



Election campaigning gathered pace yesterday on the second day, with candidates holding rallies and events across the country. (From left, clockwise) BNP candidate for Dhaka-6, Ishraq Hossain, campaigning in Old Dhaka's Suritola; Saiful Alam Khan Milon, Jamaat's candidate for Dhaka-12, interacts with a voter in the capital's Mogbazar area; Nahid Islam, NCP convener and 10-party alliance candidate for Dhaka-11, waves to locals during a rally in Badda's Hossain Market area; and Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim, ameer of Islami Andolan Bangladesh, presents the party's electoral symbol, a hand fan, to a candidate during a rally in Narayanganj's Fatullah.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN/ STAR



## No one shed blood for another Hasina

### Says Nahid as he launches campaign in his constituency

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam yesterday said the upcoming election is crucial for safeguarding the country's sovereignty, saying that no one shed blood in the July uprising to elect "another Sheikh Hasina, another extortionist, or another looter."

Nahid, who is contesting from the Dhaka-11 constituency, also alleged that a group, alarmed by a surge in public support for the 10-party alliance, is spreading misleading statements and trying to create an atmosphere of fear ahead of the polls.

Addressing a rally marking the inauguration of his election campaign in Shahjadpur, Nahid said, "After 16 years of fascist rule, this election is an opportunity to

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## 'Committed to ensuring rights of people'

### IAB ameer starts 18-day campaign

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Ameer of Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB) Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim, popularly known as Charmonai Pir, has launched an 18-day election tour following his party's withdrawal from Jamaat-e-Islami's alliance ahead of the polls.

The tour began yesterday after Juma prayers from Narayanganj-4 (Fatullah). On the same day, he also joined election rallies of party candidates in Narayanganj 3 (Sonargaon-Siddhirganj) and Dhaka-5 (Demra-Jatrabari).

According to the party's central publicity wing, Rezaul will visit key districts across all divisions during the 18-day programme, continuing until the election. The tour will include direct exchanges of views with people from different walks of life, including prominent ulema, academics and social workers.

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## Election race heats up

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Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman flew from Dhaka to Syedpur and then travelled by helicopter to the Sugar Mill Ground in Panchagarh, where he addressed a rally.

He said if the 10-party alliance is elected, five years would be enough "to change the face of northern Bangladesh". He later addressed rallies in Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Rangpur.

Alliance partner National Citizen Party's Convener Nahid Islam campaigned in Shahjadpur of the Dhaka-11 constituency, from where he is contesting.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh ameer Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim launched his campaign in Narayanganj. Speaking at a rally in the Kajlarpur area of Jatrabari, he said a group has drawn up a blueprint to deceive people with colourful visions of power.

"Those who can betray even their own comrades cannot be trusted with the safety of Islam or the country," he said.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir campaigned at Sholtohori Bazar in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila.

Referring to communal harmony, he said, "Just as in the past Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians together built our society and our

country, we want to move the country forward in the same way. We want to ensure equal security for all."

Jamaat Secretary General and Khulna-5 candidate Mia Golam Porwar, speaking at street rallies in Dumuria and Phultala upazilas, said there is no alternative to ending an era of misrule, corruption and political repression.

Chattogram witnessed vibrant campaigning as candidates carried out door-to-door drives across several constituencies.

In Chattogram-11, BNP candidate Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury campaigned in Laldiar Char, saying that after 17 years people are finally ready to exercise their voting rights.

In Chattogram-9, Jamaat candidate AKM Fazlul Haque held a mass contact programme after Juma prayers at Kapasgola Jamtal Jame Mosque, pledging to work for organised urban development and justice.

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed, a candidate for Cox's Bazar-1, addressed a street rally in Chakaria.

He said the people have regained ownership of the country and freed democracy from confinement.

"Now that democracy must be strengthened so that everyone feels they are owners of this state.

Therefore, on February 12, each of us must exercise our voting rights freely and independently," he said.

NCP Member Secretary Akhter Hossen campaigned in Rangpur-4 as the 10-party alliance candidate, saying that despite domestic and foreign conspiracies, people will bring the alliance to power.

In Lakshmipur-1 (Ramganj), Azizur Rahman, an Ishapur Union BNP leader, is seeking votes for the party, even as his son Mahbub Alam is contesting as an NCP candidate.

Mahbub, a frontline activist of the July uprising, is also the brother of former information adviser Mahfuj Alam.

This time, 1,981 candidates, including 249 independents, are contesting the polls. Campaigning will continue until 7:30am on February 10.

Alongside the general election, voters will also take part in a referendum on key constitutional reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and rebalancing state powers.

With the Awami League barred from contesting, analysts say the race is shaping up primarily as a contest between the BNP- and Jamaat-led alliances.

[Our correspondents in respective districts contributed to this report]

## Business community

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Underscoring the need for an environment that would instill confidence among businesspeople, he said businesses must be provided with adequate energy supplies, and utility prices in the industrial sector should be lowered to help them stay competitive in the global market.

Mohammad Hatem, president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), said the parties must commit to restoring law and order in industrial zones and implementing reforms to the customs system and the National Board of Revenue (NBR) to facilitate trade and business.

"At present, banks are imposing various charges on businesses, along with high interest rates. Political parties should clearly outline in their manifestos how they plan to address these issues if they are voted to power."

Echoing his views, Taskeen Ahmed, the president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), said political parties should make lowering the cost of doing business a top priority in their manifestos.

"They should cover issues such as developing railways, waterways, and ports; simplifying the licensing and approval process; strengthening infrastructure planning and coordination; and expanding fully automated systems for customs and trade to reduce the lead time."

He also said they should make time-bound commitments to tackle urgent issues such as energy shortages and take measures to ensure smooth day-to-day business operations.

"The business community expects a credible roadmap that ensures policy certainty, enhances competitiveness, and supports sustainable economic growth."

Tapan Chowdhury, managing director of Square Pharmaceuticals Ltd, said, "We want a more business-friendly environment. Businesses remain hesitant to make investment decisions because of the existing uncertainties."

In recent times, many workers lost jobs due to the closure of several factories. The next government will need to take measures to help reopen these industrial units, he added.

Hoping for a fair election and a smooth transition of power, MA Jabbar, managing director of DBL Group that mainly exports garments, said the next government should choose the right people to run the crucial ministries if they want to serve people in the true sense.

On a similar note, Abul Kasem Khan, vice chairman of A.K. Khan & Company Ltd, said, "We expect to have a stable government... The economy must not face any setback because of political instability."

Emphasising the importance of both political stability and economic clarity, Mohammed Amirul Haque, president of the LPG Operators Association of Bangladesh (LOAB), said, "We expect political parties to outline the direction they intend to take the economy. This should be clearly reflected in their manifestos."

He highlighted regulatory hurdles in the LPG sector, saying companies currently need to obtain and renew

the private sector will contribute to national development, he observed.

"We want ease of doing business. Still, we need 27 to 29 signatures from officials at government offices to start a business venture. We want deregulation and a one-stop service in the real sense."

Asif Ibrahim, former president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), stressed the need for a comprehensive plan to put in place a multimodal transport network comprising railways, waterways, seaports, and land ports to relieve pressure on roads, which handle over 70 percent of freight movement.

"Digitisation of customs, permits, and freight tracking could cut clearance times by 30 to 50 percent." Simplifying licensing procedures and rationalising tariffs would also improve efficiency and transparency, he added.

Ibrahim recommended expanding private investment and public-private partnerships (PPPs) to modernise infrastructure.

Targeted support for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) – through trade finance, cargo insurance, and regulatory simplification – could help reduce hidden costs and strengthen Bangladesh's competitiveness in global trade.

Meanwhile, the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) has prepared a 10-point reform agenda, urging political parties to incorporate key private sector demands into their manifestos.

The agenda starts with restoring macroeconomic stability by reducing inflation through coordinated fiscal and monetary policies, along with ensuring a predictable exchange rate.

The chamber advocates banking sector reforms to curb irregular lending and improve recovery mechanisms for non-performing loans.

Regarding the tax policy, MCCI calls for a simplified and digitised system that will ensure compliance with regulations and expand the tax base without overburdening existing taxpayers.

The chamber also underscores the need to boost export competitiveness ahead of Bangladesh's graduation from LDC status through free trade agreements (FTAs), tariff rationalisation, and round-the-clock operations at ports and customs.

It also called for improving the investment climate and reforming the energy sector to ensure reliable and affordable supply.

## 'North has long been treated like a stepchild'

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tour of eight northern districts, Shafiqur told reporters at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport that national unity is essential. "We need to reach the people with our own programmes without attacking each other."

He flew to Syeddpur and then travelled by helicopter to the sugar mill ground in Panchagarh, where he criticised the BNP's promises of "family cards" and "farmers' cards".

"Brothers, we don't have any cards. You, brothers and sisters, are our cards. We want a card of love in your hearts. With your support, prayers and love, we want to build a Bangladesh free from unemployment and impunity. We don't want to see people of any part of Bangladesh living as recipients of anyone's charity."

There, he handed over Shapla Koli, the electoral symbol of 10-party alliance partner National Citizen Party, to Sarjis Alam, the alliance candidate in Panchagarh-1, and Daripalla, Jamaat's symbol, to Panchagarh-2 nominee Saiful Alam.

Without naming any party, he said some leaders appear before people only once every five years. For the rest of the time, they cannot be found even "with a lantern".

"Some are like cuckoos of spring. They appear only in spring and sing 'kuhu kuhu', then disappear. They have no connection with the people, the grassroots, or the poor and distressed. We hate this kind of politics. We were there, we are here, and we will remain, Insha Allah."

He also said he does not want to see a single unemployed person in the northern region. If elected, Jamaat would generate large-scale

employment and establish medical colleges in all 64 districts, including Panchagarh.

"People chant slogans 'from Teknaf to Tetulia'. But the development wave of Teknaf never reaches Tetulia. We will reverse this. We will say, 'from Tetulia to Teknaf'."

After Panchagarh, he travelled by road to Dinajpur. Speaking at an alliance rally at Gore-e-Shaheed Maidan after Juma prayers, he reiterated plans to modernise agriculture.

"We want the North to be the capital of our agro-industry. Farming will no longer be done in the old ways. We will modernise agriculture, ensure modern logistics, and deliver fair and low-cost inputs to farmers, thereby increasing productivity."

He also rejected claims that Jamaat would restrict women if it came to power.

"A group of miscreants claim that if we get the chance to run the country, we will confine mothers and sisters to their homes. Those who are frightened by the love and support Jamaat-e-Islami is receiving from women today are spreading these lies."

In the afternoon, he addressed another rally at Thakurgaon Government Boys' High School ground, saying voters would support not only Jamaat but the entire 10-party alliance.

"We cannot build Bangladesh alone. A just state must be built by uniting the nation."

He introduced the alliance nominees for Thakurgaon's three constituencies and later reached Rangpur, where he spoke at the Public Library ground and stayed overnight.

At the rally, he said that if Jamaat

is voted to power, Bangladesh would remain Bangladesh and not become Pakistan, Afghanistan or Iran.

"In governing the country, we will follow the Charter of Madinah as a model, where justice and the rule of law will be established, and people of all religions and backgrounds will enjoy equal rights."

Expressing frustration over the current situation, he said they had expected a peaceful Bangladesh after August 5, but anarchy had continued.

"Many false cases have been filed. Many innocent people have been accused, and money has been taken to remove their names from the cases."

Today, he will visit the grave of Abu Sayed, a martyr of the July uprising and a student of Begum Rokeya University. Shafiqur will then address rallies in Gaibandha, Bogura, Sherpur, Sirajganj, and Pabna.

[Our correspondents in Lalmonirhat and Thakurgaon contributed to this report.]

### CORRECTION

In the front-page report titled "Record crore-rich candidates in race", published yesterday, the first paragraph under the subhead "FOREIGN ASSETS" should read: Iftekharuzaman said information suggested involvement of a declared dependent of a candidate in a house worth £1.4 million purchased in 2013 in the UK, which was not mentioned in the affidavit.

We regret the error.

## US 'armada' heads towards Iran

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The nationwide shutdown of the internet by authorities in Iran, which activists fear is aimed at masking the true scale of a crackdown on protests, has lasted more than two weeks, a monitor said later on Thursday.

"Iran has now been under a national internet blackout for two full weeks," said Netblocks in a post on X.

"At hour 336, connectivity levels continue to flatline with only a slight rise at the backbone supplying regime-whitelisted networks," it said. "A few users are now able to tunnel to

the outside world," it added, without specifying the tools used for this.

The UN Human Rights Council held an emergency session yesterday to discuss the "alarming violence" used in Iran against protesters, while a group of states called on United Nations' investigators to document alleged abuses for future trials. UN rights chief Volker Turk urged Iran authorities to "end brutal repression".

Meanwhile, an influential Iranian cleric warned that Iran may target US-linked investments in the region in retaliation for any US attack on

the Islamic Republic, Iranian news agencies reported.

The UN nuclear watchdog must clarify its stance on US and Israeli attacks on Iran's nuclear sites last June before inspectors are allowed to visit those facilities, Iranian media yesterday quoted the country's atomic chief as saying.

Mohammad Eslami said the inspections so far had been limited to undamaged sites and he criticised the watchdog for letting Israeli and US pressure influence its actions.