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## MANIFESTO EXPECTATIONS

With the national election just 14 days away, political parties are finalising their manifestos. The Daily Star spoke to women voters of different professions and backgrounds to identify the pressing issues that should top the agenda for parties.

# Women demand action, not just promises

NILIMA JAHAN

As Bangladesh moves towards the February 12 national election, women, who make up half the electorate, say political rhetoric no longer moves them.

What they want from the next government, they say, is not another round of promises, but evidence that long-pledged commitments will finally be acted upon.

From domestic workers and students to professionals, entrepreneurs and activists, their demands converge around a few urgent priorities: safety without fear, justice without delay, secure livelihoods, accessible healthcare, and recognition as equal citizens.

These demands are not new. But rising violence, a shrinking civic space, job losses, economic insecurity, continued neglect of women's health, and the shelving of 423 recommendations by the Women's Affairs Reform Commission have widened the gap between promises and delivery, with women paying the price in their daily lives.

The Daily Star spoke to 20 women across professions and SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Unscrupulous traders have been razing a red clay hillock in Tarafpur's Purbapara Rakher Chala area of Tangail's Mirzapur upazila over the last couple of days. Locals said the soil is being hauled away in dump trucks to brick kilns while the authorities turn a blind eye. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: STAR

# Rebels giving BNP run for its money

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Rebel candidates from BNP ranks are mounting strong challenges to the party's nominated contenders in at least 72 constituencies, raising concerns over vote-splitting as the party heads into an election after more than 17 years out of power.

The scale of internal defiance has triggered questions about BNP's ability to enforce organisational discipline even as it confronts rival parties. According to party insiders, in more than three dozen constituencies, the principal contest is shaping up between BNP nominees and party rebels, rather than candidates from opposing parties.

Despite hectic negotiations, repeated warnings, and expulsions, the BNP leadership has failed to contain the rebellion. Instead, punitive action against rebel candidates and grassroots leaders accused of campaigning for them has deepened resentment at the local level, intensifying fears that divided votes could weaken the party's electoral prospects.

Abdul Monayem Munna, a member of BNP's Election Steering Committee, said disciplinary action was being taken strictly in line with party rules.

"Those who violate organisational discipline are being punished according to the rules. No action is taken out of anger or personal consideration," he said.

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# BNP-JAMAAT CLASH Brawl over front-row seats leaves Jamaat leader dead

Both sides claim 50 of theirs injured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A Jamaat-e-Islami leader died last night after being injured in clashes between activists of BNP and Jamaat in Sherpur's Jhenaigati upazila yesterday afternoon.

The deceased was identified as Md Rezaul Karim, 42, secretary of Jamaat's Sreebardi upazila unit in Sherpur.

Rezaul was among around 50 Jamaat activists and supporters injured in clashes with BNP supporters, Jamaat leaders said.

The BNP nominee for the constituency, however, said Jamaat leaders and activists made a planned attack leaving around 50 BNP activists and leaders wounded.

Nuruzzaman Badal, Jamaat candidate for Sherpur-3 (Jhenaigati-Sreebardi), said Rezaul and two others, Aminul Islam and Tahirul Islam, were critically injured.

Rezaul died on the way to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, he said, adding that the other two were later sent to Dhaka for treatment.

The clash erupted around 3:00pm over seating arrangements at a programme at the Jhenaigati Upazila Mini Stadium, leaving at least 65 people injured, locals and witnesses said.

They said the upazila administration organised the programme, where candidates for the Sherpur-3 constituency were invited to present their election manifestos to voters. Jhenaigati UNO Ashraf Alam Rasel was scheduled to preside over the event.

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Md Rezaul Karim

# EU-INDIA TRADE DEAL Exporters here to face tougher days

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh's garment exporters are set to face tougher competition and growing price pressure in Europe after the European Union and India reached a sweeping free trade deal that will grant Indian clothing manufacturers duty-free access to the bloc.

The agreement, announced on Tuesday, is expected to come into force in 2027, following vetting by the European Council, the European Parliament and India's parliament.

After it takes effect, the EU's tariff on Indian apparel products will drop to zero from the existing 12 percent, potentially eroding a long-standing advantage enjoyed by Dhaka.

Under the deal, the EU hopes to double its exports to India by 2032 through the elimination and reduction of tariffs on 96.6 percent of traded goods by value, generating estimated savings of €4 billion in duties for European companies. In return, the EU will cut tariffs on 99.5 percent of goods imported from India over a seven-year period.

Bangladesh currently ships garments duty-free to the EU, but that benefit will continue only for three additional years after its graduation from the least developed country (LDC) bracket, scheduled for November this year.

"The implications will be significant, particularly for apparel," said Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). He warned that Bangladesh will become less competitive in the EU market once India secures duty-free access.

Riding on preferential access to the EU since 1975 SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

In the run-up to February 12 polls, Shakeel Anwar visits outlying constituencies to hear directly from voters about their hopes, demands and expectations.



# Unfamiliar ballots for voters in Dakop-Batiaghata

SHAKEEL ANWAR, from Dakop, Khulna

I reached Dakop Batiaghata in Khulna on Monday, travelling through flat land crisscrossed by embankments and rivers. Compared to other constituencies, this seat has the highest number of Hindu voters, combining two upazilas, though a little short of majority. This is a political fact that has shaped voting behaviour here for decades. Until now, the choice had rarely been complicated.

Most Hindu voters here cast their votes for Awami League, with one exception: in 1996, they elected an Awami League rebel, belonging to their faith.

However, AL's absence from the February 12 elections has left behind a quiet unease. As I moved through bazaars and villages, one question kept ringing in my mind: whom will Hindus SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

# Tarique to hold 3 rallies in the North today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman will join six election rallies in six districts - Rajshahi, Naogaon, Bogura, Rangpur, Sirajganj, and Tangail - during his three-day tour starting today.

During the visit, he will offer prayers at the shrine of Shah Makhdom (R) in Rajshahi and at the grave of July uprising martyr Abu Sayed in Pirganj, Rangpur.

According to BNP, Tarique will leave Dhaka for Rajshahi by air around 12:30pm today.

After reaching Rajshahi, he will visit the shrine of Shah Makhdom (R) around 1:30pm and then take part in his first campaign rally at the Rajshahi Madrasa playground around 2:00pm.

At the gathering, BNP candidates for 13 Rajshahi constituencies and all 39 seats in the northern region will be formally introduced.

Party leaders said this will be Tarique's largest public gathering in Rajshahi in more than two decades. For the last time, he had attended a conference for SEE PAGE 5 COL 6



Election camps of BNP and Jamaat candidates have been set up near the capital's Gulshan-2 roundabout. With the national election just 14 days away, leaders and activists of both parties were seen busy campaigning yesterday. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

# 'If anyone harms women, we will not remain silent'

Says Jamaat chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday reiterated allegations of obstruction, violent attacks, and harassment of women activists of the Jamaat-led 11-party electoral alliance, and vowed to resist such actions.

"If anyone dares to harm women, we will not sit idly by. We are sons of our mothers - we will roar. At any cost, we will protect their dignity," he said at a women's rally at the Manipur High School and College premises in the afternoon.

Shafiqur Rahman spent the entire day campaigning in his parliamentary constituency, Dhaka-15 (Kafur-Mirpur).

"Those who have laid hands on mothers and humiliated them, seek forgiveness and repent. Allah will forgive you. But let me make it clear: the honour of our mothers is far more valuable to us than our own lives," he said. SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

