

Weak policing driving crime

Reform and revitalise police, abandon political patronage of criminals

Crime has been surging over the last few months. Police's own records show 915 murder cases all over the country in the last three months, averaging more than 10 murders a day, according to a report in The Daily Star. These are horrifying statistics and should deeply worry the government that has come to power with a mandate to bring about, among other things, peace and order in the country.

During the post-uprising period, many top criminals returned to the scene, while illegal firearms were smuggled in. Besides, many stolen weapons had not been retrieved. These criminals have now become emboldened further by weak policing, political rivalries, and factional feuds, which provide them with "jobs" that pay generously.

Targeted killings, some in broad daylight, have created an atmosphere of fear among citizens. On June 13, Jubo Dal leader Masudul Haque Chowdhury was gunned down in broad daylight by several armed men at a crowded market in Chattogram's Raozan upazila. CCTV footage showed the boldness with which they arrived at the scene, scaring off the crowd by firing shots in the air. Raozan is now known as a "terror zone" among its residents. Muggings, too, have increased, leading to severe injuries or even death. Only a few days ago, a woman was mugged in front of Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital in Dhaka and later died from the injuries she sustained when muggers tried to snatch her bag, making her fall from the rickshaw she was on. Dhaka seems to be the crime capital, recording the highest number of murders—207 cases—followed by Chattogram, Rajshahi, and Khulna. Certain residential areas, such as Mohammadpur, have become dens for gangs to operate in.

Since May 1, police have arrested 18,000 people under a special drive, but this has done little to improve the law and order situation. Why is that? It is because all the factors that have allowed criminals to thrive continue to exist. More than 1,000 stolen firearms are still missing; firearms are still smuggled in; and criminals continue to operate freely, often under political patronage. Many criminals released after August 2024 have reclaimed their territory, rebuilding their networks and continuing crimes, which include taking revenge on rival gangs. But often, no arrests are being made. According to Human Rights Support Society, there have been 64 incidents of political violence in May, leaving five people dead and 289 injured. In April, there were 98 incidents with six dead and 533 injured. Many of these incidents involved BNP men.

Experts have reiterated that unless the police force is reorganised and reformed, and political patronage of criminals abandoned, law and order will persist in this precarious state. The government should heed such advice and immediately take steps to revitalise the police force through necessary reforms and give clear directives to clamp down on crime without being influenced by anyone.

Dolphin deaths must be investigated

Stronger response needed to address environmental stressors affecting biodiversity

We are deeply saddened and alarmed by the news that some 140 dolphins have washed up on Kuakata's beaches over the past nine years, with four found dead so far this year alone. The estimate is unofficial and comes from a volunteer group that tracks dolphin strandings in the area. The actual numbers are expected to be higher, which should raise alarm bells, as this may signal deteriorating health in our coastal and marine ecosystems.

The absence of an official estimate is itself unacceptable, given that dolphins are protected under the Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act. The lack of an official figure suggests ambivalence at best and negligence at worst—neither of which reflects well on the relevant authorities. Given dolphins' status as marine wildlife, they should be a concern for both the forest and fisheries departments; however, experts argue that a lack of institutional clarity often prevents the establishment of processes that would allow the causes of death to be scientifically determined and enable possible rescue and rehabilitation work.

The latest of the dead was a 10-foot Irrawaddy dolphin, and the reasons behind the animal's death remain speculative. One suspected cause of dolphin deaths is entrapment in fishing nets, from which the animals cannot resurface to breathe or are freed too late to survive. Many of the carcasses have deep wounds and injury marks, with ship propeller strikes often cited as the second leading suspected cause of dolphin deaths.

Stranded marine animals along our shores are, unfortunately, not a new phenomenon. In April this year, three dolphins and three sea turtles washed ashore dead within a period of two weeks, suggesting that other, more complex factors may be at play, including the use of poison in coastal fishing operations, microplastic pollution, warmer water temperatures, underwater noise, and food shortages. These concerns come amid broader signs of stress in the marine environment, with declining fish yields in recent years. However, it is impossible to know just what is killing the marine life without scientific observation, which the authorities haven't been able to do due to the lack of laboratories equipped to carry out necropsy procedures.

We call on the government to adopt a more coordinated approach to protecting marine life, especially dolphins, whose death rate is already feared to outpace their reproductive rate. There should be a clear protocol for responding to animal strandings, and authorities must strengthen community awareness to reduce accidental deaths. Dolphins are widely regarded as indicators of marine ecosystem health. Therefore, a dedicated effort is needed to unearth what is killing these wonderfully intelligent animals, as the answers may contain warnings about our marine habitat and inform future conservation and economic strategies.

Benazir's arrest only the start of the state's accountability test



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Benazir Ahmed's arrest in Dubai is significant in that it marks an important first step in a much longer pursuit of accountability. Bangladesh has secured the detention of the former inspector general of police who, for years, represented the frightening fusion of coercive state power, political patronage, and impunity under the ousted Awami League regime. But if the government treats this as a triumph rather than the start of a difficult legal battle, the country may again mistake motion for justice. Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed recently told parliament that Bangladesh received confirmation of Benazir's arrest from the UAE authorities on June 12, 2026, and that a formal extradition request must be submitted within 30 days from the date of arrest. Completing the necessary legal, diplomatic, and administrative measures successfully is now the real test.

The public should be clear about what has happened in this case. An Interpol red notice is a request to locate and provisionally arrest a wanted person pending extradition or similar legal action; Interpol itself says it is an international alert, not an arrest warrant, and each member country decides what legal value to give it. This distinction matters because Bangladesh's political class has an old habit of converting legal processes into slogans. A red notice may get a fugitive stopped at an airport; it does not bring him to Dhaka, convict him, recover his assets, or vindicate his victims. Those outcomes require evidence, admissible records, diplomatic credibility, and a justice system that foreign courts can trust.

That is why Benazir's arrest should humble, not intoxicate, the state. The final decision on his return rests with the UAE judiciary, so Bangladesh must demonstrate that the cases against him are legitimate criminal proceedings, not instruments of political vendetta, while also showing that he will receive a fair trial. If the case file is sloppy, if the charges are theatrically overextended,

if due process is sacrificed to political appetite, the defence will not need to invent a persecution argument—Dhaka will have supplied it.

The justice question is broader than unexplained wealth. Benazir was not merely another public servant accused of living beyond known means. He was also a former director general of RAB, an institution the US Treasury sanctioned in 2021 over serious human rights abuses, naming Benazir among former RAB leaders designated in that action. If Bangladesh brings him back



FILE ILLUSTRATION: BIPOLOB CHAKROBORTY

only to litigate property schedules while avoiding the architecture of coercion he had helped command, it will send a cynical message: looted money deserves files and warrants, but enforced disappearance, torture, and extrajudicial killing can be buried under selective anti-corruption theatre.

The asset recovery lesson is equally severe. Handcuffs do not repatriate money. The ACC has already secured domestic preservation orders including court orders covering properties under 83 deeds, stating 114 acres of land, and the freezing of 33 bank accounts in

transaction maps, identify beneficial owners, obtain bank records, preserve digital evidence, engage competent domestic and foreign counsel with expertise in the relevant fields of national and international law, and file requests that meet the standards of the requested jurisdiction. Inflated rhetoric will not survive cross-examination in a foreign court.

This is especially important because the present government has placed laundered asset recovery at the centre of its strategy to combat corruption, money laundering, and financial crimes. In early April, Prime Minister

Tarique Rahman told parliament, citing the interim government's white paper committee, that \$234 billion was siphoned abroad between 2009 and 2023, averaging \$16 billion annually. That figure may be politically explosive, and convincing, but to recover assets, courts need provable links between predicate offences, money flows, and property. The larger the allegation, the greater the burden on Bangladesh to show that it is building defensible cases, not merely narrating plunder.

There is at least an institutional skeleton. As per the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit, an Inter-Agency Task Force on Stolen Asset Recovery and Management was restructured in September 2024, chaired by the Bangladesh Bank governor and including the ACC, CID, Attorney General's Office, NBR bodies, foreign ministry, home ministry, and others. In March, the incumbent governor asked banks to accelerate work with global litigation firms and provide data, while legal experts warned that recovering laundered money can take three to five years. That timeline is unpopular, but it is more honest than the fantasy that stolen assets will return because a fugitive is arrested in Dubai.

The darkest risk here is selectivity. Many Bangladeshis accused of siphoning off wealth were not lone criminals; they thrived through the collusion of bank boards, regulators, land registries, passport offices, tax authorities, politically protected lenders, and legal fixers. If Benazir becomes the sacrificial spectacle while new networks of influence quietly inherit the old privileges, then the arrest will cleanse nothing. The government cannot credibly promise asset recovery while protecting friendly defaulters, favoured money launderers, or politically convenient financiers. Anti-corruption without institutional self-criticism is only regime change with better public relations.

Benazir's arrest offers Bangladesh a rare opening. It can demonstrate that even one of the most powerful former security officials can be brought within the law, that stolen assets can be pursued through disciplined international cooperation, and that victims of state abuse will not be erased by narrow financial prosecution. Or, it can squander this moment through haste, incompetence, and selective justice. Bangladesh has a chance to prove it knows how to end impunity.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR COUNTERING HATE SPEECH

Countering online hate speech needs a collective response



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Consider what happened to dozens of women across Bangladesh during the political transition of 2024. Photographs were taken from their social media profiles, digitally altered to place their faces on explicit imagery, and spread widely online. Fabricated stories about their personal lives circulated through WhatsApp groups in their home communities. Threats flooded their inboxes. Many stopped posting. Some withdrew from public roles entirely.

This is technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV): the deliberate use of digital tools to intimidate, humiliate, and exclude. According to the National Violence Against Women Survey 2024, more than five out of every hundred Bangladeshi women reported experiencing it. Among women aged 20 to 24, that figure rises to one in six.

The methods follow a recognisable pattern. Deepfakes (digitally altered images or videos that make it appear someone said or did something they never said or did) destroy reputations. Coordinated trolling, where organised groups flood a target's accounts with abuse, makes online engagement feel impossible. Sexualised smear campaigns spread false, sexually explicit content to drive people offline permanently. These tools are deployed strategically against women who have

stepped into public life, in politics, journalism, activism, or civic society.

The aim is to make a public voice feel too costly. Around Bangladesh's 13th national election in February 2026, researchers documented that more than 74 percent of online misinformation was politically motivated, and one in six posts surveyed contained hate speech. This is organised pressure, designed to shape who gets to participate in public life.

The consequences extend well beyond the screen. When someone is publicly humiliated online, the damage follows them offline: into their community, their workplace, their family. Evidence from across Bangladesh shows that online hatred frequently precedes and accompanies physical intimidation and violence, particularly around elections. When targeted groups are effectively silenced, democracy loses the very diversity of voices that it depends on.

Bangladesh is navigating this challenge at a pivotal moment, and its government is leading the response. Through the Cyber Security Ordinance, 2025 and the forthcoming National AI Policy 2026-2030, the country is building the legal architecture for a safer digital environment. The United Nations in Bangladesh supports this national agenda, drawing on the UN

secretary-general's 2019 plan of action on hate speech, a global framework that commits the entire UN system to understand, prevent, and respond to speech that incites discrimination, hostility, or violence, while protecting legitimate expression. This effort is also embedded in the UN's gender equality action plan political strategy, which calls for coordinated action against hate speech and disinformation as part of the commitment to women's rights and equal participation.

Beyond targeting individuals, misinformation and disinformation erode the social fabric. Misinformation is inaccurate content spread without deliberate intent; disinformation is deliberately fabricated to deceive. Both spread far faster online than corrections do. In Bangladesh, false stories about religious and ethnic minorities have repeatedly circulated ahead of elections and public events, stoking fear and suspicion between communities. When people cannot distinguish fact from fabrication, hostility fills the gap, and what begins online surfaces in neighbourhoods, at polling stations, and sometimes in violence.

This year marks the fifth International Day for Countering Hate Speech, themed "The power of partnerships," and Bangladesh is putting that principle into practice. No single actor can solve this alone. The government sets the agenda; the UN contributes data, expertise, and convening power to bring together actors who would not otherwise coordinate. Together, they work to align laws like the Cyber Security Ordinance, 2025 and the forthcoming National AI Policy 2026-2030 with international human rights standards, so that measures against hate

speech cannot be misused to silence journalists or suppress dissent.

In practice, this partnership supports protection for those most at risk—women politicians, journalists, human rights defenders, and minority activists—through digital security assistance, legal referrals, and psychosocial support for those already targeted. It also means ensuring women have a voice in cybersecurity policymaking, because when they are absent, the resulting policies tend to overlook the specific ways women are targeted online.

That is why others must join in this effort. Media organisations need to examine practices that amplify harmful content in the pursuit of engagement. Technology companies must invest in content moderation in Bangla and Bangladesh's indigenous languages. Regulatory authorities need the mandate and capacity to act before incitement turns into violence. Even civil society and youth movements have a critical role in refusing to normalise harassment as the price of participation.

Bangladesh's political transition has opened new civic space, already under pressure from organised efforts to silence and exclude. The cost of inaction is measured in women who withdraw from public life, minorities who do not report abuse, journalists who self-censor, and the erosion of trust that healthy societies require.

Making online spaces safer is not about restricting speech. It is about ensuring that everyone, regardless of gender, religion, or ethnicity, can exercise the freedom to speak without fear. That is not a secondary concern. It is the foundation on which democratic participation and sustainable development depend.