



Clockwise from top left: BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman addresses a rally at the BSCIC Industrial Park in Sirajganj; Jamaat supporters join a rally of the 11-party alliance in Chaudhagram, Cumilla; Bangladesh Women Sports Federation displays a banner at the Women's Complex in Dhanmondi urging a "yes" vote in the February 12 referendum; colour posters seeking votes for Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis candidate for Dhaka-13 Mamunul Haque and BNP candidate for Dhaka-10 Shaikh Rabiul Alam in Dhanmondi-32 area violating the electoral code; and an Election Commission banner on the upcoming referendum, hung from a Secretariat boundary wall, explains the power of choice in fine print but visually emphasises a "yes" vote with a tick and a "no" vote with a cross. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL/STAR/ANISUR RAHMAN



## Avoid use of lethal weapons during election duty

### BGB asks troops; 37,000 deployed across country

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Troops of the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) have been instructed to avoid using lethal weapons while performing election duties.

BGB Dhaka Sector Commander Colonel SM Abul Ehsan disclosed the information at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday, outlining the force's preparedness and operational plans for Dhaka and surrounding districts.

More than 37,000 BGB personnel have been deployed across the country to maintain law and order during the upcoming polls.

Col Ehsan said BGB has been deployed nationwide alongside its regular responsibility of safeguarding the country's 4,427-kilometre border, with the objective of ensuring a free, fair, neutral and credible election.

According to a press release from the BGB media wing, members will perform election duties in 489 of the country's 495 upazilas, while BGB will have sole responsibility for election security in 61 border upazilas.

Across all 300 parliamentary constituencies, BGB personnel will operate as both mobile and static forces, with two to four platoons deployed per upazila depending on risk assessment.

In the Dhaka sector, battalions under Dhaka (5 and

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## Wrong choice will push the country backwards

### Warns Mirza Fakhrul Islam at Thakurgaon rally

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said that if the wrong candidate or the wrong government is voted into power, the country will move backwards.

"We had to struggle a lot to get the February 12 election. We had to carry out a movement for 15 years. Cases were filed against around 60 lakh leaders and activists; 20,000 people lost their lives; 1,700 people were disappeared; and during the July uprising, nearly 2,000 students and citizens had to give their lives — only then did we get the election.

"That is why we consider this election to be very important. If we cannot elect the right government in this election, we will have to move in the wrong direction again," Fakhrul, also a candidate for Thakurgaon-1, said during an election rally in Akcha union of Thakurgaon Sadar.

The country has suffered immensely over the last 15-16 years, he said, adding that some people looted banks,



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## 26 hurt in pre-polls clashes in Bhola, Cumilla

### Case filed over Jamaat leader's death in Sherpur

STAR REPORT

At least 26 people were injured in separate clashes between activists of BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami in Bhola and Cumilla yesterday.

In Bhola's Borhanuddin upazila, 14 people were wounded when activists of the two parties clashed while campaigning in the Chowkidar Bari area around 8:30am.

Locals said Jamaat men were campaigning for party candidate Mufti Fazlul Karim in the Bhola-2 constituency.

At one stage, as they entered the house of Ayub Ali, a BNP activist, to seek votes, an altercation ensued, triggering the clash.

Later, Jamaat men held a press conference at the Borhanuddin Upazila Press Club and demanded punishment of those involved in the incident.

Contacted, upazila unit Jamaat ameer Maksudur Rahman alleged that BNP activists carried out the attack in a pre-planned manner using local weapons.

Upazila unit BNP president Kazi Md Azam denied the allegation and claimed that Jamaat activists had launched the attack and vandalised the houses of BNP activists.

Borhanuddin Upazila Health Complex medical

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## 'A neighbouring country conspiring over elections'

### Nahid says foreign meddling will be resisted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A neighbouring country is attempting to engineer the electoral process and is engaged in conspiracies surrounding Bangladesh's upcoming national election, said National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam yesterday.

"By openly taking a position against the 11-party alliance, the neighbouring country is siding with a particular political party," he said at a pre-election rally organised by the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance in the capital's Keraniganj.

The upcoming election would determine which path Bangladesh takes: whether hegemonic forces once again dominate the country or whether Bangladesh stands tall with dignity.

"If any neighbouring country attempts to interfere in the electoral process, the people of this country will respond on their own," he said at the rally in HJ Pilot High School ground in Chaudhagram upazila of Cumilla.

Such actions run contrary to the country's sovereignty and democratic principles.



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## Strike over DP World cripples port

FROM PAGE 1

The High Court on January 29 rejected a writ petition challenging the legality of the government's move to award the NCT contract to DP World.

Sources at the CPA and the shipping ministry said the interim government is now preparing to sign the concession agreement with the UAE firm before the national election.

They added that members of a seven-member tender evaluation committee and a subcommittee, along with the NCT project director and other senior port officials, have been in Dhaka for more than a week to finalise the deal.

Not a single senior port official involved in the process could be reached for comment despite repeated attempts over several days.

The government has set multiple timelines for completing the deal on the NCT, the port's largest facility.

On several occasions last year, senior officials, including BIDA's Ashik and Shipping Secretary Mohammad Yousuf, said the agreement was expected to be finalised by December 2025.

Port officials said the process slowed down due to the writ filed with the HC.

After a two-judge bench delivered a dissenting verdict on December 4, then chief justice Syed Refaat Ahmed assigned the case to the High Court bench led by Justice Zafar Ahmed.

In early January, the government initially set a 24-day timeline to complete the deal, fixing January 8 for issuing the Request for Proposal (RFP) and January 31 for signing the concession agreement.

Later, a February 1 deadline was set for the signing of the deal.

According to shipping ministry sources, DP World's proposal and its technical and financial evaluation, negotiations, vetting by the law ministry, and approvals from

multiple agencies were scheduled to be completed.

The CPA was to issue the RFP addendum and revised concession agreement on January 20, while the international terminal operator was expected to submit its bid on January 24. January 25 and 26 were earmarked for technical and financial evaluation, followed by negotiations and final approval by the CPA board on January 27 and 28.

A CPA source said yesterday that negotiations over the financial proposal were still incomplete.

Contacted, CPA spokesperson and Director (admin) Md Omar Faruk said he was not well informed about the latest progress of the deal.

The eight-hour work abstention yesterday was enforced by several worker organisations, including Chattogram Bandar Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal. Loading and unloading of cargo and containers at almost all jetties was suspended from 8:00am.

Addressing a protest rally outside the port's administrative building, worker leaders accused the government of offering excessive concessions to DP World, warning

that a large portion of the port's earnings would be transferred abroad if the most profitable terminal was "leased out".

Protest leader Humayun Kabir, who chaired the rally, alleged that more than 30 CPA officials have been confined to the BIDA office in Dhaka for the last few days to complete negotiations with DP World.

He said the port currently earns \$161 for handling a 20-foot container (TEU).

"The port authority shows expenses at \$56 per container, 10 to 20 times higher than actual. Even after that, the port's net income per container stands at \$105," said Kabir, also a former publicity secretary of the now-defunct Chattogram Port CBA.

"It is a matter of great regret that BIDA Executive Chairman Ashik Chowdhury is pushing for the deal at a net income rate of only \$42," Kabir claimed.

Currently, CPA pays a small portion of per-container earnings to private operators. Under the proposed arrangement, the foreign operator would collect the full revenue and give the CPA a share.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Worker organisations at Chattogram port demonstrate yesterday.

## A party canvassing for 'yes' under public

FROM PAGE 1

speaking about the referendum later, meaning since yesterday [Friday], because of the push from the people."

He also said that if the July uprising did not happen, then there would be no question of holding an election in 2026. "Without July, the election in 2029 would have been held under a fascist regime. To demand elections in 2026 but not accept July, to deny the fulfilment of July's aspirations — this cannot be."

Shafiqur made the remarks while addressing a rally at the Shakta High School playground in Keraniganj, Dhaka. The rally was held in support of the 11-party alliance candidates for the Dhaka-1, 2, 3, 19 and 20 constituencies.

Accusing a party of conspiring to deny recognition to the July uprising, he said, "We had hoped they would honour July. But members of the martyrs' families were disrespected. They were belittled, ignored.

"Respecting July cannot mean extortion, corruption, grabbing land from innocent people, case-filing trade, or raising hands against our mothers. These acts do not align with the spirit of July."

Referring to the July Uprising Memorial Museum, he said, "Many prototypes of the dictatorship's 'Aynaghar' have been preserved there. Those who will govern the country in the future should go and see what the consequences are when people are subjected to oppression."

Speaking at an earlier rally in Cumilla, without naming any party, the Jamaat ameer said, "Once you too were oppressed. Then why did you choose to become oppressors? We hope they will correct themselves."

Addressing the rally at HJ Government Pilot High School ground in Chaudhagram upazila, Shafiqur said his party, if elected,

would form a "government of unity" and invite all stakeholders to join nation-building efforts.

"We will accept no more supremacy; we do not want to see fascism. We do not want to see any more corrupt governments in this country. We want to see a humane Bangladesh. Even those who are competing against us now — if Allah grants us success, after victory we will invite them as well, asking them to come and contribute.

Mentioning that he did not see anyone through a partisan lens, he said, "Everyone in Chaudhagram is my brother. Those who support BNP are my brothers; those who support other parties are also my brothers. An MP is not a representative of any party; an MP is a representative of the people. That is why I am seeking votes from all the people of Chaudhagram, regardless of party affiliation."

The rally was held in support of Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher, the alliance candidate for Cumilla-11.

The Jamaat chief said, "We do not believe in the policy of absorbing other parties within our own. That is why the 11 parties within the alliance are contesting with their own symbols. We have also declared that whichever symbol is allocated to whichever party will be the symbol of us all. This is how we are conveying a message of unity to the nation."

At the rally, National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam, a member of the 11-party alliance, said, "Neighbouring countries are engaging in various conspiracies surrounding the election. They have openly taken the side of a party that is speaking against the 11-party alliance."

Also speaking at the rally, Mamunul Haque, ameer of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, another partner of the 11-party alliance,

said without naming any party, "Sometimes they openly call for voting 'no' in the referendum, and at other times they call for voting 'yes'. Those who say one thing publicly and another behind the scenes are called hypocrites. The people of Bangladesh will not hand over the governance of the country to any hypocrite."

After the Chaudhagram rally, the Jamaat ameer joined a roadside meeting in Daudkandi.

## Saudi-Pakistan mutual defence pact will not include Turkey: sources

AFP, Riyadh

Turkey will not join a mutual defence pact between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, a source close to the Saudi military told AFP yesterday, after a Turkish official said earlier this month that they had entered talks aimed at entering the alliance.

Speculation has been rife that the three countries were intent on forming a powerful alliance amid soaring tensions in the region, following Israeli air strikes in Doha over the summer targeting Hamas officials that preceded Iran's bombing of a US air base in Qatar.

"Turkey won't join the defence pact with Pakistan," the source told AFP, dismissing reports of negotiations.

"It's a bilateral pact with Pakistan and will remain a bilateral pact."

A Gulf official also confirmed the information.

"This is a bilateral defensive relationship with Pakistan. We have common agreements with Turkey but the one with Pakistan will stay bilateral," the official said.