

'It's the start of govt-backed mob culture'

Says Jamaat about how BB governor was removed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday described the circumstances surrounding the ouster of the Bangladesh Bank governor as the "formal beginning of a government-backed mob culture", calling it unfortunate and completely unacceptable.

In a post from his verified Facebook page around 5:45am, he said no one has the right to insult respected individuals such as the central bank's governor and his adviser.

"Such conduct at an institution as important as Bangladesh Bank is unacceptable," he wrote.

Shafiqur alleged that the country's economy is already in a dire state due

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Prime Minister Tarique Rahman poses for a photograph with the recipients of the Ekushey Padak, one of Bangladesh's highest civilian honours, at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

LPG STATION BLAST Six victims in critical condition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Six of the 15 people injured in a blast at an unauthorised LPG filling station in Cox's Bazar are undergoing treatment in critical condition at Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH), district authorities said yesterday.

Additional District Magistrate Shahidul Islam, who is heading a five-member committee to investigate the incident, said the six patients were in a critical state because they suffered burns to their respiratory tracts.

The patients are Abdur Rahim, 32; Siraj, 30; Abu Taher, 40; Abul Kashem, 27; Sakib, 30; and Mutabber, 40.

Dr Ashfaque Asif, registrar of the Burn and Plastic Surgery unit at CMCH, said they sustained between 20 percent and 93 percent burns. Taher, Siraj and Rahim were shifted to the ICU after their condition deteriorated.

The explosion occurred around

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More families turn to TCB as poverty deepens

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A few steps away stood Md Shakil, a green coconut seller from Mohammadpur Geneva Camp. He joined the queue at 11:00am and received his package at 2:30pm.

"For this package, I had to wait four hours. I had to close my coconut stall, which caused me losses. However, I was lucky to get the package."

Their stories reflect a larger reality.

Food inflation, which affects ordinary Bangladeshis the most, rose to 8.29 percent in January, up nearly 0.6 percentage points from December, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Prices of essential food items have been rising in recent months. After easing to 7.08 percent in October from 7.64 percent in September, food inflation climbed again over the next three months.

The mounting pressure is pushing more families into poverty. A 2025 World Bank report projected that the national poverty rate would rise to 22.9 percent that year, from 18.7 percent in 2022.

The share of people living in extreme poverty, earning below \$2.15 a day, is expected to nearly double to 9.3 percent, potentially pushing an additional 3 million people into extreme hardship. However, the report forecasts some easing in 2026.

According to findings presented in August last year by the Power and Participation Research Centre, the rise has been even sharper. Nearly 28 percent of the population is now poor, compared to 18.7 percent in 2022.

The share of people living in extreme poverty has increased to 9.35 percent this year from 5.6 percent three years ago, meaning about one in 10 survives in extreme poverty. One in four people lives below the poverty line.

Another 18 percent are classified as vulnerable non-poor, at risk of slipping into poverty.

Now with Ramadan ongoing, TCB launched its nationwide truck sale programme on February 17 to ease the suffering. The initiative will continue

until March 12, excluding Fridays and public holidays.

TCB officials said that in the capital alone, essential commodities are being sold daily at 50 designated locations. Across the country, 450 mobile trucks, each carrying enough supplies for 400 families, operate daily to provide subsidised goods to low-income consumers.

Over the 20-day campaign, TCB aims to distribute 23,000 tonnes of essentials to an estimated 35 lakh consumers nationwide.

According to Public Food Distribution data from the food ministry, from July 1, 2024, to February 20, 2025, the ministry distributed 17.64 lakh tonnes of food. This amount increased to 19.93 lakh tonnes, but the queues in front of the trucks keep getting longer.

The Daily Star tried to contact TCB Chairman Brigadier General Mohammad Foyshol Azad for comment but received no response.

Meanwhile, for 70-year-old consumer Mulkuch Bibi, the TCB truck is not just a government programme but a lifeline.

On Wednesday night, before going to bed, she placed her grocery bag beside her and kept her water container ready to collect water from a WASA ATM booth. That day, her household had run out of cooking oil, sugar, and chickpeas.

"If I cannot buy goods from the TCB truck tomorrow, I will not be able to purchase other essential items," she told this paper that night.

After finishing sehri and resting briefly, she collected water and reached the Kazipara Metro Station spot shortly after 8:00am. By then, 33 people were already ahead of her in the queue.

Weighed down by age, she struggled to stand for hours and eventually sat on the metro station stairs to rest. The truck arrived around 10:00am, and she purchased the goods around noon.

"My husband passed away 27 years ago. Since then, I've been living with my daughter and son-in-law. Both of them are garment workers, and their combined income barely covers household expenses.

"With the money we save from

purchasing essentials here, we can buy other necessary items. Otherwise, it will be very difficult."

Minuara Begum, a resident of Mollapara in Dhaka's Agargaon, arrived at the TCB truck in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar at 9:00am. With no one else to care for her child, she brought her one-year-old along.

At one point during her wait, she was seen breastfeeding her baby standing in the queue. "There's no one at home to look after my child, and it's difficult to manage the household on my husband's income. That's why I had to come to buy goods from the TCB truck and also bring my baby along."

The truck reached the spot around 12:15pm, and she completed her purchases around 2:30pm.

Talking to The Daily Star, Selim Raihan, professor of economics at Dhaka University and executive director of SANEM, said, "People are under significant pressure due to prolonged high inflation over the past three years, especially low-income groups.

"In that context, the current scale of TCB operations is insufficient compared to people's needs. We expect the new government to expand the coverage and find more effective ways to reach a larger number of vulnerable people."

He added, "Many working-class people have to spend hours in line, sometimes losing half a day's income. That creates additional financial losses for them. Special arrangements can be made for workers, particularly in factory areas, so that they can access these goods more easily.

"Even informal workers such as rickshaw pullers, small shop employees and others in labour-intensive jobs should be targeted through area-based programmes. If distribution is expanded to places where low-income populations are concentrated, it would reduce their suffering and provide some relief during this difficult time."

The Daily Star tried to reach Khandaker Abdul Mukhtar, minister for commerce, for comment but received no response.

New BB chief signals rate cuts to spur growth

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country from a fragile economy to a low-level equilibrium," Mostaqur said in a central bank statement. "Now our responsibility is to bring an investment driven growth while maintaining macroeconomic stability, so that employment is created."

Arriving at his office at 10:40am, Mostaqur held meetings with deputy governors and executive directors but declined to make detailed remarks, saying only, "First, I will join the office, then I will speak."

Breaking with tradition, he did not meet journalists on his first day. Instead, central bank executive director and spokesperson Arief Hossain Khan briefed reporters at a press conference, conveying the governor's positions and outlining his initial priorities.

Arief said the governor's direct interaction with the media would be limited, though the central bank would remain media-friendly, with communication primarily channelled through the spokesperson.

During the meetings with senior officials, Mostaqur prioritised maintaining macroeconomic stability while accelerating inclusive growth to generate employment.

Underscoring the need to reopen factories that have been shuttered over the past 18 months due to political

instability, dollar shortages and other challenges, he promised central bank support for their revival.

High interest rates were identified as a major obstacle to investment, Arief said, adding that the central bank would explore ways to address the issue while also focusing on steps to ease inflation.

"Controlling inflation and ensuring price stability to protect people's purchasing power will remain a core mandate," said Arief.

Mostaqur pledged to strengthen governance within the central bank by making objective, rule-based decisions and avoiding subjective considerations or discriminatory treatment.

To improve efficiency, he emphasised greater delegation of authority at different levels to enhance accountability and institutional capacity.

The new governor also cautioned that a central bank, as a regulator, must be prudent in public statements, given their potential impact on markets and the broader economy.

According to the spokesperson, the governor praised the efforts of the interim government to stabilise the economy.

"He acknowledged the efforts of the interim government's economic

team in maintaining macroeconomic stability at a time when the economy was on the brink of crisis. Although growth and employment generation did not meet expectations, macroeconomic stability was preserved," Arief said.

Asked about the appointment of a businessman as governor, Arief said performance, not academic background, was the key consideration.

MINISTER DECLINES COMMENT

Around 2:00pm, Mostaqur went to the finance ministry to complete formalities, and later met Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury at the Secretariat.

The governor arrived at about 3:30pm, briefly joining a meeting the minister was holding with officials from the Dhaka office of the Asian Development Bank.

After the ADB meeting ended, the two held an hour-long discussion. Financial Institutions Division Secretary Nazma Mobarek attended part of the talks before leaving them to meet privately.

When approached by journalists after the meeting and asked about the leadership change and the governor's appointment, the finance minister repeatedly declined to comment, saying, "Nothing to say."

Govt okays waiver of farm loans

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and marginal farmers and strengthen the backbone of the country's agricultural sector, Ghani said.

Around 12 lakh farmers will directly benefit from the decision.

Both the principal amount of up to Tk 10,000 and the full accrued interest on such loans will be waived.

The move will relieve small and marginal farmers of their debt burdens and encourage them to invest more actively in agricultural production.

"The money that farmers would have spent on loan instalments can now be used to purchase quality seeds or adopt modern irrigation technologies," he said, adding that the absence of debt pressure would allow farmers to begin the next

cultivation season with renewed enthusiasm.

The immediate impact of the loan waiver could include reduced rural-to-urban migration and easing rural inflationary pressures, Ghani added.

According to the officials, the waiver is also expected to improve farmers' credit records and creditworthiness, enabling them to access fresh agricultural loans from banks at lower interest rates and reduce reliance on high-interest loans from local moneylenders.

After assuming office, the Prime Minister has focused on initiatives such as the Family Card, Farmers' Card, canal excavation, tree plantation, monthly honorariums and festival allowances for religious leaders.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister reached his office at the Secretariat at 9:04am and joined the cabinet meeting at 9:30am yesterday.

The government employees have been instructed to be in office on time or else strict action will be taken against them as per the existing laws and regulations, Ghani said.

"Everyone concerned has already been officially informed about this," he added.

After wrapping up the meeting, Tarique left the Secretariat around 10:40am through Gate No. 5 and walked to the Osmani Memorial Auditorium, located just across the road, to attend the Ekushey Padak distribution ceremony. His daughter Zaima Rahman accompanied him.

Lobbying heats up for reserved seats

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On the other hand, Jamaat is assessing potential nominees from its women's central committee to determine who can play an effective role in the parliament and meet public expectations, while professional women, including teachers, physicians and lawyers may also be considered.

No formal decision has yet been taken to prepare the list at the party's highest policymaking level regarding the reserved women's seats, The Daily Star has learnt from people involved with the proceedings.

Nominations are unlikely to be finalised before Eid as the party is still in a preparatory phase, said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

"Most of our responsible leaders are engaged in various professions. While preparing and scrutinising the primary list of candidates, we have taken into account their qualifications, performance, experience and acceptability in their respective areas," said Nurunnisa Siddika, secretary of Jamaat's women's wing.

Jamaat leaders, however, have indicated that internal scrutiny is already underway.

Under the constitutional framework, the parliamentary seats reserved for women are distributed according to the seats won by the parties in the general elections.

The members of parliament elected in the general election cast ballots for the reserved seats.

One reserved women's seat will be allocated for every six general seats won. In some cases, the law also allows a lottery system.

In the 13th parliamentary election held on February 12, the BNP won 209 seats on its own. Based on the seat ratio, the party will get 35 of the 50 reserved women's seats. In addition, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami will get 11 seats and the National Citizen Party one seat.

The remaining three seats will be distributed among independent candidates and the other parties including Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish, Ganosambhati Andolon, Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP), Gono Odhikar Parishad and Khelafat Majlis.

Within the BNP, discussions suggest that this time the reserved women's seats may reflect a mix of senior and younger leaders, with a relatively strong presence of comparatively young faces.

The party has given priority to former reserved-seat lawmakers from 2001 and 2008 in selecting nominees this time, considering their past parliamentary experience and organisational background.

Among senior leaders under discussion are Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal President Afroza Abbas, the wife of BNP Standing Committee Member Mirza Abbas, and Mohila Dal General Secretary Sultana Ahmed, who was a reserved seat lawmaker in 2001.

Also in consideration are 2001 reserved seat lawmaker Mohila Dal leader Rehana Akter (Ranu); 2001 reserved seat lawmaker and BNP Executive Committee member Bilkis Islam; 2001 reserved seat lawmaker and BNP Training Affairs Secretary Rasheda Begum Hira; 2001 reserved seat lawmaker and BNP Relief and Rehabilitation Affairs Assistant Secretary Nowaz Halima Arly; and 2001 reserved seat lawmaker and BNP Education Affairs Assistant Secretary Helen Zerir Khan.

BNP central committee member Shirin Sultana, who was also a reserved seat lawmaker in 1996, is among the aspirants, as is Dhaka district BNP General Secretary Nipun Roy Chowdhury, the daughter of Cultural Affairs Minister Nitai Roy Chowdhury.

BNP Chairperson's Adviser and singer Baby Naznin is also being discussed, along with Central BNP Self-Reliance Affairs Assistant Secretary Nilufar Chowdhury Moni.

Among those from the 2008 reserved seats are BNP Local Government Affairs Assistant Secretary Shammil Akter and BNP Human Rights Affairs Assistant Secretary Syeda Ashifa Ashrafi Papi.

BNP National Executive Committee members Ayesha Siddiqia and Farida Yasmin are also aspirants.

In addition, several former central leaders of Chhatra Dal are seeking nomination, including Mahila Dal Co-Self-Reliance Affairs Secretary Asma Aziz, former central vice-president

Sultana Jesmin (Jui), Mahila Dal Dhaka City South Member Secretary Nasima Akter (Keya), senior joint convener and former councillor of Kotwali Thana BNP Suraiya Begum, and Chhatra Dal Central Committee Joint General Secretary Mansura Alam, among others.

The final selection will depend on political balancing, regional representation and internal consensus, according to BNP insiders.

Jamaat's potential nominees similarly include leaders from its central working committee as well as professional women.

Among those being discussed are Nurunnisa Siddika; Mardia Mumtaz; central working committee member Ameena Begum Rahman, who is also the wife of Jamaat ameer Shafiqur Rahman; central Majlish e-Shura member Shahana Ara Begum; Habiba Akhter Chowdhury, the wife of Jamaat's Naye-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher; and Supreme Court lawyer and assistant secretary of the women's wing Sabikun Nahar Munni.

The other names include Saeeda Rumman, Khandaker Ayesha Khatun, Kazi Maria Islam Baby, Rabeya Khanam, Shirin Akter Runa, Tanha Azmi, Nargis Khan, Kaniz Fatema, Selina Akter and Ayesha Siddika Parveen.

While BNP insiders say the final selection will depend on political balancing, regional representation and internal consensus, Jamaat leaders emphasise consultation and structured review.

The final decision will be taken based on a review of the list submitted by the women's wing to the central executive council, said Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair, assistant secretary general of Jamaat and head of the party's central publicity department.

In this regard, individuals outside the list may also be considered.

Asked about discussions surrounding the names of the wives of Shafiqur and Taher, Zubair said: "First, in our party, two members of the same family have never become MPs. Second, all decisions are taken through consultation and discussion. So the time has not yet come to make any final comments."

India, Israel to boost defence cooperation

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Israel and India in a variety of fields including technology and energy.

"Together, we will move forward towards joint development, joint production, and the transfer of technology," Modi told journalists.

"At the same time, we will also advance our cooperation in areas such as civil nuclear energy and space."

Netanyahu, who described Modi's visit as "amazing" and "extraordinarily productive", also

spoke of joint innovation between the two countries, reports AFP.

"The future belongs to those who innovate, and Israel and India are bent on innovation," Netanyahu said.

"We're proud ancient civilisations, very proud of our past. But absolutely determined to seize the future, and we can do it better together," he added.

At the press conference, a raft of memorandums of understanding were signed between the two countries in fields such as education,

geophysical exploration and artificial intelligence.

On Wednesday, Modi told lawmakers at the Israeli parliament that his country stood "firmly" with Israel following Hamas's attack on October 7, 2023.

"I... carry with me the deepest condolences of the people of India for every life lost and for every family whose world was shattered in the barbaric terrorist attack by Hamas on October 7," Modi said in the Knesset.