

Shafiqur vows to uproot graft

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unjust to punish petty criminals while allowing major corrupt individuals to remain above the law.

Referring to graft and money laundering during the previous government, the Jamaat chief alleged that about Tk 28 lakh crore was siphoned off abroad over the last 15 and a half years through banks, insurance companies, and mega projects. "This amount equals four national budgets and belongs to the country's 18 crore people. We will fight to bring this money back."

Shafiqur also spoke about repression against Jamaat leaders and activists, saying that the party has been the most persecuted political organisation in the country. "Eleven top leaders were killed through extrajudicial actions and thousands of activists were killed or permanently disabled."

"Jamaat offices were shut for years and the party's registration and electoral symbol were unjustly withdrawn."

Regarding the post-August 5 situation, he said Jamaat would not engage in revenge politics after any change in government. "However, the families of martyrs and victims have the right to justice and would be provided legal support."

Addressing river erosion in the Barishal region, he said river restoration is more important than temporary river control measures. "If proper embankments and river restoration are implemented, the region's situation can change within a decade."

Emphasising equality, the Jamaat

chief said his party prioritises people's victory over party victory. "From the president to ordinary people, everyone will be equal before the law."

Urging people to vote in favour of change, he said, "This Bangladesh will remain, but its character will change -- it will become a Bangladesh of the masses."

At the rally, Jamaat introduced its candidates for different constituencies in the Barishal region. Central and local party leaders were present at the event.

At another event, Shafiqur said the aspirations of people have not been fulfilled through the last 12 national elections held in Bangladesh.

"The upcoming February 12 elections would not be like the previous 12 polls. This election is completely different," he said while addressing a gathering at the Pirojpur Government High School ground.

He added that if Jamaat is voted to power, the party would ensure employment opportunities for all on the basis of merit, regardless of religion, ethnicity, gender, or class.

Claiming that Delwar Hossain Sayedee, who was convicted for crimes against humanity during the Awami League regime, was killed, Shafiqur said a single vote and a single seat are extremely valuable to ensure justice for this killing.

At another rally in Narail yesterday afternoon, Shafiqur urged people to remain alert so that no one can snatch away even a single vote.

"Everyone must ensure that no black vulture can snatch even one person's vote. If any

miscreant stretches a hand towards another citizen's vote or tries to do engineering, we will not spare anyone," he told the gathering at Narail Government High School ground.

"We don't want only Jamaat or Daripalla [balancing scale] to win; we want victory for 18 crore people. Those who consider politics a business commodity can never build the country. We don't want to return to old politics."

At a campaign rally at Faridpur's Boalmari Stadium in the evening, Shafiqur said he did not want a government run by any single party, family or group.

"I want a government of the people, a united Bangladesh," he said, adding that no one would be allowed to divide the country along religious, ethnic or communal lines.

He alleged that attempts could be made to snatch votes and urged people to seek protection from such threats.

Calling for a fresh start, the Jamaat chief said the country's map would not change, but its character must. "We no longer want a Bangladesh where people are killed, disappeared, sent to secret detention or harassed with false cases simply for being political opponents."

He added that he did not want a Bangladesh where minority communities are attacked, where thousands of educated youths remain unemployed, or where justice is sold for money.

[Our Barishal, Pirojpur, Bagerhat, and Faridpur correspondents contributed to this report.]

Dhaka signs historic EPA with Tokyo

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of both countries. This is the first-ever EPA signed by Bangladesh, although the country has had a preferential trade agreement with Bhutan since December 2020.

The EPA process began in 2022, and formal negotiations were launched in March 2024 following recommendations of a Joint Study Group report released in December 2023. The Advisory Council approved the agreement on January 22 this year to secure tariff benefits after LDC graduation.

Japan currently provides duty-free market access to LDCs, including Bangladesh, on 97.9 percent of tariff lines, according to Bangladesh Customs.

Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said the EPA is a positive step covering trade in goods and services, investment and technology. He said it may also open opportunities for sending skilled workers, including trained nurses, from Bangladesh to Japan.

"This is important for addressing export challenges in the post-LDC period, amid a weakening multilateral trading system and the weaponisation of trade," he said.

Rahman added that the deal is favourable for Bangladesh as full reciprocity was not required, which is standard practice between developed countries and LDCs. Bangladesh offered market access for over 1,000 products, while Japan offered more than 7,000.

"This will improve Bangladesh's global connectivity in trade and investment," he said.

Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, economist and chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID), said the agreement is a timely and strategically important step as Bangladesh moves towards LDC graduation.

"It signals a shift towards rules-based, reciprocal trade arrangements with advanced economies and shows Bangladesh is ready to anchor its future market access in predictable, negotiated frameworks rather than temporary preference schemes," he said.

Razzaque added that with Bangladesh securing duty-free access

for nearly 7,400 products while offering such access to about 1,039 Japanese products, the agreement sets a precedent of calibrated, less-than-equal reciprocity, giving Bangladesh policy space to build competitiveness gradually.

He also said the EPA dispels the notion that Bangladesh lacks negotiating capacity, demonstrating that favourable deals can be secured with focused engagement.

"I see the Japan-Bangladesh EPA as a historic step forward," said Tareq Rafi Bhuiyan (Jun), president of the Japan Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JBCCI).

"This EPA is not merely about tariffs; it establishes a long-term, rules-based framework for trade, investment and technology transfer," he said, adding that it provides predictability and investor confidence at a critical moment for Bangladesh's post-LDC transition.

"JBCCI strongly believes this EPA will catalyse Japanese investment, diversify Bangladesh's economy, and deepen our strategic economic partnership for decades," Jun said.

JBCCI Secretary General Maria Howlader said the agreement marks a significant milestone in long-term cooperation between the two countries.

"The creation of 100 percent duty-free access to the Japanese market for about 7,379 Bangladeshi products sends a strong positive signal for our export sector," she said, adding that it would expand opportunities for Bangladeshi professionals in RMG, IT, engineering, caregiving, nursing and other services.

Md Saiful Islam, former president of the Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association of Bangladesh (LFMEAB), said the EPA would open new export windows for garments, leather and leather goods, jute and jute products, benefiting especially small and medium enterprises.

However, he stressed that Bangladesh should prioritise attracting Japanese investment under the deal, as Japanese firms are diversifying their destinations under the "China plus one" policy. He also cited the Japanese Special Economic Zone as a key initiative to draw more investment.

Syed M Tanvir, managing director of Pacific Jeans, said the EPA would help him export denim products to Japan in the post-LDC period.

Saiful said the agreement would also ease Bangladesh's path towards trade deals with other countries, while Tanvir said it would support the hiring of Bangladeshi skilled workers by Japanese companies.

Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, welcomed the EPA and said similar agreements should be signed with other partners, including the European Union.

Faisal Samad, director of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, called the EPA a landmark achievement and said it should serve as a guideline for future trade agreements.

The EPA will give Bangladeshi exporters immediate duty-free access to 97 percent of their export basket, including ready-made garments and nearly 7,379 other products.

However, automobiles from Japan -- home to brands such as Toyota, Honda and Subaru -- will not enjoy duty-free entry. Mahburur Rahman said the move was deliberate to encourage Japanese investment in Bangladesh's vehicle sector, potentially reshaping the domestic automotive industry.

Japan is Bangladesh's second-largest export destination in Asia. Exports reached \$1.33 billion in FY2024-25, posting 8.2 percent year-on-year growth, according to Bangladesh Bank.

Major export items include ready-made garments, fish, shrimp and prawns, home textiles, jute manufactures, leather and leather goods, raw jute and handicrafts.

Bangladesh imported \$1.87 billion worth of goods from Japan in FY25, resulting in a trade balance in Japan's favour. More than 60 percent of imports comprised iron and steel; vehicles and parts; ships and boats; and machinery and mechanical appliances, Bangladesh Bank data showed.

Bangladesh is currently negotiating similar agreements with nearly a dozen partners, including the European Union, ASEAN, RCEP, India, Nepal, Malaysia, South Korea and the UAE.

At least 70 hurt as cops

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unit spokesperson Fatima Tasnim Zuma, and Rajshahi University Central Students' Union (Rucus) General Secretary Salahuddin Ammar.

Several journalists were also hurt, while some policemen were attacked, witnesses said.

Tensions had already been simmering since 3:40pm, when Dhaka University student Reyadul Islam Zubah alleged that he and several female activists were beaten by police in front of Jamuna, the chief adviser's residence.

Shortly after, protesters attempted to break through police barricades to reach the residence, prompting a baton charge, water cannons and sound grenades. Brick chunks were thrown from both sides as loud blasts echoed through the area.

The situation deteriorated again around 7:35pm, when a second round of clashes began at Shahbagh, where protesters had regrouped after being pushed back from the InterContinental earlier in the day.

Witnesses said tension flared when a police team moved from near BIRDEM Hospital towards the InterContinental intersection around 7:30pm. Protesters chanted "bhua bhua" and a section chased the police. Reinforcements soon arrived from the InterContinental side, firing sound grenades and tear gas.

The protesters responded by hurling brick chunks, scattering into roads leading to Dhaka University, Matsya Bhaban and Katabon. Intermittent skirmishes continued for over an hour.

By 8:45pm, police withdrew from Shahbagh, allowing protesters to reoccupy the intersection. Demonstrators set tyres on fire and continued chanting slogans late into the night, while several Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducus) leaders addressed the gathering. The protesters eventually left the area around 10:30pm.

The violence left many bystanders

caught in the crossfire. Marufa Maya, a middle-aged woman at the scene, was seen frantically searching for her eight-year-old son who went missing during the evening clash.

"After the clashes began, I can no longer find him," she said.

Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) Director Brigadier General Md Asaduzzaman said the hospital had received around 60 injured patients by 8:30pm.

"We haven't found any patients with bullet injuries," he said, adding that most injuries were cuts, blunt-force wounds and breathing problems caused by tear gas. "Many have already left after receiving primary treatment."

The protest had begun on Thursday afternoon and later split into two groups. One group, led by Hadi's wife Rabeya Islam Shompa, staged a sit-in in front of Jamuna. The other occupied the intersection in front of Hotel InterContinental. Both groups stayed overnight at their respective locations.

By 2:00pm yesterday, the InterContinental group formally began a sit-in, demanding a UN-led investigation into Hadi's death and exemplary punishment for those responsible.

In a Facebook post last night, Inqilab Moncho claimed, "League activists have become active and are blending in with the public to steer the situation in another direction. There are attempts to derail the election and obstruct justice for the killing of Shaheed Osman Hadi. Everyone is requested to move to a safe place."

The interim government, in a statement yesterday evening, denied that law enforcers had fired any bullets. It said protesters had ignored a ban on demonstrations in the area and escalated the situation by climbing onto a water cannon and breaking through barricades.

"The government remains committed to ensuring justice for Hadi's killing," the statement said,

adding that a formal letter would be sent to the relevant UN agency on Sunday, February 8, seeking an investigation.

Urging restraint ahead of the February 12 national election, the government said the period was politically sensitive and that around 180 million people were awaiting the polls under intense international scrutiny.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police, in a separate press release, described reports of gunfire as "false and misleading" and said the dispersal was carried out in a "fully lawful" manner. It added that several police members were also injured.

In a Facebook Live session, Abdullah Al Jaber urged people to stay calm until Sunday but demanded that the government show them the draft of the UN letter.

"No deceptive letter can be sent without showing us," he said, alleging that some police officers involved were masked and not wearing nameplates, and questioning whether "Hasina's police league" was still active. He also claimed that a section of the advisory council was involved in Hadi's killing.

Referring to the February 12 election, Jaber said issues of independence, sovereignty and security were at stake. "For that reason, the election must be held on the 12th. Those who attacked us to thwart it -- we must show their blueprint the thumbs down and realise our people's rights," he said.

July uprising frontliner Hadi was shot in the capital on December 12 last year as he was preparing to run for the Dhaka-8 constituency. He died at a Singapore hospital on December 18.

Although the Detective Branch submitted a charge sheet naming 17 accused on January 6, protesters rejected the findings. A court later ordered the Criminal Investigation Department to conduct a fresh probe, but the agency has yet to submit its report.

15 in Colombo. Pakistan players also stated that they would seek government clearance if they come across India in the knockout stage, which remains a possibility.

However, India captain Suryakumar Yadav said on Thursday that his team would show up in Colombo for the group-stage clash against Pakistan, stating: "We haven't said no to playing them (Pakistan)."

Meanwhile, Scotland, despite being a last-hour replacement, remain determined to prove they belong on the marquee T20 stage.

"I mean, firstly, we're very sympathetic towards Bangladeshi players, but we still massively believe that we should be here," veteran Scotland left-arm spinner Mark Watt said yesterday.

"We believe that we can beat teams higher ranked than us. So there's no second guess in our invite into this tournament. We're all ready to go."

Scotland will make their fifth consecutive appearance at the T20 World Cup, while Bangladesh will miss out on the tournament for the first time since its inception in 2007.

For Bangladesh, the absence is a bitter blow. Yet, by standing by their player and raising concerns over safety, the Tigers have made a statement that goes beyond cricket -- one that underscores their willingness to challenge the status quo, even at the cost of a World Cup berth.

Voting for Jamaat 'not permissible' for Muslims

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candidate but was using him as a means to "fight" Jamaat-e-Islami.

"I do not understand election and selection. This is jihad (holy war) against them," he said in the video.

Babunagari also claimed that if Jamaat came to power in Bangladesh, it would harm Islam and Muslims.

"If they come to power, they will uproot Islam and destroy the very foundation of Muslims. They are a group that cuts people's throats," he said.

Five shot by pellets during BNP campaign

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They were initially taken to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital. Later, Nusrat and Shahab were transferred to Chattogram Medical College Hospital for advanced treatment. Nusrat was shot in the back, while Shahab suffered injuries to his waist.

Witnesses said the BNP campaign team had gathered about two dozen supporters on the roadside, dancing and chanting slogans ahead of the 13th parliamentary election in the Cox's Bazar-4 constituency. As onlookers gathered, shots were fired, causing panic and a stampede.

A graft-free Bangladesh grounded

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and self-respecting Bangladesh rooted in Islamic values.

According to the manifesto, people, employment, and human security will be at the centre of its development agenda, rather than the interests of a small group.

It said the Quran and Sunnah would serve as the supreme guiding principles of state governance. The Qadiani and Ahmadiyya communities would be declared non-Muslim by the state. The ideals of the Sahaba would be adopted as a foundation of state policy, and an interest-free Islamic economic system would be introduced.

The manifesto also proposes bringing the entire education system under a universal national curriculum. Equal importance would be given to Quran and Hadith-based moral education alongside science, technology, English, and IT. An autonomous grants commission would be formed for the development of Qawmi madrasas. Freedom of religion for all citizens would be

Nusrat's mother, Samira Begum, said she had been standing with her daughter in front of a house by the roadside, watching the campaign performance in support of the paddy sheaf symbol, when pellets struck her daughter's back.

Bacha Mia, who was shot in the hand, said some people were singing and dancing in support of the paddy sheaf campaign when gunshots rang out. "Panic broke out as people began to run. Before I could grasp what was happening, pellets suddenly struck my hand."

Abdur Rahman, who was shot

in the left leg, said he collapsed at a roadside shop after gunfire erupted shortly after evening prayers.

OC Saiful said although gunfire occurred during the campaign for the BNP, there was no political involvement behind it.

"Preliminary investigation suggests that a local criminal, identified as Jalal, fired several rounds from a firearm while intoxicated."

He added that an operation is currently underway to arrest the suspect.

However, as of last night at 9:00pm, there were no arrests over the incident.

T20 World Cup begins amid political chaos

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than a billion home cricket supporters.

On-field action finally returns after events began spiralling over a month ago, when Bangladesh player Mustafizur Rahman was dropped by Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) on instructions from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on January 3.

That incident triggered a chain of developments, including the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) requesting relocation of their matches outside India due to security concerns and in line with government directives, only for the ICC to eventually reject the plea and replace Bangladesh with Scotland for the tournament.

Pakistan, slamming the ICC for having "double standards", had also threatened to boycott the entire tournament. While its government eventually cleared the team to participate, it instructed Pakistan not to take the field against India in their group fixture scheduled for February

ensured.

It further pledges to simplify the process of delivering agricultural produce directly from farmers to consumers and to take effective measures to curb the dominance of middlemen. Ensuring women's dignity and security in line with Islamic values is also among the commitments. The party promised quality, accessible, and humane healthcare for all citizens.

The manifesto promises speedy trials in cases of journalist killings and an end to false cases and harassment. For expatriates, it proposes special interest-free loan facilities and zero tolerance for harassment at all stages, including at airports. A special task force would be formed to curb extortion.

Bribery, corruption, and waste would be treated as serious offences. Tender manipulation, armed party cadres, and terrorist politics would be considered anti-state crimes. Special monitoring cells and skilled investigation units would be formed to prevent

enforced disappearances, killings, and abductions.

The party also pledged to set up special tribunals to ensure swift trials in cases of rape and violence against women and children. Strict legal action would be taken against willful loan defaulters and money launderers.

The manifesto unveiling event was conducted by Maulana Yusuf Ashraf, party's senior nayab-e-ameer and convener of the election management committee.

Talks with US

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states fear a breakdown in the negotiations would lead to another conflict between the US and Iran which could spill over to the rest of the oil-rich region.

Iran has vowed a harsh response to any military strike and has cautioned neighbouring Gulf Arab countries hosting US bases in the oil-rich region that they could be in the firing line if they were involved in an attack.

have fanned smouldering tensions between the nuclear-powered neighbours who engaged in their worst conflict in decades in May.

New Delhi has denied any involvement in the violence in Balochistan where Pakistan's military has battled a decades-long insurgency.

That region was brought to a standstill after separatist militants stormed government buildings, hospitals and markets in a coordinated attack, killing 58 civilians and security officials. The military said it killed 216 militants in targeted offensives across the province.

Irfan Memon, said in a statement.

The capital was already on high alert yesterday for the visiting President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, with roads around the capital blocked by checkpoints and security forces posted across the city.

"We are giving every possible help to the families of those killed and those injured," Pakistan's parliamentary affairs minister Tariq Fazal said after visiting the wounded at Islamabad's Polyclinic hospital.

Pakistan has also blamed India for assaults by militants in the restive Balochistan province over the weekend, accusations that