Police and media have no right to shame detainees



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FILE VISUAL: **STAR**

A police outpost stood barely 30 yards from a house in Purbachal where "drug parties" had apparently been held for nearly a year. The house belonged to a senior police officer. When detectives finally raided it early Tuesday, October 20, 85 people—26 women and 59 men—were detained and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment.

Thanks to the broadcast of the raid and the disclosure of the backgrounds of these otherwise affluent detainees by a section of the media, the episode has since generated considerable curiosity on social media. Ideally, the questions following such a raid should have concerned the police and the alleged offences: what the police knew, why the gatherings and DJ parties went unchecked for so long if they were being held illegally, and what evidence justified the sentences imposed. Some of the media coverage, however, turned elsewhere: Who were their fathers? Where did they study, work, or live? These personal details along with the footage, supplied by the officers themselves, established nothing about the alleged offences. Yet, such public exposure and shaming of people caught in police operations have become routine, both among law enforcers and in sections of the media, despite repeated High Court directives against parading detainees before cameras.

The Daily Star found that residents often saw cars outside the Purbachal property and heard loud music late at night. Local police acknowledged knowing about the gatherings but denied prior knowledge of drug-related activities. Officers of the Detective Branch (DB), however, alleged that 20 to 22 parties were held monthly, accusing the property's owner, Additional DIG Abdullah Al Jahir, of obtaining profits from them. Jahir, however, disputed the allegations, saying he had rented out the premises for private functions and prohibited drugs.

DB's limited seizure list, however, raised questions about the police accounts of widespread drug consumption, especially given that the nearly three-hour raid led to the detention of 85 people. Among the items recovered were one yaba tablet, some bottles of liquor, and a small quantity of a substance described as "kush". When asked, investigators claimed the participants had already consumed drugs before the arrival of officers. That explanation warrants scrutiny alongside the evidence and procedures underpinning the summary proceedings. Limited physical recovery alone does not establish that the sentences were unjustified, but how each sentence was reached, why "unlawful" gatherings went unchecked for so long, or whether the police followed due process during the raid are matters of public interest.

The test for the media, meanwhile, is straightforward. Did the coverage establish what evidence supported the sentences, how the premises were supervised, and whether anyone received preferential treatment? These questions need documents and verification, not pictures or videos sensationalising the raid. Yes, naming someone convicted of an offence can serve the public interest. A person's identity, family connections, or place of employment may help verify information or uncover a wider network of wrongdoing. But these details do not deserve publication merely because they are readily available. If a relative of the detainees participated in wrongdoing or an employer helped conceal it, that is a story worth investigating. Without such evidence, why should their identities enter a crime report?

A person's identity, family connections, or place of employment may help verify information or uncover a wider network of wrongdoing. But these details do not deserve publication merely because they are readily available. If a relative of the detainees participated in wrongdoing or an employer helped conceal it, that is a story worth investigating. Without such evidence, why should their identities enter a crime report?

For police, their responsibility begins before anything reaches a newsroom. Officers control a scene, determine who can enter, and have custody of those detained. This puts them in a position of power, making it particularly important that they ensure the dignity and privacy of detainees. Journalists can observe police operations, but no one should be compelled to uncover their face for a camera. Unfortunately, this distinction was also disregarded during an August raid at a residential hotel in Abdullahpur, where video footage showed female officers trying to uncover detained women's faces. One woman was crying, and an officer was seen threatening violence if the women kept their faces covered.

The practice extends beyond cameras brought by journalists, however. A September investigation by *Prothom Alo* identified 107 Facebook accounts run by police officers. Videos posted there, showing encounters with members of the public, attracted large audiences. But under Article 10.12 of the Bangladesh Police Social Media Use Guidelines 2025, officers cannot post photographs or videos of their operations without prior approval. Police Headquarters, in the same report, acknowledged violations and said action had been taken against some officers. It remains unclear how consistently such violations are detected and addressed, particularly when they attract little public attention.

In 2012, the High Court directed law enforcers not to expose arrested or detained people before the media, describing such conduct as illegal and unconstitutional. In 2015, it asked the police chief to stop presenting accused persons before cameras prior to their court appearances. A 2019 ruling called for regulations governing the presentation of detainees and the disclosure of information while investigations are under way. The constitution also points in the same direction: Article 31 protects people against actions detrimental to their reputation except in accordance with law, while Article 39 guarantees freedom of the press, subject to restrictions provided by law. Importantly, these interventions concern the treatment and exposure of detainees by law enforcers; they do not amount to a ban on reporting arrests, investigations, etc.

In fact, filming police operations can sometimes be essential. Video evidence can expose an unlawful search, an assault, or a misleading official account. Where influence has been used to obstruct justice, identifying those responsible can be essential to accountability. The question here is not whether cameras should be present at a crime scene, but what they record, who controls access to the footage, and what editors choose to publish. The Society of Professional Journalists' code makes it clear that journalists' ethical responsibilities go beyond what they can legally obtain and broadcast. Producers choose the footage, digital editors select the clips and thumbnails, and news editors decide whether to name relatives or employers. Each has a responsibility to ask whether a certain detail advances the public's understanding or merely satisfies curiosity.

That said, failings along that line must not become a pretext for giving the state new powers over journalism. Such powers could just as easily be used to suppress footage exposing official abuse. The answer lies instead in enforcing professional standards within news platforms, explaining difficult editorial decisions, and correcting errors across videos and social media posts, not just in written articles. Police Headquarters should also publish clear procedures governing camera access during raids but, at the same time, take responsibility for how they investigate and discipline officers who violate existing instructions.

The questions raised by the Purbachal raid remain, and the police must answer them. As for journalists, they must think what purpose their disclosure of detainees' faces and personal details—especially those of women—served. Did these help uncover wrongdoing, or did they simply turn people in police custody into objects of public humiliation? If they added nothing to the public's understanding of the alleged offences, why were they necessary? We cannot demand accountability from the police while refusing to account for our own editorial decisions.

A trillion-dollar economy sounds good, but it must benefit the people



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A few months ago, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman said that the BNP-led government is working to transform Bangladesh into a trillion-dollar economy by 2034. Bangladeshis have heard ambitious promises before. During the Awami League government's tenure, Sheikh Hasina also spoke of making Bangladesh a trillion-dollar economy and a fully developed Smart Bangladesh by 2041. As a matter of fact, Bangladesh became a lower-middle-income country in 2015. The question, therefore, is not simply how large Bangladesh's economy becomes, but how much that growth improves the lives of ordinary people.

During the Awami League period, Bangladesh recorded impressive GDP growth. But this did not create enough decent jobs for a young and growing population. Between 2013 and 2017, GDP grew by an average of 6.6 percent a year, while employment grew by only about 0.9 percent a year. Economists described this as "jobless growth". Employment elasticity also declined from 0.54 during 1995-2000 to 0.25 during 2010-2018, showing how slowly job creation responded to economic growth.

The benefits of growth were also unevenly shared. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2016, the income share of the richest 5 percent rose from 24.61 percent in 2010 to 27.89 percent in 2016. During the same period, the share of the poorest 5 percent fell sharply from 0.78 percent to just 0.23 percent. This is why many ordinary people feel disconnected from politicians' celebration of GDP growth or rising per capita income. For an ordinary citizen struggling to pay rent, buy food, send their children to school, or deal with expensive medical costs, a higher GDP figure means little unless it visibly improves their quality of life.

A 2025 survey by the Power and Participation Research Centre estimated that 27.93 percent of the population was living below the upper poverty line, while 9.35 percent was living in extreme poverty. The situation is also being made worse by high living costs and pressure on household incomes.

Food security remains another serious concern. The 2026 Global Hunger Index found that 8.2 percent of Bangladesh's population was undernourished, while 24 percent of children under five were stunted. Unicef has also reported that two in every three children under five in Bangladesh face child food poverty. More recently, the Food and Agriculture Organization reported that about 1.81 crore people are projected to face high levels of acute food insecurity between September and December 2026.

Housing, water, and sanitation remain major challenges. According to various reports from 2019, more than 50 lakh people in Bangladesh have no homes to live in. According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2019, 74.87 percent of families live in permanent mud houses, while only 4.95 percent of households have pucca buildings. Another 2.13 percent of people reside in slums and makeshift mud houses. The World Bank says 6.83 crore people lack safely managed drinking water, while 10.3 crore people lack safely managed sanitation facilities.



FILE VISUAL: **REHNUMA PROSHOON**

Meanwhile, more than seven crore people are employed in Bangladesh, but around 85 percent of them are engaged in the informal sector, where wages are low, jobs are insecure, and there is no social protection. The number of unemployed people in the country stands at around 27.3 lakh as per the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) data for 2025. An International Monetary Fund report published in 2026 noted that unemployment among highly educated young people in Bangladesh is around 36 percent.

It is unfortunate that, since independence, governments have come and gone, but ordinary citizens continue to struggle with the same basic problems.

BNP won the February 2026 election and Tarique Rahman became prime minister with a clear opportunity to present a different model of governance. Having spent many years in the United Kingdom, he has had the opportunity to observe how a developed country manages public services, healthcare, education, housing, transport, social protection, and institutions. It is therefore understandable that people expect his experience abroad to be reflected in his approach to state-building at home. Of course, no one expects Bangladesh to become a developed country overnight, as building effective institutions and public services takes time. But people do expect to see evidence that the government is moving in the right direction.

This is where the government could have made a visible difference through a few practical pilot projects. For example, our public hospitals are in dire straits, so why not transform at least one into a genuine model hospital, with modern equipment, clean facilities, proper nursing standards and reliable services? Similarly, why not develop affordable flats of 300 to 500 square feet for low-income families in selected areas? Why not turn one public school, college, or university into a model institution with modern classrooms, libraries, laboratories, playgrounds, and research facilities? Of course, such projects would not solve the country's problems overnight. But they would show people that change is possible and that the government is serious about delivering it.

People do not oppose ambitious economic goals, but they want to see the benefits of growth reflected in their own lives as well. That is why the government's performance cannot be judged by economic targets alone. Law and order are equally important. In the first eight months of 2026, police recorded 14,602 incidents of violence against women and children, while Ain o Salish Kendra reported that 254 children died in various forms of violence during the same period. Such figures are a reminder that economic progress has little meaning if people do not feel safe. The attack, looting, and demolition of the Radda MCH-FP Centre in Mirpur and a studio at ECB Chattar attacked and ransacked are troubling examples. For ordinary citizens, this is not an abstract issue of governance, but about whether the state can protect a public-serving institution and enforce the law.

Therefore, the lesson for the government is simple. Bangladesh does not need another development slogan. It needs visible results that ordinary people can see and feel in their daily lives. A trillion-dollar economy should not be measured only by the size of GDP, but by the quality of life it creates.