation		
17	Experience, Resources and Delivery Capacity Required	a. Firms with specific experience of 5 years. b. Required hardware (RTK GPS) and licensed software [Survey data processing (GPS data Processing Software, etc.), GIS (Arc GIS) and Photogrammetric (Photogrammetric stereo Image processing Software) and other related original software]. c. Related Experience (Photogrammetric mapping by using 3D work station etc.) d. Resources (office space, financial and managerial strength, computer and other logistics) e. Related professionals (GIS/RS Specialist, Photogrammetric Expert, Land Use Analyst) and 3D GIS support staffs.		
18	Other Details	Interested consulting Firms are hereby invited to submit Eoi containing printed brochures (showing organizational identity and background), legal documents showing managerial and financial standing (according to PPA 2006 and PPR 2025), Staffing and inventory of resources and logistics confirming the firm's capabilities to provide the required services.		
19	Association with foreign firms is	Not Encouraged		
20	Ref No	Phasing of Services	Location	Indicative Start Date
	25.45.00000.000.002.14.0006.25 Note 14.0	Not phased	Munshiganj District	January, 2026
				July, 2026
PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS				
21	Name of Official Inviting Eoi	Magsud Hashem		
22	Designation of Official Inviting Eoi	Senior Planner Urban Development Directorate		
23	Address of Official Inviting Eoi	Room # 509, Urban Development Directorate 82, Segunbagicha, Dhaka - 1000		
24	Contact details of Official Inviting Eoi	Phone no: 01711937013		
25	The Procuring entity reserves the right to reject all EOIs			

GD-2411

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