



BUSY FIRST DAY

With electioneering officially kicking off yesterday, political parties had a busy day of campaigning across the country. Clockwise from top left: BNP supporters attend a rally at the Alia Madrasa grounds in Sylhet city. The Jamaat-led 10-party alliance holds a rally at the capital's Mirpur Adarsha School grounds. Islami Andolan Bangladesh Senior Nayeb-e-Ameer Mufti Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim distributes leaflets among voters in Barishal city. Communist Party of Bangladesh leaders pay respect to language martyrs at the Central Shaheed Minar.



PHOTO: STAR, PALASH KHAN, TITU DAS, PRABIR DAS

Tarique slams 'ticket to heaven' pledge

In campaigns across districts, he vows employment, self-reliance

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

In his maiden election rally yesterday, BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman alleged that a certain party is trying to deceive voters, particularly women, with "tickets to heaven" in exchange for votes.

Addressing a huge gathering at the Alia Madrasa field in Sylhet city, he also criticised the party for its stance against the 1971 Liberation War.

Without mentioning Jamaat-e-Islami's name, he continued, "They are already cheating you. Now think about how they will cheat you after the election... They are not only deceiving the people; they are making Muslims commit 'shirk' [the act of ascribing divinity or worship to others alongside Allah]. Nauzubillah [We seek refuge in Allah]!"

He further warned, "Over the last few days, you have seen in newspapers and on social media how postal ballots sent to different countries, including the Middle East, were robbed.... We must be alert to conspiracies."

Thousands of party leaders, activists and supporters gathered at the venue, applauding as he called on voters to support the "paddy sheaf" -- the BNP's electoral symbol -- for national development.

With the upcoming election being the first Tarique is participating in, he attended multiple rallies across seven districts yesterday.

He reached Sylhet city around 8:00pm on Wednesday and visited the shrines of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) and Hazrat Shah Paran (RA) in



droves, donning colourful caps and t-shirts.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir spoke as a special guest, while Sylhet district BNP President Abdul Qaiyum Chowdhury presided over the programme. Candidates from Sylhet and Sunamganj also addressed the rally, pledging to work in unity to ensure the party's victory.

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NCP's only goal is to win, form govt

Says Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Citizen Party (NCP) convener Nahid Islam yesterday said the party's sole objective now is to win the upcoming national election and form the government.

"We want the polls to be held on February 12 at any cost. Our only agenda is to win and form the government," he said while launching the party's campaign in the Dhaka University area.

The electioneering began with tributes to three national leaders at Tin Nekar Mazar and prayers at the grave of slain Inqilab Moncho leader Sharif Osman Hadi on the DU campus.

Nahid urged people across Bangladesh to support candidates of the Jamaat-e-Islami-led 10-party alliance and the NCP, whose electoral symbol is Shapla Koli (waterlily bud).

He also raised concerns over the neutrality of the Election Commission.

"We are seeing that a particular party is being

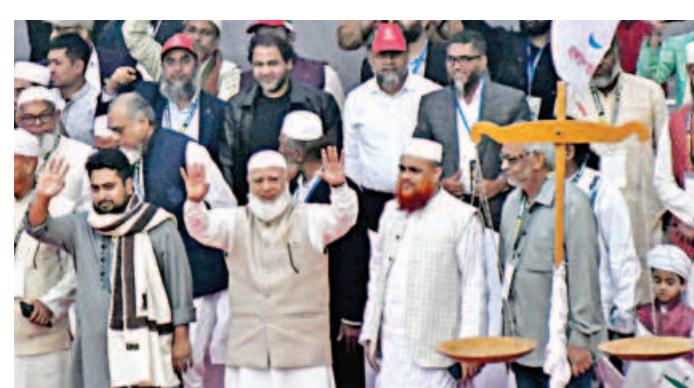
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Won't indulge in graft, nor allow it
Says Jamaat ameer kicking off party campaign

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday launched its election campaign, with its ameer warning against the resurgence of fascism and vowing to build a corruption-free country.

Addressing a rally at the Adarsha School ground in Mirpur-10, Shafiqur Rahman, the party's candidate for Dhaka-15, said if fascism reappears wearing a new outfit, it will meet the same fate as before.



Thousands of people gathered at the venue hours ahead of the scheduled time, while leaders and activists of Jamaat and other parties in the 10-party alliance took positions on nearby roads.

The formal programme began at 3:00pm with recitation from the Holy Quran. Saif Khan, son of July martyr Abdul Hannan, delivered the opening speech.

Referring to the last three elections, the Jamaat ameer said people had been unable to cast their votes and described those who deprived them of that right as vote thieves.

"We do not want to see any new vote thieves," he said.

He added, "Those who can restrain their own activists from

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IAB promises justice, equal opportunities
Starts campaign in Barishal

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Barishal

Islami Andolan Bangladesh Senior Nayeb-e-Ameer Mufti Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim yesterday said his party, if voted to power, will work to build a new Bangladesh free from corruption, misrule, and discrimination.

"I seek the prayers and cooperation of the people to establish Islamic values, justice, and good governance," he said while launching the party's election campaign at a rally in the Ashwini Kumar Hall area in Barishal city.

"We will ensure equal opportunities for all and establish a welfare-oriented society and state system, where justice and equal rights are guaranteed for every citizen," he added.

Faizul is contesting the Barishal-5 and Barishal-6 constituencies in the 13th national election, scheduled for February 12.

A large number of party leaders and activists joined

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Nation steps into campaign fest

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on the eve of voting, BNP and other opposition parties boycotted the 2014 and 2024 polls. In 2018, BNP contested under the Jatiya Oikyafront banner but faced widespread intimidation and little redress from the Election Commission.

This time, 1,981 candidates are contesting the polls, launching campaigns in village markets, town squares and city centres. Campaign slogans echoed from rural areas to cityscapes as candidates visited voters at their homes.

Candidates will be allowed to campaign until 7:30am on February 10, 48 hours before polls open on February 12.

Most candidates have also taken to social media to announce their campaign launch. They shared updates and engaged with voters, turning the digital space into an extension of the campaign trail and amplifying the festive mood and signalling the return of competitive politics.

Following tradition, BNP Chairperson Tarique Rahman launched his party's campaign from Sylhet with a rally at the Alia Madrasa ground, followed by two more gatherings in Moulvibazar and Habiganj by 7:30pm. He had rallies scheduled all night long in different northeastern districts.

Travelling by road in a red

and green bus, Tarique waved to supporters lining the roads.

This marks the first time he is running for public office and leading a national campaign since returning from exile.

At the Alia Madrasa, Tarique was greeted with thunderous applause and slogans. Thousands of activists from different constituencies gathered at the venue, chanting slogans for the party's Sheaf of Paddy symbol, and for BNP founder Ziaur Rahman and long-time party leader Khaleda Zia.

Many wore caps emblazoned with the symbol and wore party bandanas.

In his speech, Tarique criticised Jamaat, BNP's main rival in the polls with the Awami League's activities banned.

"Bangladesh comes first, not Delhi, not Pindi, not any other country," he declared, adding, "We believe the people of this country are the source of all our political power, and therefore we believe in uplifting their destiny."

Recalling the Liberation War, he said, "Because of their [who opposed independence] actions, countless brothers of this nation were martyred, and countless mothers and sisters suffered indignities. The people of Bangladesh have already seen the role they played."

He concluded by seeking prayers, support and votes for the BNP.

Meanwhile, Jamaat Ameer

Shafiqur Rahman launched his party's campaign with a rally in Dhaka's Mirpur, under the Dhaka-15 constituency from where he is running.

The party boycotted the 2014 and 2024 polls and contested the 2018 election under BNP's symbol as part of the BNP-led alliance.

Its registration was cancelled in 2013 following a High Court verdict but restored along with its symbol in June last year.

From noon, small processions gathered at Mirpur Adarsha High School ground in Mirpur-10.

By 3:00pm, the ground was packed with activists. As Shafiqur arrived, supporters welcomed him with slogans calling for votes for the party's symbol Balancing Scale.

In his speech, Shafiqur said many people had been unable to vote in previous elections and warned against the rise of new "vote robbers".

"People do not want to see extortions," he said. He also criticised BNP's proposed "family card" programme, saying, "We are not making such a pledge. Will Tk 2,000 really solve anything for a family?"

He also introduced the names of party and alliance-backed candidates for five Dhaka seats, including National Citizen Party (NCP) convener Nahid Islam.

Earlier in the day, Nahid and other leaders of NCP, formed by frontliners

of the July mass uprising, launched their campaign by paying tributes at the graves of three national leaders and Sharif Osman Hadi on the Dhaka University campus. Hadi, also a frontline July protester and aspirant for the February polls, was gunned down and killed a day after the election schedule was announced.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh also launched its campaign in a festive atmosphere in Barishal. Senior Nayeb-e-Ameer Mufti Syed Faizul Karim, who is contesting from Barishal-5 and Barishal-6, began his campaign in front of Ashwini Kumar Hall.

A large number of party leaders and activists joined the rally, after which the candidate led a procession and conducted door-to-door campaigning.

Other political parties also launched their campaigns. Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader started campaigning from Rangpur.

Candidates of the left-leaning Ganotantrik Juktafront, including the Communist Party of Bangladesh and Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal, began their electioneering by paying tribute to the martyrs of the Language Movement, the 1971 Liberation War, and the democratic and anti-communal uprisings of 1990 and 2024 at the Central Shaheed Minar.

Gonosamhati Andolan also started its campaign from the Shaheed Minar.

CHILD ABUSE
Sharmin Academy founding principal, manager sued

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two separate cases were filed yesterday over a child abuse incident at Sharmin Academy after CCTV footage showing the school's founding principal and manager beating and intimidating a child, triggering widespread public outrage.

The child's mother filed a case with Paltan Police Station under Section 70 of the Children Act against Sharmin Jahan, the

founding principal of Sharmin Academy in Nayapaltan, and the school's manager, Pabitra Kumar, both seen in the viral video circulated on Wednesday.

According to Paltan Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mostafa Kamal, the two accused are spouses. "They both went into hiding after the video drew widespread attention from lawyers and journalists. We are trying to arrest them."

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Four-day holiday for election

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meeting at the Chief Adviser's Office with Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus in the chair.

Later, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam briefed the media at the Foreign Service Academy in Dhaka, saying the council approved the proposal made at a high-level meeting held on Wednesday on the election preparations and security issues.

He said the meeting also approved another holiday on February 10 only for workers in industrial zones.

He said the rationale behind this proposal was that, as February 11 is the day before the election, many voters who are currently staying in Dhaka, industrial towns, or other major cities would be able to travel back to their respective home areas to cast their votes.

It was also expected that such a measure would help manage law and order more effectively during the election period, Shafiqul said.

An official order regarding these decisions will be issued very soon, he said.