



THE FINAL PUSH

With voting just two days away, the country was buzzing as the campaign trail hit the home stretch yesterday. From city streets to village corners, the final day of electioneering unfolded like a festival of politics. **Top left**, Islami Andolan Bangladesh Ameer Syed Rezaul Karim addressing a rally in Barishal; **top right**, Jatiya Party (GM Quader-led) candidate for Gaibandha-1 Barrister Shameem Haider Patwary greeting a rickshaw puller while campaigning in the district. **Bottom (L-R)**: Dhaka-9 candidate Tasnim Jara hugging a voter while campaigning in the capital's Sipahibagh; supporters of Dhaka-5 BNP candidate Nabi Ullah Nabi attending a rally in the capital's Jatrabari; a women's procession held in support of Jamaat's Chattogram-10 candidate Shamsuzzaman Helaly in the district's Halishahar; and supporters of Dhaka-12 independent candidate Saiful Islam Nirrob at a procession in the capital's Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue.

PHOTOS: STAR



BNP alone has plan, experience to govern

Says Tarique on last day of campaigning

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman said that winning applause with pleasing words is easy, but running a country is not. He added that, at present, no political party other than BNP has a clear plan, concrete programmes, or the experience needed to govern the nation.

He also called on everyone to remain vigilant and, hinting at Jamaat activists, alleged that a group is attempting to manipulate the election by manufacturing fake ballot seals.

"Where are their plans? They only have big words... We have seen that their own friends were part of the government over the last one and a half years. But why is the country in such a difficult situation now?" he asked while addressing an election rally on Pir Jangi

SEE PAGE 7 COL 4

Shafiqur alleges plot to hijack election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman alleged that a certain group, fearing defeat, has become desperate and is now plotting to hijack the election "through the back door".

"They are unleashing goons, stockpiling weapons, and attempting to capture polling centres to snatch away people's votes," he said, hinting at BNP activists.

Shafiqur made the remarks while speaking at an II-party alliance election rally at the Mohammadpur Central Eidgah ground in Dhaka yesterday afternoon. The event was organised in support of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Ameer Mamunul Haque, the alliance candidate for Dhaka-13 constituency.

The Jamaat chief further said, "Let me make it clear -- the July warriors have not fallen asleep. They are still awake. In Sha Allah, we will resist all their [BNP activists] misdeeds. Don't dare to snatch people's votes again."

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

IAB commits to ideology over power politics

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB) Ameer Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim has said his party has never engaged in power-centric politics, stressing that it remains committed to ideology and Islam.

"If we had practised power politics, we could have tasted power long ago. We have pursued ideology and Islam," he told an election rally in Barishal-4 (Mehendiganj Hizla-Kazirhat) yesterday, campaigning for party candidate Mufti Syed Muhammad Abul Khair.

Rezaul Karim, also the Pir of Charmonai, said IAB is contesting the election despite obstacles, solely to uphold Islam and Shariah. He urged voters to support the party's hand fan symbol, saying it would "bring smiles to your faces."

Senior Nayeb-e-Ameer Mufti Syed Faizul Karim described the February 12 polls as a chance to change the nation's fate. He argued that Bangladesh's 12 previous elections failed to meet public expectations due to flawed

SEE PAGE 7 COL 3

Parties outline visions in televised speech

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Political parties yesterday outlined their visions for governance, reform, and citizen welfare, among other issues, in addresses to the nation on state television, a day before the polls.

Emphasising justice-based, corruption-free governance, economic fairness, and protection of citizens' rights, they urged voters to cast their ballots and support their candidates.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) President Kazi Sajjad Zahir Chandan warned of a "deep systemic crisis" marked by inequality, democratic decline, and falling living standards.

He pledged widespread reforms, drawing inspiration from the 1971 Liberation War and the July 2024 Uprising, and promised universal healthcare, free education, guaranteed employment for families, food rationing, and workers' protections.

Urging voters to resist manipulation, he said the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Jamaat pledges 'Bangladesh 2.0'

FROM PAGE 1

own -- Bangladesh 2.0.

Describing youths as hardworking, courageous, talented, and technologically aware, he said Jamaat wanted to work hand in hand with them to rebuild the country.

He said people want security, good governance, and insaf (justice), stressing the need for fundamental reforms to ensure accountability and fairness.

"Some steps towards reform have been taken, but many are incomplete or at a very early stage," he said, urging people to vote "yes" in the referendum to complete the reform process.

Termining the national elections held in 2014, 2018, and 2024 a "mockery", the Jamaat chief said citizens had been deprived of their voting rights in those polls.

On Jamaat's vision for governance, he said the party had outlined it through policy summits and its election manifesto, which was prepared with input from experts at home and abroad, as well as people from different professions.

"If we get the opportunity to form the government by the will of Allah and the love of the people, we will begin implementing our plans from the very first day, after the Fajr prayers," he said.

"We must say yes to honesty and justice, and no to corruption and oppression," he said, urging votes for Jamaat.

On women's rights, Shafiqur said no society could prosper without ensuring women's dignity and security.

"If we come to power, women will not remain confined to the household. They will lead mainstream society with pride, from corporate leadership to politics, without discrimination," he said.

He also pledged equal rights and security for people of all faiths.

"This Bangladesh belongs to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians alike. No one will live in a culture of fear," he said, adding that any attempt to attack people based on religious identity would be resisted.

Addressing religious leaders, he called on the ulama and members of the Tablighi Jamaat to play an active role in nation-building, saying it was a collective responsibility to establish justice and insaf in society.

Steps would be taken to strengthen

the role of religious groups in national policy processes, he added.

He further pledged that, if Jamaat comes to power, no one would face persecution, arbitrary "tagging", or extrajudicial killings.

Outlining priority areas for reform, Shafiqur identified education, the judiciary, and the economy as key sectors.

"Education must be ethics-based and technology-driven," he said, adding that Jamaat wants to turn young people into skilled professionals and provide them with jobs rather than unemployment allowances.

On the judiciary, he said meaningful reform was essential to ensure justice.

"Without establishing justice in society, we cannot build the Bangladesh we aspire to," he said, calling for honest, capable, and committed individuals to be appointed to the bench.

On the economy, he said wide-ranging reforms were needed, particularly in the banking sector.

"We must make our economy investment-friendly. Only then will employment be created and unemployment reduced," he said.

The Jamaat chief alleged that previous rulers had treated the state as personal property and misused public resources, institutions, and development projects for personal and partisan gain.

Jamaat representatives who had previously served in parliament and local government, he claimed, had not been accused of corruption.

He also announced plans to hold elections among volunteer representatives to choose delegates who would liaise with embassies and high commissions, advocate for expatriates' rights, and ensure their voices are heard.

He said efforts would be made to restore suspended international flights, including the Manchester route, and to launch new services where needed. He also pledged to ensure the dignified repatriation of deceased migrant workers and expressed support for proportional parliamentary representation of expatriates.

On foreign policy, Shafiqur said Bangladesh would pursue relations with all countries based on equality and mutual respect.

"Our national interests, dignity, and development goals will guide our international engagements," he said.

He also pledged responsible and transparent action on climate change.

Concluding his address, Shafiqur said state power was an amanat (trust) of the people and must never be treated as a privilege.

"We must always remember that we are accountable," he said, recalling Hazrat Omar's saying that a ruler would be held responsible even if a dog died of hunger by the banks of the Euphrates.

"I earnestly appeal to you all to elect Jamaat-e-Islami candidates on the Daripalla (balanced-scale) symbol and the candidates of the II-party alliance in your respective areas on February 12," he said.

US lowers tariff for Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 1

reduction and zero-duty access for textiles using US inputs would give Bangladesh exporters "a major boost".

The agreement was approved by the Council of Advisers yesterday and will take effect once both sides issue formal notifications.

The deal follows earlier tariff changes. In April last year, US President Donald Trump imposed a 37 percent reciprocal tariff on Bangladeshi exports, later reduced to 20 percent after negotiations.

As part of broader commitments, Bangladesh has pledged to purchase 25 Boeing aircraft, with 14 deals already being finalised at a value between Tk 30,000 crore and Tk 35,000 crore.

The country will also increase imports of US cotton, soybeans, liquefied petroleum gas and other products.

Bangladesh previously agreed to import 3.5 million tonnes of US wheat over five years, of which 660,000 tonnes have already been purchased.

US Trade Representative data show that bilateral goods and services trade rose to \$12.4 billion in 2024, marking a 3 percent increase from the previous year. The trade deficit stood at \$6.1 billion, as Bangladesh exported goods worth \$8.4 billion to the US and imported \$2.3 billion in American products.

BNP will build safe, self-reliant country

FROM PAGE 1

responsibility to run the state, it will build a self-reliant Bangladesh, targeting every sector and every class of people, and will announce and implement the national pay scale for government officers and employees on time.

Tarique warned that certain groups are deliberately misinterpreting religion for political gain and attempting to mislead faithful Muslims, urging citizens to remain alert and united during this critical electoral period.

Citing respected religious scholars, he said, "Many prominent ulemas have spoken out clearly that some people, for the sake of party interests, are misusing religion and trying to confuse devout Muslims. Therefore, I appeal to all believers -- we must remain cautious so that no one can mislead faithful Muslims."

"BNP wants to build a safe Bangladesh in which Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians -- believers, non-believers, or sceptics -- whether living in hills or plains, every citizen will remain secure."

Calling the upcoming election a historic milestone, he added, "The fallen, defeated, and expelled fascist clique had taken away ownership of the state from the people and seized all democratic political rights. Finally, through long movements and sacrifices of thousands of lives, the ownership of the state has been

returned to the people."

"Direct voting -- from local representatives to members of parliament -- is the precondition for restoring people's lost political authority."

Outlining BNP's manifesto, the party chief pledged wide-ranging reforms focused on employment, youth, women, farmers, education, healthcare, technology, and governance.

He announced plans to create one crore jobs through economic restructuring, regional development, foreign investment, and expansion of IT, freelancing, and outsourcing sectors.

Educated unemployed youth would receive temporary financial support for up to one year until employment is secured.

On women's empowerment, he said BNP would introduce Family Cards in the names of female household heads, initially providing monthly assistance to economically disadvantaged families.

"We consider the Family Card a symbol of women's economic empowerment," he said, adding that his party would ensure daycare centres and breastfeeding corners at workplaces, women-only electric transport, strict laws against cyberbullying, and exemplary punishment for violence against women.

Addressing farmers, he said Farmers' Cards will provide updated agricultural information and financial

assistance, reiterating BNP's belief that protecting farmers means protecting the nation.

Education reforms would include mandatory vocational training from high school, free skill development programmes at colleges and universities, and the introduction of a third language alongside Bangla and English to enhance global employability.

On healthcare, he said BNP plans to recruit 1,00,000 healthcare workers, 80 percent of them women, to deliver basic medical services at the grassroots level.

He also highlighted initiatives in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, data processing, and semiconductors, aiming to generate hundreds of thousands of jobs annually.

Regarding religious harmony, Tarique said, "The state belongs to everyone. Ensuring safety is the responsibility of the state, and security is the right of all."

He stressed that Bangladeshis have consistently rejected dictatorship, extremism, and communalism.

Calling on voters, he urged citizens to support the BNP. "A victory for the paddy sheaf means victory for Bangladesh. It means an independent, sovereign, and fascism-free Bangladesh."

"On February 12, please vote for the paddy sheaf... Let the first vote of our youth be for democracy. With your support, we will build a just, humane, and secure Bangladesh."

UK PM Starmer's communications director quits

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer was scrambling to shore up his premiership yesterday, as another top aide quit and he prepared to face lawmakers furious that his government has become embroiled in the Jeffrey Epstein scandal.

The Labour leader, in office for 19 months, is facing calls from opposition politicians to resign over the appointment of Peter Mandelson as US ambassador, despite knowing he had maintained links to Epstein after the sex offender was convicted in 2008.

In a fresh setback, Starmer's communications chief Tim Allan quit just months into the role, the day after his chief of staff, Morgan McSweeney,

also resigned for advising Starmer to make the contentious Mandelson appointment.

McSweeney's departure deprives the beleaguered UK leader of his closest adviser.

Allan said in a short statement that he wanted "to allow a new No.10 team to be built", referring to the prime minister's 10 Downing Street office.

Starmer has already had several communications chiefs in his short tenure, with staff departures, policy U-turns and missteps an increasing hallmark of his struggling administration that has increasingly dented his popularity.

The embattled prime minister was due to address Labour MPs later yesterday in a crunch meeting.

"Advisers advise, leaders decide. He

made a bad decision, he should take responsibility for that," Conservative opposition leader Kemi Badenoch told BBC radio, calling Starmer's position "untenable".

The fallout from the appointment of Mandelson, sparked by emails showing that he remained friends with Epstein long after the latter's conviction in 2008, is the most serious crisis of Starmer's time in power.

Several backbench Labour MPs, mostly from the left of the party who have never warmed to Starmer's centrist tilt, have suggested that Starmer should follow McSweeney out of the exit door.

But a number of leading figures have defended him, as no clear successor has emerged, and with the party facing key local elections in May.