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No upsets, but plenty of heart
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Tarique vows crackdown on crime, graft

Puts drugs, gambling in his crosshairs during his first address to nation as PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday declared that stabilising law and order and strictly controlling corruption are the top priorities of his government. "The government is taking the highest measures to ensure peace and security in public life," he said in his first address to the nation since assuming office on Tuesday. In the 11-minute address, broadcast live on state-run BTV from 9:45pm, Tarique said the government began its journey with a fragile economy battered by corruption and misrule of the previous fascist regime, weakened governance structures, and deteriorating law and order. Outlining his government's vision, he stressed that the



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman chaired his first cabinet meeting at the Cabinet Division at the Bangladesh Secretariat yesterday.



Holy Ramadan begins today

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh will begin observing the holy month of Ramadan today, after the new crescent moon was sighted last evening, marking a period of fasting and self-purification for Muslims worldwide.

The National Moon Sighting Committee took the decision at a meeting held at the conference room of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque with Religious Affairs Minister Kazi Shah Mofazzal Hossain Kaikobad in the chair, after reviewing

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New govt faces 5 early economic tests

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The new finance minister, Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, may have arrived in office with a long list of priorities – fiscal reform, banking stability, and negotiations with international lenders. Whether he anticipated it or not, his most immediate and politically sensitive challenge is inflation. For millions of households, the early success of the new government will be judged by a simpler measure: the price of food.

Ramadan has arrived – a period that traditionally brings a surge in demand for essential commodities and, often, a corresponding rise in prices. Recent data underscores the urgency. Inflation rose to 8.58 percent year-on-year in January, upending expectations of a slowdown.

Even more concerning, food inflation accelerated to 8.29 percent in January from 7.71 percent in December last year. This places the finance minister in a familiar but unforgiving political reality: public confidence in the government's economic management rises and falls with food prices.

Selim Raihan, a professor of economics at Dhaka University, has stressed that businesses must receive a clear and firm signal against unjustified price hikes, backed by a thorough assessment of supply conditions. Such a response demands tight coordination across ministries – finance, commerce,

PRIORITY TASKS FOR GOVT

- Keep food prices from rising
- Secure IMF support and stabilise the economy
- Control government spending and debt
- Boost revenue collection and plug tax leakage
- Prepare for life after LDC status

and home affairs working in concert – an area where past governments have often faltered. The political "honeymoon," Selim warns, may last no more than six months before public impatience begins to build.

The new administration led by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman inherits an economy that is fragile and still tethered to external lifelines. Bangladesh entered an IMF programme in January 2023 after foreign exchange reserves fell

sharply, and since then the relationship has been marked by periodic tension.

The interim administration that preceded the current government had hoped international goodwill might ease negotiations, but lenders remained firm. Loan disbursements were paused when targets were missed, resumed after strict compliance in June, and slowed again in December.

Another IMF mission is expected in Dhaka next month, and sentiment or political narrative will carry little weight. The IMF will focus on fiscal discipline, monetary tightening, and reform progress. Securing continued support is essential, not only for IMF financing itself but also because its approval unlocks confidence among other international lenders. Without that endorsement, bilateral and multilateral partners tend to hold back.

Economist Mustafizur Rahman, also a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, has argued that the finance minister must "begin with a careful stock-taking of available resources." The IMF's emphasis on contractionary monetary policy – keeping interest rates high to curb inflation – presents a difficult balancing act. Should the government maintain tight policy to stabilise prices, or attempt to renegotiate terms to allow more room for growth?

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Mob culture will not be tolerated

Says home boss

STAFF CORRESPONDENTS

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed yesterday said mob culture would not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Speaking to reporters at the home ministry after meeting officials on his first day in office, Salahuddin said people's democratic right to protest would remain intact, but unlawful acts would face an immediate response.

"This is the end of mob culture," he said. "There will be lawful democratic practices. But blocking highways and roads in the name of realising demands – this cannot continue. This is clear."

He said people can press their demands through proper procedures, including rallies and assemblies.

The home minister said the police and other agencies must rebuild their credibility and regain public trust through impartial law enforcement.

"Our police and many other organisations and agencies are inadequate.

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As head of government, I want to draw the people's attention to one thing: whether you voted for the BNP and gave it the mandate to form this government, or chose not to, or did not vote at all, you all hold equal claim to this government.

Tarique Rahman

rule of law would be the guiding principle in running the state. "We want to turn the country into a safe land for every citizen. Building a self-reliant, safe, humane, and democratic Bangladesh is the goal of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party government," he said.

The premier said he wanted to deliver a message to the nation that this country belongs to all, regardless of their party affiliation, religion, or caste, or whether they live in the hills or on the plains.

Tarique, also chairman of the BNP, and his 49-member council of ministers were sworn in on Tuesday afternoon following the party's landslide victory in the 13th national election held on February 12. He chaired his first cabinet meeting at the Secretariat around 3:00pm yesterday.

In his address, the prime minister said all constitutional, government, and non-government institutions would operate strictly in accordance with established laws and regulations. "Not party influence or political force, but the rule of law will be the final word in governing the state."

Reiterating the message of inclusivity, he said that under his administration, every citizen would enjoy equal rights, regardless of how they voted in the election.

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Zahir Uddin Swapon

Journalism would be free from fear

Says info minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will ensure an environment free from fear for journalism, said Zahir Uddin Swapon, the information and broadcasting minister.

Referring to his political life, the minister said he understands the mental distress people endure when living in fear, particularly those working in professions such as the media.

"If they have to remain under constant

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Justling broke out among low-income people who had been waiting in line for hours to buy subsidised essentials from a TCB truck in the capital's Darussalam area yesterday, ahead of Ramadan.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

LDC deferral request deadline is February 23

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The new government must apply to the United Nations Committee for Development Policy (UN CDP) by February 23 if it intends to defer Bangladesh's graduation from the least-developed country (LDC) category to developing nation status.

A report titled "Graduation from LDC: Challenges, Progress and Way Forward", prepared by the finance adviser to the now-dissolved interim government and handed over to the new finance minister on Sunday, cites recommendations from a high-level committee on LDC graduation.

Bangladesh is scheduled to graduate from LDC status on November 24, having already met all three UN criteria – income, human assets, and economic and environmental vulnerability – in two consecutive triennial reviews by the UN CDP.

A third review is currently underway ahead of the final transition.

Taking into account post-graduation risks as well as recent global and domestic shocks, the report suggested that Bangladesh may coordinate with fellow graduating countries such as Nepal and Lao PDR to seek a deferral of graduation from the UN CDP until 2030.

An Independent Assessment by the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UNOHRLLS) also flagged some observations on a possible deferral.

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