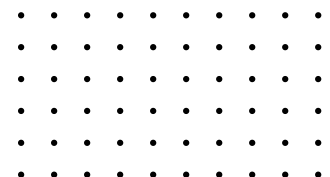


POSITION PAPER

ESTABLISHING POLICE COMMISSION FOR
A RESPONSIVE PRO PEOPLE POLICE
SERVICE IN BANGLADESH

October 2025



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Establishing police commission for a responsive pro people police service in Bangladesh





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Introduction

The “chain of command” of the police force has broken down after the fall of the government of Sheikh Hasina due to the student-people movement. All types of activities of the law enforcing agency were stopped for three consecutive days. The police were politicised on a large scale in the three consecutive terms of the government of Sheikh Hasina.

According to a report of the Daily Prothom Alo as of November last year, the total number of members of Bangladesh Police was 213,000, according to the information of the public security division of the home ministry. Out of this, 105,925 constables and 11,500 SIs were appointed in three terms of the Awami League government since its formation under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina in 2009. Police operations virtually came to a standstill due to attacks, arson and panic since the fall of the Awami League government on 5 August. The army, Ansar and students are guarding the police stations. The police headquarters has asked all members of the force to report for duty by 8 August evening. Politicization in the force will not stop in the future if there are no fundamental reforms.

Underlying Assumptions of Police Reform in Bangladesh

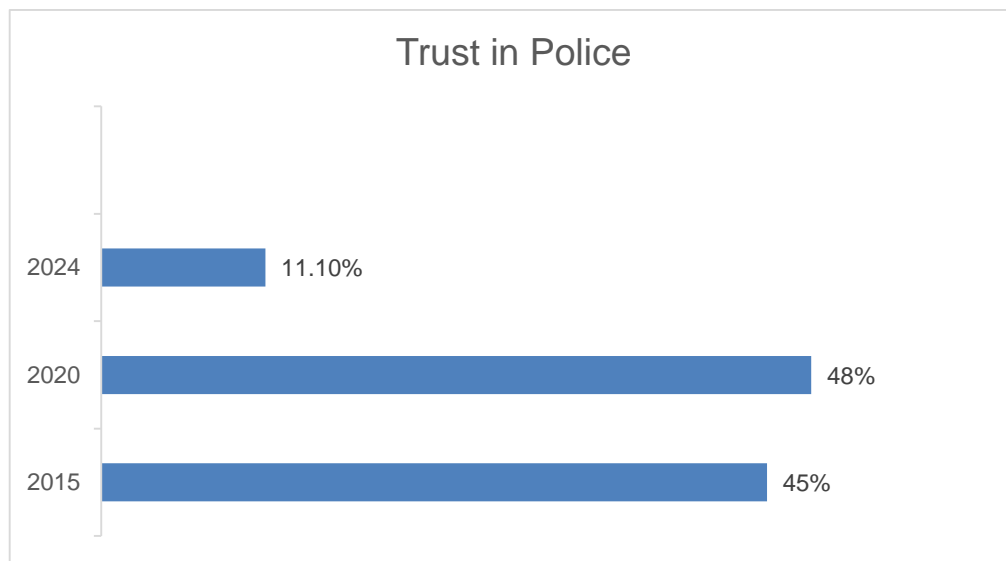
A successful police reform agenda assumes that the police force will remain under central administration, rather than transitioning to local government control in the near future. Thus, it is logical to approach police reform from a top-down perspective rather than a bottom-up one. Additionally, reform initiatives should be structured with short-, medium-, and long-term goals. Years of politicization under the AL Government’s 15-year rule have eroded professional standards, reshaping the police into a force largely characterized by loyalty rather than impartiality. Therefore, for any reform to succeed, it must start with a thorough cleansing and restoration of the current police force, which should be prioritized as a short-term objective.

The imperative for police reform in Bangladesh

The agenda for Reforming Bangladesh Police was there but stalled since the Last Caretaker Government of 2007-2009. The July Movement of 2024 which led to the fall of the Hasina Regime and the incarnation caused by the BD Police which led to the loss of innocent young students and citizens in huge numbers, the decades of torture to the opposition political parties, forced disappearance, and the use of police for political purposes resulted in huge hatred towards police. It resulted many police stations being burnt and many police men being killed

just after the uprising and fall of the regime. For several days, the country witnessed many police stations empty without police men, roads were seen without traffic police. Many could not return to their work for fear of mob killing. Many police men came out to speak to media that they do not want to be politically used and want to serve a professional police. Military was being deployed to calm down the situation and return to normal life. Such recent incidence spurred the reform agenda very strongly than ever before.

Figure 1 Trust in police based on the surveys conducted by SIPG since 2015



The data from the trust surveys conducted by the SIPG, governance surveys, and the national survey on public expectations from an interim government reveal a troubling trend in public confidence in the police force over recent years. As illustrated in the "Trust in Police" chart, public trust in law enforcement has experienced a significant decline, moving from a relatively stable position in previous years to a dramatic decrease by 2024. This steep downward trajectory in public trust underscores the urgent need for a reformative body, such as a police commission, to address the growing public concerns and to restore faith in law enforcement.

In 2015, public trust in the police was recorded at 45%. While this figure does not indicate an overwhelming level of confidence, it suggests a moderate level of public support for the police force, with nearly half of the population trusting its operations. By 2020, this number had slightly improved to 48%. However, despite this minor gain, the subsequent data from 2024 paints a starkly different picture. Trust in the police has plummeted to a mere 11.1%, a drastic reduction that indicates a severe crisis in public perception and confidence. Such stark drop in the trust percentage may indicate that people in fear or intimidation used to rate police in high

regards, but as soon as the government changed they exercised their freedom and painted the true picture. Potentially, this loss of trust can be attributed to various issues, such as instances of alleged misconduct, lack of accountability, or an inability of the police to address contemporary challenges effectively. Furthermore, public sentiment likely reflects broader dissatisfaction with the police's responsiveness to societal concerns and the adequacy of oversight mechanisms.

The erosion of public trust to such low levels suggests an urgent need for structural reform. Establishing a police commission would serve as a proactive step toward rebuilding this trust. Such a commission could provide oversight, transparency, and accountability mechanisms that are currently lacking or perceived as ineffective. By implementing reforms through an independent police commission, there is potential to create a framework that ensures that the police not only operate within their mandates but also work towards regaining public confidence through consistent, fair, and effective practices.

Draft Police Ordinance of 2007: A Missed Reform Opportunity

The Draft Police Ordinance of 2007 was the product of the Police Reform Programme mainly funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The draft ordinance remains a public document. The draft ordinance imagined the role of the police as protectors of human rights, aligning with the emerging ideas of democratic policing. The ordinance also introduced the National Police Commission, the Police Complaints Wing and Community Policing. The police commissions created a scope for less bureaucratic, less politicised and less militarised policing. Community policing also held similar potential.

However, the on-the-ground developments of community policing attest that community policing in antidemocratic or undemocratic contexts of Bangladesh shows prospects of more politicised policing partly through politicised community policing forums. The resistance from bureaucrats did not allow the ordinance to be adopted by the then-military-backed caretaker government. Additionally, the police, the military and the politicians resisted the reform process. Later, a Draft Police Ordinance of 2013 was created by the Police Reform Commission as a much watered-down version of the Draft Police Ordinance of 2007. The bureaucracy did not agree to the adoption of the draft ordinance as law. The lack of public participation, lack of



political engagement and lack of diplomatic and international support did not help the reform process introduce the draft ordinance as a law and implement it.

The outcome of police reforms and formation of a police commission is expected to result in the following:

1. Insulation of police from political or clientelist control

This will allow police to act legally and without any political pressure independently. The clientelist nexus between OC and local MP bypassing the SP in a district, or the Minister and OC as it often breaks the formal channel of communication with a resultant problem of unity of command needs to be broken.

2. Enhanced professional independence and superintendence

Professional independence will come with enhanced responsibility and accountability for police actions. The current UNO - OC, or DM and Police relationship, the Divisional Commissioner-DIG/Police Commissioner relationship or the Home Secretary- IGP relationship needs to be rebuilt considering strict application of law and enforcement, public safety, lawful implementation of executive orders, maintenance of law and order, recovery of public assets, protection of human rights, and abuse of law or any excess by police action.

3. Community responsiveness

Much of the success of the reform initiative will depend on the services being derived by the common citizens from a Thana of a Police Station. Police needs to act as a trusted institution, and also to be feared by a criminal. Community superintendence comprising people comprising students, guardians, teachers, media representatives may review performance of a particular police station. Besides, the inspection of positional authorities in the case of thanas across the country may be parallelly continued.

No earlier reform programs make explicit comments on this deep ailment of police administration, but certainly this ill needs to be talked about and cured if any meaningful reform agenda is to be considered. It exists in the form of booty for posting, transfer, recruitment, or collection from a road which is a systematic extortion and goes on from below to the higher up. This situation can only be reversed if the demand from higher-ups can be stopped. This is again a very challenging task in a society where clientelism is deeply rooted. This can be

reversed or reduced if the IGP or the Home Minister makes declaration as may be required by law either publicly or in the Parliament. For breach of any such law, p by any citizen prosecution may be initiated by any citizen or authority.

Striking a balance between increased criminality in the society and attaining greater resilience

There are various possible scenarios, such as a society with high criminality and a highly resilient police force, a society with low criminality and a resilient police force, or a society with both low criminality and low police resilience. According to the 2023 Global Organized Crime Index, Bangladesh ranks 89th out of 193 countries with a criminality score of 5.12 and 89th out of 103 countries with a resilience score of 4.42. This suggests that for the police to function more effectively, efforts must focus on reducing the societal criminality score while strengthening police resilience. Any reform agenda must address the rising trend in societal criminality and work toward building a more resilient police force.

Global Best Practices

To provide a framework for the formation of police commissions for the Bangladesh Police, it would be pertinent to discuss relevant global practices. In established democracies such as the United Kingdom, independent police commissions ensure human rights compliance, accountability, oversight, and independence of the police, among other responsibilities. All these models emphasize the importance of civilian involvement and institutional independence from the government to ensure human rights-based democratic policing. While their effectiveness may vary, they offer valuable insights into the principles of maintaining public trust and confidence in the police across different contexts.

Bangladesh can take inspiration from the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland in creating the Police Commission. The post-conflict contexts of Northern Ireland with its history of policing a divided society with implications for human rights make the independent police commissions as a noteworthy example for that of Bangladesh. The other relevant models could be the Scottish Police Authority, the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (PIRC) of Scotland, and the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) for England and Wales.

Proposed Principles of Police Commissions

The proposed structure of the National Police Commission can vary based on circumstances. It can adopt the approach of combining political and independent members within the commission.

The proposed Police Commissions in Bangladesh may embody the following principles:

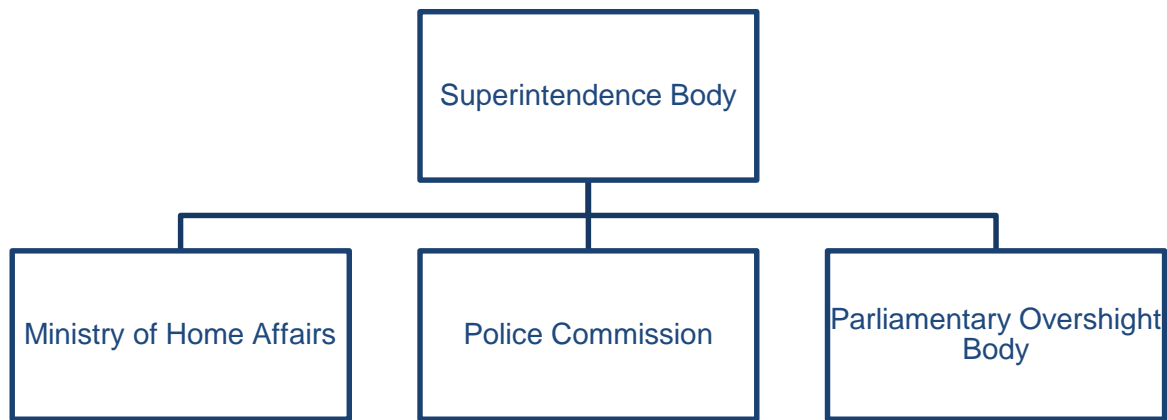


Possible Composition of the Police Commission

The primary objective of establishing a Police Commission arises from the need for effective oversight of the police as an organized force, ensuring impartial law enforcement, preventing human rights abuses, and supporting its independent operation. Therefore, while the police should be held accountable through rigorous control and monitoring, it must also be free from political influence to perform its duties impartially.

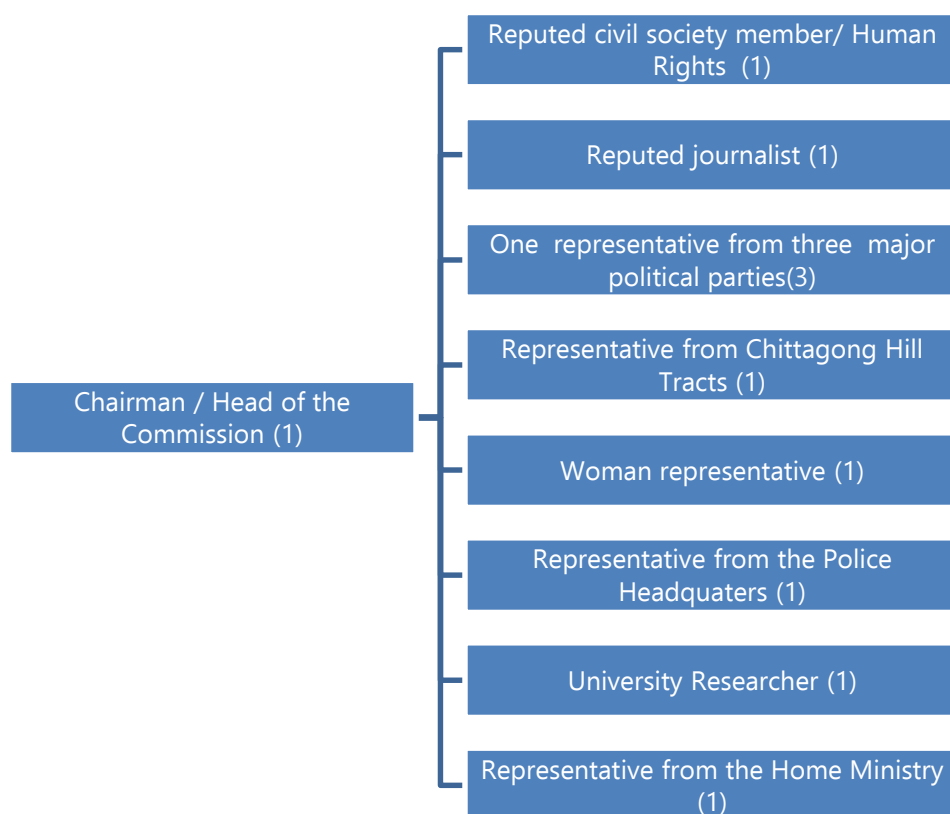
We propose a three-pronged approach to police oversight to enhance accountability, effectiveness, and independence. First, the Ministry of Home Affairs, as the supervising ministry, will be responsible for appointments, disciplinary actions, and budget allocation. Second, the Police Independent Commission will function as an advisory and regulatory body, with decisions that are binding and implemented by the administrative ministry. This commission will possess sufficient authority to override administrative ministry decisions

where necessary. Third, oversight will be reinforced by a Parliamentary Committee, tasked with reviewing the overall performance of the police and investigating any instances of human rights violations.



The relationships and lines of communication among these three oversight bodies should not be viewed as conflicting or overlapping; instead, they are designed to complement one another, creating a more accountable and responsive police service. Given that the police will not be subject to local oversight by authorities such as a mayor, these three bodies collectively strengthen the police's ability to withstand political pressure and operate with greater independence and impartiality. Furthermore, this structure reduces the likelihood of arbitrary decisions. A thorough analysis of the roles and responsibilities of these bodies will ensure a clear delineation of functions and prevent any overlap in their operations.

Figure 2 The Proposed Composition of the Police Commission



The committee will be led by a chairman appointed for a one-year term, chosen from retired professionals with at least 35 years of experience in administrative, police, or judicial services, ensuring seasoned leadership. The committee's members include a respected journalist, a representative from each of the three major political parties, a human rights or civil society advocate, a representative from minority ethnic groups, a woman representative, a delegate from the Police Headquarters, a university researcher, and a representative from the Home Ministry. This diverse assembly is designed to bring a balanced and inclusive approach, drawing on expertise from government, media, civil society, academia, and underrepresented communities.

The ToR of the Commission.

1. The Commission will oversee the general functioning of the police and maintain liaison with the Ministry of Home Affairs for daily operational matters.



2. It will investigate any incidents of injustice, whether they involve individual citizens or police personnel.
3. The Commission will have the authority to override any decisions made by the Ministry of Home Affairs that contravene human rights or the rule of law.
4. The Commission will review police training programs and professional development to ensure continuous growth and skill enhancement within the force.

By ensuring such representation, the Police Commission would be well-positioned to lead reform efforts that are both comprehensive and contextually relevant.

Position of Neighborhood Policing and Police Community Support Officer

We are proposing a Neighborhood Policing Team (NPT), or Safer Neighborhood Team (SNT), which is a small team (usually 3-10 strong), consisting of police officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) as practised in England and Wales and Scotland. They contribute to visible policing, reducing fear, increasing interaction between the public and the police, and accessing local knowledge. The Police Community Support Officers are uniformed members (without arms) of police staff holding limited police powers than fully sworn officers but with comparatively lower, yet handsome salaries. The Police Community Support Officers can phase out or replace the Village Police System in Bangladesh and yet, can build on local leadership development. The neighbourhood policing model, along with Police Community Support Officers, could help enhance police autonomy, making them independent from the District Magistrate/District Commissioner or the executive.

**Police Complaints Wing: Ensuring Accountability Within **

A dedicated Police Complaints Wing within the proposed Police Commission can serve as an essential mechanism for maintaining accountability and integrity within the Bangladesh Police. Functioning as an internal oversight body, this wing would handle complaints of misconduct, abuse of authority, and other violations by police personnel. Unlike an independent external commission, a complaints wing embedded within the Police Commission would streamline the process of addressing grievances, allowing for swifter resolutions while ensuring that police accountability remains an internal priority. By integrating this wing, the Police Commission



could build a culture of transparency and responsiveness, enhancing public trust in the police service.

The Police Complaints Wing would operate with a mandate to thoroughly investigate allegations, assess misconduct, and, where necessary, recommend disciplinary action. This structure ensures that public grievances are addressed without bypassing the police's formal channels of command. Additionally, by centralizing complaint management within the Police Commission, the wing would be empowered to issue findings and recommendations that align with the broader goals of police reform, such as reducing politicization, promoting professional conduct, and safeguarding citizens' rights. Establishing this wing within the Police Commission framework would signal a commitment to reform from within, fostering a policing environment that is both self-regulating and more responsive to public concerns.

Community Engagement: Building a Bridge Between Police and the People

For the success of a reformed and responsive police service, community engagement must be prioritized as a core component of the new policing structure. The proposed police commission should serve not only as an oversight body but as a bridge between law enforcement and the public, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship that encourages transparency, accountability, and collaborative problem-solving. In this capacity, the commission would ensure that the police are not isolated from the communities they serve, but rather, are actively supported by and responsive to the needs of the people.

The events following the July Revolution of 2024 highlighted the potential for effective community engagement, particularly the active role played by the youth and students. In the absence of regular police presence, young people took on vital responsibilities, such as managing traffic control and ensuring community safety. This spontaneous mobilization demonstrated both the willingness and capability of Bangladesh's youth to contribute to public order and highlighted an untapped resource for community-centered policing efforts.

Institutionalizing this involvement would create a formal pathway for youth participation in public safety. The commission could introduce a structured program, similar to the *Scouts or Bangladesh National Cadet Corps (BNCC)*, allowing students to take on part-time roles in traffic management and community policing. Under this model, youth volunteers could receive



training in basic policing functions, traffic regulations, and conflict de-escalation, allowing them to support police operations in a way that is both practical and empowering.

Such an initiative would accomplish several objectives:

- **Increased Police Visibility:** With youth and student volunteers in supportive roles, the presence of law enforcement would be felt more widely, potentially deterring minor crimes and encouraging adherence to regulations.
- **Enhanced Community Trust:** A program involving community members, particularly youth, would humanize the police force and promote a sense of shared responsibility for public safety.
- **Skill Development for Youth:** By providing training and experience in law enforcement support, the program could equip students with valuable skills, instilling a sense of civic responsibility and potentially guiding some towards careers in policing or public service.
- **Cost-Effective Resource Augmentation:** Leveraging community volunteers could alleviate some of the resource strains faced by the police, allowing them to focus on more specialized tasks.
- **This model would create a sustainable framework for community policing** that is embedded within local neighborhoods, ensuring that policing strategies align with the values and needs of those they are designed to protect. The commission's role would be to oversee this engagement, setting guidelines, ensuring training standards, and managing coordination between the police and community volunteers.

Our Position and Strategic Approaches to Reform

1. Conduct comprehensive consultations with all relevant stakeholders, ensuring broad-based input that reflects the diverse perspectives and needs within society.
2. Undertake a thorough review of previous reform initiatives and best practices from policing models worldwide to inform a contextually appropriate and effective approach.
3. Regularly engage with the broader community and key stakeholders, including political actors, to disseminate findings and gather feedback. This continuous dialogue is essential for fostering a sense of ownership and shared commitment to reform.

4. Pursue financial and political support from international donors to strengthen the foundation and sustainability of the reform agenda.
5. Actively involve students, community members, and women from all segments of society in the reform process, ensuring that it is inclusive and representative.
6. Reevaluate the organizational structure of the police to reduce opportunities for political interference and misuse of authority.
7. Establish a Police Commission comprised of capable, competent, credible, and impartial members. This commission should exercise superintendence over the police force, providing resilience, oversight for crime control and public safety, protection of human rights, and prevention of police abuses.
8. Clearly define the channels of communication, roles, powers, and relationships between the Commission and the Ministry of Home Affairs, as well as between police leadership and other governmental counterparts, to ensure effective and transparent governance.

Phased Approach to Sustainable Reform

Recognizing that *effective reform is an evolving process*, the restructuring of Bangladesh's police force should be implemented through a phased approach, allowing for gradual, sustainable change. This multi-phase framework—comprising Phase 1, Phase 2, and Phase 3—will enable the police commission to implement reforms methodically, ensuring that each stage is given the necessary resources, oversight, and time for integration. Each phase will build upon the successes and lessons of the previous one, ensuring that reforms are thoroughly embedded within the organizational culture and practices of the police force.

To support this process, each phase should include periodic reviews to assess progress, identify challenges, and adapt strategies as necessary. This iterative approach ensures that the reform process remains responsive to emerging issues and changing public needs. By incorporating ongoing evaluation and streamlining measures at each stage, the phased approach not only enhances accountability but also secures long-term effectiveness and resilience within the police structure.



Conclusion

The introduction of the Police Commission in Bangladesh is the right direction towards decolonized, less bureaucratic, pro-people community engaged, and human rights-based responsive and responsible democratic policing. By prioritizing human rights for both normative and practical changes, it is possible to address systemic failures to some extent. The idea of the key role of the police as a protector of human rights and its interactions can contribute to the autonomous functioning of the National Police Commission. This reform initiative could strengthen public confidence and trust in the police, fostering a more secure and tolerant society.

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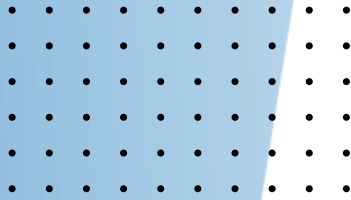
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