

Bangladesh Police Battling the COVID-19: Triumph and Challenges

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Abstract: *The global pandemic COVID-19 embraces the whole economy and social settings of Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, the COVID-19 incidence was creeping gradually though the government had taken many preventive measures including social distancing, quarantine, and locked down to control COVID-19 spread. In the battle of existence and combat against the invincible enemy, Bangladesh police is regarded as the frontline warrior. Though Bangladesh Police is blamed for various issues but in this pandemic, they played a catalytic role by performing their duties as 'Altruistic Police' effectively towards achieving citizen's trust. The objective of this study is to evaluate the performance, work dynamics and challenges of Bangladesh Police during the pandemic situation. Hence, a qualitative research including in-depth interview of twelve police personnel were carried out to visualize the contribution of Bangladesh Police through challenges at current situation.*

Keywords: *COVID-19, Altruistic Police, Locked Down, Social Distancing, Pandemic*

Introduction

COVID-19 is a contagious and respiratory disease caused by the infection of novel corona virus which is known as SARS-CoV-2. COVID-19 patients were first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. Later it was spreading out in other countries and Bangladesh found the first three corona virus cases on 8 March 2020. After the detection of corona virus in human body, thousands of people died of COVID-19 in China and other countries and Bangladesh registered its first death due to the corona virus on March 18, 2020. When the number of COVID-19 affected people from 100 countries tolls to more than 100,000 then The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic on March 7, 2020 (Shaw et al., 2020). Like other parts of the world, Bangladesh is at high risk of devastating attack of corona virus. To tackle the situation, government initially declared general holiday from 26 March 2020 to 14 April 2020 to maintain social

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distancing, though many areas and families were locked down since before for the presence of COVID-19 symptoms. According to the COVID-19 tracker, the present infection rates are as follows:

Table 1. Prevailing scenario of COVID-19 upto 30 November 2020

COVID-19 Incidences	Statistics (persons)
Total Death	6,644
Under Treatment	77,577
Total Recovered	3,80,711
Total Infected	4,64,932

Source: <http://covid19tracker.gov.bd>, dated 30 November 2020

Like other countries, this locked down/social distancing created huge pressure on society and economy. In this crisis moment some sectors are providing the service unconditionally more often crossing the professional perspective to humanistic perspective. Bangladesh Police is one of the leading divisions among them. In a densely populated country like Bangladesh where majority of the people are poor, it is difficult to enforce social distancing and other preventive measures. Bangladesh Police has been working tirelessly to enforce the provisions of lockdown to prevent corona virus from spreading, besides their daily routine work to keep the country safe.

Bangladesh has had difficulty with institutionalizing the democratic process. Bangladesh police force is a highly bureaucratic organization built on a top down structure, which, according to colonial era laws, is only accountable to political and civil administrative executives of the state (Laws of Bangladesh, 2020). In Bangladesh, all public institutions are subject to a high degree of politicization. Especially the Bangladesh Police is often used by the ruling elites to achieve and protect their interests. Different human rights organizations, the media, and families of victims often claim that the Bangladesh Police has been involved in incidents of disappearance. In recent years, extrajudicial killings, abductions and disappearances, tortures, arbitrary arrests, theft and robbery has made its image worsen.

Unfortunately Bangladesh Police failed to perform properly, could not become citizen-friendly institution and thus lost its public trust (TI, 2011). People in Bangladesh believe that there must be a strong relationship between political institutions and police which become a political culture started from long before. This influence on policing has degraded public image of Bangladesh police as well as public trust (Chowdhury, 2011). However, during COVID-19 pandemic; in the country's most crucial situation; the contribution of police is appreciated by everyone to bring its image back by conquering traditional criticism after liberation

war. In such condition, this study is trying to reveal how unprecedented COVID-19 has impact on the mandate of Bangladesh police and also their duties and responsibilities which leads to praiseworthy to their contribution.

As Bangladesh has never experienced such kind of pandemic like COVID-19 before so there is no studies found in direct relation to the role of Bangladesh Police but there are some related literature available elsewhere. Kyprianides et.al, examined in a global context that by definition, police officer's health and well-being are at greater risk than that of the normal community, even before coping with the obstacles, stress, and uncertainty associated with the pandemic (Kyprianides et.al, 2021). According to Vartti et al., a great deal of knowledge and perception surrounding SARS was tied to preventive behavior adoption, but further research on how the public's precautionary behaviors work in handling epidemics, such as SARS, is still needed (Vartti et al., 2009). For China, COVID-19 management is not such difficult as it has SARS experience and also their people are well educated. In China, the people adopted precautionary practices to protect themselves from COVID-19 (Li et al., 2020) because of their extensive knowledge of the danger. The Chinese were convinced that COVID-19 had finally been defeated, and they confidently predicted China would triumph in the struggle against the virus. This pattern of attitude and confidence was on display throughout the SARS outbreak. Policing domains, regulatory policies, potential consequences, approaching attitude and many more characteristics of police force have been changed throughout the globe during COVID-19 pandemic (Maskaly et. al., 2021). Another study was carried out by Imtiaz, Khan, & Hossain on control over human behavior during pandemic situation (Imtiaz, Khan, & Hossain, 2021). On the other hand, COVID-19 challenges become more difficult for frontline fighter like police in Bangladesh but they did an outstanding job during the whole pandemic situation. The Bangladesh Police has proven their capability and willingness in various United Nations Peace Keeping missions including health related issues. They also mentioned while Bangladesh has historically been a top troop and police contributing country (PCC) (Zaman & Biswas, 2021). It is already proved that Bangladesh police have the potentiality to face the emergency situation. So it is high time to apply their maximum potentials to save the nation. Bangladesh Police launched an ICT-based project named 'Citizen Help Request (CHR)' in 2010 to give e-police services to Bangladesh's citizens (Hasan, 2015). During this pandemic situation police can reach to the mass more efficiently and promptly through their various internet-based initiatives. However, Bangladesh police initiated their dedication and gave maximum effort in a national urgency during pandemic situation which has never been faced before. Therefore, every new dimension of COVID-19 spread out is challenging to their capacity, capability and dedication. In this regard, it is expected and timely to assess the overall performance and newly added challenges of Bangladesh Police especially in this pandemic.

The main objective of the present study is an attempt to reveal the pivotal contribution of Bangladesh Police during pandemic. In specific,

1. To explore the duties and responsibilities done by Bangladesh Police in current pandemic crisis.
2. To know what are the challenges faced by them.
3. At the end of the study it will suggest some policy recommendation to enhance its capacity building and strategic crisis management for overall development more especially in pandemic time.

Hence, to reveal these objectives, the following research questions are commonly arisen:

- a) How effectively Bangladesh Police provide their services during COVID-19?
- b) Are they really efficiently fighting against COVID-19 challenges?

Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature and using the qualitative tools of social research. The Data for this article were collected from various primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources include: books, newspapers, journals, annual reports of different national and international human rights organizations, WHO's and IECDR's regular bulletins, Bangladesh police press releases etc. Primary sources of data comprised of in-depth interviews with the members of Bangladesh Police who have been actively fighting against COVID-19 staying at the battle ground. There were twelve (12) members of Bangladesh Police from different levels and places randomly selected for the interview. Among all members, four (4) key members (SP, ADC, DC) were belong to the higher officials levels and rest of them were from field levels (Inspector and Sub-Inspector) of Bangladesh police. This study included small number of sample to facilitated close association with the respondents which also enhance validity of fine-grained inquiry.

Historical background and administrative set-up of Bangladesh police

Law enforcement unit is one of the most crucial parts of the governance in a democratic society. Bangladesh police has a vision "To provide quality service by competent, efficient and dedicated professionals enjoying trust and respect of citizens to make Bangladesh a better and safer place to live (Bangladesh Police, 2020)." It is a law enforcement agency which is under the Ministry of Home Affairs and structured force having its network all over the country. Maintaining peace, enforcing law and order, securing citizen's life and their properties, investigating for criminal justice systems are key role of Bangladesh police.

Bangladesh Police was formed under the Police Act, 1861 to control law and order situation as an un-armed force. Daily activities of the members of police forces are

regulated by the Police Regulations, Bengal (PRB) which was first compiled in 1927 under the authority of the Police Act, 1861. Various rules and government orders were incorporated later to the PRB under the Police Act, 1861 and the Government of India Act, 1935 (Police Regulations, Bengal, 1943, 1997). After the partition of the Sub-continent in 1947, police force in Bangladesh was first named as East Bengal Police, and the police force of Pakistan continued the system of British period (Bangladesh Police, 2020). After the independence of Bangladesh on 16 December 1971, Bangladesh police started working as Bangladesh Police but it shares common historical background of the police of Indian sub-continent.

IGP (Inspector General of Police) is the head of Bangladesh Police. Bangladesh Police has its own administrative set up both in urban and rural areas. Moreover, there are different components of police work in Bangladesh, like range police, special police, criminal investigation police, railway police, armed police battalion, metropolitan police, highway police and rapid action battalion. Administrative units of police are designated as Dhaka Range, Chittagong Range, Khulna Range, Rajshahi Range, Barisal Range, Sylhet Range and Sardah Police Academy. Additional Inspector is the head in DMP while CMP/KMP/RMP is headed by a Deputy Inspector General. Metropolitan police is headed by a Police Commissioner and comprised with other ranks such as Additional Police Commissioner, Deputy Police Commissioners, Additional Deputy Police Commissioner, and Assistant Police Commissioner. The metropolitan police can enjoy more power and authority to handle the law and order situation of the big cities. Dhaka Metropolitan Police is responsible to implement the beat policing in Dhaka city. On the other hand, all the 64 districts police have a Three-tier administration system which is governed under the authority of SP, ASP (circle), and officer in charge (OC) of the police stations respectively. Nevertheless, Bangladesh Police became member of the Interpol in 1976. Bangladesh Police has contributed to numerous UN peace-keeping missions from 1989 in Namibia.

Findings and Discussions

Role of Bangladesh Police during Pandemic

Bangladesh Police is the important structure and a large embodiment of the Bangladesh government to ensure a happy and peaceful society. According to the statement of The Bangladesh Police Headquarter, nearly 10,000 cops were infected, and thirty-eight died due to novel corona virus infection till 26 June of 2020 while performing the duty amid this pandemic in Bangladesh (Daily star, 2020). They are putting their lives and safety at risk to execute their duties in this pandemic time. Nevertheless, they have been acting as bellow:

i) Outdoor fighter to ensure social distancing and lockdown

At the beginning, first instruction for Bangladesh police was cancelation of their all

kinds of leave. After rapid spreading of corona virus infections in community level, the government of Bangladesh announced lockdown for a long time which extended to 66 days. To mitigate the transmission in community level, Bangladesh police was assigned to implement the lockdown all over the country. Initially they collected the list of COVID-19 positive cases and identified infected persons. After that they marked the house or place, sometimes the whole area in order to combat spreading. Local community policing forum, sometimes local political leaders, volunteers and local elite helped a lot to make the things possible. In this regards, one of higher officials of Bangladesh Police, Md. Morshed Alam, Superintendent of Police (SP), Rajshahi Range Office stated,

“To tackle the outbreak of COVID-19, the Police Administration in Bangladesh is playing noteworthy roles since the identification of first COVID-19 patient in Bangladesh. Still we are acting as the frontline fighters to control this crisis. The vital role of the police administration is to implement several policies in the field levels such as; lockdown/shutdown strategies, health measures strategies (using the mask, hand sanitizer, keeping social distance etc.), food distribution, and so on. Our patrol teams are regularly monitoring the activities of banking organizations and shopping malls to ensure three meters physical distance of the people by drawing circles at the entrance. We also ensured ‘no mask no service’ campaign everywhere to prevent the outbreak”.

ii) Emergency services provider during pandemic

Bangladesh Police provided several emergency services to the people who were in different difficulties during the lockdown started. A significant interviewee of this study, Mr. R M Faizur Rahman, Additional Deputy Police Commissioner Dhanmondi Zone, Ramna Division, Dhaka Metropolitan Police stated that,

“Bangladesh police worked ‘out of the box’ as one of the top frontline fighters, during this crisis moment. We provided cooked foods, food grains and other supportive cooking ingredients to the low income families and marginalized people of Dhaka City using our self-generated fund. We also helped the city corporation and other government offices to distribute the government’s relief, TCB (Trading Corporation of Bangladesh) goods among the poor people and slum dwellers in Dhaka maintaining physical distance and discipline. Moreover, Police patrol teams always cheerfully extended supports to different voluntary and charitable organizations to distribute foods or food grains among the appropriate recipients. In addition each and every Police Station helped the COVID-19 suspects who sought the ambulance services or transportation to be hospitalized in Dhaka Metropolitan Area (DMP). As far as the preventive and anti-spread out campaign of Covid-19 is concerned.”

iii) Open market monitoring

Police are working to control commodity prices, curbing stockpiling and black marketing, relocate the open markets, taking strict actions on all irregularities and also tried to help to the vulnerable people during pandemic. According to one of the key interviewees of this study, Mr. Sudip Kumar Chakrabarty, Deputy Police Commissioner (DC), Gulshan Division, Dhaka said that,

“From the very beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh, we have been implementing each policy very carefully such as: we forced people to stay at home, distributed health protective equipment like masks, hand sanitizer, soap, etc. Moreover, to prevent the outbreak of COVID-19, we introduced market monitoring to control the people from gathering. As we know that there is no entry and no exit point of the open market in the Dhaka Metropolitan Area (DMP). People from all walks of life get together in the open market to purchase their daily goods and services. So market place (vegetable and fish market) is turned into hotspot of the COVID-19 outbreak. That’s why we had made a decision to decentralize the open market into a small unit on the basis of the open fields like the playground or open spaces. Moreover, we declared the owners of the market to open their shop by following an odd-even approach. Such initiatives were effective to control the COVID-19 outbreak”.

iv) Distributed food among the lower and middle income people

While lockdown has started, some people who were not poor, they fall in troubles by losing their income sources. It was very essential to help these people who cannot seek help openly. Mr. Sudip Kumar Chakrabarty, Deputy Police Commissioner (DC), Gulshan Division, Dhaka informed about the initiatives taken by the police that,

“A number of low and middle income people who were engaged with teaching profession (Kinder Garden level, and other private organizations), event management activities, educated jobless people, religious leaders (Imam, Moyajjin), Uber driver, Pathao driver, third gender people, etc. were helpless. And they did not seek support from anywhere due to their social status. In this regard, we helped out them by formulating a volunteer group. Essentially, we distributed the Ration of our staff and officials through our volunteer team where the team maintained the privacy of the help seekers (no photos were taken and not disclose their identity). In this journey, we got help from multiple corporate organizations and all the societies that belonged in the Gulshan area, Dhaka”.

v) Decentralized the responsibilities of the staffs

Duties and responsibilities have been divided among all the frontline police into weekly rotation basis. Therefore, first week certain police staff will be responsible

for the duties next week they will take rest from home quarantine then others will take the responsibility for the next week. Although it depends totally on police super of the certain region. Mr. Md. Hafizur Rahman, Inspector (Investigation), Lauhojong Thana, Munshiganj praised this system confidently during this pandemic. He also added, sometimes it becomes difficult to manage workload if anyone get infected.

vi) Assist in mobile court mechanism

Vigilance over the infected area got more importance than patrolling important points. Emergency calls considered as the most important service because this was controlled from headquarter directly. Mobile court is always an effective way-out in a very short term. In this crisis moment this mechanism helped a lot to ensure lockdown and other necessary activities like, maintenance of (10 AM to 4 PM) market grocery shops and dispensary Mobile court is headed by an assistant commissioner (Magistrate), police staffs do their duty directed by mobile court.

vii) Coordination with community level stakeholders

Community leaders have much influence on controlling mass people to maintain physical distance. Mr. Sudip Kumar Chakrabarty, Deputy Police Commissioner (DC), Gulshan Division, Dhaka said that,

“When the COVID-19 infection rate was increasing rapidly, most of the Muslim religious people were not concerned about it and they were gathered in the mosque to pray by ignoring physical distance. Similarly, other religious people also ignored physical distance while praying in their religious places i.e Temple and Church. However, we had taken initiatives to ensure the physical distance among such people through the help of religious leaders, community leaders (councilor; community elite, civil society person, and related stakeholders). This initiative was also effective to control the COVID-19 spread”

viii) Motivate and aware the mass

Creating public awareness and implementing the lockdown are the basic tasks. The success of this process depends on different location and methods such as announcing in local area are the possible best way to aware the people. Here all are not connected to TV, Newspaper or social media so that police have to decide outreach through miking in rural, local and urban area in order to increasing the public awareness. One of interviewees expressed her opinion regarding contributions of Bangladesh Police to grass root level in following way –

‘I am Momotaj Begum, Sub-inspector of Bangladesh police, serving at Sherpur police office in woman support center desk. At present all over the world is facing a terrible problem known as COVID-19. In this situation police department are

playing as a frontline fighter. As a lady officer in police department, I have tried my best to serve the marginalized people in the lockdown period. Our work includes; motivate people to successful the lockdown; miking among the people to aware people regarding COVID-19; disburse government food aid to poor people; identified the infected people and marked the house; ensure social distancing; execute government order in root level; so that they become safe.'

ix) Accomplished funeral activities during the crisis

Since the outbreak started, people were so panicked about the death of infected people considering that this virus can be spread out consequently from the dead bodies. So these dead bodies were neglected by their relatives to accomplish the religious rituals in order to bury them. Sometimes people left the bodies of their relatives behind scaring viral infection. In this situation police make several teams in every region to complete the rituals with dead bodies. These types of initiatives prove themselves, they are beyond their professionalism and put lot of examples of humanity.

A glimpse of activities done by Bangladesh Police during pandemic

- Launched COVID 19 online portal
- Introduced two biased guidelines on COVID 19 and diabetics for health care professionals
- Inaugurated online certificate course on COVID 19
- Accomplished online KAP survey, distributed leaflet, created animation, and documentary
- Sent public awareness text and video massages to two lac people through mobile phones
- Awareness building program launched by Bangladesh Police among school; madrasa; religious leader to mitigate COVID 19
- Arranged conferences in home and among SARCC countries representatives
- Becoming an 'Altruistic Police' for the mass people

Source: Website of Bangladesh Police, November 2020

Challenges faced by Bangladesh Police during COVID-19 pandemic

Unfortunately, sometimes police were blamed for beating and harassing poor people like; Rickshaw pullers who have gone outside to earn their livelihoods violating police regulations to stay at home. Our study explored similar incidents have been taken place in different parts of the country including in Bhola, Barisal, Rajshahi, Bogura, Dinajpur and Gaibandha-where the policemen have been seen

beating people up with sticks and using other forms of physical punishment. Legal and human rights experts termed the police's behavior unconstitutional, unlawful and a clear violation of human rights. Sultan Mohammed Zakaria, a South Asian researcher at the Amnesty International also mentioned that violation of human rights could be resembled as criminal act. Still, there are a few complaints against police personnel who are involved (The Business Standards, 2020). Police in Bangladesh are vulnerable along with health workers and faced continually different types of challenges.

Firstly, ensuring the lockdown was one of the major challenges for the police. Sometimes restriction should be imposed on public transports and market places to keep social distancing which were difficult to execute properly.

Secondly, lack of coordination between law enforcement authority and government orders was observed during our study. Md. Morshed Alam, Superintendent of Police (SP), Rajshahi Range Office stated that it is difficult to implement government order to keep people stay at home while different industries are kept open. This dilemma has made people confused to abide the government rule. He marked this lack of coordination between government order and law enforcement authorities which arises a great challenge for police.

Thirdly, shortage of manpower created due to the rotation system caused by corona infection, quarantine, observation, death. Though these weekly rotation systems have been changed now but police staffs are still suffering from the shortage of manpower. In this regard Md. Morshed Alam, Superintendent of Police, Rajshahi Range office stated that police has to accomplish COVID-19 related duties in addition to their regular routine work such as general diary, case investigation, forwarding, FIR, case diary and so on. These types of parallel duties make the tasks more difficult. Within the all overloaded duties this increasing number of emergency service creates another pressure for police staffs.”

Fourthly, medical assistance like protection mask, hand sanitizer, hand gloves, personal protection equipment (PPE) etc. have shortage from the initial time. Hence, the authority could not able to provide enough medical and protection equipment due to limited supply chain. A police sub-inspector, Nur Uddin Ahmed, Dhamnondi thana, one of the interviewees of this study who is attached to police headquarters in Dhaka informed that- *“Police officers are carrying out their duties with what they have and personally purchase (PPEs) from local markets to ensure their safety.”* Situations are changing now, production is going on and supplies are increasing but during pick time of infection a large number of police staffs had been infected. Moreover, wearing PPE for long time over official dress causes extra sweating and sometime it made them sick. Another Sub-Inspector of Bangladesh Police, named Shah Mohammad Himel, Sub-Inspector of Bangladesh Police, Biyanibazar Thana,

Sylhet sadly explained that *“they cannot overlook official calls considering their health safety under the strict police rules and regulations”*.

Fifthly, ensuring lockdown is mainly depended on public cooperation but surprisingly people adhere it when polices are in filed visit. Such kind of irresponsible behavior makes their duties more difficult. Mr. Md. Hafizur Rahman, Inspector (Investigation), Lauhojong Thana, Munshiganj criticized that

“Currently, we are facing several challenges amid this pandemic. One of our prime challenges is to convince people to maintain health rules, as well as social distance. Because, most of the people are not interested to wear masks and among of them the old-age people complain that wearing mask create breathing problems”.

Sixthly, day by day number of samples of corona testing is increasing but capacity of testing Lab is very limited. As a result test report delivery becomes delayed and this may contaminate their colleagues and family members if they are positive. Mr. Kajol Sarker, Sub-inspector, Morolganj Thana, Bagerhat has shared with anxiety that field level staffs could be contaminated easily due to lake of testing.

Seventhly, continuous duty and excessive pressure increase mental stress among police staffs. Ahtisham Talukder, Sub-Inspector of Bangladesh Police, Jawa Bazar Police Camp, Chhatak Thana, Sunamganj opined that *“since we are working tirelessly in the field levels, so we do not enjoy any holiday which considerably responsible for mental tiredness or sometime illness.”*

Besides, Bangladesh Police have to face these challenges also:

- Less educated people are not interested to wear masks.
- Due to frequent lockdown domestic violence and crimes rapidly surged in society.
- COVID-19 positive people were kept untouched and isolated considering possible contamination.

Recommendations

To successfully manage the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and improve the efficiency of Bangladesh Police following issues are recommended:

- i. Mass awareness building campaigns should be promoted in different media so that people come forward to co-operate police for ensuring lockdown abiding by the law and orders.
- ii. Coordination between government order and implantation mechanism should be more logical.
- iii. Number of police staffs (field level) should be increased to overcome the shortage of workforce created by additional load and COVID-19 infections among themselves.

- iv. Priority should be given to the police staffs and their family members by providing medical support (testing, medical equipment, admission, oxygen, ventilation etc.) rapidly. In addition, health safety should be confirmed at their work premise.
- v. Rotation of duties of police and reasonable vacation are required to reduce their mental stress during pandemic.
- vi. Finally, reward management for every level of police staff can bring betterment in their psychological attitude.

Conclusion

Although Bangladesh Police has been facing tremendous problems during COVID-19 crisis but they showed huge commitment to serve the people and country. Our study found that Bangladesh police gave their full efforts to ensure social distancing, effectively engaged them to ensure lockdown, donated food to the poor and low income people from their own income, and contributed to build up public awareness. Most importantly, Bangladesh police came forward to accomplish the funeral of dead bodies with COVID-19 positive. On the other hand several challenges hindered their work efficiency to manage pandemic situation such as convincing mass people to keep social distance, shortage of manpower and health safety equipment, and lack of coordination with government order and reality. Nevertheless, to regain citizen's trust and image it is essential to provide all the necessary resources and logistics supports to create favorable working conditions. Finally, Bangladesh Police who are working for the nation everyday leaving their own life at risks are thankworthy. They have shown gallant performances in this ongoing pandemic situation which is acknowledged by the nation.

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