



Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, *left*, addressing an election rally, organised by 11-party electoral alliance, at Sherpur Municipal Park yesterday. *Top right*, Rajshahi-2 BNP candidate Mizanur Rahman Minu seeking votes in the city's Bulonpur area, while Jatiya Party nominee for Khulna-5 Shamima Ara Parvin, *bottom right*, distributing leaflets during her campaign in the Shiromoni area.



PHOTO: JAMAAT MEDIA CELL, AZAHAR UDDIN, HABIBUR RAHMAN

## JAMAAT AMEER'S 'REMARKS' DU, JnU erupt in protests

Students refute X account hack claim, demand public apology

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Protests erupted at Dhaka University (DU) and Jagannath University (JnU) campuses yesterday over allegations that Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman made derogatory remarks about working women in a post on his X (formerly Twitter) account.

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), left-leaning student bodies, and groups of working women staged separate demonstrations, including broom and torch processions, demanding a public apology from the Jamaat chief.

Around noon, JCD leaders and activists marched from DU's Madhur Canteen, parading through the Arts Building and Raju Sculpture areas before holding a rally at the foot of Aparajeyo Bangla.

Addressing the rally, speakers slammed the Jamaat leader for his alleged comments.

"They [Jamaat] view working women as prostitutes. They do not see women as equals but as servants," said

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## BNP, Jamaat spar over poll environment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday met the Chief Election Commissioner with various complaints and accused the other party of disrupting the election environment without mentioning each other by name.

"A party is forming 'peace committees' in various areas under the pretext of law enforcement -- the term 'peace committee' carries historical controversy," said BNP Standing Committee Member Nazrul Islam Khan after the meeting in the morning.

Through this, fear may be created among the public and attempts may be made to suppress the opposition.

The commission, however, said no decision has been made to form such committees and they have no knowledge of this matter, he said, adding that the party has been campaigning in religious institutions in violation of EC rules.

He also alleged unusually high voter migration in certain constituencies before the election.

"Where only 4-5 people are supposed to live, 20-30 voters have been shown. In many cases, voter registration was done without holding numbers. Although the EC says it has found no evidence of these, we are not satisfied with the information provided."

He urged the EC to provide detailed constituency-wise migration information and demanded strict action if any suspicious evidence is found.

"Leaders and activists of certain political parties are working outside their own areas. Although there is no direct legal prohibition, we demand that outsiders leave the area at least two days before the election to prevent any kind of disorder," Khan added.

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## 'Jamaat will establish US, Indian types of justice'

Says IAB chief

STAR REPORT

Coming down heavily on Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB) Ameer Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim yesterday said Jamaat plans to hold "secret meetings" with the US and India to implement "their own versions of justice".

He made the remarks while addressing an election rally in Lakshmipur, where he spoke about the policies and principles of BNP and Jamaat.

Rezaul, who is also the pir of Charmonai, said, "Jamaat says it wants to establish justice. What kind of justice? It will establish justice after holding secret meetings with America and India."

"We have observed Indian justice, we have observed American justice. We, the people of Bangladesh, don't want to see that justice."

## Fear now shapes journalism in Bangladesh

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Daily Star, Anam said the people who actually acted and set fire to the building were unlikely to be The Daily Star readers.

"So what motivated them?" he asked, adding, "I think it was well planned. They had their political motivation, financial motivation, and there was also the idea of demolishing the tradition of liberal journalism, journalism that supports democracy, multiplicity of views, and dissent, in a very big way."

"Our reporting, if it is flawed, somebody can say it. We can be criticised. But to burn us down, I think this is most unfortunate."

He described the night of the attack as "absolute panic". "They [the staff] were having problems breathing. I was talking to the newsroom over the phone, and they were telling me, 'Mahfuz Bhai, we may not meet again'. They were ringing their parents, their wives, their friends, saying maybe they will never meet again," described Anam.

The Daily Star editor said many in Bangladesh use social media to express their views, but

this freedom has also produced "a huge amount of fake news, hate speech, [and] unsubstantiated accusations" just like anywhere else in the world.

He said using social media to attack and discredit individuals or institutions "is also a reality in Bangladesh," adding that some political parties "have taken good advantage of it" by building dedicated "social media teams."

"So if you say anything against this particular political party, suddenly hundreds of people will start abusing you," Anam said. "And if you say something nice, again hundreds of people can start praising you. The political use of social media is very much in vogue."

He continued, "It is well known to anybody who followed social media that night that there was one influencer who said, 'Prothom Alo is down, now go to Daily Star and attack this'."

"They were trying to destroy us as an institution. And by the way, all the criticism that has been made against us has not been

substantiated. Sometimes we were cited totally out of context. So it has been a very deliberate, very powerful, and, I must say, sadly effective way of continuing to denigrate two powerful mainstream media of Bangladesh."

Anam spoke about how the politicisation of media has eroded public trust.

Over the years, journalists have become increasingly divided along political lines, with some openly aligning with one party and others with another, he said.

"So imagine that when the public sees that a journalist who is supposed to tell me the truth actually belongs to a political party, the credibility of that media outlet, the belief of the readers of a paper or viewers of a television, suffers greatly because of the political division within the journalist community."

He said that after being deprived of three credible elections, the public is now entering a fourth with heightened expectation and a strong desire to see a vote that genuinely reflects the people's will.

"Whoever gets elected, they will not forget the fact about the fall of Hasina. And her fall was directly linked with the oppressive nature of her government, and her government's treatment of the media."

He told Al Jazeera that the last 15 years of Sheikh

period of silence."

The editor elaborated how the then government spared no one -- from cartoonists and teachers arrested in midnight raids for innocuous social media posts to the systematic judicial harassment of the nation's leading editorial voices.

"I have had 83 cases launched against me by Hasina. Matiuur Rahman, the editor of Prothom Alo, had a murder case against him. Our advertisements were stopped, and our revenue dropped by about 40 to 45 percent. None of my reporters were ever allowed to cover the prime minister's events, and she personally attacked me on the floor of the parliament," explained Anam.

He expressed hope that this experience will shape future governments, leading to a brighter future for free media in Bangladesh.

The Listening Post featuring Mahfuz Anam will be re-aired on Al Jazeera today at 2:30pm (Bangladesh time) and can also be watched on YouTube.

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Hasina's governance "is epitomised by one act, which was called the Digital Security Act."

"This encapsulates the government's total dominance of dissent. They had 20 provisions for punishment, 14 of which were non-bailable. So, the whole idea was to create an environment of fear. Society goes into a total

## Jamaat ameer's X account

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women's participation in public life as morally harmful.

The account was compromised at 4:37pm and recovered by 5:09pm, and a rejoinder was issued at 5:22pm, said Ehsanul Mahbub Zubayer, chief of Jamaat's publicity and media department, at an emergency press conference held at the party's central office in Moghbazar, Dhaka, yesterday morning.

Following the incident, Sirajul Islam, a member of Jamaat's National Election Steering Committee, filed a GD at Hatirjheel Police Station yesterday morning.

Zubayer claimed the attackers took control of the device through malware and gained access during an active session.

He alleged a "special group" hacked the ameer's account and posted offensive content to tarnish the party's image.

Those responsible had been preparing for several days, he said, without

naming any political party, alleging a "deep conspiracy" behind the incident.

Describing the incident as an attempt to malign Jamaat, he said the party maintains a clear position on respecting women and that its chief has repeatedly emphasised the issue at election rallies.

The party claimed that not only the ameer's account but also several Jamaat-e-Islami pages had faced attempted cyberattacks in recent days.

Mahmudur Rahman, an ICT affairs member of the party, presented what he described as "technical evidence" of the breach at the briefing.

Around 4:53pm, a similar post was made from the X account of Shafiqur Islam Masud, secretary of Jamaat's Dhaka Metropolitan South unit, Mahmudur said, adding that later checks indicated both accounts had been compromised around the same time.

He further alleged that the hacking was carried out using a government

email address. According to him, a file purportedly containing election-related information was sent to the party's email from an official address in an attempt to sabotage Jamaat.

He claimed the sender used the email address "assistantprogrammar@bangabhaban.gov.bd" and was identified as Mohammad Sarwar Alam, an employee of the President's Office.

In a separate thread posted on X yesterday morning, Shafiqur said false and misleading content had been circulated to misrepresent both his views and the party's position.

He said Jamaat's manifesto supports women's active participation in education, healthcare, administration, entrepreneurship and public service.

He cited commitments to uninterrupted education for girls, safe campuses, zero tolerance for harassment, women-centred healthcare, equal pay, safe workplaces, childcare support, and skills development.

"These are not new positions," he wrote, adding that he had outlined them previously and reaffirmed them at a policy summit on January 20.

He also said the party's full manifesto would be launched on February 3.

"Judge me by my record and manifesto, not false narratives," he wrote, adding that respect for women could move the country forward.

Meanwhile, speaking at a press conference at the BNP Election Steering Committee office in Dhaka's Gulshan yesterday afternoon, Mahdi Amin said the "hack" claim surfaced nearly nine hours after the offensive post was published and only after public outrage.

"The claim appeared long after the post circulated and criticism mounted. If a verified account of a major political figure is hacked, the first responsibility is to inform the public immediately so confusion does not spread," he said.

Mahdi said the delay

raised doubts about the credibility of the explanation.

"Only after anger erupted did the hacking story surface. During that period, many posts were made from the Jamaat chief's Facebook account, but not a single one warned that his X account had been compromised," he added.

He also questioned inconsistencies in the timeline surrounding the GD.

"It was later observed that a GD was lodged at around 3:30am. In that document, it was mentioned that they learnt of the hacking at 4:55pm. If that is true, why was the GD filed nearly 12 hours later? What is the explanation? How believable is the claim that the account was recovered shortly after announcing it had been hacked?" he asked.

Condemning the language used in the disputed post, Mahdi said BNP stands firmly for women's dignity, freedom and equal rights.

## Parties hunting voter NIDs

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In Kafrul and Mirpur, BNP candidate for Dhaka-15 Shafiqul Islam Milton said tensions flared several times over requests for NID cards. He alleged that Jamaat activists faced public resistance at least four times, adding that the Jamaat ameer of Kafrul thana later apologised publicly and promised not to repeat the activity. A video clip of the local Jamaat ameer apologising spread online at the time.

Clashes were also

reported in South Pirobagh on January 20, after Jamaat activists allegedly went door to door asking for NID details.

Idris Ali, former general secretary of the Haven Tower Flat Owners' Association, said residents protested after campaigners ignored restrictions on entering homes to seek documents.

At Mohakhali Sat Tala slum, Selina Begum said groups enter the slum every one or two days, sometimes identifying as political activists and other

times as NGO staffers. She said both Jamaat and BNP activists recently collected phone numbers and NID details.

Md Hasan, 65, a resident of Korail's Ershadnagar, said that in recent days, BNP activists collected NID photocopies while distributing blankets.

Rana Ahmed, senior joint convener of the Banani thana BNP, said "some parties" are collecting this information in slums as proof of outreach.

"Those collecting the information told us that

they had to prove to their superiors that they had campaigned for the party," he said.

BNP Standing Committee member Selima Rahman, who is also a member of the party's election steering committee, said she was not aware of BNP activists seeking voters' NID details.

"We've asked the party activists to avoid such activities. We're continuing our campaign," she told this newspaper yesterday.

Jamaat central leaders could not be reached

for comments about the matter despite repeated attempts.

Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair, Jamaat assistant secretary general and lead of its publicity wing; Maolana ATM Masum, assistant secretary general and head of its national election steering committee; and Maolana Abdul Halim, assistant secretary general and member secretary of the committee, did not respond to The Daily Star's calls and text messages over the matter last night.