



## 16 DAYS TO VOTE

Clockwise from top left: A huge crowd attends the BNP campaign rally in Noakhali's Hatiya upazila; Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman addresses a rally at Shahid Abrar Fahad Stadium in Kushtia town; NCP spokesperson Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain speaks at a rally in Chattogram's Boalkhali upazila; activists and supporters of Islami Andolan Bangladesh attend a rally at the Nur Muhammad High School ground in Jamalpur's Bokshiganj; Dhaka-6 BNP candidate Ishraque Hussain gets blessings from an elderly woman while campaigning in Dhaka's Sutrapur. All photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTOS: STAR



## Certain group conspiring to obstruct polls

Tarique warns Noakhali rally, urges party leaders to remain cautious

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday urged his party leaders and activists to remain cautious as "a group is conspiring to obstruct the national election". "Were you able to vote for the last 15-16 years? You weren't. Those who did that have left the country. But another group is now conspiring to obstruct the polls," he told a campaign rally held on a college ground in Noakhali's Hatiya upazila.

Addressing the rally virtually from Dhaka, he told his party supporters to offer Tahajjud prayers and go to the polling centres, where they should offer Fajr prayers.

"People from other religions will also go. Everyone can line up early in the morning and cast their votes properly," he said, adding, "But voting is not enough.... You must stay there [at the polling centres] after voting and make sure your vote is counted properly. Can you do that?"

The crowd unitedly replied, "Yes!" Tarique further said that people of all religions - Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians - must all work together and build the country. "This is our nation... our first and last destination."

Apologising for not being able to attend the rally in person, he said, "The Election Commission gave us very little time for poll related activities, which has

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



**"Voting is not enough.... You must stay there [polling centres] after voting and make sure your vote is counted properly."**

Tarique Rahman  
BNP chairman

## 'Jamaat's politics is for people's welfare'

Shafiqur says all past rulers ransacked the country

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday said his party practises politics for the welfare of people, not for personal or organisational gain.

"Our politics is neither to feed ourselves nor to fill the stomachs of party workers. Rather, we pursue politics to ensure food for the poor, hungry, and destitute people of this country," he said.

He made the remarks while addressing a rally as the chief guest, organised by the district unit of Jamaat at Shaheed Abrar Fahad Stadium in Kushtia town.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



**"They have ransacked the country in whatever way they could - biting, gnawing, and scratching."**

Shafiqur Rahman  
Jamaat ameer

## Defeated, new fascist forces now united to ensure 'no' vote

Asif tells Ctg rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

National Citizen Party spokesperson Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain yesterday said "defeated and new fascist forces" have reached a tacit unity to ensure the victory of the "no" vote in the upcoming referendum.

"If elected, we [the NCP] may get the opportunity to serve you for the next five years. But if the 'yes' vote wins in the referendum, its benefits will not be limited to you or me. It will shape the future of your children and generations to come," he told a campaign rally held in support of the 'yes' vote and the I-party alliance candidate in Chattogram's Boalkhali upazila.

He alleged that the pattern of repression witnessed before August 5 - marked by enforced

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

## Past rulers have nothing new to offer: IAB chief

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Ameer of Islami Andolan Bangladesh Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim yesterday said past rulers who have governed the country since independence have nothing new to offer.

"Those who have governed the country since independence have already ruled for 53-54 years and have nothing new to offer on the path of development," he said at a rally at the Nur Muhammad High School ground in Bokshiganj of Jamalpur.

"If there are good policies, good leadership, and morality, then ideal leaders can establish governance like that of Caliph Umar," the IAB chief told the gathering,

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



**"Vote for Islamic Andolan, enjoy peace in this world and attain peace in the hereafter as well."**

Mufti Syed  
Muhammad Rezaul  
Karim  
IAB ameer

## The 'youth vote', from the ground

FROM PAGE 1

year Mathematics student; and Lamiya Irshad, a first-year English student. They were articulate and measured in their responses.

This campus carries a valiant and tragic connection to the July uprising. Abu Sayed, a student here, was shot dead by police during a demonstration and later became a symbol of the uprising.

Bayezid still struggles to talk about that day. "Abu Sayed was a student of our department," he said. "Sometimes I still feel emotional. And I feel worse when I see that even now his trial has not been completed."

For him, that failure is not procedural; it is political. "The interim government largely failed to uphold the spirit of July," he said. "They forgot their mandate."

Asked what drove them to the streets in the first place, Mustansir answered without hesitation. "We wanted democracy restored. We wanted opportunities based on our merits and qualifications. We wanted justice and freedom of speech," he said.

Those words were written on walls across the country during and after the July uprising. Faded slogans still remain, particularly around campuses.

Do they feel those demands are being fulfilled? Lamiya shook her head. "Hardly," she said. "I don't see any headway."

Bayezid believes the problem lies in continuity rather than rupture. "The people making policies are largely the same," he said. "Look at the trials of killings during the July movement. What percentage has been completed? Even Abu Sayed's case is unfinished. You can imagine the fate of the others."

Mustansir was blunter. "Is there negotiation going on with political parties?" he asked. "Is the police administration stopping the trials because they were involved? We don't know and that insecurity remains."

He pointed to the killing of Osman Hadi, which shocked the country. "We never thought this kind of murder

would happen after 2024," he said. "And then we hear advisers making outlandish claims like 'the killers fled the country'. These excuses are not convincing."

Mustansir believes such incidents are happening because critical state institutions were not reformed.

When asked what matters most to her after finishing her education, Lamiya answered immediately. "A job."

Does she feel confident she will get one? She paused before answering. "Not really. We still see corruption and irregularities in recruitment."



SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH VIDEO

The quota movement that erupted into a mass uprising in 2024 was rooted in students' deep anxiety over dwindling employment prospects after graduation. That anxiety, I found, continues to shape how they listen to election campaigns. All three said they are paying attention, but without much faith.

"Young people and students are being ignored," Mustansir said. "Political parties focus on rural and low-income groups because they are vote banks. But look at me, a student of Begum Rokeya University. Are we being given the facilities so that we can contribute to the country?"

He gestured towards the campus. "This university spreads over 75 acres. We have only two dormitories. No proper lab facilities. I don't even consider this a complete university."

Yet parties continue to promise more colleges and universities. "We've seen this before," Bayezid said. "Universities mushroomed during the Hasina period. But did they produce skilled people?"

The emphasis on numbers, they argue, misses the point. "If we could turn young people into skilled human resources, that would be better than handouts like interest-free loans," Bayezid said. "Do they even think about budgetary capacity when making these lofty pledges?"

On the BNP's promise of millions of new jobs, Mustansir laughed. "Where will those jobs come from?" he asked. "Are we being made skilled first? They want to give me a job without making me capable. Isn't that laughable?"

Jamaat-e-Islami's proposal of monthly interest-free loans for graduates sounded more practical to them, but trust remains thin. "We are in a situation where we cannot trust anyone," Bayezid said. "Commitments are made and forgotten. We've seen that too many times."

Before leaving, I posed a hypothetical question. If party supremos from BNP or Jamaat, Tarique Rahman or Shafiqur Rahman, were sitting across the table, what would be their number one demand?

"For me, it's good education," Lamiya said. "Education that makes me a skilled and worthy citizen."

Bayezid leaned back before answering. "An education system that produces skilled and honest citizens," he said. "And let me tell you, I will vote only for those who think about protecting the country's sovereignty."

Mustansir did not hesitate. "Freedom of speech," he said. "That solves many problems. And I want the guarantee of a normal death. Insecurity still haunts us."

As I left the campus, it was clear that the students who once filled the streets are no longer chanting slogans. They are weighing choices. The election that exists because of their movement now faces their quiet but ruthless scrutiny.

(Shakeel Anwar is a former BBC journalist)

## Safety, freedom and job

FROM PAGE 1

journalism at DU, said, "Political leaders should pay attention to fair recruitment, digital education, and mental health support."

Young professionals argue that law and order cannot improve unless political interference in various government agencies ends.

Sajal Kundu, a private bank employee, said the police force must remain independent and free from political influence.

"I expect the new government to do whatever is necessary to stop extortion and the reign of local thugs. I want to see an end to the brandishing of weapons by criminals," said the 28-year-old banker.

Some young voters said they want more than arrests after headline-hogging crimes; they want a justice system that functions impartially.

Tamanna, a higher-secondary student at Lalmohon Islamia Kamil Madrasa in Bhola, alleged that money sometimes dictates outcomes in the justice system, enabling those with financial power to escape accountability.

"Those who speak out against injustice must be provided with safety and the right to express themselves," she pointed out that activists who have spoken publicly against corruption now feel increasingly vulnerable to reprisals.

Faimun Noman, a student of accounting and information systems at Islamic University, said he wants a government that believes in accountability, transparency and justice.

"I want to see a government that takes an effective and neutral stance against corruption, and a system where state institutions operate above partisan influence," said Faimun, a first-time voter from Lalmonirhat 3.

He hoped the next administration would take measures to control spiralling living costs, create jobs and ensure good governance in the health sector.

Benzir Ahammed Shawon, a master's student at North South University, said the next government should be "social-development-oriented."

"It should take up projects that reduce inequality and curb the commercialisation of education," he said, calling for economic measures to address the recession and

Expressing concern about job scarcity, Aysha Tofail, a final-year student of mass communication and

unemployment. "Freedom of the media and publishers must be ensured," he added.

Sumaya Akter Ripa, an MBA student at Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), said, "The next government must focus on improving the wages and living standards of the most neglected workers. We need to reduce reliance on imports and utilise our domestic assets."

She also hoped that there would be reforms to modernise the judiciary and ensure corruption-free recruitment exams.

Md Nayim Howlader, a master's student at Dhaka College and a first-time voter, said, "No matter which party forms the next government, it must be people-friendly. It must show zero tolerance for all forms of injustice and corruption."

He further said the future administration should prioritise healthcare and education and work to develop domestic industries.

Madrasa students highlighted that they are being left behind in terms of skills.

Habibur Rahman, a higher secondary student at Darunnajat Siddiqiya Kamil Madrasa in Dhaka, said manifestos must address the "digital divide".

"The madrasa education system is still lagging behind, especially when it comes to ICT. While the country is moving towards digitalisation, there are no major initiatives in this sector for us. This leads to discrimination in the job market."

Tamanna of Lalmohon Islamia Kamil Madrasa called for curriculum reforms, compulsory classes and the early introduction of ICT-based subjects.

During interviews, young voters also weighed in on the referendum, with opinions divided. Those leaning towards "Yes" described it as a necessary firewall against future authoritarianism and a rare chance for citizens to have a direct say in major state reforms.

Those intending to vote "No" described the single-question ballot as misleading, and argued that the proposed changes should be passed by parliament.

[Shamima Rita, Tangila Tasnim and Sakib Ahmed contributed to this report]