

Bangladesh-Malaysia

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recruitment. In 2008, he founded Bestinet, a company offering software to digitise Malaysia's recruitment system, pitching it as a tool to curb corruption.

Some officials were sceptical. The International Labour Organization reviewed the system in 2013, calling it innovative but warning it was not "fool-proof in protecting migrants from excessive fees." Malaysia adopted the system two years later.

People who know Amin said he cultivated powerful allies, including former senior officials and an influential politician, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi. When Bestinet was adopted in 2015, Zahid was home affairs minister overseeing immigration and announced Malaysia would recruit up to 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers.

But all recruitment was routed through just 10 Bangladeshi agencies out of more than 1,000, ending open competition. Three former Bangladeshi officials told Bloomberg that Malaysia imposed the arrangement, warning it would recruit from elsewhere if Dhaka refused.

Six people said Amin selected the agencies while Zahid handled the politics, according to the report. A parliamentary committee later found the ministry issued Bestinet a letter of acceptance before finalising procurement terms.

Zahid has denied involvement, and Amin said Malaysia chose the agencies and that he is not Zahid's friend.

Agencies excluded from the list sued in 2018, calling the arrangement a cartel designed to control recruitment costs. The suit alleged the firms were not selected on merit and that Amin helped design the scheme. The case was later withdrawn without findings of wrongdoing.

Citing interviews, official letters and witness statements, Bloomberg reports that the selected agencies began charging workers an unlawful "syndicate fee" of about \$1,350. Without cash payment, workers were

allegedly denied their passports.

Ruhul Amin, owner of Dhaka-based Catharsis International, was accused by agents of collecting these fees, which allegedly exceeded \$1 billion over a decade. If agencies failed to pay, Bestinet's system allegedly blocked new recruitment orders.

These and other charges pushed recruitment costs as high as \$6,600 per worker, according to a 2024 memo prepared for Anwar – more than double previous levels and far higher than fees paid by Indonesian or Nepali workers, according to the report.

Amin denied the existence of syndicate fees. "I never met a single worker, so how do I collect money?" he told Bloomberg.

Three agencies denied collecting unlawful fees, including Catharsis, which said it operates ethically. Others did not respond.

It remains unclear how many workers paid the fees or where the money went. There is no evidence it went to Amin.

But in 2024, Bangladesh arrested dozens of recruitment agents on charges of money laundering, extortion and trafficking, and asked Malaysia to stop using Bestinet and extradite Amin and Ruhul.

Bangladesh's Interpol office accused the pair of playing key roles in a system that "fraudulently extorted money" and caused workers "physical and mental torture".

Amin denied the allegations. Malaysia's home affairs minister said police in both countries are in contact, but Amin has not been extradited.

Latheefa Koya, former chief of Malaysia's Anti-Corruption Commission, described Amin as a symptom of deeper institutional rot. She and other senior officials said recruitment has become so lucrative that companies over-recruit or promise fake jobs to illegally subcontract workers.

The fees sustain the system, they said. Everyone gets a cut and the workers pay.

Protect UN's

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join Trump's new grouping, neither has confirmed participation.

Xi told President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva during their morning phone call that in the current "tumultuous" international situation, China and Brazil "are constructive forces in maintaining world peace and stability", according to a readout published by state broadcaster CCTV.

"They should stand firmly on the right side of history... and jointly uphold the central role of the United Nations and international fairness and justice," Xi said.

While in Davos, Switzerland, Trump said that once complete, the board "can do pretty much whatever we want", while adding that "we'll do it in conjunction with the United Nations".

Beijing's foreign ministry said on Wednesday that "no matter how the international situation changes, China firmly upholds the international system with the United Nations at its core".

Brazil has also expressed scepticism about the Board of Peace, saying it could represent "a revocation" of the United Nations.

Lula's special advisor Celso Amorim told Brazilian media that "we cannot consider a reform of the UN made by one country."

During Trump's global tariff onslaught last year, China and Brazil sought to present their countries as staunch defenders of the multilateral trading system.

Xi told Lula in August they could set an example of "self-reliance" for emerging powers.

China, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, engages with the international body even as it has objected to what it terms internal interference.

Advocacy groups like Human Rights Watch have accused China of seeking to undermine the United Nations by reducing contributions to the organisation's rights budgets, establishing an alternative international mediation body and blocking activists from UN events.

Committed to ensuring

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Yesterday afternoon, Rezaul addressed a public rally in Jatrabari as the chief guest in support of Islami Andolan's Dhaka-5 candidate Md Ibrahim.

"We are committed to ensuring the fundamental rights of the people and building a humane and just society. A just society cannot be established without Islamic principles," he said.

Calling on voters to support the hand fan symbol, he said casting ballots in its favour would help "fulfil people's expectations" and "establish peace".

In an apparent reference to Jamaat, he said, "Driven

by colourful dreams of power, a party has drawn up a blueprint to deceive the people. Those who can betray their own allies cannot be trusted with Islam or the country."

He also said Islami Andolan had refused to take an easy path to power by compromising with injustice.

Earlier, addressing another rally in the Hariharpara area of Panchabati under Narayanganj-4 constituency, Rezaul said, "Keeping the country, Islam and Shariah in mind, we have placed one box – the hand fan. There is no other box in favour of Islam."

Dhaka rejects

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as illegal migrants before the International Court of Justice is aimed at reinforcing a false narrative of internal security threats to divert attention from atrocities committed against the community.

The government said the Rohingyas are a distinct ethnic group with deep historical roots in Arakan, predating modern borders and the incorporation of the region into the Barman Kingdom in 1785. Their presence is well documented in historical records, colonial demographic accounts, and independent scholarship, it added.

Bangladesh said the term "Rohingya" evolved historically from the old Arakan capital Mro-Haung or Rohang, and was later adopted by the community for self-identification amid systematic marginalisation in Myanmar. Attempts to portray the Rohingyas as foreigners or recent migrants are inconsistent with historical facts, the statement said.

The Rohingyas were an integral part of Myanmar's political and social life until the promulgation of the 1982 Citizenship Law, which excluded them from citizenship on ethno-religious grounds, Bangladesh noted. Despite sustained marginalisation, the community retained voting rights until they were fully disenfranchised during Myanmar's 2015 general elections.

Bangladesh said Myanmar has persistently denied the Rohingyas their constitutional guarantees, culminating in their mass eviction from Rakhine State during the 2016-17 period, rendering them stateless as part of a planned process to destroy the community.

The statement said the systematic labelling of the Rohingyas as "Bengalis" denies their inherent right to self-identify and has been used to justify exclusion, persecution and ethnic cleansing. Bangladesh noted that despite such claims, Myanmar had recognised the Rohingyas as "lawful residents of Burma" in the 1978 bilateral repatriation agreement with Bangladesh and assured their reintegration in subsequent accords.

No one shed blood

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establish a new settlement. It is meant to fulfil the promise made through the mass uprising – to build a corruption-free, discrimination-free, and justice-based Bangladesh. To achieve that goal, there is no alternative to victory for the 10-party electoral alliance."

He said thousands of people sacrificed their lives not merely to change a government.

"One Hasina has gone, another may emerge; one extortionist has gone, another may follow, but no one shed blood for this," he said.

"The upcoming election is not just about changing the government; it is about changing the power structure, reforming the country, re-establishing democracy, ensuring freedom of expression, and upholding national sovereignty."

Nahid further said, "When students, workers, and women across Bangladesh have taken to the streets to campaign for us, misleading statements are now being spread. Various negative narratives are being created to spread fear and panic."

"But this election is meant to defeat land grabbers, extortionists, looters, and loan defaulters," he added.

He warned that any attempt to occupy polling stations or commit voting irregularities would fail. "If there is any intention to occupy or seal polling stations, forget it. It will not succeed," he said.

Referring to the referendum, Nahid said a 'Yes' vote would mean standing in favour of reform, good governance, sovereignty, and the July popular uprising.

"We will reject dynasticism and discrimination and move forward with the reform process," he said.

Highlighting local issues in Dhaka-11, Nahid said the constituency remains deprived of civic amenities. "Traffic congestion, gas

and electricity shortages, extortion, and terrorism – we will work to resolve these problems," he said, adding that occupied playgrounds, canals, and land would be restored and opportunities created for youths to engage in sports and community development.

Advocate Atiqur Rahman Atiq, former Jamaat-e-Islami-nominated candidate for Dhaka-11 and former central president of Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir, was present at the event. Atiq withdrew his nomination in line with a party decision.

"Atiq Bhai and I will conduct the election activities together in unity," Nahid said, formally announcing the start of the campaign.

Later in the afternoon, a mass procession organised by the 10-party alliance under Nahid's leadership marched from Banshatala to Rampura, drawing a large number of leaders, activists, and supporters.

Earlier in the day, Nahid took part in campaign activities in the Bashundhara Residential Area.

Other NCP candidates have also stepped up campaigning. The party's Member Secretary and 10-party alliance candidate for Rangpur-4, Akhter Hossen, has been conducting door-to-door outreach and visiting shops, hats, and markets, according to posts on his Facebook page.

Another NCP candidate, Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary, has launched his campaign by visiting mosques, streets, and tea stalls in his constituency.

Meanwhile, NCP South Chief Organiser Hasnat Abdullah from Cumilla-4, North Chief Organiser Sarjis Alam from Panchagarh-1, Senior Joint Chief Coordinator Hannan Masud from Noakhali-6, and other candidates have also begun their election and referendum campaigns in their respective constituencies.

Two dead

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Dewanganj Government Abdul Khalek Memorial Degree College. Selected officials were instructed to attend the training.

The list of assistant presiding officers attached to the letters included the names of the two deceased teachers.

Md Shafiul Alam, superintendent of Char Magurihat Dakhil Madrasa, said, "Abdul Karim's name was not included in the list sent from the madrasa for election duty. I do not understand how his name was added."

Abul Kalam Azad, acting head teacher of Polakandi High School, said, "Ataur Rahman died four months ago. I have no idea how his name appeared on the list of assistant presiding officers."

Upazila election officer Rafiqul told The Daily Star, "Due to an unintentional mistake and technical error, the names of the two deceased teachers were included... Their names have been removed from the final list."

Mohammad Yusuf Ali, Jamalpur deputy commissioner and returning officer, said, "We will investigate how the names of deceased teachers were included."

Democratic reform

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In its opening statement, the alliance said despite Bangladesh's birth through the Liberation War in 1971, people's aspirations remain unfulfilled even after 54 years.

It blamed successive governments – both military rulers and elected regimes – for failing to establish genuine democracy and for allowing corruption, repression and inequality to deepen.

The manifesto strongly criticised the past 15 years of rule, saying state institutions were destroyed by corruption, enforced disappearances, killings and vote rigging.

Referring to the July uprising, in which more than a thousand people were killed and thousands injured, the alliance said the people are still waiting for justice and meaningful change.

Among its key pledges, Gonotantrik Juktafront promised to restore democratic rights, including freedom of speech, assembly and political activities.

It vowed to repeal repressive laws, ensure an independent judiciary, reform the police and make the Anti-Corruption Commission fully independent.

The alliance also proposed major electoral reforms, including restoring paper ballots, scrapping electronic voting machines, introducing the right to recall lawmakers and ensuring voting rights for expatriates.

On the economy, the manifesto focused

on curbing price hikes, breaking market syndicates, creating jobs and reducing inequality.

It pledged state intervention in essential goods, progressive taxation and increased spending on health, education and agriculture.

The alliance also promised free primary healthcare, food security through rationing, fair wages for workers and equal rights for women.

Calling for a people-based political force, the alliance urged voters to support its candidates to transform parliament into a platform for the rights of workers, farmers and the oppressed.

Camps, crime, civic

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education and health are neglected, our land is being encroached upon, and we face harassment through politically motivated cases," he said.

"Peace will not return to the camps without permanent rehabilitation. Political parties have made promises before only to exploit our votes, but have abandoned us after elections. This time, we will vote for whoever guarantees permanent rehabilitation in their manifesto," he added.

Talking to The Daily Star, BNP's Aminul Haque said he has been documenting local grievances for months.

"I grew up here, and people know me as a sportsman and a neighbour. I have already discussed the camp issue with the BNP Chairperson. If we form the government, we will begin phased permanent rehabilitation. Once people have stable homes, crime in these areas will naturally decline," he said.

He also called for policies based on unity and harmony. "I want to practice the politics of brotherhood, sincerity, and love. People of all views should coexist in harmony. If we stay united, many problems can be solved." "I believe people from all walks of life will vote for me and allow me to serve as their representative," Aminul added.

Jamaat candidate Abdul Baten said he is receiving "strong public support".

"People want change. They are tired of extortion and moral decay," he said, adding, "Voters see Jamaat as a fresh alternative."

Regarding the camps, he said, "Past governments used these residents for criminal gains. We want to give them a normal life and a better environment and future for their children."

Both leading candidates, however, expressed concerns about possible electoral irregularities.

Baten warned of attempts to influence polling centres or intimidate polling agents, though he said he trusts the interim government led by Prof Muhammad Yunus.

Meanwhile, Aminul raised concerns about a "certain group" collecting voters' NID details and mobile banking information. "We don't know their intentions, but we are alert and have informed the returning officer," he said.

The constituency has 400,499 voters – 201,168 men, 199,323 women, and 8 hijra.

Other candidates running for Dhaka-16 include Saiful Islam (Islami Andolan Bangladesh), Mohammad T o w h i d u z z a m a n (Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan), Abdul Kader Jilani (Muktijote), Mamun Hossain (Gono Odhikar Parishad), A.K.M. Moazzem Hossain (Labor Party), Tarikul Islam (NPP), Nazmul Huq (BJP), Rashidul Islam (BASAD), and Sultan Ahmed Selim (Jatiya Party).

Man killed

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around 8:00am during land measurement and escalated into a scuffle. Mosharraf collapsed after being pushed and was taken to Durgapur Upazila Health Complex, where the duty doctor declared him dead around 10:00am.

In another incident, the body of Md Rabiquil Islam, 37, was found hanging inside his room at Chinahala village of Sadar union. His wife, Manjura Khatun, informed police, who recovered the body and sent it for autopsy.

Earlier the same morning, a two-year-old child, Sani, son of Md Jalal Mia, drowned in a pond at Baroiundo village in Barkhapan union.

According to police and family members, the child fell into the pond in front of the house unnoticed. He was taken to Kalmakanda Upazila Health Complex, where the physician declared him dead.

Kalmakanda Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Siddiq Hossain told The Daily Star that two unnatural death cases were filed in connection with the deaths of Rabiquil and the child. No written complaint has yet been received over the clash between the two brothers, though legal proceedings are under way.

The bodies of Rabiquil and Mosharraf were sent to Netrokona Modern Sadar Hospital for autopsy. As no complaint was filed, the child's body was handed over to the family, the OC added.

Relations between

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"friendship" with Jamaat-e-Islami and would impose a 100 percent tariff on Bangladesh if Jamaat attempted to implement Sharia law. The journalist sought Farhad Mazhar's reaction.

In response, Farhad Mazhar said every political party in Bangladesh is connected to the United States in some way, either directly or indirectly.

He argued that following the July uprising, what he described as a "constitutional counter-revolution" has been portrayed internationally as a regime change in favour of the US.

"Even before the mass uprising, and even before Gono Odhikar Parishad, I said removing Sheikh Hasina was not the main issue. The US would do that anyway. Our task was to think about how to build a new Bangladeshi state," he said.

Farhad Mazhar said international law has little meaning in practice. Citing former US President Donald Trump's actions, he called it a harsh reality.

"Amid this situation, my concern is simple – how do I survive with 17 crore people? I do not want to be dragged into any war," he said.

He also questioned why political discourse often focuses on opposing India while remaining silent on what he described as US imperialism.

Farhad Mazhar said Jamaat had not opposed the proposed stabilisation force being sent to Gaza and claimed this showed Jamaat's policy alignment and relationship with the US.

"That is why the United States is making these statements in advance. I see this as a very dangerous warning sign," he said.

He also urged people not to create divisions between the army and the public.

He said the uprising was based on solidarity among students, citizens and soldiers, noting that soldiers come from farming and working class families.

"Any attempt to separate them from the people would be dangerous."

On Gaza, he said participation in any international military initiative in favour of Israel and the US would not be acceptable to the public.

Speaking on state reform and elections, Farhad Mazhar said, "If elections are held without uprooting the looting system, the resulting government will not belong to the people," he said, adding that state-building should come before elections.

The discussion was organised by a platform called Gono Obhuthan Suraksha Mancha. Other speakers included Ahmed Ferdous and Mohammad Romel, an organiser of Bhabboithoki.

Support BNP

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activists here in trouble. We will take care of you. You will not be in danger. We are with you."

He said that those responsible for wrongdoing would be punished, while those not involved would not be targeted.

At 78, Fakhrul said he remains young at heart and capable of solving local problems if given the chance. He recalled contesting elections in the constituency since 1991, sometimes winning and sometimes losing, but "Even when I lost, I never abandoned you."

Later in the day, he also attended several meetings in the Debipur union of Sadar upazila.

PRAYER
TIMING

JANUARY 24

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5:30	12:45	4:15	5:40	7:00
JAMAAT 6:05	1:15	4:30	5:44	7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION