

BANGLADESH POLICE'S PAIN POINTS: THE REALITIES BEHIND SERVICE DELIVERY

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On 4 November 2025, at just 34 years of age, Afro–Asian–American immigrant Zohran Mamdani defeated former governors and seasoned politicians to win the New York City mayoral election, setting several records and breaking a few in the process. Naturally, the question arises: what is the secret of his success?

According to leading media analyses, Zohran Mamdani was able to identify with great precision the pain points of New Yorkers – that is, the real pressure points and sufferings in citizens' everyday lives.

But today we will not tell his story. We will talk about Bangladesh Police – the institution that, in recent times, has been at the center of public discussion, expectations, and controversy. During the August uprising, the same agitated students and masses who burned down more than 400 police stations and outposts were the ones who, even before the ashes had settled, demanded that the police return to their posts. Why then is this police force – which still stands at the center of ordinary people's hopes – unable to deliver the level of service that is expected of it?

Let me put it another way: in the context of service delivery, what are the real “pain points” of Bangladesh Police, an institution under such intense public scrutiny? And at the strategic level, how seriously have we thought – or are we thinking – about this problem?

In the mid–1990s, an American relative of mine, a woman living in Los Angeles, witnessed a robbery incident in Old Dhaka. Visibly angry, she reacted by saying, “If this were in L.A. (she lives in Los Angeles), the police would be chasing the robbers with helicopters.” I was very new in service then, yet I replied, “We have a tiny problem here. Not only Hazaribagh Police Station – even DMP or Bangladesh Police as a whole doesn't have a single helicopter.”

Let me say this to the reader: to this day, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, responsible for serving over twenty million people, does not have a helicopter with which it can track and chase a gang of robbers from the air.

Leave that aside, let's speak of something even more basic. In a district adjacent to Dhaka, the statistics for a single month this year show over 900 GDs (general diary

entries) for “lost” mobile phones and close to 90 GDs for missing persons. Service-seeking citizens lodged these GDs, but what does the service provider – the investigating or inquiry officer – need in order to respond?

They need:

- specialized, or at the very least basic, knowledge of CDR and intelligence analysis;
- formal mechanisms for obtaining relevant records; and
- if they themselves are not CDR or intelligence analysts, a formal – not informal – avenue for accessing such specialized assistance.

Let me lengthen this essential list just a bit more: a supervisory officer with the knowledge and skills to ensure that the investigation or inquiry is proceeding according to an appropriate framework; and ...

The technical list goes on; let me not extend it further for now.

So yes, you are entirely justified in being angry when you do not receive quality service. But the problem for the service provider is this: they don’t even have a “helicopter”!

On top of that, for very real reasons, the problems of police personnel have become even more acute since August 2024. A large segment of the leadership at both field and management levels has been politically sidelined for the last 15 years; therefore they are aggrieved. And unfortunately, for that very reason, many of them at the field and management levels also carry a certain degree of inexperience and lack of skill – this has to be acknowledged. You cannot bridge this gap with laws and seminars alone; subject-based training is indispensable.

The post–August revolutionary government has formed a Police Reform Commission. A number of very good and thoughtful suggestions have emerged. The Commission has recommended reform of old laws – modernizing the Police Act of 1861, the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1898, and the Police Regulations of Bengal of 1943. It has proposed an independent police accountability commission. It has called for reform of arrest and detention procedures, and for establishing an independent body to ensure professional accountability of police officers, institutional transparency, and responsiveness to citizen complaints.

The Commission has recommended enacting a separate law for the protection and rehabilitation of witnesses and victims; introducing a depoliticized, merit-based and digital system for recruitment and promotion; assessing physical and mental fitness; and adopting improved policies on housing, healthcare, mental support, leave, and working hours for police personnel. It calls for technological modernization, digital policing, intelligence-led crime analysis, and the formation of specialized units and

regional coordination mechanisms to combat cyber crime, financial crime, and transnational organized crime.

The recommendations include establishing “Community Safety Boards” in every police station with citizen participation; ensuring that at least 25% of the force consists of women and that safe infrastructure and career development opportunities are created for them; and placing emphasis on oversight, evaluation, and anti-corruption through appropriate performance indicators.

The objective of this reform framework is to build an accountable, humane, technology-driven, and citizen-friendly police service. This is not merely about changing laws or structures – it is about cultural transformation, where service, integrity, and public trust become the core values of policing.

These excellent ideas and recommendations will, God willing, be implemented – not only in the interest of the police, but in the long-term interest of the country and its people. However, that is not exactly what I intend to discuss today. I want to talk instead about some areas where, with just a little initiative, we can bring about significant qualitative improvement in service and professional competence.

Let me begin with investigation. If we define investigation as the collection of evidence, then clearly there is substantial scope for enhancing our investigating officers’ capacity and skills in collecting evidence within a framework of scientific investigation. (For those who do not grasp formulations in polite language, let me spell it out: “Our investigating officers, by and large, do not yet possess the knowledge and skills required for scientific evidence collection.”)

To prepare oneself as a twenty-first century investigating officer, one must understand that investigation is not merely a bundle of statements recorded under sections 161 and a few confessions under section 164.

Investigation means collecting evidence – and the crime scene is a crucial source of that evidence. It is often said that every offender leaves behind some trace of his crime at the scene. But any lack of professional knowledge and experience in collecting evidence from the crime scene calls into question the competence of the investigating officer.

Today, we have the option of seeking help from the crime scene teams of CID or PBI. Even so, every investigating officer needs to know: by what process, and what types of physical or digital traces, he should collect or have collected from the scene; and what he should or should not do so as not to destroy potential physical evidence at the crime scene.

Although witness or suspect interviews and interrogations are vital components of investigation, a large proportion of our investigating officers still need academic and/or professional training in this area. Skills in arresting suspects, searching their

bodies, premises, or vehicles, and recovering incriminating evidence would contribute significantly to professional excellence for many officers.

In investigation, a suspect's PCPR – that is, previous crimes and punishment record – needs to be checked. The old Village Crime Note Book (VCNB) is no longer maintained; instead, we have its digital successor – the Crime Data Management System (CDMS) database. It is encouraging that, with some exceptions, a substantial number of investigating and supervising officers now know how to use CDMS.

In the further development of CDMS, initiatives have been taken to incorporate the village crime register, court warrants, daily lists of pending cases, trial documents, final reports, conviction warrants, bail bond registers and similar records. In CDMS, a person's record will appear only once. If this uniqueness is preserved with due care, it will represent a major leap forward in CDMS-based case management.

For arresting suspects, recovering victims or property, identifying accomplices and similar tasks, the analysis of CDRs, bank account information, Facebook, e-mail and other digital sources has now become a crucial part of investigation. Not every investigating officer needs to be a full-fledged criminal intelligence analyst, but every district or unit must have a criminal intelligence analysis cell, and every investigating officer must at least have a basic understanding of how to obtain support from such a cell.

It is worth noting that Police Order 1/2024 has already instructed that each district or unit should have a criminal intelligence analysis cell.

Different types of crimes are now being committed using mobile financial services such as bKash, Nagad, Rocket, UCash and others. Yet only a very small number of investigators have professional expertise in analyzing financial transactions through these platforms. Meanwhile, crimes are also being committed via the internet. A key challenge for investigating officers is knowing what types of evidence or information to extract from websites or digital devices in a way that will be admissible in court.

In complex cases and for uncovering crime-related information, CDR or call record analysis is now recognized as one of the most effective tools. If an investigating officer lacks the necessary technical knowledge, the potential output from CDRs may never materialize. The very same CDR, when analyzed by a skilled regular analyst, can yield crucial and deeper leads, greatly increasing the chances of solving the crime or identifying the perpetrators.

We may not be able to turn all 30,000 investigating or supervising police officers (from SI upwards) into CDR analysts or criminal intelligence analysts. But, following Police Order 1/2024, we can train a small team in each district or unit and assign them to a Criminal Intelligence Analysis Cell to support investigating officers in their cases.

Until such cells are formally established, this kind of support will remain outside the institutional structure and depend largely on individual officers. By bringing this support function into the formal organizational framework, we can achieve remarkable positive changes in the outcome of almost 100% of investigations.

A few examples may help illustrate the role of a district-level Criminal Intelligence Analysis Cell. In Sonargaon, Narayanganj district, the body of an unidentified teenage girl was found. A district police officer trained in criminal intelligence analysis ordered a search of the area within a few hundred meters around the crime scene. The day after the incident, a mobile phone without a SIM card was found and seized about 100 meters away. By analyzing the CDR of that phone, the victim's family and her identity were established.

Take another example: a bKash agent named Khairul pays out 50,000 taka in cash to a customer named Bashir Uddin. Shortly afterwards, Khairul finds that the SIM for his agent account is not working. After obtaining a replacement SIM a few hours later, he discovers that the entire 300,000 taka balance in his agent account has been stolen.

Who is the thief? By what method did the criminal ring steal the 300,000 taka? And what connection, if any, does customer Bashir Uddin and his 50,000 taka transaction have with this theft? A trained criminal analyst – or his team – at the district level can play a critical role in answering these questions.

Since 2013, CID's Forensic Training Institute (FTI) has been running a Criminal Intelligence Analysis Course (CIAC), also known as the CDR Analysis Course. This course has gained notable popularity among police officers in Bangladesh. To date, more than one thousand additional SPs, ASPs and other officers have been trained in criminal intelligence analysis.

Even so, to see the full benefits of intelligence-led policing in Bangladesh, every district or unit initially needs a Criminal Intelligence Analysis Unit with 30–100 personnel, whose members will receive appropriate training and continuously support field investigators. Although Police Order 1/2024 mandates the establishment of such a unit in every district or unit, this has not yet been implemented in practice.

Of course, for intelligence-led policing to succeed, those who will be directly served by the Criminal Intelligence Analysis Unit (CIAU) – the field-level investigating and supervising officers – must themselves have a working knowledge of criminal intelligence. What does this imply? It implies that we must ensure, in the shortest possible time, that all of the roughly 30,000 officers from SI up to Additional SP attain working knowledge of scientific investigation.

What then should be the definition of scientific investigation? Should we simply move away from witness-based investigation to purely physical evidence-based

investigation? No. That is not the meaning. Rather, even in witness or suspect interviews and interrogations, scientific methods and training are needed. Among the more than 30,000 SIs and above in a force of about 225,000 police personnel, a large number still need institutional training in questioning and interrogation techniques; yet in traditional police investigation, we rely heavily on statements recorded under section 161 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

In planning training on scientific investigation – CDR analysis, cell-ID tracking, analyzing undisclosed or “black” money to properly apply the Money Laundering Prevention Act, investigating mobile financial crime, using CDMS, crime scene management, IT forensics and cyber crime, DNA evidence collection, investigating organized crime using visual analytical charts, or interviewing women, children, victims and suspects – we face a major challenge: we are working across more than 30 topics, but in any one topic we are unable to train more than one or two thousand officers per year.

Even if we could train just 1,000 officers per year in a single subject related to scientific investigation, it would still take 30 years to train all 30,000 SIs and above in that one topic. (Therefore, for 30 topics, it would take $30 \times 30 = 900$ years!)

In this reality, we have two options.

First, we can select one or two Additional SPs/ASPs and two or three Inspectors/SIs from each district, and create a group of around 300 officers to receive ToT (Training of Trainers). These officers would then organize the necessary number of training workshops in their respective districts or units.

Second, through tutelagebd.com, we can design systems for simultaneous online training for large numbers of police officers and employees, thereby spreading knowledge of scientific investigation more widely.

We can also adopt a mixed or hybrid approach: allowing trainees to study a topic online beforehand and then attend on-campus classes on the same subject. In such cases, interaction between trainer and trainee will increase significantly, ensuring higher-quality training.

At this point, the responsibility of district and range-level officers (SPs, DIGs) is to identify suitable officers, ensure they receive training, organize a sufficient number of training programmes in their respective districts, and then, through proper supervision, ensure that trained officers and staff actually deliver improved services.

If we can foster an environment in which mid- and senior-level officers at field and headquarters possess the sensitivity and sense of responsibility to guide officers skilled in scientific investigation, support the fruits of their hard work, and provide them with policy and logistical backing, then the overall output of the police in scientific investigation will increase noticeably.

As you can see, most of the issues I have discussed can initially be implemented through internal initiatives within the police itself.

The recommendations of the Police Reform Commission are undoubtedly timely and lay the groundwork for structural change. But real change will come only when transformation of thinking, skills, and culture begins from within the force. If we can build, in every district, a culture of scientific investigation, data-driven analysis, and sustainable training, then it will be possible to bring about major positive changes in the quality of police service even without waiting for every law to be amended or every commission to be implemented in full.

True police reform does not mean only changes in law or rhetoric – it means reform of people, mindset, and merit. The day when every field-level investigating officer truly understands and applies intelligence-led, proactive policing, that will be the day Bangladesh Police regains the trust of the people – and from within the reform process itself, a new dawn of renewal will begin.

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