

"Our brave Armed Forces are prepared -- with their fingers on the trigger -- to immediately and powerfully respond to ANY aggression..."  
Iranian FM Abbas Araghchi warns US

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## Fast deals, flimsy scrutiny

With the election less than 2 weeks away, the government is hurriedly pushing opaque, last-minute decision-making

STAR REPORT

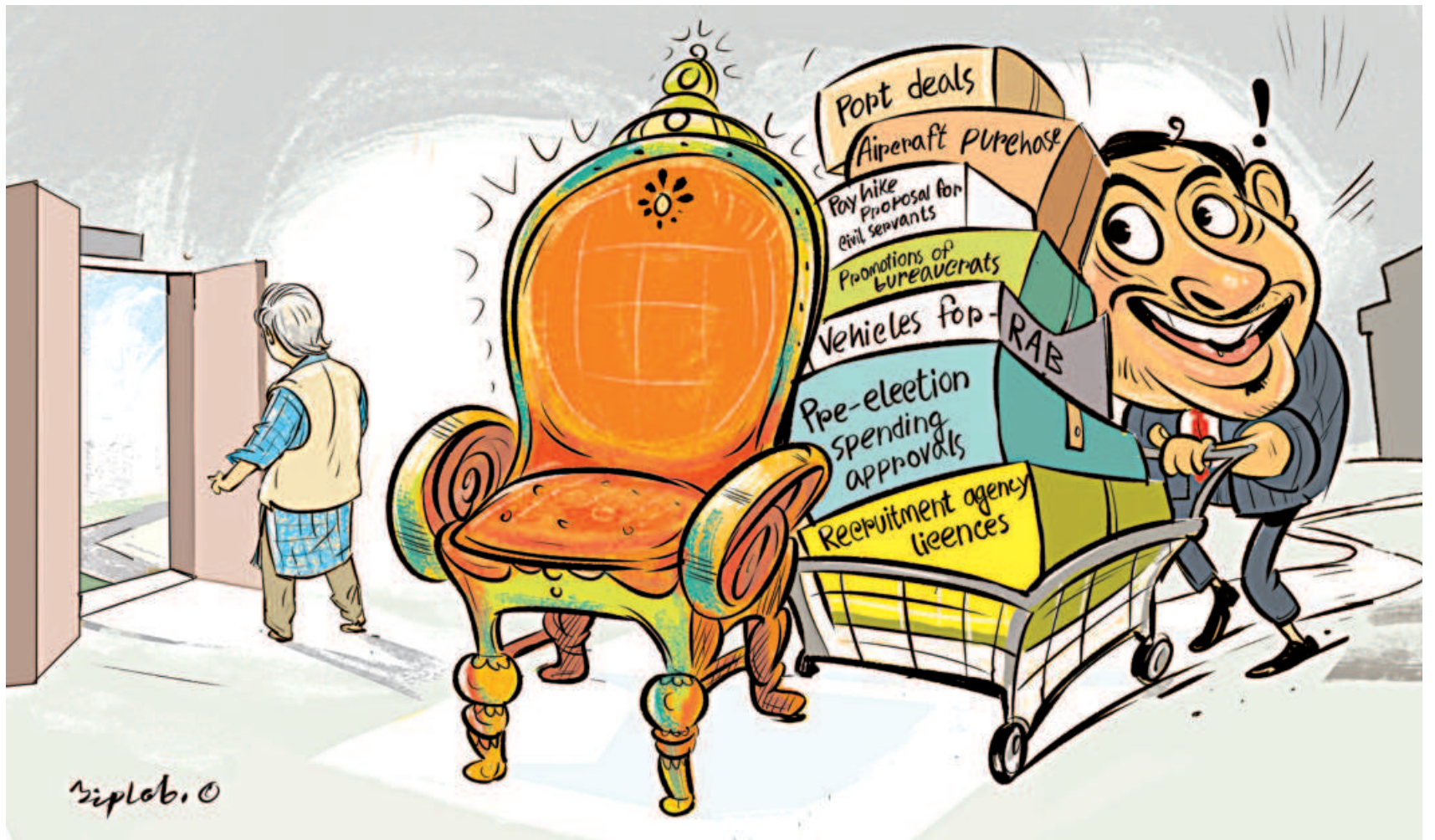
In its final days, Bangladesh's interim government has embarked on a rapid push for long term, high-value commitments, effectively tying the hands of the elected administration that will succeed it.

Foremost among them is a prospective deal with UAE-based DP World to manage cargo operations at the New Mooring Container Terminal in Chattogram Port, the country's most strategically important port asset. This follows the November decision to grant Denmark's APM Terminals a 33-year concession to build and operate the \$550 million Laldia Container Terminal. Simultaneously, Switzerland's Medlog SA is poised to run Pangaon River Port under a 22-year contract.

While Medlog's appointment followed an open tender, the Laldia and DP World negotiations did not. That lack of competitive bids is fuelling backlash as the interim government's mandate nears its end. Installed to oversee a smooth transition to elected rule, the interim authority now faces mounting criticism that it is exploiting its status to make opaque, long-term policy decisions with lasting consequences.

Alongside the port deals, the government is fast-tracking a major procurement of 14 Boeing aircraft for Biman Bangladesh Airlines and pushing through promotions of 118 senior bureaucrats. In parallel, a state-appointed commission proposed a public sector pay hike of as much as 142 percent. Economists warn that the wage increase alone could destabilise already fragile public finances.

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## FEBRUARY 12 REFERENDUM Govt, EC at odds over civil servants' push for 'yes/no'

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and AHMED DEEPTO

The Election Commission and the government are at loggerheads over whether employees of the republic can campaign for a "yes" vote in the referendum, scheduled to be held along with the February 12 general election.

"According to the Referendum Ordinance, government officials cannot campaign for either 'yes' or 'no'. If they do, it will be a punishable offence."

Election Commissioner Anwarul Islam Sarkar



For several days, government machinery and officials have been actively seeking support for a "yes" vote in the referendum on reforms related to constitutional matters outlined in the July charter.

Yesterday, the EC said government officials are not allowed to campaign for either a "yes" or "no" vote, warning that such campaigning would constitute a punishable offence.

The commission sent a letter to all returning officers, with copies forwarded to the cabinet secretary, principal secretary, secretaries of all ministries and divisions, and other senior government officials,

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## 13 DAYS TO VOTE

## Farm loan relief, Padma barrage if BNP elected

Tarique promises at Rajshahi rally

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP, if voted to power, will waive agricultural loans of up to Tk 10,000 with interest and build the Padma Barrage to benefit the people of the Rajshahi region, party Chairman Tarique Rahman told a campaign rally in Rajshahi city yesterday.

"Over the last 16 years, did you see them [a certain party] anywhere on the streets or in movements?... They were nowhere. But secretly, they were with them [those who fled]... Now they have started new conspiracies."

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman

"We have checked all the calculations and decided that those who have agricultural loans of up to Tk 10,000 at this moment -- if the paddy sheaf wins and forms the government -- we will waive those loans with interest.

"We also want to start work on building the Padma Barrage. If we can... people of this area, including farmers, will benefit from it."

Among other pledges were building cold storage facilities, reviving the Barind Multipurpose Development Authority and the IT park, establishing a specialised hospital, and re-excavating canals.

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## IAB vows to protect minorities thru' Islam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB) will ensure the security of minorities following Islamic principles for running the state if voted to power, its Ameer Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim said yesterday.

Islam is a proven system of governance for all oppressed and vulnerable people, including minorities, he said while campaigning in various constituencies of Lalmonirhat and Rangpur, according to a statement from the party.

Instead of protecting the oppressed and the weak and building a true citizen-centered state, the current system and laws were used as tools of politics, said Rezaul Karim, the pir of Charmonai.

These turned the

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## Will take ruthless action against extortionists

Shafiqur promises

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday said if the II-party alliance comes to power in the February 12 national election, 90 percent of extortionists will no longer get the scope to extort people.

He added that the remaining 10 percent would first be urged to refrain from extortion, but if they refuse,

"We did not leave so that at least three ministries could be saved and protected from corruption."

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman

"whatever needs to be done, will be done."

"It will not be considered whose father, brother, or child an extortionist is. In this regard, there will be ruthless, uncompromising, and strict action."

The Jamaat chief made the remarks as the chief guest at an election rally in Karwan Bazar, organised in support of Saiful Alam Khan, the alliance candidate for Dhaka-12.

He also opined that the country would move far ahead if extortion and corruption can be stopped.

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## DYING UNDER SILT

Choked with silt and reduced to a fraction of its former width, the Bhadra River now forces locals, including schoolchildren, farmers, labourers, and the elderly, to risk their lives on a fragile bamboo bridge to cross to the middle of the narrow stream, where boats wait to carry them across. In the dry season, the shallow water level also devastates fish and aquatic biodiversity. The photo was taken recently at Sharafpur ferry ghat in Dumuria, Khulna.



PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## VIOLENCE IN SHERPUR BNP, Jamaat trade blame

EC withdraws Jhenaigati OC, UNO; 5 BGB platoons deployed a day after Jamaat leader's killing

STAR REPORT

Five platoons of BGB members were deployed in Sherpur's Jhenaigati and Sreebardi upazilas to maintain law and order after a Jamaat leader was killed in an election-related violence on Wednesday, said Shariful Islam, public relations officer of BGB headquarters.

The Election Commission yesterday withdrew Jhenaigati UNO Ashrafal Alam Rasel and Officer-in-Charge Nazmul Hasan of Jhenaigati Police Station following the incident.

Tarafdār Mahmudur Rahman, Sherpur deputy commissioner and also returning officer of the district, told The Daily Star that they have urged all candidates of Sherpur-3 (Jhenaigati Sreebardi) to postpone their campaigns for two days.

Kamrul Islam, the district's superintendent of police, said law enforcers, along with army personnel, have also been kept on high alert.

No case was filed in connection with the violence till filing of this report around 8:30pm, said Additional SP Mizanur Rahman Bhuiyan.

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