

## Rumeen accuses BNP men of assault at Shaheed Minar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Rumeen Farhana, MP from Brahmanbaria 2, yesterday said she was obstructed and attacked while attempting to place a wreath at the Sarail Shaheed Minar during the first hour of International Mother Language Day.



Her supporters blocked the Dhaka-Sylhet highway following the incident.

Speaking to local journalists, she said, "As an elected member of parliament, I was supposed to place the first wreath at 12:01am. But some BNP men launched an attack. I was pushed aside, and a situation was created where I could have been knocked to the ground."

"After 17 years, BNP has returned to power. If the party does not immediately control its activists at the local level, the consequences will be dire," she said.

Describing the incident as "premeditated," she claimed that the local BNP president and secretary were not present and a locally known "goon" led a group of unruly youths in carrying out the attack.

Rumeen also linked the incident to political rivalry, saying her victory as an independent candidate had fuelled resentment among her opponents.

Termining the law-and-order situation "vulnerable", she said police had tried to intervene but "five or ten officers cannot control such a violent situation when ruling party activists unleash mayhem."

"I want justice. I have already filed a case," she said.



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman unveiled a commemorative postage stamp at his office in the capital's Tejgaon, marking International Mother Language Day yesterday.

PHOTO: PTD

## CENTRAL SHAHEED MINAR Shafiqur pays tribute, cites 'state protocol'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The appearance of Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman at the Central Shaheed Minar early yesterday has sparked a debate across political and social circles, piquing interest around this "unprecedented" visit.



This had been the first time in 74 years, since the 1952 Language Movement, that a chief of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami had laid a wreath at the Central Shaheed Minar to pay tribute to the language martyrs.

Although other parties within the Jamaat alliance have marked the day in previous years through rallies and discussions, no Jamaat chief has publicly paid floral tribute at the monument.

Asked why Jamaat had not laid flowers before and what prompted the visit this year, Shafiqur cited "state protocol".

"As part of state protocol, it is my responsibility," he said. "As the leader of the opposition, I had to come with my colleagues, so I have."

Currently serving as leader of the opposition in parliament, Shafiqur went to Shaheed Minar with members of the opposition alliance and paid tribute after the president, the prime minister and cabinet members. After placing wreaths, he offered a quick prayer and then spoke to reporters.

When asked whether the party still considers the act of paying tribute with floral wreaths "najayez" (religiously impermissible), Shafiqur reacted, "Why are you asking such a question on such a solemn day? It is better not to ask such questions."

## Jamaat finds footing in the cities

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among the educated and affluent classes," said Prof Sk Tawfique M Haque, director of the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance at North South University.

Dhaka University political science Professor Sabbir Ahmed said Jamaat, from its rightist stance, has been showing a tendency toward centrism. "We saw this just yesterday, when the Jamaat leader went to the central Shaheed Minar to offer tribute to language martyrs on February 21.

"That too is proof that they are leaning toward a centrist position, which has an impact. Because the liberal, urban educated class prefers this kind of approach. For that reason, their change or shift has been accepted by many."

Both Tawfique and Sabbir said Jamaat's role in the July mass uprising, along with its well-planned organisational activities, also contributed to the party gaining support in urban areas.

STRONG PRESENCE

Election Commission data shows that of the 45 constituencies in 11 city corporation areas, including Chattogram-4, where results are withheld, the BNP won 21 seats. These include Rajshahi-2, Khulna-3, Barishal-5, Mymensingh-4, Dhaka-6 to 10, Dhaka-13, Dhaka-17 and 18, Gazipur-1 and 2, Narayanganj-3 and 5, Sylhet-1 to 3, Cumilla-6, and Chattogram-5, 8, 9, 10 and 11.

Jamaat won 10 seats: Rangpur-1, 2 and 3, Khulna-2, Dhaka-4 and 5, Dhaka-12, and Dhaka-14, 15 and 16. Jamaat led alliance's National Citizen Party won Dhaka-11. Of Dhaka's 15 constituencies, Jamaat secured six.

There were also close contests in several other Dhaka seats. In Dhaka-7, 8, 10, 13, and 17, Jamaat or alliance candidates lost by narrow margins. The gap was 2,320 votes in Dhaka-13, 3,300 in Dhaka-10, 4,399 in Dhaka-17, and 5,239 in Dhaka-8.

Sabbir Ahmed said, "Jamaat has managed to build a hold among the lower urban classes, particularly

the working people, in various ways. I believe this shows that they have gradually entered urban areas. For them, relying on this lower class base has made it easier to strengthen their position and increase their votes."

"I have noticed similar patterns in several constituencies around Dhaka as well. Therefore, I think it would be wrong to take it for granted that they [Jamaat] cannot establish influence in urban areas. On the contrary, they have already created opportunities to perform well in future elections," he said.

Tawfique pointed out, "In Gulshan, a constituency where people are usually educated and liberal, Jamaat lost by only a very narrow margin, which highlights their growing strength."

"Many of these constituencies have madrassas, and in some seats, voters were strategically transferred from other constituencies to boost their chances. Young voters have shown strong support, and notably, many women voters have also backed them. My general observation is that in constituencies with higher turnout, the BNP performed well, while Jamaat tended to do better in seats with lower turnout."

WHAT HISTORY SHOWS

In 1991, Jamaat won 18 seats, all outside city corporation areas: Dinajpur-6, Bogura-2, Chapainawabganj-3, Naogaon-4, Natore-3, Pabna-1 and 5, Chuadanga-2, Jessore-6, Bagerhat-4, Khulna-6, Satkhira-1, 2, 3 and 5, Rajbari-2, Chattogram-14, and Cox's Bazar-1.

In June 1996, it won three seats: Nilphamari-3, Satkhira-2, and Pirojpur-1 — again all outside city corporation areas.

Since then, Jamaat has contested elections in alliance with the BNP. In 2001, it won 17 seats; in 2008, two — all from rural constituencies. BNP and Jamaat boycotted the one-sided polls of 2014 and 2024. In 2018, Jamaat contested using BNP's symbol in an election marred by ballot stuffing the night before polling.

Political analyst Altaf Parvez said,

"There are many reasons behind Jamaat's success. In fact, it is the result of their organisational activities over the past 15-20 years combined with various social changes. For example, Jamaat has long faced criticism for its anti-Liberation War role in 1971. But in my view, this is no longer a major issue for young people. For new voters, it is not a significant concern."

He added, "Secondly, Jamaat has never been in power in Bangladesh. This has given them a certain advantage. Beyond that, Jamaat has directly provided material support to a large section of society. They distributed rice and lentils, and arranged medical treatment."

"Another factor is that anti-India sentiment has become a strong political product in Bangladesh. Jamaat has been able to capitalise on this effectively."

Altaf also noted that Bangladeshis are generally religious, and over the past two decades the influence of religion has grown.

"Finally, after the uprising, the BNP filed many cases against Awami League supporters, while with a few exceptions Jamaat did not do that. As a result, many minority voters and Awami League supporters felt safer with Jamaat," he said.

Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair, assistant secretary general of Jamaat, said, "We have been carrying out our organisational activities in Dhaka and other cities for a long time, especially social and humanitarian programmes. Every city has a huge population, and a large portion of them belong to lower-income or marginalised groups, and the party has tried to stand by them."

"For the past 16-17 years, we could not engage in open politics, but our social work never stopped. Despite organisational obstacles, we continued our social and humanitarian activities."

He added that in cities, especially Dhaka, Jamaat tried to nominate quality and capable candidates.

"All of these combined helped us achieve good results from the people," he said.

now hangs in doubt. Exporters face a troubling question: have they escaped a high, certain cost only to enter a world of lower but unpredictable risk? With the US administration exploring alternative, legally secure tariff tools, the rules could change again before the next export cycle.

BUY TIME, DON'T RUSH  
Bangladesh's path forward is extremely delicate. Any abrupt attempt to withdraw from commitments could trigger retaliation. Yet blind continuation would lock the country into costly commitments. The challenge is to buy time without provoking confrontation.

Trade analysts have pointed toward a practical solution. The US Supreme Court ruling provides Bangladesh with a legitimate, non-confrontational justification to request a technical pause for the sake of a review. Such a move would shift the discussion away from politics and into the neutral language of compliance and due diligence. It would signal caution, not rejection. Trump's February 18 letter to Tarique Rahman, urging "decisive action" and praising "tremendous momentum," carried a veiled warning. Washington expects compliance, not hesitation.

Other countries offer useful lessons. The United Kingdom, despite securing a favourable tariff rate, has adopted a strategy of quiet restraint — maintaining core benefits while avoiding unnecessary political noise. Malaysia is waiting for clarity before committing. Larger economies such as India and South Korea are studying developments before acting. None are rushing. Bangladesh must do the same.

Time, once lost, cannot be recovered — but it can still be managed. Bangladesh cannot undo the haste of February 9, but it can prevent further strategic errors.

## Uncertainties loom over Dhaka's trade prospects

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If the 15 percent rate replaces the 19 percent reciprocal tariff finalised for Bangladesh under the trade deal, Bangladesh's effective tariff for exports to the US would stand at 31.5 percent, including the existing 16.5 percent Most Favoured Nation (MFN) duty. The MFN rate varies across apparel categories, and many key items — such as trousers, T-shirts, formal shirts and denim — face duties below 16.5 percent.

The sudden shift in America's tariff regime could disrupt the exporters' calculations, Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), told The Daily Star over the phone.

"Frequent tariff changes make business planning difficult. Suppliers had already adjusted plans based on the 19 percent rate agreed under the trade deal," he said.

Meanwhile, he added that the US Supreme Court's ruling could be a "positive sign" for Bangladesh since lower tariffs would reduce prices, which could raise demand and boost exports from Bangladesh.

But according to economist Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID), the ruling could only temporarily boost exports, and the benefit may be short-lived. The new tariff may only be in place for a limited period, and further measures could follow, he said.

He said the implications of both the scrapped reciprocal tariff and Bangladesh's signed deal require deeper legal interpretation.

It also remains unclear whether Bangladesh, under the trade deal, is still bound to import the committed aircraft and other goods, including wheat, cotton, soybean, LNG and LPG, or to proceed with defence purchases and sourcing conditions.

"Will Bangladesh be able to bypass the American pressure and say 'no' to purchasing the committed commodities from the US?" Razzaque asked.

Commerce Secretary Mahbubur

Rahman acknowledged that the interim government signed the agreement under pressure from the US side amid concerns that a new government after the election might delay it.

He also said he hoped the deal too would be cancelled in light of the Supreme Court's decision. "The scrapping of the tariff is good news for Bangladesh," he said.

Under the deal, Bangladesh agreed to import significant American goods, including 14 aircraft from Boeing, as well as soybean, wheat, cotton, LNG

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Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development



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Khadija Nazneen, additional secretary at commerce ministry

and LPG, to reduce the trade gap.

The US is Bangladesh's single largest export destination. Bilateral trade is currently tilted in Bangladesh's favour, with over \$8 billion in exports to the US annually, compared to \$2 billion in imports. Garments account for 86 percent of Bangladesh's exports to the US.

"We will keep contact with the

US for our business relations," the commerce secretary said, referring to a message from Brendan Lynch, assistant US trade representative for South and Central Asia.

Citing Lynch, Mahbubur said future US trade relations would depend on partner countries' engagement in trade deals, and Washington is expected to issue new notifications following the imposition of the new rate.

Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), urged the government to revisit the February 9 deal, citing difficult clauses.

He also said Bangladesh should begin negotiations to see whether the new tariff can be reduced further.

Mostafa Abid Khan, former member of the Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission (BTTC), called for a more strategic approach. He noted that the trade agreement has neither been notified nor ratified and has yet to come into force.

Some of its clauses were concerning, he said, but the current tariff offers at least 150 days of breathing space, as it could be reviewed by Trump. He also said the US Congress could take a different stance due to the upcoming midterm elections in November.

Khadija Nazneen, additional secretary of the WTO wing at the commerce ministry, said they would first analyse the deal, and then take a decision.

She noted that the agreement signed by Bangladesh includes an exit clause — a provision not granted to other countries. "Only in the case of Bangladesh is there an exit clause in the deal. So, we will decide as per government policy," said Nazneen, who led the delegation that was present during the signing of the deal in Washington.

Trump had declared reciprocal tariffs under a national emergency on April 2 last year. Bangladesh had initially faced a proposed 37 percent tariff, later reduced to 35 percent. After negotiations, it fell to 20 percent and then to 19 percent following the deal.

## A costly trade gamble

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look less like foresight and more like miscalculation.

The new government led by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has inherited a difficult and delicate problem. The agreement signed by the Yunus administration carries heavy economic and political obligations. Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman, who played a central role in negotiating the pact, must now explain why Bangladesh committed itself so quickly while US courts had already been questioning the legality of the tariff strategy for months. The warning signs were visible, yet they were ignored.

The interim government seemingly acted out of fear — fear of tariff shocks and fear of unilateral US trade action. It sought a "safe harbour" before February 12. But in diplomacy, especially when negotiating with a far stronger partner, haste is dangerous.

Now, Tarique Rahman's administration is expected to stabilise the situation without provoking Washington. By indicating a formal review of the agreement after the US Supreme Court ruling, Bangladesh has aligned itself with a growing number of countries reconsidering similar deals. Around the world, governments that rushed into trade arrangements with the United States are reassessing whether they paid too high a price for uncertain protection. Even major economies are proceeding carefully.

Bangladesh, however, faces a tougher position because its commitments are already signed. The greatest risk lies not in tariffs alone but in the non-tariff clauses buried in the agreement. Some provisions restrict Bangladesh's freedom to engage in digital trade cooperation or nuclear partnerships with countries

deemed contrary to US interests. These clauses directly constrain Bangladesh's foreign policy flexibility. Bangladesh's predicament closely mirrors that of Indonesia, which also moved swiftly to finalise its agreement, signing the deal just one day before the US court delivered its ruling. Like Dhaka, Jakarta now finds itself locked into commitments shaped by a legal framework that has suddenly shifted, forcing both countries to reassess their positions amid growing uncertainty in global trade.

For Bangladesh, the economic burden is serious. The agreement includes major procurement commitments: a \$15 billion energy purchase, orders for 14 Boeing aircraft, and a \$3.5 billion agricultural import pledge. These obligations represent a massive fiscal strain for a developing economy. When compared to the likely trajectory of US tariffs — potentially averaging around 11.4 percent if exemptions remain — the price Bangladesh agreed to pay appears increasingly disproportionate. What was touted as protection may instead become an expensive overcommitment.

For Bangladesh's garment industry, the Supreme Court ruling brought short-term relief. The cancellation of the 19 percent reciprocal tariff removed a threat to exporters. But that relief did not last. By raising the global tariff baseline from 10 percent to 15 percent, the White House has made clear that any breathing space will come at a price. What once seemed like the "lesser of two evils" now looks far less manageable, as costs rise again and uncertainty deepens.

The broader legal uncertainty surrounding the trade agreement has created new risks. One of the most attractive features of the February 9 deal — the possibility of duty benefits for garments produced using US cotton —

## Khatibs, imams to get allowances before Eid

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responsibility. The Daily Star has learnt from people with direct knowledge of the meeting.

He also sought support from those present to implement the election pledges so that people's trust in the government is strengthened.

He stressed that the pledges must not create any controversy or have any negative impact on the public.

The government discussed wider election promises, including creating employment opportunities on merit without discrimination across public and private sectors, entrepreneurship and overseas employment, Mahdi said.

## Some groups patronising mob activities

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essential to democratic practice, but added that media freedom must be accompanied by accountability.

Later, at the Barishal Press Club, he spoke about regional development plans, including transporting gas from Bhola to Barishal and upgrading the Bonga-Payra road into a four-lane highway.

Meanwhile, Water Resources Minister Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Anee yesterday called on all sides to move away from what he termed "mob culture".

After paying tribute at the

Reforms in education, especially technical and vocational training, and policy changes for business and industry were also discussed to help create skilled manpower and faster job opportunities, he added.

Another meeting was held on establishing a cheerful and career-oriented education system, creating employment opportunities and expanding sports infrastructure and training facilities.

Tarique Rahman started the day by planting a Magnolia Champaca sapling on the grounds of the PMO and offering special prayers.

He then unveiled a commemorative

postage stamp marking 'Amar Ekushey', the Language Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day.

Navy Chief M Nazmul Hassan and Air Chief Hasan Mahmud Khan paid a courtesy call on Tarique.

Tarique also spoke with PMO employees who had served during his mother Khaleida Zia's tenure.

He exchanged greetings with officials and staff, calling over a number of familiar faces for a conversation.

Tarique, who took the oath of office on February 17, had spent the previous two days working from the secretariat.

take effect automatically," he said.

He said issues relating to "no" votes or notes of dissent would be discussed in parliament.

"Legal experts have explained this clearly. It is important to understand and articulate it properly," he said.

Calling for political cooperation, Anee said, "Opinions and paths may differ, but we must move away from opposing every issue. Everyone should work sincerely to build the nation."

Local BNP leaders and activists were present at the programme in Lakshimpur.