



FEBRUARY 12 ELECTION

As the February 12 national election draws closer, these three stories spotlight women navigating the campaign trail in markedly different circumstances. In Chattogram-10, Asma Akter's low-key, on-foot outreach cuts through a culture of loud processions. In Natore-1, first-time BNP candidate Farzana Sharmin Putul takes politics to doorsteps, building trust through personal connection. In Barishal-3, Habiba Kibria campaigns in place of her jailed father, appealing to voters as a daughter rather than a politician.



Asma's quiet presence on Ctg's busy roads

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

At around 11:30am yesterday, a group of five stepped down from a CNG auto-rickshaw at the Badurtala Boro Garage intersection in Chattogram. Two men and three women stood briefly by the roadside. One young man carried a hand microphone and a poster, while the others held leaflets.

The woman leading the group walked up to passers-by and asked for their support. She was Asma Akter, a candidate of the Socialist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist), contesting the Chattogram-10 constituency.

In a seat where electioneering is usually dominated by large processions, blaring microphones and show-of-strength rallies, Asma's quiet, on-foot campaign drew attention.

With limited resources and a small team, she has been canvassing on foot for the past eight days, distributing leaflets and speaking directly to voters at street corners and busy intersections.

"She came quietly and talked to us. That felt different," said Enayet Hossen, a rickshaw puller who paused to take a leaflet from her.

Asma faces multiple challenges, including a lack of funds, minimal organisational backing and a political culture where visibility is often measured by the size of rallies and the volume of slogans.

"Most campaigns here are about showing power," said Mohammed Ibrahim, a local resident and voter in the Badurtala area.

Abdul Kader, a vehicle mechanic and voter, said the sight of a woman

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Putul's doorstep campaign in Natore-1

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, from Lalpur, Natore

Farzana Sharmin Putul is taking a personal approach to campaigning in Natore-1 ahead of the February 12 parliamentary election, presenting herself to voters not as a traditional political figure but as someone they can relate to and confide in.

A BNP-nominated candidate for

group of associates.

The Daily Star followed her campaign from noon to evening on Wednesday as she visited Balitita Islampur, Ulipara, Sontoshpur and Ramanandapur.

In each village, she interacted with residents and sought votes for the sheaf of paddy symbol, promising development in what she described as a long-neglected area.



the Natore-1 constituency, Putul is a Supreme Court lawyer and the daughter of late BNP minister Fazlur Rahman Patal.

The sole female BNP nominee in the Rajshahi division, Putul is contesting the Natore-1 seat for the first time. Her campaign, however, faces a significant hurdle from a rebel candidate, even as she continues canvassing with a small

Arriving in Balitita Islampur by car, Putul proceeded on foot through dilapidated rural roads. She appeared particularly well received by women and children. Beyond routine campaign exchanges, she entered homes and listened to personal accounts of hardship.

A 70-year-old widow from Ulipur village said no elected representative

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



A daughter's campaign to free her father from jail

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

From local markets to village haats and riverside communities, Habiba Kibria has been carrying a single appeal to voters in Barishal -- "Your one vote can bring my father back to you."

Habiba, the daughter of Jatiya Party presidium member and Barishal-3 (Babuganj-Muladi) candidate Golam Kibria Tipu, has been campaigning on his behalf as he remains in jail for more than 14 months in connection with multiple cases.

On Thursday, around 1:00pm, she was seen campaigning on foot at the market of Rautakathi union in Babuganj upazila. Accompanied by seven to eight local party activists, she moved slowly through the market, stopping to speak with small traders and shoppers, seeking their

prayers and votes for the plough symbol.

In Tipu's absence, Habiba has taken to the field, appealing to voters on both political and personal grounds.

"From morning, I go from local market to haat, from house to house -- not just to reach homes, but to reach people's hearts," Habiba said. "I convey my father's salam and ask them to help by voting for the plough."

Referring to her father's political career, Habiba said he had been elected MP three times and worked for the development of the area. "During his time, no one was harassed. But after August 5, people have faced extortion and harassment, and they are living in fear," she claimed.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Strict action if polls officials show bias

Warns home adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury

yesterday warned that the government would take strict departmental and legal action if evidence is found that anyone engaged in election duty worked in favour of any candidate or sought to implement any party agenda.

Jahangir said government employees are not members of any political party, but salaried state officials appointed with taxpayers' money.

"Therefore, even the slightest bias or biased behaviour towards any political party will not be tolerated," he said at a meeting at the Bangladesh Police Auditorium in Rajarbagh, organised by the home ministry and the Dhaka divisional commissioner's office.



Mamunul warns against bid to derail polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mamunul Haque, the 11-party alliance candidate for the Dhaka-13 constituency and ameer of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, yesterday demanded justice for the killing of a local Jamaat-e-Islami leader in Sherpur.

Condemning the incident, he said the situation must be handled with patience and restraint, warning that no conspiracy to derail the election should be allowed to succeed. He made the remarks in Dhaka during a "Jagaran Padayatra" organised as part of his election campaign.

Mamunul said the public hacking to death of a Jamaat activist in Sherpur was a deeply tragic incident. "We never wish for such violence. We demand that the perpetrators be identified through a prompt and impartial investigation and brought to justice," he said.

He criticised the Election Commission and the BNP over the incident, alleging failure to act. "The lack of any legal action or arrests so far reflects the Election Commission's failure. The BNP also bears responsibility. As a major political party, they were expected to act responsibly, but they are not doing so," he said.

CHATTOGRAM-8 (BOALKHALI-CHANDGAON)
Jamaat, NCP tug-of-war leaves voters puzzled

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

Voters in Chattogram-8 (Boalkhali-Chandgaon) are growing increasingly confused as tensions between Jamaat-e-Islami and its alliance partner National Citizen Party (NCP) intensify, disrupting coordinated campaigning and creating uncertainty at the grassroots ahead of the polls.

Although Jobairul Hasan Arif of the NCP has received the alliance's nomination for the seat, seven days into his campaign, Jamaat leaders and supporters are reportedly trying to bring back their withdrawn candidate, Abu Naser, into the race.

They have also carried out activities, including chanting slogans, to openly boycott the NCP.

"Abu Naser is a widely popular figure

who has been working in the area for 30 years. That is why we are trying to convince the party leadership to bring him back," Dr Khorshed Alam, ameer

KEY ISSUES

- NCP-Jamaat discord disrupts joint campaigning
- Jamaat supporters seek return of withdrawn candidate
- Alliance candidate yet to receive Jamaat support

of Jamaat-e-Islami in Boalkhali upazila, told The Daily Star.

Other alliance partners withdrew after the submission of nomination

papers, but the Jamaat candidate did not, meaning his name remains on the ballot. However, Jamaat has officially confirmed the withdrawal of its candidate through a press conference.

Khorshed said they are neither opposing nor campaigning. "Our manpower is not active. We are waiting because we are hopeful that our candidate, Abu Naser, will be allowed to contest this seat," he said.

Meanwhile, the constituency has increasingly turned into a battleground of verbal exchanges between NCP and Jamaat supporters.

To address the situation, the NCP has already held two press conferences.

NCP leaders and activists alleged that, although the Jamaat candidate has stayed off the campaign trail, his

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

'Women can't be at Jamaat helm' Shafiqur cites religious, biological limitations in Al Jazeera interview

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman has said women cannot lead the party, citing religious obligations and biological limitations.

In an interview with Al Jazeera's Srinivasan Jain, Shafiqur was asked whether a woman could ever head the party. He responded, "It's not possible. It's not possible because Allah made everyone in its own entity. Because you [a man] will never be able to bear a child."

Further clarifying his response, he said, men will never be able to breastfeed a child. "This is God-given. And there are some differences between men and women. What Allah made, we cannot change it."

Al Jazeera uploaded the full interview on YouTube yesterday.

Asked how many women candidates the Jamaat-e-Islami has fielded for the national polls, Shafiqur replied, "Not a single one."

However, he said it is a matter of timing and the country's political culture. "But we are preparing."

"You will not see any substantial number [of women] in other parties also, because this is the cultural entity in Bangladesh. [But] we are getting prepared for that."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

With the national election less than two weeks away, banners and posters of candidates have sprung up across the port city. However, most of the candidates are breaching the electoral code of conduct by either using multi-colour banners or photographs other than party leaders. Many of these banners are also tied to electric poles, which is also banned. The photo

FACT-CHECKED ✓

Claim of Sherpur Jubo Dal leader's death false

Dismislab confirms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fact-checking organisation Dismislab has debunked recent social media claims that Saiful Islam, joint convener of Sherpur's Jhenaigati unit Jubo Dal, was killed following a clash between Jamaat and BNP activists in Sherpur.

WHAT THE CLAIM SAID

On December 29, a Facebook account named Daliaa Rahman posted a video with the caption: "Saiful Islam, joint convener of Jubo Dal in Jhenaigati, Sherpur, has just died after being attacked by Jamaat." The post quickly received

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6