

## WHAT MINISTERS SAID ON THEIR FIRST DAY



### Democratic values to be guiding principle

Says LGRD minister  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, minister for Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives, yesterday said rebuilding the nation through democratic values is the main challenge facing the new government. Speaking to reporters at the Secretariat on his first day in office, Fakhrul said the country has just gone through a major political transition. "A big storm has passed over us. It is not reasonable to expect that everything will be fixed instantly in such a situation." Asked whether a white paper would be published on the undertakings of the interim government, Fakhrul said it was unnecessary. "They took responsibility at a special moment. The core issue was the transition to democracy, and they completed that. Credit should be given to them. They have done many good things." Replying to a question on whether an election without the Awami League was inclusive, Fakhrul said the election has been recognised nationally and internationally as inclusive and acceptable.



### Judges must uphold honesty, or resign

Says law minister  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Md Asaduzzaman, minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, yesterday stressed that judges must uphold honesty, warning that anyone involved in corruption will face both administrative and legal action. "Those who feel a judge's salary cannot cover family expenses and those who believe they cannot sustain themselves on this salary may resign. This is my clear message," he said while speaking at an introductory meeting with officials and employees on his first day at the ministry. "There is no separate definition of an honest judge. Integrity is inherently associated with the word judge," he added, noting that honesty is a fundamental expectation of the judiciary. The minister warned that corruption would not be tolerated. "If anyone thinks they can get away with corruption, they will not. We will take administrative measures and also file corruption cases. Everyone must keep this in mind."



### Will minimise load-shedding this Ramadan

Says power minister  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Iqbal Hassan Mahmood, minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, yesterday said ensuring a stable power supply during Ramadan and the irrigation season is the top priority of the new government. "We are stepping into this sector at a critical time -- fasting begins tomorrow [today]. Nothing functions without electricity. We will try to minimise load shedding during Ramadan." However, he noted that outages caused by technical reasons are a separate matter. "After managing power supply during Ramadan and irrigation, we will move to future planning." The newly elected minister made the remarks while speaking to reporters after an introductory meeting with officials on his first day in office at the Secretariat. During the meeting, the minister sought the officials' cooperation, saying the prime minister had emphasised a "Bangladesh first" policy. "For us as well, Bangladesh comes first. We do not want the ministry to be run by partisan interests. We want an administration focused solely on Bangladesh."



### Need big leaps, not small steps

Says education minister  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon, minister for Education and Primary and Mass Education, yesterday said the government would undertake wide-ranging reforms to modernise the country's education system, stressing that the sector now requires "big leaps" rather than incremental change. He made the remarks while speaking to reporters on his first day in office at the Secretariat. "In the education sector, we now need not just small jumps, but much bigger leaps. That is what I believe, and we will work accordingly." Asked whether the government was planning another curriculum overhaul, Milon ruled out abrupt changes. He added that the curriculum would be reviewed, not replaced. "The world is now a global village. We must build our education system in line with international standards." Milon noted that the country must adapt to the Fourth Industrial Revolution by incorporating nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, and robotics into education.



### Will ensure attendance of doctors

Says health minister  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sardar Sakhawat Husain, minister for Health and Family Welfare, yesterday vowed to ensure timely attendance of doctors in all rural hospitals. "They [doctors] must be present at their workplace on time... I will ensure it within 30 days," Sakhawat told reporters at his secretariat office. "I will make surprise visits and take necessary action if I find them absent." The minister said his first priority would be making the ministry corruption-free. "This ministry must be and shall be corruption-free... I will dislodge the syndicate. There will be no corruption, no nepotism, and no syndicate." Replying to a question, the minister said he would not seek treatment abroad unless unavoidable. He stressed that facilities and service quality must be improved to discourage people from seeking treatment overseas. Apart from maximising the use of existing infrastructure, the new government will develop a new framework to make health services more accessible, particularly in rural areas.



### Planning to ease suffering of passengers

Says state minister for civil aviation  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

M Rashiduzzaman Millat, state minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, yesterday said the government plans to ensure that air passengers receive their luggage promptly after completing immigration, as part of efforts to improve airport services. Speaking to reporters at the Secretariat on his first day in office, he said authorities have begun planning changes to ease passenger inconvenience from ticketing to baggage collection. "We want to redesign airport processes so that passengers do not face difficulties from ticketing to luggage handling," he said. Millat said the initiative aims to end long waits at baggage belts, where passengers often spend one to two hours for their luggage, and to curb corruption linked to the process. Addressing complaints about ticket shortages, he alleged that in many cases flights operate with empty seats while passengers are unable to obtain tickets, allegedly due to syndicates behind the system.



### Work must begin on polls commitments

Says state minister for finance, planning  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Zonayed Saki, state minister for Finance and Planning, yesterday said work must begin immediately to implement commitments made in the election manifesto, with discussions covering short-, medium- and long-term measures. He noted that the prime minister would soon present a 180-day plan before the cabinet. Speaking to journalists at the Secretariat after the first cabinet meeting, Saki said the prime minister raised the matter during the session. Saki stressed that time must not be wasted and commitments must be implemented. "With Ramadan beginning tomorrow, ensuring public comfort, from market stability to law and order, is everyone's responsibility." Responding to a question about corruption, the state minister said cabinet members had been instructed to remain vigilant so that no one could use them for corruption or political shelter. "The government has made a commitment to maintain transparency," he added.



### Middle Eastern labour markets to be reopened

Says state minister for expatriates' welfare  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nurul Haque Nur, state minister for Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, yesterday said the government is working to reopen Middle Eastern labour markets that have narrowed in recent years. "We have placed this matter before the prime minister from our ministry, seeking special attention to restoring access to key labour destinations in the Gulf. Necessary steps will be taken," he said while speaking to reporters at the secretariat. "Our labour market was opened during the time of former president Ziaur Rahman and continued during Khaleda Zia's government. But since then, especially under the Awami League government, many markets were restricted." The state minister said expanding overseas employment remains a top priority, given the critical role remittances play in supporting the national economy. Earlier in the day, while visiting the ministry's offices after formally assuming charge, Nur told journalists reducing the high cost of overseas migration and curbing fraud would be his immediate focus.

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## Tarique vows crackdown on crime, graft

FROM PAGE 1

"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."

He said the BNP government believes that while political ideologies and religious identities may differ, the state belongs equally to all its citizens.

Identifying gambling and the spread of drugs as major drivers behind the deterioration of law and order, he said, "Law enforcement agencies are taking strict action on all fronts to curb gambling and drug abuse."

Extending greetings to the nation on the occasion of Ramadan, Tarique said the holy month is a time for self-purification and reflection, urging businesses to uphold its sanctity and not to treat it as an opportunity for profiteering.

He said he has already directed the authorities concerned to ensure uninterrupted gas, water, and electricity supply for fasting people during iftar, sehri, and taraweh prayers.

Tarique called on traders to remain vigilant so that essential commodity prices stay within the reach of ordinary people. "The BNP government is determined to dismantle all syndicates of irregularities and corruption in every sector," he said.

Tarique said the government's position towards all businesses -- small, medium or large -- is "simple and clear": it aims to take necessary measures to protect the interests of traders and consumers.

The government is open to receiving suggestions and complaints on the steps it should take to stabilise the market, he said.

"Buyers, sellers, recipients -- this government belongs to all. This government is yours. You have entrusted it with the responsibility of running the state through your votes. You are the strength of this government," Tarique added.

Addressing traffic congestion, the prime minister said gridlock in divisional cities, particularly in Dhaka, has become severely unmanageable, inflicting immense suffering on the public. "Alternative measures have become necessary to ease population pressure in the capital," he added.

He said initiatives are underway to overhaul the country's railway system so that people can stay in their own districts or homes and still go to work, go to the court, and conduct business activities efficiently and on time.

"As part of this plan, the activities of the rail, shipping, road, and bridges ministries are

**"If our large population can be transformed into skilled manpower, it will become our human resource."**  
Tarique Rahman  
Prime Minister

being reorganised and integrated first," he said, adding that if railway communication across the country can be made easy, affordable, and safe, people's dependence on city-centred living will decline and the environment will also improve.

Tarique said there is no end to the challenges facing the nation, but alongside those challenges lie many possibilities.

"If our large population can be transformed into skilled manpower, it will become our human resource," he said. By equipping themselves with skills, people will not only strengthen Bangladesh but also gain access to opportunities in the global market, he added.

"In this competitive technological age, to survive with dignity and prosperity, we must each become proficient in some field or skill.

"To the millions of students and young people of our country, I say this: the government stands ready to provide every possible form of support so that you may build yourselves with merit, knowledge, and science."

He further said his government began its journey with a clear commitment to ensuring employment and a climate conducive to work.

The prime minister also urged everyone to remain conscious in offices to avoid unnecessary or excessive use of gas, electricity, and water.

"But before calling on all government and private officials, employees and the general public to practise austerity, I wanted to set an example through the ministers and MPs. In the first meeting of the BNP parliamentary party, we decided that no MP elected from BNP will import tax-free cars using government facilities or take plots."

Tarique said he had earlier told the people that if allowed to run the state, the BNP government would follow Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) ideal of justice, and that the decisions of the BNP parliamentary party reflect it.

He said that after returning to the country on December 25 last year, following nearly 18 years abroad, he had announced a plan for the nation and its people.

Before the February 12 national election, he presented many aspects of that plan to citizens while visiting different parts of the country.

He said that through their votes, the people have placed their trust in the BNP. "It is now the responsibility of the BNP government to seize this opportunity and fulfill all commitments.

"We have already begun implementing our plans and fulfilling promises, In Sha Allah. On this journey of fulfilling our commitments, we look forward to your continued support in the days ahead," he added.

The translation of the speech was done by The Daily Star.

## From ashes to resilience

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features video, photographs, light and sound, sculpture, painting, poetic theatre, and recorded testimonies from staffers who witnessed the attack.

It will remain open to the public daily from 11:00am to 1:00pm and 3:00pm to 5:00pm until February 28.

The inauguration drew members of the Editors' Council, the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab), diplomats stationed in Dhaka, journalists, media professionals, artists, writers, and business leaders. Prothom Alo Executive Editor Sajjad Sharif moderated the programme.

Transcom Group Chief Executive Officer Simeen Rahman also visited the exhibition.

Speaking at the event, Prothom Alo Editor Matiuur Rahman called for an end to longstanding divisions within the journalist community, urging solidarity against future threats.

Referring to the newspaper's motto, "Truth is Courage," he said factual reporting remained the strongest shield.

"We want this division to end," he said. "In the future, we will stand by any journalist or media organisation facing attacks or danger, regardless of their ideology or beliefs."

He noted that while Prothom Alo and The Daily Star had faced sustained pressure, other publications such as Naya Diganta, Sangram, Jaijaidin, and Amar Desh had seen their editors subjected to arrest, harassment, and torture.

"We condemned those actions then. We will be even more conscious and responsible in defending each other moving forward."

Mahfuz Anam, The Daily Star editor and publisher, said the arson attacks on Prothom Alo and The Daily Star were not simply fires set at two news organisations, but an assault on independent journalism and freedom of thought.

He added that the attacks were not a sudden incident and had a specific plan and objective behind it.

He urged the new government to conduct a thorough investigation, identify both the planners and the perpetrators, and expose them before the public.

Mahfuz Anam also recalled the courage and dedication of journalists

and other staffers of the two organisations who returned to work despite the devastation and restored the news flow as quickly as possible.

At the event, Noab President AK Azad, also the publisher of Samakal, called for "rock-solid unity" among publishers and editors to counter future attempts to stifle the press.

"This is not the end of the attacks. More will come. But if publishers, editors, and journalists remain united, we will be ready to strike back."

Jatiya Press Club President Hasan Hafiz criticised the interim administration for failing to safeguard media institutions. "The failure and responsibility must be taken by those who were in charge during the transition."

Dewan Hanif Mahmud, editor of Bonik Barta and general secretary of the Editors' Council, described the burning of newspaper offices as the "lowest of the lowest" point for any society.

"A very bad message has been sent to the whole world about Bangladesh: that newspaper offices are burnt in this country," he said.

Kader Gani Chowdhury, secretary general of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ), said media freedom is inseparable from democracy.

"The Daily Star and Prothom Alo have been turned into skeletons. But we have also seen that even a skeleton can have a soul," he said, warning journalists against "embracing fascism" in any form.

On the night of December 18 last year, a mob launched coordinated attacks on the offices of the two leading newspapers, in what media leaders described as a deliberate attempt to intimidate independent journalism.

The attackers also targeted Chhayanaut, one of the country's leading cultural institutions.

At another event, diplomats call for stronger protection of freedom of speech and press in Bangladesh.

Ambassadors, high commissioners, and other representatives of diplomatic missions joined the programme in front of the Prothom Alo office in the afternoon.

Among those present were European Union Ambassador and Head of Delegation Michael Miller,

Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma, British High Commissioner Sarah Cooke, Canadian High Commissioner Ajit Singh, French Ambassador Jean-Marc Séré-Charlet, and Italian Ambassador Antonio Alessandro.

EU Ambassador Miller said he and many of his colleagues came in December to express solidarity and returned because they believe in media freedom and freedom of expression. He also described journalists as fearless defenders of democracy.

The Italian ambassador said freedom of information lies at the core of their values.

British envoy Sarah Cooke said they joined the programme to show support for media freedom, which she described as a foundation of democracy.

Recalling the "shocking" events in December, she said that as a member of the Media Freedom Coalition in Bangladesh, they had strongly condemned the attacks on journalists, editors, and media houses.

US Embassy Spokesperson Poornima Rai said the United States is fully committed to freedom of expression and stands with The Daily Star and Prothom Alo.

## Fireworks shop explosion kills 12 in China

AFP, Beijing

An explosion at a fireworks shop in central China killed 12 people yesterday, the second day of the Lunar New Year holiday, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

Setting off fireworks and firecrackers is common during holiday celebrations in China, especially around Lunar New Year, which fell on Tuesday.

While many larger cities, including the capital Beijing, have banned the practice in recent years -- in part due to pollution -- towns and rural areas are often filled with the sounds of exploding firecrackers and "missile" fireworks for days on end during the holiday period.