

‘BNP confident of decisive victory’

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politics. “I will try to do better than them,” he added.

Among the top of the list of tasks he will face if elected will be to tackle the economic woes of the world’s second-largest producer of garments.

“There are serious challenges ahead of us – we need to tackle the economic situation...there are a huge number of unemployed. We need to create businesses for these young people to have jobs,” he told the AFP.

Tarique was particularly worried about the economic situation faced by women.

On ties with India and other neighbours, Tarique said, “The interest of my people, and the interest of my country, comes first.”

He added that Bangladesh

nevertheless wanted “at least a neighbourly relationship” with the countries surrounding it.

Tarique opposed banning political parties by law.

Bangladesh’s interim government, led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, has barred Hasina’s Awami League from contesting the vote.

“Of course, if someone is involved in some kind of crime, they need to be punished as per the law,” he said.

In a separate video interview with Deutsche Welle Bangla last night,

Tarique reiterated the BNP is confident that the party will form the government alone.

On the question of forming a national government with Jamaat, Tarique said, “We are very confident that we will get the verdict of the

people of Bangladesh. We will be able to form the government on our own. In that case, someone will have to stay in the opposition. If there is to be balance in the government and the state, there must be an opposition. If everyone comes into the government, how will the country run?”

He also said, “We are hopeful, and people are hopeful too, that the election will be fair.”

Speaking about India, Tarique said, “There is a distance between BNP and them. If we see that any agreement has been made that goes against the interests of the people of Bangladesh, against the country’s interests, and does not match the interests of the people and the state of Bangladesh, then naturally there will be distance. It does not matter which country it is with.”

17 hurt in pre-polls violence in 3 dists

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house to free their supporters.

At a press conference yesterday, BNP’s Bogura-4 candidate Mosharraf Hossain alleged that Rana’s eye was gouged out during the attack by Jamaat-Shibir activists. He claimed four BNP men were injured in the incident.

Monjur-A-Murshed, deputy director of Bogura Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital where Rana was undergoing treatment, said Rana’s eye was severely injured but did not confirm whether it was gouged out.

Mosharraf also said when doctors informed the family that Rana had lost his right eye, his wife conveyed the news around noon by mobile phone to his elderly mother Rabeya Bewa, who was at home.

Upon hearing the news, Rabeya fell ill immediately and died shortly

afterwards, before she could be taken to hospital. Mosharraf said her namaj-e-janaza was held at their village home at 9:00pm yesterday.

A doctor at the hospital’s ophthalmology department, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the bone next to Rana’s right eye had fractured and penetrated the eye, causing the eyeball fluid to leak out. He added that Rana has been referred to the National Institute of Ophthalmology in Dhaka.

Jamaat’s Bogura-4 candidate Mostafa Faisal held a separate press conference denying allegations of vote buying, claiming instead that BNP men attacked Jamaat activists without provocation. He said two Jamaat supporters were injured.

Nandigram Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mizanur Rahman acknowledged the violence but said he

did not yet have details. No case had been filed as of 8:00pm last night.

In Patuakhali, at least four activists were injured in two separate clashes between BNP and Jamaat supporters in Bauphal upazila on Monday night and early yesterday. The first incident occurred around 8:30pm at Ainabaj Kalaiya village, followed by another at 12:15am in Keshabpur.

Bauphal Police Station OC Siddiqur Rahman confirmed the incidents.

In Panchagarh, seven people were injured in a clash between supporters of BNP and NCP-nominated candidates at Ramzanpara in Atwari upazila around 10:30pm on Monday.

Police went to the spot and brought the situation under control, said Atwari Police Station OC Motiar Rahman.

[Our correspondents in Bogura, Patuakhali and Thakurgaon contributed to this report.]

‘People will deliver the right verdict’

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We hope that, in the end, victory will belong to the people,” he said.

He urged government officials to carry out their responsibilities neutrally.

“We want everyone to perform their duties impartially from their respective positions. On the day of the election, various kinds of rumours may spread. On behalf of the 11 parties, we call upon the people not to pay attention to any misleading

statements unless a clear and official announcement is made,” he said.

He added that those fearful of defeat may spread false allegations and attempt to create fear and panic.

“Overcoming all obstacles, people must exercise their right to vote and should not return without ensuring the results. Even after voting, votes can be tampered with, and before voting, artificial crises may be created,” he said.

“We believe that the brave people

of the country will make the February 12 election a success, defying all odds, and the government that will be formed that day will represent a new Bangladesh,” he added.

He said around 40 percent of the country’s voters, who could not exercise their voting rights in the past, will not allow the electoral process to be destroyed.

“We, the 11-party alliance, are ready to help in every way to hold free and fair polls,” the Jamaat chief said.

Bangladesh fares worse

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Full democracies average a CPI score of 71, flawed democracies 47 and authoritarian states only 32, showing that democratic systems are far more effective in controlling corruption, the TIB chief said.

“Based on civic space indicators, Bangladesh falls into the category of authoritarian countries where civil society freedoms are severely restricted.”

Commenting on the domestic situation, Iftekharuzzaman said public expectations after the mass uprising have not been met and the foundation of state reform remains weak.

Sections of the bureaucracy and political parties are obstructing accountability focused reforms.

Calling for comprehensive and sustainable changes, he said: “Although kleptocracy has ended, money laundering has not stopped – rather, it has been re-established.”

TIB clarified that it does not produce the CPI but only publishes it locally.

The CPI 2025 is based on 13 surveys from 12 international institutions, including the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, the Economist Intelligence Unit and the World Justice Project. Eight surveys were used for Bangladesh.

Responding to a question from a journalist about whether the February

12 election will be inclusive without the participation of the Awami League, Iftekharuzzaman said that the party cannot expect to return to political participation without first admitting its mistakes and showing remorse for its actions.

“The party [AL] itself had taken a clear position against the ongoing election process and therefore could not claim exclusion afterwards. The party has openly declared an anti-election position. If a party boycotts an election on its own, how can it then be included?”

Regarding the current narrative around “inclusive elections”, Iftekharuzzaman said concerns over inclusivity were conspicuously muted during the past 16 years when the AL was in power.

“When we talk about inclusive elections today, we must ask what we did in the last 16 years. How many institutions or individuals had the courage at that time to say elections were not inclusive?”

Although the AL is officially boycotting the polls, it is still attempting to shape the electoral environment indirectly.

“They are trying to obstruct the election through violence and instability. This is happening through their supporters, agents at home

and abroad, and in some cases with encouragement from sheltering countries.”

Iftekharuzzaman also questioned the party’s actual stance on participation, claiming that many AL members had already cast their votes while in jail.

“Those voters have already voted. You protested against this yourselves,” he said.

At the grassroots, the AL leaders and activists are not contesting under the party symbol but are instead joining or campaigning for other political platforms.

“Yet some people still say the Awami League is actively participating in the election. On what logic is this being said?”

The TIB chief stressed that the party’s political legitimacy cannot be restored by outside actors.

“No one else can bring the Awami League back to politics. The current situation of the party is primarily the result of decisions taken by its own leadership.”

Public acceptance remains possible if the party demonstrates accountability, he said.

“If they accept responsibility, express remorse and say, ‘we were wrong’, I think the people of this country will accept them. But whether they choose to do that is entirely up to them.”

Limit SSC exams to five core subjects

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The report said this would ease “unnecessary academic pressure” on adolescents who currently sit for exams in all subjects, leaving limited scope to strengthen foundational skills in language and mathematics.

The committee also argued that shortening the public exam schedule would reduce prolonged school closures.

NO PUBLIC EXAMS AT CLASSES 5 AND 8

The report recommended that PSC and JSC exams in classes 5 and 8 remain abolished permanently and called the reintroduction of the Junior Scholarship Examination last year “unnecessary”, proposing scrapping it.

On structure, it proposed universal education up to class 12, defining classes 6 to 12 as the secondary level, and putting the school system from pre-primary to class 12 under a single ministry or authority.

It also recommended keeping the curriculum undivided up to class 10, calling the stream split at class 9 “not well considered”, and said that should begin only at class 11.

The committee proposed amending the constitution to recognise education as a fundamental right, rather than only

a principle of state policy, and enacting an Education Rights Act allowing citizens to take legal action if the state fails to provide quality education.

The proposals come against a field assessment that found learning gaps. The committee assessed 437 students from 10 schools, including institutions in char, haor and coastal areas. In mathematics, 77.13 percent of class 8 students and 65.42 percent of class 9 students scored below 33 percent; 71.4 percent failed overall. In English, 55.4 percent failed to achieve the passing grade.

ACADEMIC CALENDAR, CLASS DURATION

On the academic calendar, it called the January–December cycle a “colonial legacy” and proposed a September–June academic year, with the long vacation in July and August to reduce monsoon disruptions.

It also criticised the fixed 45-minute class as a “rigid routine” and suggested calculating total weekly instructional time per subject, allowing longer sessions, particularly for mathematics and science.

On governance, it recommended that MPs, upazila chairmen and elected public representatives should not serve as SMC presidents. Instead, presidents

should have at least a university degree, with priority for genuine guardians and local educationists, citing political interference and irregularities.

It said the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education is overstretched and proposed a separate Directorate of Secondary Education to oversee classes 6 to 12. It also suggested a Secondary Education Taskforce and an independent and permanent Education Commission to shield reforms from political change.

On teacher recruitment, it recommended a National Teaching Service Corps, modelled on the civil service. Meritorious students would enrol in a four-year integrated education honours programme after the Higher Secondary Certificate and upon completion, join the corps with pay, allowances and social status comparable to civil service cadres. They must serve at least five years in assigned institutions, particularly in rural areas.

Education Adviser Prof CR Abrar said the ministry would review the recommendations for policy and legal action.

He urged political parties to play an effective role not only in budget allocations but also in structural and institutional reforms.

Pro-BNP, Jamaat actors play

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On the other hand, Jamaat and its 11-party alliance partners are claiming their opponents are “seasonal Muslims” who only adopt Islamic attire (beards and tupis) during election season “to deceive voters”.

According to section 16(e) of the National Parliamentary Election Code of Conduct, which governs election conduct on social media, states: “No person shall engage in any activity that exploits religious or ethnic sentiments for the purpose of gaining electoral advantage.”

Asked about the violation by the parties at a press conference yesterday, Election Commissioner Abul Fazal Md Sanaulah, told The Daily Star, “Election Commission cannot go into the theoretical discussion [about Islamic faith], but we are taking action whenever we have clear evidence of code violations.”

‘THE BETTER MUSLIMS’

On January 28, the official page of Maj General (Rtd), Sharif Uddin, the BNP-nominated candidate for Rajshahi-1 and former defence adviser to Begum Khaleda Zia, ran a political ad on Facebook. The ad labeled Jamaat’s tactics as deceptive, stating, “Asking for votes in the name of religion or promising tickets to Jannah is clear hypocrisy (Munafiq); Allah has commanded us to stay away from such deception.”

The ad, which cost between \$200 and \$299, reached more than a million people. It showed a short documentary in rural setting where a man says his wife was approached by women “preaching Islam” and urging them to vote for a certain party. A cleric is then seen telling the man that Allah is the almighty and there is no relation between faith in Allah and election – a clear reference to Jamaat-e-Islami’s door-to-door female campaigners.

Just days later on February 3, 2026, the Facebook page “Kazipur Daripalla Samartha” (Kazipur Daripalla Supporters), which appeared to be campaigning for Maolana Shahinur Alam ran an ad. In the ad, the Sirajganj-1 Jamaat candidate called “seasonal Muslims” those individuals who accused Jamaat of “selling Jannah tickets”.

In the ad, which reached 1.25 lakh people, Shahinur mocked his opponents for only adopting Islamic attire like beards and prayer caps for the election season, claiming that “looking

at them, there is no way to tell if they are Muslims or followers of another religion.”

In addition to dismissing the BNP, members of the Jamaat-led alliance also spent money on Facebook to provoke voters using religion.

For example, Abm Shirajul Mamun, the Khelafat Majlish candidate and 11 party alliance nominee for Narayanganj-5, ran a provocative ad addressing voters. In the ad, he demands to know why there is no sign of Allah’s law on His own land. The ad carried a caption with an ominous ultimatum, “We will meet on the Day of Judgment.”

In another ad in January, he pledged to implement a “Jiziya” tax for non-Muslims, to exempt them from protecting the sovereignty of the country.

Shirajul ran a total of 18 ads between December and February, many of which were religiously provocative, spending a little more than \$270, and reaching 1.8 million people.

Other BNP-aligned platforms sponsoring religious provocation include the pages of Shohidul Islam Babul (Faridpur-4) and Khairul Islam Sajib. According to his Facebook profile, Sajib is the senior joint convener of Narayanganj District Jubo Dal, and he ran ads on behalf of Narayanganj-3 BNP candidate Azharul Islam Mannan. Surrogate pages such as “Team Jhalakathi” for Rafiul Islam Jamal (Jhalakathi-1), “Voice Of Mirza Abbas” for Mirza Abbas (Dhaka-8) also ran similar ads.

Babul targeted Jamaat by characterising them as communal and disrespectful of minority rights, positioning himself and the BNP as the protectors of a diverse society. Sajib said that Jamaat’s lack of religious sincerity is evident on their campaign leaflets, which omit the phrase “Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim.”

Pages which spread religious narratives for 11-party alliance and Jamaat-nominated figures include those affiliated with Principal Shahabuddin (Bogra-1), Nurul Islam (Rajbari-1), Abm Shirajul Mamun (Narayanganj-5), Advocate Md Abdul Awal (Jamalpur-4), Shayekh Mufti Shuaib Ibrahim (Gopalganj-2), and Hafez Hazi Muhammad Enayet Ullah (Dhaka-7).

Abdul Awal sponsored an ad speaking about how Muslims have no alternative but to implement Allah’s law

on the planet, calling those who disagree as non-believers and “munafiqs” and claiming that if Jamaat had agreed to turn away from Allah’s law, their leaders would not have been hanged to death.

Together, the 50 BNP and Jamaat-affiliated pages targeted an estimated 21.1 million viewers with their political ads, with BNP having a slight edge over Jamaat, drawing 57 percent of the eyeballs.

While BNP led the race when it came to paid ads Jamaat-aligned entities topped the list of non-sponsored posts, disseminating 16 posts classified as religiously provocative from 17 December to 24 January. Pro-BNP actors posted 14, and both sides targeted each other an equal number of times during this period.

Jamaat-aligned entities repeatedly portrayed the BNP as hostile to Islamic symbols such as beards, tupi, hijab and the burqa. Through such posts, pro-Jamaat actors have sought to position themselves as the sole guardians of Islamic identity, while questioning the religious credibility of BNP leaders.

For instance, on December 17 last year, a page named Tafsir TV Dhaka shared a video of a religious sermon (waz). The caption directly targeted BNP leader Salahuddin Ahmed, stating: “BNP leader Salahuddin wants the Islam of Medina! Then why doesn’t he have a beard?”

However, not all posts from Jamaat-aligned entities targeted the BNP. Some of them sought to bolster Jamaat’s own Islamic credentials. For instance, Uttarbongo Television circulated an AI-generated content, portraying an elderly man who equated political opposition to Jamaat with an affront to the holy Quran.

Pro-BNP entities also attempted to portray BNP as the “true” Islamic party and attack Jamaat for their alleged religious and political hypocrisy.

The cumulative engagement of these non-sponsored religiously charged contents from the two sides drew 5 lakh likes, comments and shares.

Although pro-Jamaat entities contribute to a third of the total non-sponsored posts, which is only about three percentage points more than pro-BNP ones, they garnered more than half of engagement (54.46 percent) within 24 hours since the post was published.

[Reporting and research: Zyma Islam, Nourin Sultana, Abdullah Hel Bubun]

Parties spend crores on Facebook ads

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Advertisers employed two approaches – publishing fewer but more expensive ads designed for broader reach, and releasing cheaper ads with a high frequency.

Operating through a network of 136 distinct pages, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has deployed at least 5,179 advertisements with a total expenditure of \$96,171 (about Tk 1.15 crore).

Jamaat-e-Islami and the 11-party alliance utilised at least 104 pages to run 2,792 advertisements, spending at least Tk 85 lakh.

Of this, Tk 4 lakh was spent by its alliance members Khelafat Majlish and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish, Tk 3.8 lakh by National Citizen Party and about Tk 1 lakh by Amar Bangladesh (AB) Party.

Independent candidates operated across 33 pages, spending about Tk 22 lakh to run 843 advertisements.

Thirteen Islami Andolon Bangladesh pages ran 432 ads for Tk 9 lakh.

Of the biggest 20 advertisers, 12 belong to the BNP and six to the Jamaat.

However, although more of the big spenders are from the BNP, the number one spender among everyone was Dhaka News 24 Online, a Facebook page masquerading as a news organisation that is actually a mouthpiece for Jamaat-e-Islami, disseminating ads asking for votes for Daripalla.

Make the polls ‘birthday of new Bangladesh’

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their valuable votes. “The key to the country is in your hands. Use that key wisely. May Allah guide us on the right path.”

He emphasised that a vote in the referendum is not merely a stamp on a piece of paper, but a decisive choice that will shape the future of the next generation, the security of families, and the overall direction of the nation.

“The decisions you make today will influence education, employment, justice, democracy, and every level of governance. This is a moment when your rights and responsibilities as citizens come together,” he said, urging people to actively participate in the referendum. “Cast your vote and secure your future.”

Prof Yunus said voters should go to polling stations with hope rather than fear, with responsibility instead of apathy, and with unity rather than division.

Only through a free, fair, and credible referendum, he said, can the people of Bangladesh demonstrate their ability to determine their own future.

Once the elections are completed, he said, the elected government will promptly assume office, ending the interim government’s responsibilities.

Dhaka News 24 Online spent about Tk 1.17 lakh running 46 ads asking for votes for the party.

The second-highest spender was also a page calling itself a news page named “Dhaka 17 News”, which only publishes posts about Jamaat’s Dhaka-17 candidate SM Khaliduzzaman.

It spent Tk 9.73 lakh to post 56 ads asking for votes for the candidate and the party symbol, using hashtags like “#HealingDhaka17”.

The third-highest spender is Humam Quader Chowdhury, BNP candidate for Chattogram-7 (Rangunia). He spent nearly Tk 8 lakh and advertised 102 times.

Humam’s ads centre around his electoral promises for his constituency, Rangunia, and content about his persecution during the Awami League regime as a survivor of enforced disappearance.

Humam is closely followed by Jamaat’s official Facebook campaign page, “Cholo Eksathe Gori Bangladesh”, which spent about Tk 7.6 lakh for 65 ads.

The most prominent narrative propagated by the page is about Jamaat’s firm stance on extortion, running short documentaries about the party’s plan to end extortion.

In comparison, BNP’s official campaign page “Shobar Agey Bangladesh” spent Tk 2.4 lakh on 113 ads, while its official central media cell

spent a further Tk 2 lakh on 26 ads.

The highest spending independent candidate was MAH Salim from Dhaka-15. He spent Tk 6.7 lakh on 66 ads.

Dhaka-16 Islami Andolon Bangladesh (IAB) candidate Zahurul Islam is the highest spender from his party. He spent Tk 5.37 lakh for 205 ads.

Jamaat also used another “news outlet” called Peoples Time 24 BD to disseminate ads asking for votes. The page spent more than Tk 2.3 lakh to run 39 ads for the Islamist party.

However, Jamaat is hardly the only party to use “News” to advertise.

VOD “Voice Of Democracy” Bangla, which runs a news page with a goal to “produce reliable news coverage” sponsored ads worth 1.8 lakh for Ishraque Hossain, the BNP candidate for Dhaka-6.

Of the top 20 most frequent advertisers, 13 are affiliated with the BNP, three with Jamaat and one is from the IAB.

Over the past 30 days, BNP chief Tarique Rahman ran seven ads worth \$385 (Tk 46,200), which were paid for by the party.

During the same period, Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman ran 30 ads from his official page worth Tk 3.72 lakh, paid by the page itself. An additional 82 ads worth Tk 6.72 lakh were run by four pages on his behalf with names like “Safe and Humane Dhaka-15”.

exceeds 2,000, a figure rarely seen in previous national polls.

He appealed to all candidates to rise above personal or party interests and place the greater national interest first, regardless of the outcome. “Just as victory is an essential part of democracy, defeat is also an inseparable reality of democracy.”

Following the elections, Prof Yunus said all should dedicate themselves to building a new, just, democratic, and inclusive Bangladesh.

“Therefore, I am not merely requesting, but demanding: leave fear behind and bring courage to the polling stations. Your single vote will not only elect a government; it will respond to 17 years of silence, challenge unbridled fascism, reshape the nation, and affirm that this country will never again allow the voices of its youth, women, and struggling people to be silenced,” the chief adviser said.

The chief adviser added that the government has taken all necessary measures to ensure the elections are free, fair, impartial, and peaceful.

He emphasised that ensuring a free, fair, and participatory election is not solely the responsibility of the government, but a shared responsibility of every citizen of the state.