



PHOTO: STAR, COLLECTED

With campaigning going on in full swing, candidates had another busy day yesterday. From left, flanked by party leaders and activists, BNP candidate for Khulna-2 Nazrul Islam Manju distributes leaflets in Dak Bungalow area; Jamaat-e-Islami candidate for Chattogram-11 Shafiqul Alam waves at voters at Madarbari in port city; and Islami Andolan Bangladesh candidate for Barishal-5 Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim campaigns in Sadar Road area.

July uprising betrayers do not deserve a chance: IAB chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People who still want to run the country under the same old laws and systems, betraying the sacrifices of the July uprising victims, do not deserve the opportunity, said Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim, ameer of Islami Andolan Bangladesh.

Addressing a rally in Kurigram, he said that in July 2024, crores of people rose against the existing laws and the old system. Thousands of people – young and old, including children – were killed, maimed, or lost their eyesight.

Despite such immense sacrifice and bloodshed, those who seek to continue governing the country under the same old laws and system are betraying July even before the election, he said, adding that such people must not be given any opportunity.

Rezaul Karim, known as Charmonai Pir, said the country became independent in 1971 to establish equality, human dignity, and social justice. However, despite achieving independence through an ocean of blood, the rulers in the years that followed presided over killings, enforced disappearances, murders, and money laundering.

He said this happened because Islam was absent from the parliament of a country where 90 percent of the population is Muslim.



SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Be neutral, act with restraint ahead of polls Gen Waker asks troops

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief of Army Staff General Waker Uz-Zaman yesterday directed troops deployed in aid of civil authorities to maintain strict neutrality, professionalism, and restraint as the country prepares for the 13th National Parliamentary Election and referendum.

The army chief visited Patuakhali and Khulna to review the overall law and order situation ahead of the polls and to inspect army personnel deployed under the "in aid to the civil power" arrangement.

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) disclosed the update in a press release yesterday.

During the visit, he observed the activities of deployed troops on the ground,



SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Indian diplomats' families were never in danger: Touhid

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Indian diplomats or their families are not in danger in Bangladesh, said Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain yesterday.

"There has not been a single incident of that nature," he told reporters at the foreign ministry when asked about the withdrawal of the families of Indian diplomats in Bangladesh last week.

He said he is not sure if India wants to give any signal by designating Bangladesh as a 'non-family' diplomatic posting, lumping the country with a small group of high-risk postings such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and South Sudan.

"They may have apprehensions, or they may be thinking of something. Possibly they want to send a message -- but I cannot clearly identify any specific message here. I would say this much: if they want to take their families, there is nothing we can do about it. They are free to do so."

The Indian high commission had not expressed any security concerns before asking the diplomats to send their families back home and he was never told that they were in danger.

On the possibility of election-centric violence, Touhid said the overall security has not been disrupted so far.

"There were always some minor clashes, scuffles, pushing and



SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

No level playing field: Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A level playing field is absent in the ongoing election campaign, said National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam, citing administrative inaction despite repeated attacks and obstruction targeting his party's candidates.

"When a candidate is attacked or harassed, or when their supporters and activists are obstructed, and the administration takes no action, we cannot call that a level playing field," he told reporters after campaigning in the capital's Badda and Gudharaghat Choytola mosque area.

After speaking to the media, the Dhaka-11 candidate carried out door-to-door canvassing among local residents. He sought votes for the "Shapla Koli" symbol and "Yes" in the referendum.



SEE PAGE 5 COL 6

Women demand action, not just promises

FROM PAGE 1

backgrounds, all of whom said the election has become a long-overdue test of accountability.

Taslima Akhter, labour rights activist and president of the Bangladesh Garment Sramik Samhati, said women's economic empowerment and safety must sit at the centre of any political agenda.

"First and foremost, we want all workers – women and men – to receive equal pay and dignified wages, as wage discrimination persists in many sectors.

"Women workers, particularly in the garment sector and other industries, are often unable to develop their skills or advance due to household responsibilities and childcare... We demand the establishment of factory- and community-based daycare centres, to ensure a safe and supportive working environment.

She said a labour ordinance was issued recently, but its effective implementation is crucial. "It will only become a complete law once a parliament is in place."

As the election nears, activists said women's participation must extend beyond casting ballots. Shima Akhter, a frontline July activist and a Dhaka University student, said free, fair and inclusive polls were essential if women were to participate meaningfully, not only as voters but as leaders.

Safety, another recurring demand, cuts across generations.

Thirteen-year-old Samanta Islam, an eighth grader at Monipur High School and College, said fear shapes her daily commute. "My aunt has to accompany me, worried about gangs, harassment or road accidents. I want a country where I can go to school confidently and free from fear."

Pointing to gaps in the education system, she said schools frequently shut down, syllabuses remain incomplete, and classes are often not taken seriously. "Education is called the backbone of the nation – but what will happen to our future if this situation continues?"

Media professional Prajukta Chowdhury said workplace safety remained a defining concern, stressing that women should be able to work late shifts and take part in public life without fear of harassment. "Crimes against women must be addressed regardless of political affiliation or social status."

Mahbuba Akter Suma, an assistant professor at Jagannath University, said women continue to be pushed

to the margins in male-dominated institutions. She recounted how a colleague was stalked during a short walk home, forcing her to stay away from work for days. "Such incidents take a toll on women's mental health and are worsened by the lack of common rooms, breastfeeding spaces or female halls in many universities."

Safety, many women said, also determines whether they can work at all.

For Shiuli Begum, a 40-year-old domestic worker in Dhaka's Kazipara, political slogans hold little meaning without material change. Working in five households, she said no government had ever prioritised the roughly 2.5 million domestic workers, 80 percent of whom are women like her.

"Everything is moving forward, but the lives of female domestic workers are always left behind. Still, we ask for one thing – to be treated as human beings and as workers.

"We are left unprotected. Rising living costs make it worse. Even subsidised food from TCB trucks does not reach us. Homeowners get the cards – most of us do not."

Umme S Sathi, a bank employee and mother of a toddler, said the absence of childcare facilities forces many women out of corporate careers, cutting short the professional lives of qualified workers.

For women with disabilities, exclusion is built into the system. Ashrafunnahar Mishiti, executive director of the Women with Disabilities Development Foundation, called for a dedicated employment quota, mandatory accessibility in transport and infrastructure, and political representation, alongside an end to discrimination in public and private employment.

Economic insecurity also shapes the demands of women entrepreneurs. Noorjahan Kabir, owner of Pure Promise by Adv Noor, said women need low-interest, hassle-free loans, free from humiliation and bureaucratic barriers. "Many women lack collateral and face resistance even within their own families."

But for many women, economic insecurity is compounded by the absence of justice.

Shahina Akter (not her real name), a rape survivor from Rangpur, called for an end to political protection for perpetrators and victim-blaming in society and courts, alongside faster trials, respectful treatment of survivors, and state-funded compensation to help victims rebuild their lives.

Meanwhile, Islamic education and moral development also feature among women's priorities. SM Sharmin, a senior Arabic teacher at Tanjimul Ummah Girls Hifz Madrasa in Uttara, called for most madrasas to be brought under government regulation, with syllabuses free from content that could cause moral decay, alongside proper libraries and supervision.

In sports, veteran karate athlete Shamima Akhtar Tulee pointed to harassment and corruption within sports federations, calling for equal pay for women athletes and greater investment in individual sports.

In rural areas, the concerns are no less stark. Ayesha Siddika, a government primary school teacher in Patuakhali, called for stricter enforcement against child marriage, affordable menstrual hygiene products, and practical, life-oriented education in schools.

Tania Ahmed, a homemaker from Noakhali, said safety must begin at home, warning that without proper enforcement of the domestic violence law, homes turn into places of fear.

Shipra Rani Sarker, from Cumilla's Laksam, whose husband abandoned her, said government support programmes for poor women often fail to reach those who need them most.

"These programmes must be properly monitored... Otherwise, no government will be of any use to us." Shireen Pervin Huq, head of the now-defunct Women's Affairs Reform Commission, said meaningful change would require confronting entrenched structural weaknesses.

"The primary proposal is the creation of an independent, constitutional National Women's Commission to hold all government ministries accountable, ensuring that women's rights are built into the rules of business across every ministry."

"The women and children affairs ministry should move away from direct implementation towards a catalytic oversight role," she said, suggesting that politically aligned bodies such as the Jatiya Mahila Sangstha be dissolved or merged with the Department of Women's Affairs to ensure professional stability.

Shireen also called for a nationwide government campaign, implemented through secondary schools, particularly boys' schools, to teach respect for women as human beings, citizens and equal members of society. "Addressing these priorities would allow further reforms to follow."

If anyone harms

FROM PAGE 1

He added, "There are two options. One, change yourselves for the better – respect others, respect mothers. Otherwise, be prepared to take full responsibility for the consequences."

Addressing the women at the rally, he said, "We will not bow our heads to any force but Allah. That is the country, that is the society we want to build."

On Tuesday, Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher alleged at a press conference that the party's women activists engaged in election campaigning were being attacked. He said Jamaat's women activists are highly active, prompting their main rivals to target them. He also announced a women's rally at Suhrawardy Udyan on January 31 at 10:00 am in protest against the alleged harassment.

Speaking at the Mirpur rally, Shafiqur Rahman said, "InshaAllah, a Bangladesh of justice will be established. Women, like men, will contribute equally in the workplace with dignity and security. We will ensure this at any cost. In major cities, there will be separate bus services for women. During peak hours, they will have separate vehicles."

He added, "We do not want patriarchy, nor patriarchy. We want a humane society balanced by both."

From the rally, he urged voters to support 'yes' in the referendum scheduled for the 12th, saying, "Our first vote will be 'yes'. Our second vote will be for justice and fairness."

Jamaat's women wing secretary, Nurunnisa Siddika, hinting at the BNP, said, "Return to the path of democracy. Join the effort to build a humane Bangladesh. We are rivals, but neither of us is the enemy of the other."

Shafiqur Rahman's wife, Amana Begum, said, "We want a society of peace, freedom, justice, and fairness. For that, we need capable and honest leadership."

Earlier in the morning, the Jamaat ameer began door-to-door campaigning in the North Kafur High School area, greeting voters and seeking support for the party's electoral symbol, the balance scale. "Mirpur is a symbol of struggle, courage, and protest. It was one of the strongholds of the July uprising. But today, it faces neglect, illegal occupation, traffic congestion, waterlogging, crime, and insecurity," he said, adding that the area also faces acute housing shortages and soaring rents.

He assured voters that these problems would be addressed if Jamaat is elected. Shafiqur also pledged to improve waste collection and management across Dhaka, including Mirpur.

He continued campaigning through street meetings and door-to-door visits after Maghrib prayers in the area behind Harman Mainer School in Mirpur-13, and after Esha prayers in the fruit market area of Mirpur-10.

Exporters here to face

FROM PAGE 1

under the bloc's LDC trade facility, Bangladesh has become the EU's second-largest garment exporter after China, even overtaking it in some categories such as denim, trousers and T-shirts. Industry leaders claim that in the EU, one in every three people wears Bangladeshi-made denim trousers.

In the 2024-25 fiscal year, EU countries accounted for more than 50 percent of Bangladesh's total garment exports, amounting to \$19.71 billion.

If Bangladesh fails to secure a successor arrangement, such as a bilateral free trade deal or GSP Plus status after LDC graduation, it will face nearly 12.5 percent duty on garment exports to the EU after 2029. In contrast, India and Vietnam will continue to enjoy zero-duty access through free trade agreements.

Following recent US tariff and trade policy shifts, the EU has emerged as the principal battleground for apparel exporters, intensifying competitive pressure.

"This sudden oversupply has shifted bargaining power towards EU buyers, enabling tougher negotiation terms with suppliers and shorter lead time expectations," BRAC EPL, a brokerage firm, said in a research note. "This dynamic has structural implications for Bangladesh's export margins."

Faisal Samad, director of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said although the EU-India deal would not impact Bangladesh's exports immediately, its effects will be felt gradually.

He said India's competitiveness rests on two major strengths – raw cotton and human resources – along with extensive financial and policy support from the Indian government.

Still, Bangladesh retains several advantages, Samad said, including domestic production capacity and strength in key products such as denim, trousers, T-shirts, sweaters, formal woven shirts, lingerie and undergarments, Samad said.

Exporters are working to diversify into higher-end, value-added products, while the government is negotiating with Brussels to sign a free trade deal, he added.

Analysts said Bangladesh must urgently strengthen its trade diplomacy to prevent a deterioration in EU market access.

"Bangladesh should take the preparation for obtaining the GSP Plus status to the EU and also take preparation for signing the bilateral free trade agreements to retain market access," said CPD's Mustafizur.

"The Indian apparel policy also indicates that the country is coming in a big way in the apparel sector and textile sector," he said, adding that India also has a natural advantage

due to its raw cotton base.

Fazlul Hoque, managing director of Plummy Fashions, a Narayanganj-based knitwear factory exporting mainly to Europe, said the shift could further weaken Bangladesh's price competitiveness. He warned that if Bangladesh is forced to pay duties while rivals continue enjoying duty-free access, buyers would have stronger incentives to demand lower prices and shift orders elsewhere.

WAKE-UP CALL

Industry leaders described the EU-India agreement as a "wake-up call" and urged the government to move quickly to preserve preferential access to Europe.

Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, said Bangladesh's competitiveness must be reinforced through tax benefits and incentives for the local industry.

Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, criticised what he described as long-running policy failure for not securing any durable EU trade advantage, such as an FTA or GSP Plus access, unlike key competitors.

He also said business leaders had urged the government to pursue a trade deal with Russia to secure zero-duty benefits, but it did not happen. He added that they had also demanded Bangladesh seek an LDC graduation deferment, but the government did not do so.

Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, a trade analyst and chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development, said the RMG sector's vulnerability in Europe would intensify as the EU-India agreement is implemented.

Russia says two crew members from US-seized tanker released

AFP, Moscow

Moscow said yesterday two Russian crew members of a tanker seized earlier this month by the United States in the North Atlantic had been released and were on their way home.

US authorities took over the Russian-flagged tanker earlier this month, alleging it was part of a shadow fleet carrying oil from countries such as Venezuela, Russia and Iran in violation of US sanctions.

The United States said publicly that the Marinera's crew could be prosecuted. Russia said that would be "categorically unacceptable" and accused Washington of stoking tensions and threatening international shipping.