

Campaigning

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"Health Cards" without explaining how they would be funded. "It'll be later seen that only party members or their relatives will receive these cards, while people will be burdened with additional taxes and VAT," he claimed.

Nahid said the Awami League government in 2008 had "plundered the country" by promising rice at Tk 10 per kg and warned that such promises had previously harmed the nation. "This time, people are more aware. After not voting for the past 16 years, votes cannot be bought," he said.

He added that the upcoming election is not only about forming a government but will also shape the country's next 50 years.

He expressed confidence that the 11-party alliance would win the election and form the government.

Addressing voters, Nahid said, "If you don't like us, don't vote for us – but vote 'yes' in the referendum. Otherwise, only parties will change, and the fascist system will return without any reform."

At the programme, NCP spokesperson Asif Mahmud said the main goal of the caravan is to raise public awareness.

He claimed the AL has begun promoting a "no" vote. In response, the NCP has launched a nationwide campaign for a "yes" vote.

Foreign ministry

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between Myanmar authorities and the armed groups in Myanmar should not in any way affect the lives and livelihoods of the people in Bangladesh.

The Myanmar ambassador assured that his government would take measures to stop such incidents and expressed its sincere sympathy to the victims.

On Sunday, locals blocked the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf road in protest of such incidents.

Meanwhile, at least three people, including members of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and Nabi Hossain groups, were injured in gunfights between Myanmar's rebel group Arakan Army and Rohingya armed groups and later crossed into Bangladesh.

In December 2024, the Arakan Army claimed to have taken control of around 271 kilometres of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border in Rakhine state. Since then, tension and security risks have been rising along the Teknaf border.

For the last few days, the Arakan Army and Rohingya armed groups have been engaged in fierce fighting across the border of Teknaf.

Without accountability, democracy will fail

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Candidates and voters must be able to participate without fear, and political parties should ensure fair and peaceful polls, he said.

He urged political parties not to nominate individuals involved in corruption, extortion or land grabbing, and said Jamaat's manifesto prioritises women's rights, education, employment, housing and safety.

"All citizens, regardless of religion or minority status, should have equal access to opportunities," he said.

Gonoforum Acting President Subrata Chowdhury said political parties must reform internally before expecting national level good governance. "Without internal democracy, participatory governance is impossible," he said.

Independent candidate for Dhaka 9, Tasnim Jara, highlighted the lack of social security for informal workers such as rickshaw pullers.

She also said, "Even elected representatives cannot act against their

party, and institutions meant to check corruption or human rights violations are often controlled by the very people they should monitor."

"Citizens' rights and democratic accountability are weak. Without real mechanisms, people have no choice but to protest on the streets to demand their rights," she added.

Nusrat Tabbasum, joint convener of the NCP, stressed youth leadership and civic responsibility, saying votes should not be treated as commodities and social protection requires collective effort.

She said meaningful reform needs patience, education and civic engagement.

AB Party Chairman Mojibur Rahman Manzu apologised for failing to deliver a new political order, saying the party had been forced to operate within the old system.

"If a political party can ensure good governance, many other problems will be solved automatically," he said.

CPB General Secretary Abdullah Al Kafee Ratan

said MPs should not hold business interests to prevent conflicts of interest.

He also said elections in Bangladesh are heavily influenced by money, limiting fair competition for smaller parties.

Manisha Chakraborty, Barishal district coordinator of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal, urged greater focus on social welfare and budget allocation, noting that Bangladesh has one of the lowest minimum wages and education budgets in South Asia.

"Our manifesto will push for education to receive at least 6 percent of GDP and health around 15 percent of the total budget," she said.

Political scientist Rounaq Jahan said citizens' opinions should guide political decisions, stressing that security must respect human rights.

Security should not mean controlling people with force, she said, adding that many parties still rely on money and muscle power, ignoring real grassroots opinions and democratic principles.

CPD distinguished fellow Devepriya

Bhattacharya said national unity, citizen rights and institutional reform are essential to build an inclusive, accountable, and just Bangladesh.

"Governance must

reflect the voices and needs of marginalised groups, ensure human rights, and strengthen the rule of law through independent and professional institutions," he also said.

BNP alleges bias

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not have been possible.

"We have demanded correction, as the current method is incorrect and creates confusion," he said.

On the issue of candidates with dual citizenship, Nazrul said some nominations were being cancelled across parties and stressed that the law should apply equally to all.

He said two Jamaat-e-Islami candidates and one candidate from another party have already been disqualified. Many of those affected had left the country over the past 15-16 years, acquired foreign citizenship, and have now returned.

"It would be unfair to bar them from contesting elections on this basis," he said.

He also said the EC informed them that legal

action would be taken, including blocking NIDs, if anyone attempts fraud or disrupts the election.

Nazrul further alleged that a political party is collecting voter IDs, NIDs and mobile numbers nationwide for a "clear political agenda."

Regarding the referendum, he said, "We are not against reforms. We have participated in discussions and submitted notes of dissent where necessary."

Responding to the BNP's allegations, EC officials said the postal ballots were arranged alphabetically.

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmank Masud told The Daily Star last night, "We have heard their complaints. We will sit tomorrow and look into the matter."

Fair polls futile

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Commission should be made a constitutional body and political parties must practise internal democracy.

Former BNP lawmaker Nilufar Chowdhury Moni questioned the possibility of a "historic election" when 1,335 government weapons looted after August 5 remain unrecovered.

"If these weapons are distributed across 300 constituencies, that would mean nearly five military-grade weapons per seat. This is a serious threat," she said.

She criticised law enforcement agencies for acting as "spectators" during recent incidents of mob violence.

He also pointed out that only 65 women are contesting the election, despite women making up nearly half of the electorate.

Sakib Anwar of Nagorik Oikya, referring to recent attacks on media outlets and cultural institutions, said, "On that night, and the following day when Udichi was set on fire, Bangladesh effectively functioned as a government-less state."

He warned that similar inaction on election day day would render reform discussions meaningless.

Senior journalist Abu Sayeed Khan described mob violence as the biggest challenge to the election.

He criticised the government for using soft terms such as "pressure groups" instead of clearly condemning mobs. "The government's silence is leading the public to suspect their complicity."

He also said reform proposals failed to adequately address economic inequality.

Professor Rashed Ali Titumir said voters cannot make informed choices without "credible alternatives", which he said have been lacking since 2008.

He criticised the Election Commission for failing to develop a policy against disinformation.

He also stressed that policy making should remain the responsibility of elected representatives, not bureaucrats.

Dhaka University Professor Jasim Uddin

called for a complete overhaul of the education system in election manifestos, urging a shift from certificate-based education to skills development.

NCP Joint Convener Sarwar Tushar said the usual festive election atmosphere is absent with only 29 days left before the polls, adding that public doubt remains over whether the election will take place.

He also criticised the local administration, claiming "joint operations" are being weaponised to arrest innocent people based on political lists while known criminals find shelter within major parties.

Gonoforum General Secretary Mizanur Rahman said the interim administration has failed to control money and muscle power, warning that without strict accountability, the country could revert to the old system.

Hasan Al Mamun of Gono Odhikar Parishad cited scholar Sirajul Islam to argue that the culture of "lathial" or muscle-power politics is driven by a lack of economic opportunities.

Creating sustainable employment is the only way to replace the politics of violence with a moral society, he added.

Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of the Bangladesh Adhikar Forum, demanded a separate ministry for indigenous peoples and called for special measures to uplift marginalised communities.

Jamaat-e-Islami Dhaka City South Nayeb-e-Ameer Helal Uddin, Gono Odhikar Parishad Senior Vice President Faruk Hasan, and Bangladesh Socialist Party (Marxist) Chief Coordinator Masud Rana also spoke, among others.

PRAYER TIMING

JANUARY 14

Faz Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha

AZAN 5:30 12:45 4:00 5:36 7:00

JAMAAT 6:05 1:15 4:15 5:40 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Police block July Oikya

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The protesters carried out a programme titled "March to the Election Commission", beginning their procession around 1:00pm, but were blocked by police in front of the Islamic Foundation.

The organisers said similar marches and memorandum submissions would take place today at EC offices in divisional cities across the country.

Members of law enforcement agencies, including Ansar, police, Rab and the Coast Guard, were seen deployed in and around the EC headquarters following the July Oikya protest.

At the protest, Musaddiq Ali Ibne Mohammad, one of the key organisers of July Oikya and Ducsu's literary and cultural affairs secretary, said no "Baksal-type forces" such as the JP would be allowed to contest the election.

He further said, "Everyone who is helping these 14-party and fascist forces to contest the election, including by allowing them to run as independent candidates, must be brought to justice."

After 1:00pm, a July Oikya delegation entered the EC headquarters to submit a memorandum,

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