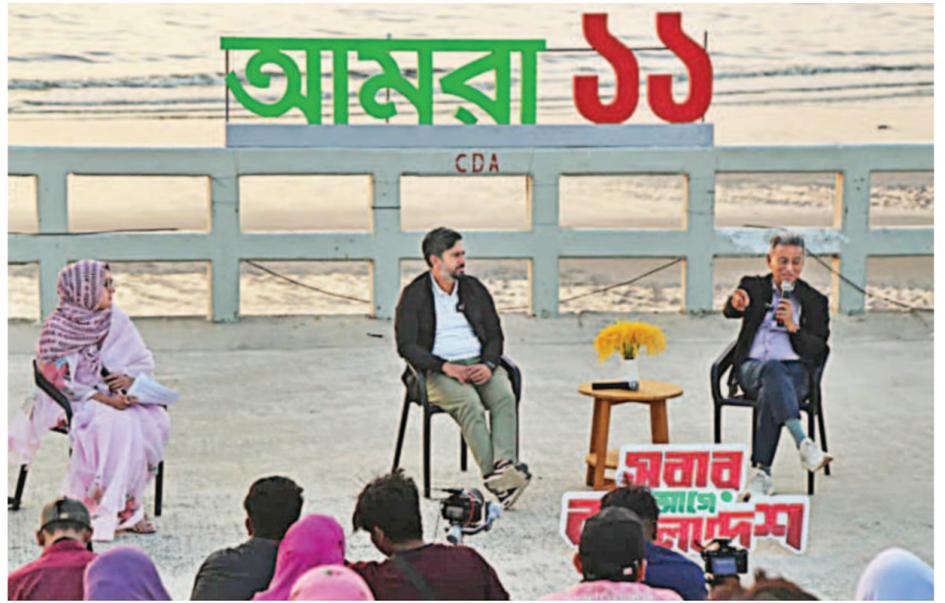




Supporters raise their hands during the speech of Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman at an election rally of the 11-party alliance at the Madrasa Ground in Rajshahi yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN



BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury speaking at Amra 11 Youth Talk ahead of the general election at Patenga sea beach in Chattogram yesterday.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

'Killings, verbal abuse of us have begun' Alleges Jamaat ameer at Rajshahi rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday alleged that attacks on his party have begun.

He said killings and verbal abuse were taking place as political tensions rose ahead of the February 12 elections.

At a campaign rally at Rajshahi's Madrasa Maidan, he questioned whether voters would "entrust a cat with guarding the meat", referring to rivals who, according to him, cannot restrain their greed.

Hinting at the BNP, he said, "In trying to seize control of various areas, 234 of their own people were killed. Now, killings of our people have begun..."

He added that those who avoid extortion, graft, and harassment are now being labelled as oppressors.

The Jamaat chief claimed corruption deepened over the past 54 years. "There has been development in depriving people of their rights, looting banks, forcing small traders out of business and building personal



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JP looks to retain its northern strongholds Goes door-to-door braving obstacles

STAR REPORT

As polling day approaches, the Jatiya Party has shifted its campaign strategy to door-to-door outreach, focusing on retaining its traditional stronghold in the Rangpur region amid allegations of obstruction in holding large-scale rallies.

Party leaders and activists claim they are facing resistance in organising mass gatherings, prompting candidates to rely more heavily on personal contact. Party sources said Jatiya Party candidates are also seeking to attract voters of the Awami League, whose activities have been banned, in a bid to secure victory for the plough, the party's electoral symbol.

The GM Quader-led Jatiya Party has fielded 196 candidates nationwide for the 13th National Election, scheduled for February 12.

"If the election is held in a free and fair manner, we will win at least 12 out of 33 seats in Rangpur division," said Jatiya Party Co-Chairman Mostafizur Rahman Mostafa, also a former mayor of Rangpur City Corporation.

He alleged that campaigning has been disrupted in several constituencies. "Our candidates cannot conduct campaigns properly in many areas. Our activists are being obstructed, banners and festoons are being torn down, and in some places our party offices and leaders have come under attack," he said.

Similar complaints were echoed by candidates in northern

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'Stand up against new oppressors' Nahid urges voters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam yesterday said those involved in extortion, land grabbing, and the rehabilitation of fascist forces after August 5 have now emerged as "new oppressors" in the country.

February 12 would be the day to resist them, he said while speaking at an election rally in Boroghop, Kutubdia, Cox's Bazar.

The people of Bangladesh would decide who forms the government, asserting that no conspiracy from Delhi would be accepted and that there would be no place for foreign dominance in the country's politics, Nahid told the event, organised in support of Jamaat-backed 11-party alliance candidate AHM Hamidur Rahman Azad for Cox's Bazar-2 constituency.

He said the contest was not limited to

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BNP's vision is equal rights for all faiths Fakhru tells Al Jazeera

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir has said that secularism is not the party's objective, asserting that the term is not "congenial" for the politics of Bangladesh.

Speaking to Al Jazeera recently, Fakhru defended party chief Tarique Rahman's leadership and outlined a vision focused on equal rights for all faiths rather than secularist ideology.

Addressing the 1977 removal of "secularism" from the constitution by BNP founder Ziaur Rahman, Fakhru said, "Secularism is not our goal."

He explained that the decision reflected the "philosophy of the party at that time."

Highlighting the country's demographics, he added that the word "is not at all very congenial for Bangladesh's politics."

Instead, Fakhru argued that the BNP's framework ensures religious freedom.

Regarding party chairman Tarique Rahman, Fakhru described him as the "most capable man" to lead the



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Lord of the wings

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intent (LoI) to the CAAB chairman. The ambition was not small: the establishment of "Akij Bashir Aviation Limited," a B-2 category company proposing to operate both domestic passenger and cargo operations by helicopter.

To facilitate this, Bashir Uddin procured a trade licence from the Dhaka North City Corporation on March 11, 2025. The licence, bearing the adviser's photograph, listed the nature of business as "Import, Aviation Service, Export." Around the same time, his company applied to the CAAB chairman for a no objection certificate (NOC) and an air operator certificate (AOC) to formally establish the company. As part of this procedure, Bashir Uddin joined the video interview as the company's owner. The certificates have not been granted yet, but are under active consideration, CAAB sources said.

To make matters worse, about a month later, on April 15, 2025, Bashir Uddin was handed the portfolio for the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism.

Bashir Uddin contends that the media and "syndicates" are conflating a personal necessity with commercial ambition. "I actually asked for a helicopter licence," he told The Daily Star on Wednesday, arguing that he has owned a helicopter for 14 years for corporate mobility. He claims that after his previous operator, South Asian Airlines, became untenable due to "extortionists," he was forced to seek an air operator certificate to keep his machine flying. "I am not running an aeroplane business; this is my personal helicopter," he insisted, adding that he has flown "Tk 1 crore worth" of flights at his own expense for state duties.

Yet, there is an ethical

pothole in this defence. The LoI explicitly mentioned passenger and cargo operations on domestic routes—the definition of commercial aviation. Furthermore, the sheer act of a serving advisory council member obtaining a new trade licence in his own name violates established governmental ethics. And seeking a certificate for a sector he now regulates as the civil aviation adviser constitutes a textbook case of governance failure.

"These are clear examples of conflict of interest that has bedevilled governance under the interim government from the beginning till date," Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, told The Daily Star.

Experts say the sector is an area where licensing, AOC approval, safety certification, route permits and operational clearances are all highly regulated, and all of these fall under CAAB and the civil aviation ministry. Bashir Uddin has policy influence over both entities.

"It is certain there are some problems. It's a conflict of interest," Kazi Wahidul Alam, an aviation expert, told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

Bashir Uddin offers a defence of his participation in the video interview. When pressed by The Daily Star, he insisted his hand was forced by the CAAB bureaucracy. "I repeatedly refused to go there," he claimed, arguing that CAAB officials had "deliberately created such a situation" by demanding the presence of the "ultimate owner" rather than his managing director.

"I am not in the company's management, I am only a shareholder," Bashir Uddin said.

"I had two helicopters. Unable to endure

harassment, I sold one. Later, I decided to sell this one as well. But people from the organisation explained to me that I should try to operate sustainably by obtaining an AOC in my own name. Then I agreed," he said.

BASHIR UDDIN SITS ON THE BIMAN BOARD

In a move that defied traditional norms, Bashir Uddin became the chairman of the Biman Bangladesh Airlines board in August 2025. Best practices dictate that the civil aviation minister (adviser) must maintain a healthy distance from the national flag carrier's boardroom, a separation designed to guarantee that oversight is not compromised. By assuming the chairmanship, Bashir Uddin collapsed the firewall between the ministry (the policy maker) and the airline (the market player).

In his defence, Bashir Uddin points to a 60 percent reduction in ticket fares and a crackdown on the "syndicates" that had allegedly siphoned off Tk 50,000 crore from Bangladesh. "I came to stop chaos in the aviation sector and at Biman," he said.

His logic is flawed. By sitting as chairman, the adviser is effectively regulating himself. If Biman violates safety protocols or engages in anti-competitive behaviour against private airlines, it is the ministry that must investigate. When the adviser is the chairman, accountability becomes a closed loop.

A \$3.7 BILLION BOEING RUSH

The disquiet in the aviation sector has deepened in the final weeks of the interim government's tenure. With the 13th parliamentary election scheduled for February 12, the administration is exhibiting a frantic urgency to lock the state into long-term obligations before the first ballot is cast.

Most alarming is the imminent signing of a massive deal worth Tk 37,000 crore (\$3.7 billion) with US aircraft manufacturer Boeing. Preparations are currently underway to ink this contract just days ahead of the polls.

The decision was rubber-stamped in late December 2025 at Biman's annual general meeting—a meeting chaired, inevitably, by Adviser Bashir Uddin. While the interim government had initially pledged to purchase 25 aircraft to reduce the trade deficit with the United States, scrutiny of the airline's actual capacity whittled the number down to 14. The shopping list includes eight Boeing 787-10 Dreamliners, two 787-9 Dreamliners, and four 737-8 MAX aircraft.

The timing is extraordinary. Bashir Uddin defends the haste, arguing that delaying the deal would push delivery dates back by years. "If you were in my place, what would you do?" he asked.

As part of final-stage negotiations, Biman has sent an urgent letter to Boeing's Seattle headquarters seeking an additional 10 percent discount on the total contract value. If Boeing obliges, the deal will be signed just before the election, binding the next government to a decade of payments and logistical integration for a fleet they did not choose.

"We have not excluded any procedural matters. Airbus has also been kept in the evaluation process. Biman's planning division conducted a techno-economic feasibility study. Based on that, a negotiation committee was formed from the Chief Adviser's Office under the leadership of Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud. A legal counsel has also been appointed. This government has no intention of doing any deal

by excluding any process or legality," Bashiruddin said.

The rush for the Boeing contract is mirrored by the rushed appointment of three new board directors. On January 14, a gazette notification named the new directors for the Biman board: Khalilur Rahman, the national security adviser; Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, a special assistant to the chief adviser with the rank of state minister; and the senior secretary of the Election Commission (EC), Akhtar Ahmed.

With the electoral process already underway, the appointment of a senior election official to a corporate directorship at a state-owned enterprise is puzzling, and so is the appointment of Khalilur Rahman. When pressed on the rationale behind his appointment by reporters on February 2, Rahman offered a response that was as cryptic as it was dismissive: "Not all countries in the world have Biman." It was a retort that displayed a cavalier attitude towards public accountability.

For a technocratic interim government known for its disdain for the unchecked cronyism of the previous regime, such blatant mixing of public duty and private profit are not merely embarrassing. They are corrosive, as sector leaders point out. The administration's handling of the aviation sector has become a lightning rod for criticism, revealing a troubling indifference to conflicts of interest.

The cumulative effect of these actions—the personal licensing, the eleventh-hour appointments, and the multibillion dollar scramble for aircraft—has drawn sharp rebuke from many.

Iftekharuzzaman, the TIB executive director, said, "The interim government has shown either a sheer

lack of understanding that such actions or decisions in reality represent abuse of power, or they took it for granted that their authority would be unaccountable forever just because they derived their authority from the people power July Movement."

The interim government has shown no consideration for the burdens it is leaving behind for the people of the country by such actions, according to Iftekharuzzaman. "Unless they have had some behind-the-scenes deals with the post-election political forces that will form the new government, they are leaving hugely difficult and messy obligations to be addressed for themselves and the new government," he said.

A HEAVY LANDING

Legal experts argue that in a mature democracy, Bashir Uddin's position would be untenable. "If such a thing had taken place in other countries, he would have been forced to resign," said Shaheen Malik, a senior Supreme Court lawyer.

Instead, the adviser remains defiant, framing legitimate inquiries into his conduct as "smear campaigns" by disgruntled extortionists and the media. He seemed to be operating under the delusion that "patriotism" and "good faith" are sufficient substitutes for structural checks and balances.

"I came to do this work purely out of patriotism. But overall, the attempts being made to destroy my reputation make me sad," Bashir Uddin said. "I was appointed according to the Bangladesh Aviation Act. I am not a legal expert. I am working in good faith."

For now, the AkijBashir Group may get its helicopter licence. Biman may get its Boeings. But this flight of fancy has cost the interim administration its credibility.

Warfaze

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In fine arts, Prof Abdus Sattar has previously received Honourable Mention awards at the Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh, along with the Best Award for Print and a Gold Medal, among many other awards.

Architect Marina Tabassum has earned international recognition, including the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2016 for the Bait-ur-Rouf Mosque and again in 2025 for Khudi Bari.

Late musician Ayub Bachchu, founder and frontman of the highly popular rock band LRB, received multiple Meril Prothom Alo Awards and a Tele Cine Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017.

Islam Uddin Palakar, a renowned folk singer, is celebrated for performing pala gaan, a traditional narrative form popular in the haor region. He formed his own troupe in 1989 and became widely known for performances including "Komola Rani Sagar Dighi", "Jahangir Badsha", and "Motilal". Recently, he reached a new generation

of listeners through Coke Studio Bangla with the song "Deora".

Sculptor Tejosh Halder Josh, known for socially engaged public sculpture, has previously received honours including a Media Best Award and an Honourable Mention Award at the Asian Art Biennale, among others.

In education, Prof Mahbubul Alam Majumdar, dean of the school of data and sciences at BRAC University, recently received the Spirit of Abdus Salam Award. He also serves as a long-time coach and mentor of the national Mathematics Olympiad team.

Warfaze, formed in 1984, is credited with popularising hard rock and heavy metal in Bangladesh, with albums spanning from Warfaze (1991) to Shotto (2012).

The Ekushey Padak, introduced in 1976, is awarded annually in recognition of outstanding contributions to various sectors. The award ceremony usually takes place on February 21, International Mother Language Day and Martyrs' Day.

Famine spreading in Sudan's Darfur Warn UN-backed experts

AFP, Port Sudan

Famine is spreading in Sudan's western Darfur, UN-backed experts warned yesterday, after the paramilitary takeover of the region's main city El Fasher triggered mass displacement into surrounding communities.

Since April 2023, Sudan has been engulfed in a devastating war between the army and the paramilitary Rapid

Support Forces that has killed tens of thousands, displaced nearly 11 million and driven multiple regions into famine and hunger.

In an alert issued by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), global food security experts said that "famine thresholds for acute malnutrition have now been surpassed" in North Darfur's contested areas of Um Baru and Kerno, near the border with Chad.