

# An election born of blood and tears

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

When Winston Churchill rose at the House of Commons in October 1944, he reminded the world that democracy rests on something really important: "At the bottom of all tribute paid to democracy is the little man and woman, walking into a little booth, with a little pencil making a little cross on paper."

Tomorrow, citizens of Bangladesh, those little men and woman, as Churchill had mentioned, will walk into those little booths, with little seals to mark their ballots and choose representatives in a competitive election, after 17 years.

The nation is witnessing such a contest following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's autocratic government in the wake of a mass uprising. Anticipation is high, nerves are taut as voters, parties, and observers wait to see the winner. For the first time in years, a glorious uncertainty hangs over who will assume power.

Although elections are constitutionally held every five years, this 13th national poll comes after just about two years (26 months) because a people's uprising ousted the previous regime in August 2024.

The spark came on July 1, 2024, when students began protesting against government job quotas only to be met with harsh and brutal response. In response, the fledgling movement transformed into an all-out anti-government campaign demanding Hasina's resignation. She fled to India on August 5, when hundreds of thousands of people began marching towards Dhaka.

The UN reported that around 1,400 people were killed during those few weeks of July and August.

Professor Muhammad Yunus assumed leadership of the interim government three days later on August 8, pledging reforms, justice for the July killings,

and a credible election. Since then, the government has repeatedly emphasised that reforms, trials, and an election are its priorities.

BNP and its allies initially demanded that the election be held by December 2025, seemingly unhappy at the government's indication that the polls may be delayed till as late as June.

Amid strong criticism for delayed polls, the chief adviser said on June 13, 2025 that polls could be held the week before Ramadan in 2026 if preparations were complete. The announcement came after a meeting with BNP chief Tarique Rahman in London.

But the much-promised reforms still remained elusive until mid-October when 25 parties signed the July charter after months-long negotiations among 30 parties at the National Consensus Commission. Five parties still refused to sign, including the National Citizen Party, which was the natural heir to the

votes cast.

On December 11, the Election Commission confirmed February 12 as polling day and campaigns began in earnest. Adversarial rhetoric filled the airwaves, but the process remained comparatively peaceful compared to past elections.

The fall of the Awami League reshaped Bangladesh's political landscape. While its leaders fled the country, the party was banned for alleged killings and crimes against humanity during the uprising, and its registration was suspended, disqualifying it from the polls.

This opened space for the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliances to contest constituencies long dominated by the AL. For decades, BNP and AL had defended their bases, alternating power since 1991. But the balance broke during the last

II-party alliance. He noted that BNP has a scope to win beyond its traditional bastions, but success depends on strategy, candidates, and their conduct. Young voters are expected to play a decisive role.

BNP, founded by Ziaur Rahman in 1978, has been out of power for 17 years – its longest stretch.

Jamaat, banned after independence for collaborating with Pakistan, revived in 1976 and later joined BNP in a four-party alliance in 1999. Together they won in 2001, with two Jamaat leaders becoming cabinet members, but were defeated in 2008.

Since then both the parties faced persecution at the hands of the Awami League government. The four-party alliance, became a 20-party combine as several other parties joined in 2012.

The next year, the HC cancelled Jamaat's registration on the grounds that some provisions of the Jamaat charter went against the country's constitution and election laws.

In the face of widespread criticism for its ties with Jamaat, which opposed the Liberation War and had sided with Pakistan, the BNP remained distant from the largest Islamist party.

The 20-party alliance dissolved in

December 2022 after the BNP asked its allies not to use the name of the alliance.

Since independence, Bangladesh has gone to the polls twelve times and another one is knocking at the door. Yet across this long journey, one fact stands out. No ruling party ever lost an election held under it.

The Awami League first tasted victory while in office in 1973. Decades later, it regained power in 1996, 2008 and in three consecutive elections – 2014, 2018, and 2024.

The 2014 and 2024 contests were condemned as "one-sided", boycotted by the opposition. The 2018 election carried even darker allegations: ballot boxes stuffed the night before voting. Critics branded all three as "sham polls". The 1973 election was also equally one-sided.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had its moments too, winning in 1979 and again in 1991, the short-lived February 1996 election as well as in 2001. The Jatiya Party, under military ruler HM Ershad, claimed back-to-back victories in 1986 and 1988 – both boycotted, both one-sided.

The other fact that also stands out in Bangladesh's electoral journey is that every single election considered fair was conducted under an interim or caretaker government. Four elections – 1991, June 1996, 2001, and 2008 – were held under caretaker or interim governments. Each time, the

previous incumbent lost, proving that free and fair elections could indeed change power and further that none of the parties had been able to overcome the anti-incumbency factor with dedicated groundwork.

But the broader record tells another story. Bangladesh has endured five one-sided polls – 1986, 1988, February 1996, 2014, and 2024 – each marked by opposition boycotts.

The Awami League secured a two-thirds majority five times, the BNP secured it twice by itself, and once with allies, and the Jatiya Party once. Strikingly, both AL and BNP achieved two-thirds majorities in elections where the opposition was absent.

Beginning with a parliamentary system Bangladesh regressed to a presidential system that also coincided with military rule between 1975 and 1990. Parliamentary system was restored in 1991 following the fall of HM Ershad.

Now, as the country prepares to vote on February 12, the nation appears to be waiting for the election result with baited breath as a genuine uncertainty engulfs every tea stall and drawing room. The kind of uncertainty that makes democracy real.

**The nation is witnessing such a contest following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's autocratic government in the wake of a mass uprising. Anticipation is high, nerves are taut as voters, parties, and observers wait to see the winner. For the first time in years, a glorious uncertainty hangs over who will assume power.**

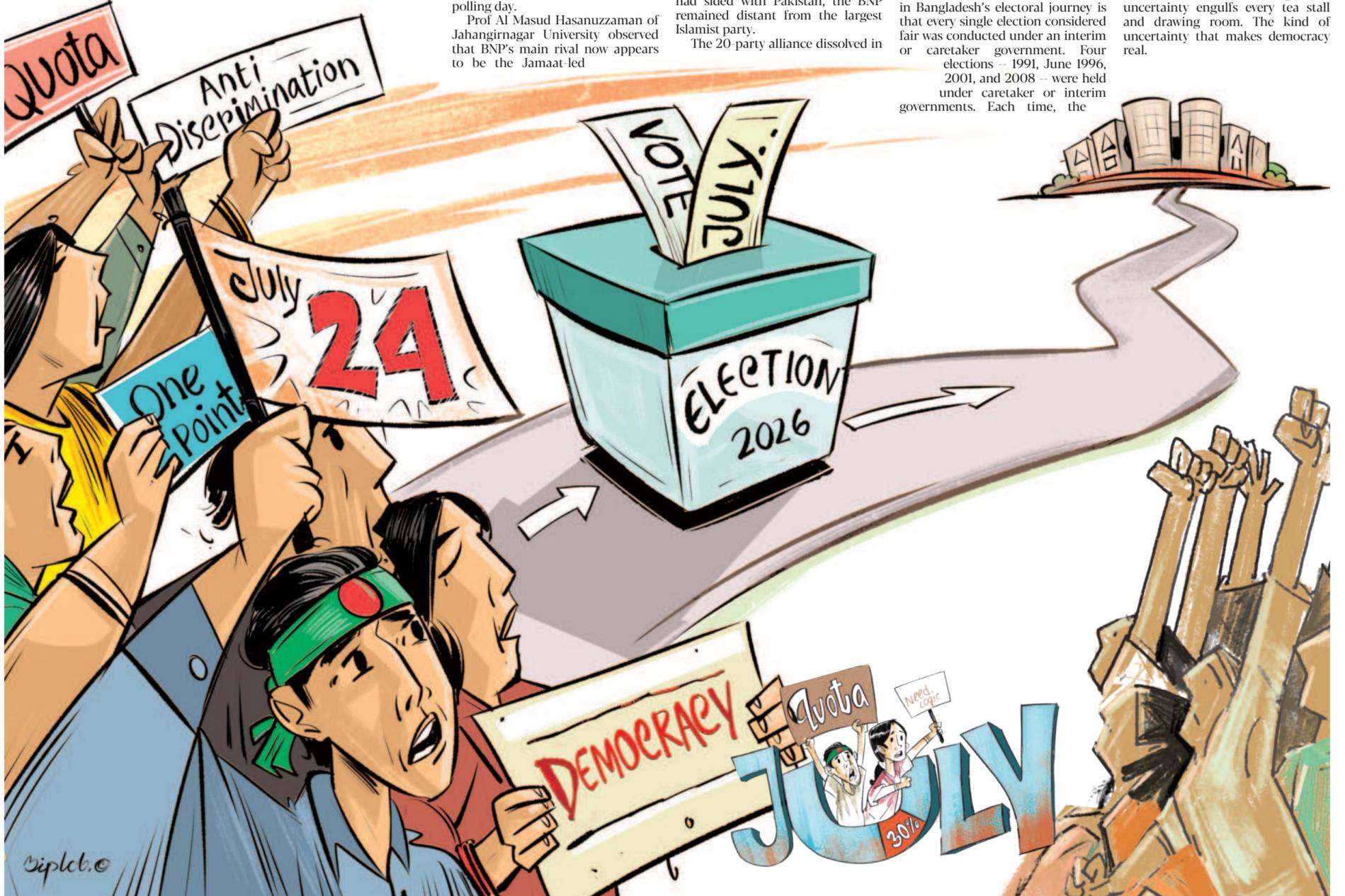
July uprising.

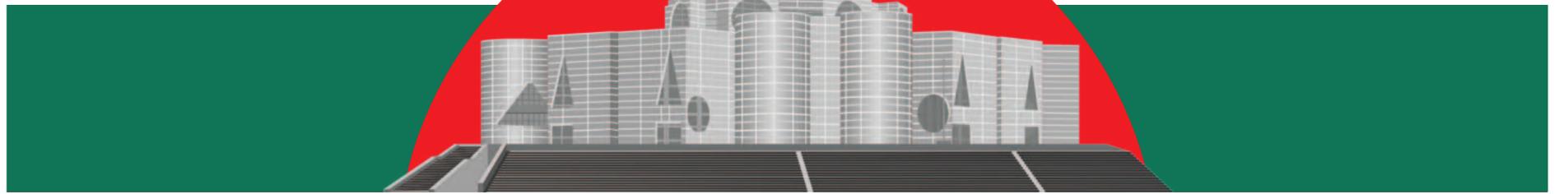
The government on November 13 announced that the national election and the referendum would be held on the same day, and that an upper house would be introduced based on proportional representation of the

three controversial elections, when the AL secured a super majority.

The 2014 and 2024 polls were mostly uncontested, boycotted by the opposition, while the 2018 election was marred by allegations of ballot-stuffing on the eve of the polling day.

Prof AI Masud Hasanuzzaman of Jahangirnagar University observed that BNP's main rival now appears to be the Jamaat-led





# BALLOTS, BATTLES AND DEMOCRACY

## The road to 13th parliamentary elections

Bangladeshis won a decisive victory in the national elections of December 7, 1970, the first general polls held in Pakistan. The Awami League secured a clear mandate to govern, but the military junta refused to transfer power. Instead, Pakistan imposed war on the people of East Pakistan. In response, the people of this land resisted, fighting the Pakistani forces and their local collaborators in a brutal nine-month struggle that culminated in the birth of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971. Since independence, the country has experienced 54 years of democracy, marked by both turbulence and resilience. The Constitution of 1972 established a multiparty parliamentary system, and in March 1973 Bangladesh held its first parliamentary election as an independent state. That election marked the beginning of a political journey that has since seen 12 parliamentary contests, reflecting shifts in governance, popular will, and democratic struggle. As the nation prepares for its 13th parliamentary election on February 12, 2026, what follows is a snapshot of the previous 12 elections, tracing how Bangladeshis have shaped their destiny at the ballot box.



Bangabandhu takes oath as prime minister after the 1973 elections.

**1973 GENERAL ELECTIONS**  
**DATE: March 7, 1973**  
**CONTESTING PARTIES: 14**  
**SEATS WON:**  
Awami League: 293  
Bangladesh Jatiyo League: 1  
Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal: 1  
Independents: 5



President Ziaur Rahman preparing to cast vote in 1979 elections.

**1979 GENERAL ELECTIONS**  
**DATE: February 18, 1979**  
In early 1975, Bangladesh's parliamentary system was replaced by the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BKSAL). Months later, on August 15, 1975, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated, and Khondaker Mustaq Ahmed assumed the presidency. The country then entered a turbulent phase marked by coups and counter-coups. In April 1977, Ziaur Rahman took over as president. Under his rule, martial law was imposed and the constitution suspended. Zia later held a referendum in 1977 and, in 1978, oversaw Bangladesh's first direct presidential election. That same year, he founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Religion-based parties were allowed to contest elections for the first time. In 1979, Bangladesh held its second parliamentary elections under the presidential system, marking another shift in the country's political trajectory.

**CONTESTING PARTIES: 29**  
**SEATS WON:**  
BNP: 207  
Awami League: 39  
Bangladesh Muslim League-Islamic Democratic League: 20  
Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal: 8  
Awami League (Mizan): 2  
Bangladesh Jatiya League: 2  
Bangladesh Gono Front: 2  
National Awami Party (Muzaffar): 1  
Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal (Marxist-Leninist): 1  
Jatiya Akota Party: 1  
Bangladesh Ganatantrik Andolan: 1  
Independents: 16

**1986 GENERAL ELECTIONS**  
**DATE: May 7, 1986**  
In May 1981, President Ziaur Rahman was assassinated in Chattogram. Hussain Muhammad Ershad seized power in 1982 and declared himself president in 1983. The third parliamentary election was held under Ershad's martial law regime and was widely seen as one-sided, as the BNP boycotted the polls, though the Awami League and Jamaat-e-Islami participated.



New cabinet takes oath after 1986 elections

**CONTESTING PARTIES: 28**  
**SEATS WON:**  
Jatiya Party: 153  
Awami League: 76  
Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh: 10  
National Awami Party: 5  
Communist Party of Bangladesh: 5  
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Rab): 4  
Bangladesh Muslim League: 4  
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Siraj): 3  
Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League: 3  
Workers Party of Bangladesh: 3  
National Awami Party (Muzaffar): 2  
Independents: 32

**1988 GENERAL ELECTIONS**  
**DATE: March 3, 1988**



Noor Hossain, an iconic pro-democracy activist, was shot to death by police in 1987.

The parliament formed through the 1986 elections provided legal legitimacy to Ershad's rule, but his government's political legitimacy remained contested, as most opposition parties refused to recognise it. By late 1987, the movement against Ershad intensified. Ershad declared a state of emergency on November 27 and

dissolved parliament on December 7. The subsequent parliamentary election was widely regarded as one-sided, as opposition alliances led by the BNP and the Awami League boycotted the polls.

**CONTESTING PARTIES: 8**  
**SEATS WON:**  
Jatiya Party: 251  
Combined Opposition Party: 19  
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Siraj): 3  
Bangladesh Freedom Party: 2  
Independents: 25

**1991 GENERAL ELECTIONS**  
**DATE: February 27, 1991**



Front page of The Daily Star on election day in 1991.

**CONTESTING PARTIES: 28**  
**SEATS WON:**  
Jatiya Party: 153  
Awami League: 76  
Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh: 10  
National Awami Party: 5  
Communist Party of Bangladesh: 5  
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Rab): 4  
Bangladesh Muslim League: 4  
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Siraj): 3  
Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League: 3  
Workers Party of Bangladesh: 3  
National Awami Party (Muzaffar): 2  
Independents: 32

In the wake of intense opposition protests and a mass uprising, Ershad was forced to resign. He was succeeded by Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, who assumed the role of acting president and led an interim administration tasked with overseeing general elections. The 1991 polls were the first national elections held under a party-neutral government. This election paved the way for Bangladesh's transition from the presidential system to a parliamentary democracy.

**CONTESTING PARTIES: 75**  
**SEATS WON:**  
BNP: 140  
Awami League: 88  
Jatiya Party: 35  
Jamaat: 18  
Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League: 5  
Communist Party of Bangladesh: 5  
Islami Oikya Jote: 1  
National Awami Party (Muzaffar): 1  
Ganatantri Party: 1  
National Democratic Party: 1  
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Siraj): 1  
Workers Party of Bangladesh: 1  
Independents: 3



Front page of The Daily Star on election day, February 1996.

**1996 GENERAL ELECTIONS (FEBRUARY)**  
**DATE: February 15, 1996**  
Following the rigged Magura-2 by-election, the demand for a

party-neutral caretaker government became a major flashpoint in Bangladesh's political conflict. The opposition launched a series of protest programmes and eventually resigned from parliament. In November 1995, parliament was dissolved. Elections were scheduled for February 1996 without a caretaker government. As the opposition boycotted the polls, the election turned into a one-sided contest.

**CONTESTING PARTIES: 43**  
**SEATS WON:**  
BNP: 278

Freedom Party: 1  
Independent: 10  
[No voting in 10 seats, 1 stayed by the court]

**1996 GENERAL ELECTIONS (JUNE)**  
**DATE: June 12, 1996**

**Hasina awaits President's invitation to form govt**



Front page of The Daily Star two days after the June 1996 elections.

Amid escalating opposition protests, the administration proved short-lived. In March 1996, parliament passed the Thirteenth Constitutional Amendment, establishing a neutral caretaker government to oversee elections. Under this arrangement, fresh parliamentary polls were held in June, marking the second election conducted under a party-neutral caretaker system. This remains the only instance of two national elections being held in a single year.

**CONTESTING PARTIES: 81**  
**SEATS WON:**  
Awami League: 146  
BNP: 116  
Jatiya Party: 32  
Jamaat: 3

Islami Oikya Jote: 1  
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Rab): 1  
Independents: 1

Jatiya Party (Ershad): 34  
Workers Party: 6  
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu): 5  
Jatiya Party (Manju): 2



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia casting her vote at Adamji Cantonment College in 2001.

**2001 GENERAL ELECTIONS**  
**DATE: October 1, 2001**

For the third time, elections were held under a party-neutral caretaker government. These polls were the first to take place after an elected government had successfully completed its full term in office. The BNP-led four-party alliance, which included Jamaat, contested the election as a coalition.

**CONTESTING PARTIES: 54**  
**SEATS WON:**  
BNP: 193  
Awami League: 62  
Jamaat: 17

Jatiya Party (Ershad) [Including Islami Jatiya Oikya Front]: 14  
Jatiya Party (Naziur): 4  
Islami Oikya Jote: 2  
Krishak Shramik Janata League: 1  
Jatiya Party (Manju): 1  
Independents: 6

**2008 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

**DATE: December 29, 2008**

In 2006, disputes over leadership of the caretaker government triggered a political crisis, forcing the postponement of the January 22, 2007 polls and the declaration of a state of emergency. Elections were eventually held in December 2008 under a caretaker administration, with the Awami League contesting under the Grand Alliance and the BNP with its four-party alliance.

**CONTESTING PARTIES: 38**  
**SEATS WON:**  
Awami League: 230  
BNP: 30  
Jatiya Party: 27

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu): 3  
Workers Party of Bangladesh: 2  
Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami: 2  
Liberal Democratic Party: 1  
Jatiya Party-BJP: 1  
Independents: 4

**2014 GENERAL ELECTIONS**  
**DATE: January 5, 2014**

The 2014 polls were another one-sided election, held amid an opposition boycott. The opposition had demanded elections under the caretaker government system, which the Awami League-led government had unilaterally annulled following a court order. First time, the election was conducted without dissolving parliament. Awami League won 153 seats unopposed – two more than the number required to secure a parliamentary majority and form government.

**CONTESTING PARTIES: 12**  
**SEATS WON:**  
Awami League: 234

Bangladesh Tarikat Federation: 2  
Bangladesh Nationalist Front: 1  
Independents: 16

**2018 GENERAL ELECTIONS**  
**DATE: December 30, 2018**

Bangladesh returned to a form of participatory election – but under very different circumstances. The main opposition parties were barely visible on the campaign trail, as their leaders and activists faced harassment, intimidation, and attacks, while police carried out mass arrests of thousands of opposition members. The polls were marred by allegations of ballot-box stuffing on the night before voting.

**CONTESTING PARTIES: 39**  
**SEATS WON:**  
Awami League: 258  
Jatiya Party (Ershad): 22  
BNP: 6  
Ganofourm 2  
Workers Party 3

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal Inu: 2  
Bangladesh Tarikat Federation: 1  
Jatiya Party (Manju): 1  
Bikalpa Dhara 2  
Independents: 3

**2024 GENERAL ELECTIONS**  
**DATE: January 7, 2024**



Sealed ballots lie on the floor following a clash at Koiyagram Government Primary School in Patiya, Chattogram, during the January 7, 2024 polls.

The 2024 election was effectively one-sided, as major opposition parties, including the BNP, boycotted the polls. To project an appearance of competition, the Awami League fielded independents, many of whom were party insiders. The Sheikh Hasina-led government was dethroned in the wake of a student-led mass uprising on August 5.

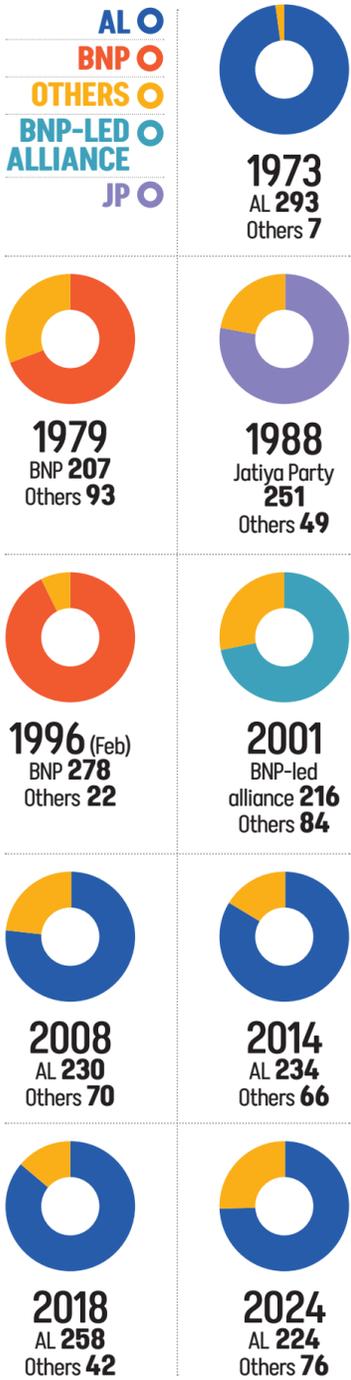
**CONTESTING PARTIES: 28**  
**SEATS WON:**  
Awami League: 224  
Jatiya Party (Ershad): 11  
Workers Party 1  
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu): 1  
Kalyan Party 1  
Independents: 62



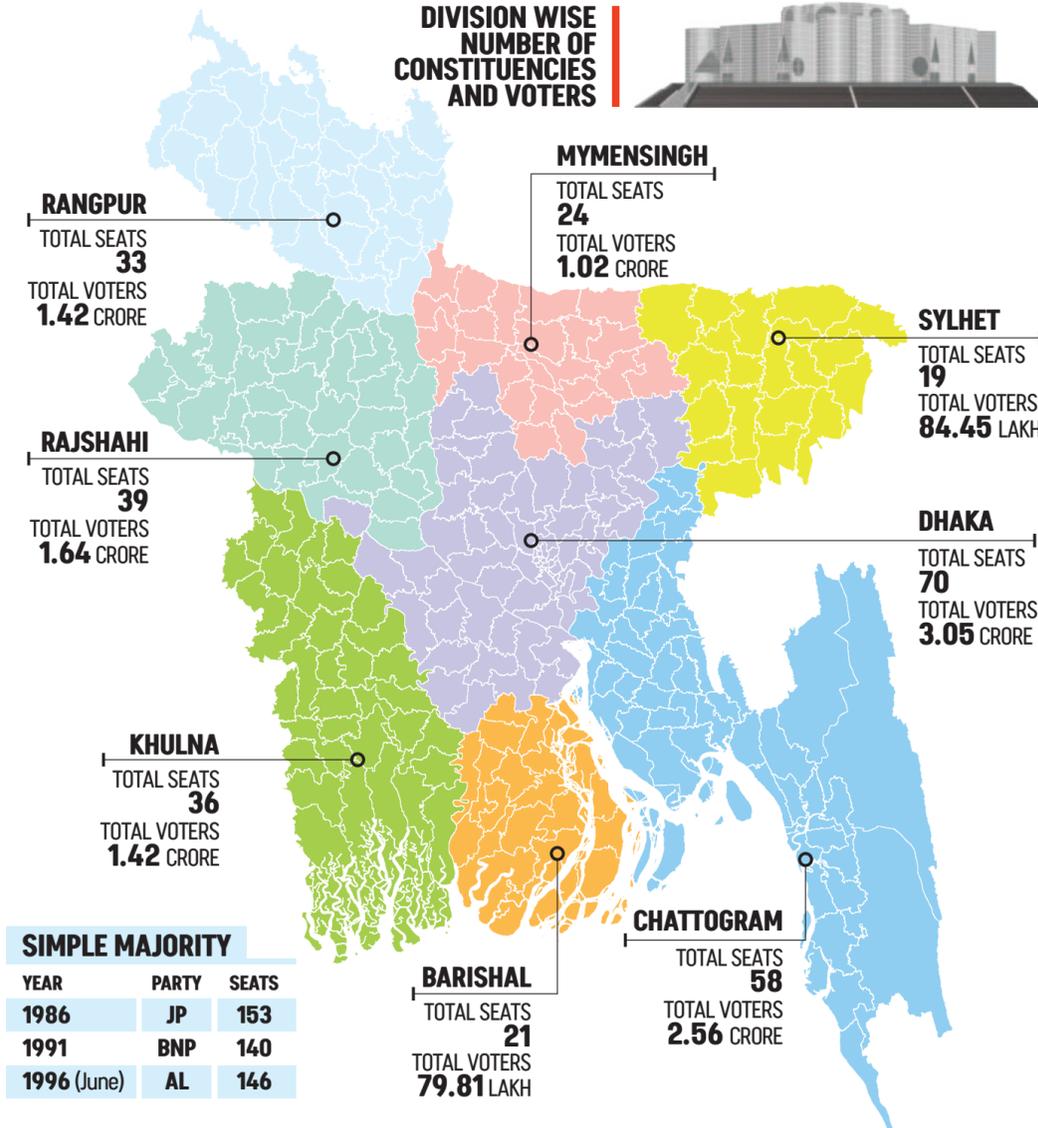
## ELECTION FACTS 1973--2026

Since independence, Bangladesh has gone to the polls twelve times, and another election is now approaching. Across this long journey, one fact stands out: no ruling party has ever lost an election while in office. The Awami League first tasted victory while in office in 1973. Decades later, it returned to power in June 1996. It won again in 2008 and later in three consecutive elections – 2014, 2018, and 2024. Those victories, however, came under a cloud. The 2014 and 2024 contests were condemned as “one-sided” and boycotted by the opposition. The 2018 election carried even darker allegations, with claims that ballot boxes were stuffed the night before voting. Critics branded all three as “sham polls”. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) also had its moments, winning in 1979 and again in the short-lived February 1996 election and in 2001. The Jatiya Party, under military ruler HM Ershad, claimed back-to-back victories in 1986 and 1988 – both boycotted and both one-sided. Amid this cycle of dominance, there were flashes of credible consensus. Four elections – 1991, June 1996, 2001, and 2008 – were held under caretaker or interim governments. Each time, the party that had ruled before the interim or caretaker administration lost, showing that free and fair elections could indeed change power. The broader record, however, tells another story. Bangladesh has endured five one-sided polls – 1986, 1988, February 1996, 2014, and 2024 – each marked by opposition boycotts. The Awami League secured a two-thirds majority five times, the BNP twice outright and once with allies, and the Jatiya Party once.

### TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY IN POLLS



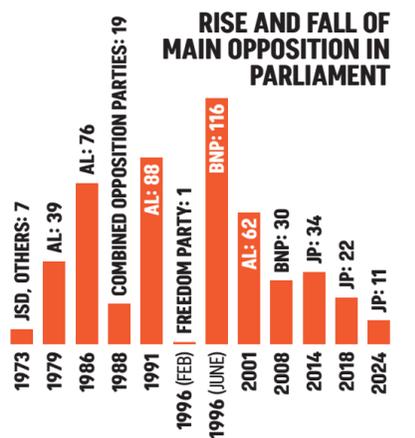
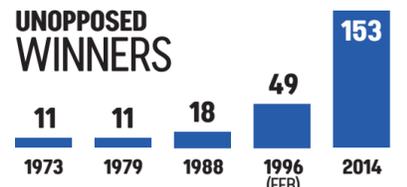
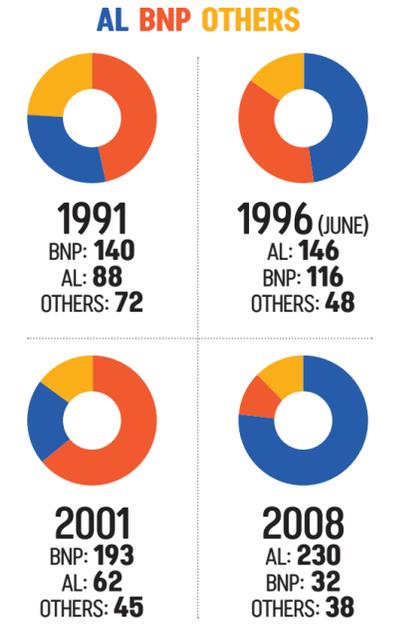
### DIVISION WISE NUMBER OF CONSTITUENCIES AND VOTERS



#### SIMPLE MAJORITY

Year	Party	Seats
1986	JP	153
1991	BNP	140
1996 (June)	AL	146

### AL, BNP PERFORMANCE UNDER INTERIM or CARETAKER GOVERNMENT



### NUMBER OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES

Polls	Parties	Party Candidates	Independent	Total
1973	14	1,089	120	1,209
1979	29	2,125	455	2,580
1986	28	1,527	453	1,980
1988	8	978	214	1,192
1991	75	2,363	424	2,787
1996 (Feb)	43	N/A	N/A	1,450
1996 (June)	81	2,290	284	2,574
2001	54	1,453	486	1,939
2008	38	1,416	151	1,567
2014	12	439	104	543
2018	39	1,733	129	1,861
2024	28	1,539	437	1,976
2026	50	1,755	273	2,028

### STATE EXPENDITURE IN POLLS

Polls	Taka in Crore
1973	2.96
1979	5.59
1986	5.06
1988	12.11
1991	34.38
1996 (Feb)	37.04
1996 (June)	30.26
2001	72.71
2008	165
2014	282.72
2018	966.73
2024	1,927.51
2026	ESTIMATED 3,150

### NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES, SEATS WON

Year	Candidates	Seats Won
1973	120	3
1979	455	16
1986	453	32
1988	214	25
1991	424	3
1996 (Feb)	N/A	10
1996 (June)	284	1
2001	486	6
2008	151	4
2014	104	16
2018	129	3
2024	437	62
2026	273	TBD

### WOMEN CANDIDATES AND SEATS WON

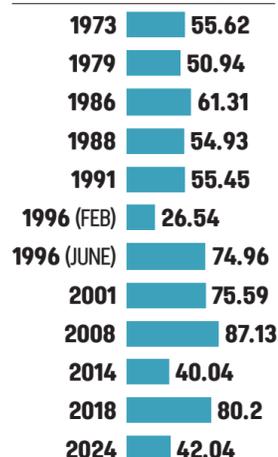
Year	Candidates	Seats Won
1973	2	0
1979	12	0
1986	13	5
1988	N/A	4
1991	40	4
1996 (Feb)	N/A	N/A
1996 (June)	36	5
2001	38	6
2008	59	19
2014	29	18
2018	70	22
2024	99	20
2026	83	TBD

### NUMBER OF VOTERS, VOTES OBTAINED BY WINNER

Polls	No. of Voters	Winner (in %)
1973	3.52cr	73.2 AL
1979	3.84cr	41.16 BNP
1986	4.73cr	42.34 JP
1988	4.99cr	68.44 JP
1991	6.22cr	30.81 BNP
1996 (Feb)	5.61cr	N/A (BNP)
1996 (June)	5.17cr	37.44 AL
2001	7.49cr	40.97 BNP
2008	8.11cr	48.04 AL
2014	9.2cr	72.14 AL
2018	10.42cr	74.44 AL
2024	11.97cr	65.15 AL
2026	12.77cr	TBD



### VOTER TURNOUT in %



### NUMBER OF OBSERVERS

Year	National	Int'l
1991	N/A	59
1996 June	45,000	265
2001	2,18,000	225
2008	1,59,113	593
2014	8,878	4
2018	25,920	38
2024	20,773	124
2026	44,995	392

DATA SOURCES: ELECTION COMMISSION REPORTS ON NATIONAL POLLS, ELECTORAL REFORM COMMISSION REPORT, AND 'BANGLADESHER NIRBACHONI BEBOSTHA O FOLAFOL', EDITED BY NASAR AMIN.

# Referendum: one question, 47 consequences

TANIM AHMED

The upcoming referendum is unique in the sense that voters will not be the final stop in the process. Instead, if the referendum carries – meaning the “yes” vote prevails – it will set in motion a sequence of further steps. Ordinarily, however, a referendum comes at the end of a process, after an issue has been discussed and debated publicly and secured a supermajority in parliament. At that stage, sovereign citizens have the final word, accepting or rejecting the proposal.

That is not the case with this referendum. Voters will be asked whether they approve the July charter implementation order and a set of proposals presented as a summary of the 47 measures requiring constitutional amendment.

The implementation order outlines a series of steps, including the issuance of another order detailing the referendum, the formation of a constitutional reform council – effectively another form of the entire parliament – its deadline, its dissolution, and the formation of an upper chamber, among other measures. The ordinance outlining the referendum has already been issued and provides the Election Commission with the legal framework to hold the vote, a step deemed necessary because the prevailing constitution does not contain any provision for referendums.

Under the order, the constitutional reform council will be able to pass July charter recommendations, which in effect amend the constitution, with a simple majority of the entire council – 151 votes in a 300-member body. The council

## A LOOK BACK AT REFERENDUMS

More than three decades after the last referendum, Bangladesh is again facing one, this time on the constitutional issue of the July National Charter. Each of the three previous referendums took place during periods of political upheaval, when rulers sought legitimacy for their regimes or for a new system of governance. The referendums of 1977 and 1985 were widely viewed as attempts to legitimise the military governments of Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Muhammad Ershad, while the third, held in 1991, was a constitutional exercise that paved the way for Bangladesh’s return to parliamentary democracy.



Media coverage of 1991 referendum.

### MAY 30, 1977

Question: “Do you have confidence in President Major General Ziaur Rahman, BU [Bir Uttam] and the

policies and actions he pursued?”  
Total voters **3,83,63,858**  
Turn out **88.05%**  
Yes **98.88%**  
No **1.12%**

### MARCH 21, 1985

Question: Do you have confidence in the policies and programmes pursued by President Lieutenant General Hussain Muhammad Ershad, and do you support his continued tenure as president until elections are held in accordance with the suspended constitution?  
Total voters **4,79,10,964**  
Turn out **72.44%**  
Yes **94.11%**  
No **5.50%**

### SEPTEMBER 15, 1991

Question: Should the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh (Twelfth Amendment) Bill, 1991, receive the assent of the president?  
Total voters **6,22,04,118**  
Turn out **35.19%**  
Yes **84.38%**  
No **15.64%**

DATA SOURCES: ELECTION COMMISSION REPORTS ON NATIONAL POLLS, ELECTORAL REFORM COMMISSION REPORT, AND BANGLADESHER NIRBACHONI BEBOSTHA O FOLAFOL, EDITED BY NASAR AMIN.

## Referendum 2026: Yes or No?

**Do you give consent to the July National Charter (Constitution Reform) Implementation Order, 2025, and the following proposals related to constitutional reforms mentioned in the July National Charter? (Yes/No)**

- a) The election-time caretaker government, the Election Commission, and other constitutional institutions will be formed in line with the process outlined in the July charter.
- b) The next parliament will be bicameral. A 100-member upper house will be formed in proportion to the votes received by parties in the national parliamentary election. Approval from a majority of the upper house will be required to amend the constitution.
- c) The parties that win the next parliamentary

election will be bound to implement the 30 proposals agreed upon in the July National Charter, including increasing women’s representation in parliament, electing the deputy speaker and several committee chairpersons from the opposition, limiting the prime minister’s term, enhancing presidential powers, expanding fundamental rights, ensuring judicial independence, and empowering local government.



d) Carry out other reforms mentioned in the July National Charter will be implemented as per the commitments of the political parties.

has a deadline of 180 working days to complete all reforms. However, there is no contingency. The order makes no provision for what happens if the council fails to meet the deadline or does not address all the July charter issues.

Once the council is dissolved, its decisions will be incorporated into the constitution and published as a gazette. There is no way to predict what the final language of the constitution will look like, and voters will have no control over that outcome if they vote yes.

On the other hand, a “no” vote would effectively shut the door on the reform process, which has been described as a core mandate of the interim government.

The ballot itself briefly mentions a selection of proposals and presents them as a done deal. The government’s campaign, which is openly in favour of a “yes” vote, claims that a “yes” victory would defeat

fascism and asserts that those who want reforms must vote yes, without clearly explaining the full process or all the measures contained in the July charter.

Saying yes or no is inherently difficult because so many issues are bundled together. The first paragraph on the ballot states: “The election-time caretaker government, the Election Commission, and other constitutional institutions will be formed in line with the process outlined in the July charter.”

It is followed by another paragraph that reads: “The next parliament will be bicameral. A 100-member upper house will be formed in proportion to the votes received by parties in the national parliamentary election. Approval from a majority of the upper house will be required to amend the constitution.”

It is evident that these paragraphs address distinct and diverse issues, some of which may enjoy wide

support and others little or none. Certain proposals evoke strong feelings both for and against, while others may not. A single proposal may appear necessary to some and sacrosanct to others. Yet the ballot offers no way to reflect these differences.

As such, the referendum forces citizens into a compromise, either by making them grudgingly accept a number of proposals they oppose or by compelling them to reject an entire raft of measures, even though some are acceptable. Yet the spirit of this republic, particularly the one aspired to after the July uprising, must have been to accommodate minorities rather than simply ensure the rule of the majority. It must have been to recognise every citizen’s right to dissent, not secure a wholesale acceptance. And yet, the referendum makes it difficult for citizens to choose because of how reforms have been packaged.

## BIGWIGS AND THEIR CONSTITUENCIES



**Tarique Rahman**  
BNP  
Dhaka-17, Bogura-6



**Mirza Fakhru Islam**  
Atangir  
BNP  
Thakurgaon-1



**Salahuddin Ahmed**  
BNP  
Cox’s Bazar-1



**Amir Khosru Mahmud**  
Chowdhury  
BNP  
Chattogram-11



**Shafiqur Rahman**  
Jamaat-e-Islami  
Dhaka-15



**Mia Golam Porwar**  
Jamaat-e-Islami  
Khulna-5



**Syed Abdullah Mohammed**  
Taher  
Jamaat-e-Islami  
Cumilla-11



**Hamidur Rahman Azad**  
Jamaat-e-Islami  
Cox’s Bazar-2



**Nahid Islam**  
NCP  
Dhaka-11



**Akhter Hossain**  
NCP  
Rangpur-4



**Hasnat Abdullah**  
NCP  
Cumilla-4



**Mufti Syed Muhammad**  
Faizul Karim  
Islami Andolan Bangladesh  
Barishal-5



**GM Quader**  
Jatiya Party  
Rangpur-3



**Shamim Haider Patwary**  
Jatiya Party  
Gaibandha-5



**Maulana Mamunul Haque**  
Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis  
Dhaka-13



**Mahmudur Rahman Manna**  
Nagorik Oikya  
Dhaka-18, Bogura-2



**Zonayed Saki**  
Ganosamhati Andolon  
Brahmanbaria-6



**Hasnat Quaiyum**  
Rashtra Sangskar Andolon  
Kishoreganj-5



**Nurul Haque Nur**  
Gono Odhikar Parishad  
Patuakhali-3



**Fazlur Rahman**  
BNP  
Kishoreganj-4



**Mojibur Rahman Monju**  
AB Party  
Feni-2



**Tasnim Zara**  
Independent  
Dhaka-9



**Saiful Alam Nirab**  
Independent  
Dhaka-12



**Rumeen Farhana**  
Independent  
Brahmanbaria-2



**"When there's a clear act of aggression, I think what we should do isn't bow down or try to reach a settlement."**  
French President Emmanuel Macron on renewed friction with US

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## US tariff cut comes at a steep cost

**Bangladesh secures a marginal US tariff cut to 19%, but commits to billions of dollars in purchases**

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh's interim government has signed a sweeping trade agreement with the United States at the twilight of its tenure to secure a partial tariff relief, but the deal comes with significant geopolitical strings attached.

The Agreement on Reciprocal Trade, signed on February 9, goes far beyond standard tariff reductions. Instead, it creates a binding framework that integrates Bangladesh's defence, energy, trade and digital infrastructure into the US sphere of influence.

The agreement mandates that Bangladesh "shall endeavour to increase purchases of US military equipment" while simultaneously limiting procurement from "certain countries" — a thinly veiled reference to Chinese suppliers. The US has also committed to working with Bangladesh to "streamline and enhance defence trade."

The signing of the agreement with Bangladesh is the first of its kind in South Asia and "marks a meaningful step forward in opening markets, addressing trade barriers, and creating new opportunities for American exporters," United States Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said in a statement.

His office, USTR, published the 32-page agreement on its website.

The deal prohibits Bangladesh from purchasing nuclear reactors, fuel rods, or enriched uranium from any country that "jeopardises essential US interests." The clause offers a narrow exception only for existing reactors where no alternative supplier exists, effectively vetoing future nuclear cooperation with Russia or China.

Under Article 4.3 of the agreement, if Bangladesh enters into a free trade or preferential economic agreement with a "non-market country" (a US regulatory term used for China and Russia), the US can terminate the entire deal and reimpose punitive tariffs.

According to another provision, if the US implements border measures or trade actions to protect its own national security, Bangladesh is treaty-bound to adopt "complementary restrictive measures" following consultations. This provision obliges Dhaka to automatically align with US sanctions and trade wars, removing its ability to remain neutral in great power conflicts.

As part of the deal, the US has cut its reciprocal tariff on Bangladeshi exports to 19 percent from 20 percent. The US will grant duty-free or preferential access to approximately 2,500 Bangladeshi products, while Dhaka will open its

market to around 4,400 American goods on similar terms. The list includes US chemicals, medical devices, machinery and motor vehicles and parts; information and communication technology (ICT) equipment; beef, poultry, and tree nuts and fruit.

However, the deal enforces a kind of managed trade with specific targets. Bangladesh has committed

"This is an imposed agreement done through the total weaponisation of trade," said Mustafizur, adding that the US had attached conditions to the reduction of additional tariffs that were originally imposed unjustly.

"Under the deal, Bangladesh must offer zero duty on a number of US items and slash duties on certain other goods over five and 10 years,

### RECIPROCAL TRADE DEAL

#### BANGLADESH SHALL

- ➔ Offer zero tariffs on many US goods
- ➔ Provide preferential access for US agricultural items
- ➔ Boost purchases of US military equipment
- ➔ Recognise FDA approvals for pharma, medical devices
- ➔ Enhance intellectual property protection
- ➔ Remove restrictions on labour right to strike in EPZs
- ➔ Make customs fully digital/paperless by 2030
- ➔ Support US trade actions on other countries
- ➔ Avoid nuclear purchases from risky countries

#### THE US SHALL

- ➔ Offer 19% reciprocal tariffs on Bangladeshi goods
- ➔ Zero duty for select Bangladeshi textiles/apparel
- ➔ Support digital trade & cybersecurity
- ➔ Apply rules of origin if third-country benefits are disproportionate

**This list is not exhaustive**

to purchasing \$15 billion worth of US energy commodities, including liquefied natural gas (LNG), over 15 years.

Additionally, Biman Bangladesh Airlines, the state carrier, will purchase 14 Boeing aircraft, steering the country's aviation sector away from European competitor Airbus. In the agricultural sector, Dhaka will import at least \$3.5 billion worth of US farm products, including wheat and soybean.

**WEAPONISATION OF TRADE**  
Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said the agreement imposes numerous compliance requirements that restrict Bangladesh's policy flexibility.

Constraints are acute in procurement, especially in the defence sector, as it limits the country's choices about both suppliers and equipment, he said.

beginning with a 50 percent cut from the date the agreement comes into force.

This has "significant revenue implications," he said.

"We are just two days away from the national election. My point is, why do they have to rush to sign an agreement that the elected government will have to implement? I don't understand the rationale," Mustafizur said.

"Couldn't we request the US to wait for a couple of days so that a democratically elected government could review and finalise the deal?"

In another significant move, Bangladesh will have to remove restrictions on the right to strike, increase fines for anti-union discrimination, and, within two years, bring its Export Processing

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1  
**BANGLADESH COMMITS TO \$18.5B US FARM, ENERGY IMPORTS — BI**

## Nation at fever pitch ahead of historic election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All eyes are fixed on tomorrow's parliamentary polls as the Election Commission and law enforcement agencies enter the final stretch of preparations to ensure a smooth exercise of franchise.

The nation throbs with anticipation, buoyed by hopes that the ballot will usher in a peaceful transition and open a new chapter in democratic practice.

The election is being held 18 months after an unprecedented student-led mass uprising brought down Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government, raising expectations that the vote could mark a break from past practices and a return to more accountable democratic norms.

For millions of voters, the long wait for an election that could reshape the country's democratic trajectory now narrows to a single, decisive day after 20 days of intense formal campaigning ended yesterday morning.

Alongside electing their representatives, voters will also cast ballots in a national referendum on the July National Charter, a document outlining key constitutional and institutional reforms.

The outcome is expected to influence how the country is governed in the years ahead, adding further weight to tomorrow's vote.

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus last evening addressed the nation in a televised speech, urging citizens to make election day the "birthday of a new Bangladesh", saying voters themselves would write the history of the country's glorious future.

As many as 42,779 polling stations are set for 12.77 crore people to exercise their voting rights. Voting will run from 7:30am to 4:30pm without break. Of the voters, 6.48 crore are male and 6.28 crore female.

A total of 1,755 candidates from 50 registered political parties are

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

**VOTE TOMORROW**



## Make the polls 'birthday of new Bangladesh'

**Says Yunus in address to nation**

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has urged voters to make the February 12 election day the "birthday of a new Bangladesh".

"Your vote will write the history of Bangladesh's glorious future. Let this election day be the birthday of a new Bangladesh. Let us make this festive election a reality and establish it as a memorable day in history," he said in a televised address to the nation yesterday evening.

Calling on people to take ownership of the country's future, the chief adviser encouraged the electorate to open the door to build a new Bangladesh through

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

## Interim govt advisers' wealth grew 6% on average in FY25

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Advisers in the outgoing interim government, along with their spouses, disclosed wealth statements yesterday, detailing changes in their assets between June 30, 2024, and June 30, 2025.

Overall, advisers and their spouses recorded a median wealth increase of six percent during this period.

To start things off, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus reported an 11 percent rise, worth Tk 1.6 crore. Meanwhile, his wife, Dr Afroz Yunus, saw her financial assets fall by almost half, resulting in a 40 percent overall decline.

Environment and information adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan's assets dropped by half, including a Tk 1 crore depletion in financial holdings. Her husband, Abu Bakar Siddique, reported no significant change.

Health adviser Nurjahan Begum's husband, KM Asaduzzaman, also lost half his wealth over the past year, with financial assets down Tk 1.64 crore, though his non-financial assets rose by Tk 14 lakh. Nurjahan's own assets remained largely unchanged.

Land adviser Ali Imam Majumder's non-financial assets halved, falling by Tk 11 lakh, but his financial assets rose by Tk 62.7 lakh, lifting his total holdings from Tk 3.37 crore to Tk 3.88 crore.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 5

### WEALETHIEST ADVISERS

Sheikh Bashir Uddin	Tk 91.7 crore
Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud	Tk 16.2 crore
Dr Muhammad Yunus	Tk 15.6 crore

### LEAST WEALTHY ADVISERS

Mahfuj Alam	Tk 12.8 lakh
Asif Mahmud Sajib Bhuiyan	Tk 15 lakh
Farida Akhtar	Tk 1 crore

## Civil aviation ministry's clarification, our reply

The Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism has issued a clarification to our report titled "Lord of the wings," published on February 6. In a statement signed by Public Relations Officer Tariqul Islam, the ministry said it sought to clarify the "ongoing misrepresentation of several issues."

**License issue of Akij Bashir Aviation Limited**

The Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism strongly condemns the use of terms such as "unabashed cronyism" to characterize an issue against which there is no substantial evidence to claim.

Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) processes AOC applications strictly according to existing regulations derived from ICAO Annexes. These procedures are applied consistently to all applicants, regardless

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

## Police roll out three-tier security plan

**Concern remains over unrecovered arms**

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and TOUSIF KAUM

With the much-awaited national election set to take place tomorrow, looted firearms yet to be recovered and thousands of licensed weapons yet to be deposited may pose security challenges, experts and law enforcers said.

Meanwhile, incidents of political violence and harassment of journalists have escalated sharply ahead of the polls, rights group Ain o Salish Kendra said in a statement yesterday.

Quoting media reports, ASK said it recorded 58 incidents of political violence between February 1 and 10, leaving 489 people injured and two dead. During the same period, at least 47 journalists were attacked across the country.

By comparison, 49 incidents were reported during the last 10 days of January (January 21-31), in which 414 people were injured and four killed. Around 16 journalists were attacked throughout the month of January, the ASK report added.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Travellers rush to get on or off the roof of Kalni Express from Dhaka at Brahmanbaria Railway Station yesterday. With election day and its eve declared public holidays and the weekend following, thousands of people headed home, making bus, train stations and launch terminals appear as if it were Eid-time.

PHOTO: MASUK HRIDYO

## People head home with ballots on their minds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It feels almost like Eid again — the familiar rush of people heading home. But this time, the journey carries a different spirit: people are setting out to exercise their right to vote.

Tomorrow's election has wrapped the nation in a holiday hush. With both the polling day and its eve declared public holidays across the country, and a special break granted yesterday for workers in industrial zones, the everyday rhythm has slowed to a pause, which will stretch further, with a two-day weekend following the vote.

From the bustling streets of Dhaka to the industrial belts, people began leaving on Monday night. By early morning yesterday, the exodus gathered pace with families, workers, and students streaming out towards their village homes, swelling the pressure on highways, rail lines, and waterways.

Bus terminals and railway stations across the capital were crowded with homebound passengers, bags in hands, and faces lightened up with smiles.

"We are going home with the joy of Eid. For the first time, I will be casting

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

## Rice trader hacked to death in Mymensingh

Several lakh taka looted from his shop, family claims

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A rice trader was hacked to death by criminals at his own shop in Mymensingh's Trishal upazila on Monday night.

The victim was identified as Susen Chandra Sarker, 62, of Southkanda village in Trishal, said police.

Police said the incident occurred at Susen's shop, "Messrs Bhai Bhai Enterprise," located at Bogar Bazar Chowrasta in Trishal.

Quoting the victim's family members and locals, Md Abdullah Al Mamun, additional superintendent of police (Administration and Finance) in Mymensingh, said the criminals struck Susen with sharp weapons on the head and face, and fled the scene around 11:00pm.

Later, family members found him lying in a pool of blood and rushed him to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 5



Workers set up CCTV cameras at Iqbal Nagar Secondary School voting centre in Khulna city yesterday ahead of the national polls. The Election Commission took the initiative to install cameras at the polling stations to monitor voting. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## 4 killed as two buses collide head-on

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

At least four people were killed and more than 30 injured in a head-on collision between two buses on the Dhaka-Pabna highway in Sholabaria area of Pabna's Santhia upazila this morning.

Two people, including a driver and a helper, died on the spot, while two others succumbed to their injuries at hospital, said Md Mostafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of the Madhupur Highway Police Station.

The victims are Md Kamal Hossain, 40, driver of Shahzadpur Travels; Mehedi Hasan, 28, helper of Maasranga Paribahan; Alef Uddin, 35; and Alomgir Hossain, 36.

The incident took place around 7:30am near the Sholabaria bridge, when a Dhaka-bound Shahzadpur Travels bus collided with a Pabna-bound Maasranga Paribahan bus.

The OC said both drivers lost control of the vehicle, leading to the crash.

Dr Rafikul Islam, assistant director of Pabna General Hospital, said 32 injured passengers were brought to the facility.

Six were later shifted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital in critical condition, he added.

Police and firefighters rushed to the scene immediately after the accident to rescue victims and clear the wreckage. Normal traffic flow resumed after being suspended during one-hour operation.

## BNP unveils plan to monitor polling centres

Party to arrange transport for voters to boost turnout

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP has issued detailed instructions to its grassroots leaders and activists to boost turnout and prevent irregularities and voter intimidation at polling centres across the country on election day.

Following a meeting attended by senior leaders in the capital yesterday, the party directed its grassroots leadership to deploy between 100 and 500 party members outside each polling centre, depending on voter numbers.

According to party insiders, the BNP will appoint a team leader, centre leader, and venue leader for each polling station to supervise overall operations and ensure compliance with the instructions.

On polling day, leaders and activists

from Chhatra Dal, Jubo Dal, Krishak Dal, Swachchhasebak Dal, and other affiliated bodies will work in three shifts at their assigned centres. Party workers have been instructed to maintain a peaceful presence so that voters do not feel intimidated.

Polling agents have been instructed to check voter lists, inspect ballot boxes, ensure they are properly sealed, record their lock numbers, and file complaints over any irregularities.

They have also been told to send hourly vote counts to a central monitoring cell and not to sign result documents if the BNP's internal count does not match the centre's result.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 6

## Tarique, Shafiqur review poll prep

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two days before the February 12 polls, BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman and Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman separately reviewed their parties' election preparations around the country yesterday, party sources said.

Both leaders issued directives to grassroots organisers after speaking over the phone with district-level leaders and candidates to assess the situation in their respective constituencies.

In the morning, Shafiqur met a 15-member delegation led by Ivars Ijabs, chief observer of the European Union Election Observation Mission and a

member of the European Parliament, at the party's central office in Moghbazar.

Meanwhile, BNP chief Tarique Rahman held discussions with foreign journalists at his office in Gulshan.

Later in the evening, Shafiqur convened a meeting with senior leaders of the 11-party alliance, according to party insiders.

Shafiqur, Jamaat's candidate in Dhaka-15, is scheduled to cast his vote at the Monipur High School and College polling centre in Mirpur's 60 Feet area on February 12.

Tarique, contesting Dhaka-17, will vote at Gulshan Model High School and College in Gulshan-2 and may visit several other polling centres afterward.

## People head home

FROM PAGE 1

"my vote," said Kamrul Hasan, a student returning home to Barishal on a launch from Sadarghat.

The rush intensified as thousands of garment workers from Gazipur's industrial zones started leaving yesterday after factories shut in line with a government directive to facilitate voting in the 13th parliament election and July charter referendum.

Akram Hossain, a garment worker, said, "We are going to our village home in Rajbari to stay with my parents and to vote." He was waiting for his bus at Gabtoli terminal yesterday morning.

Industrial units in Gazipur, Tongi, Chowrasta, Konabari, and Sreepur were closed, leading to long queues of people at bus stands along the Dhaka-Mymensingh, Dhaka-Kishoreganj, and Dhaka-Tangail highways. Male and female passengers were seen standing in lines for hours amid severe congestion, reports our Gazipur correspondent.

Around noon, Kamruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Maona Highway Police Station, said intermittent traffic congestion was reported on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway. "The situation worsened as the flow of vehicles increased from the morning."

The departure of workers created scenes reminiscent of an Eid holiday rush, with a steady stream of passengers leaving industrial belts. Law enforcement personnel were deployed at multiple points to ease congestion and maintain traffic flow.

Rahima Begum, a garment worker from Sreepur, said that voting with her family was more valuable than the

hardship of traveling home. "We face work pressure all year. Even though the journey is difficult, it is important for us to go home and vote."

However, another worker, Abdul Karim, complained of overcrowding and higher fares. "The bus stand is packed and fares have gone up, but voting is our responsibility."

Saugatul Alam, officer-in-charge of Konabari Naojor Highway Police Station, said managing traffic has become more challenging due to the deployment of personnel for election duty.

"During long holidays, hundreds of police are usually deployed on highways. This time the number is lower as many officers are assigned to election duty," he said, adding that efforts were under way to keep traffic moving in Chandra and surrounding areas despite limited manpower.

The government has declared February 11 a general holiday, while election day on February 12 is already a public holiday.

Additionally, the Ministry of Labour and Employment declared February 10 a general holiday for workers in various industrial zones, allowing industrial employees to enjoy three consecutive holidays from February 10 to 12.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Shop Business Owners' Association announced on February 7 that shops, commercial establishments, and shopping malls nationwide would remain closed for two days, including election day, to ensure wider public participation in the polls and the referendum.

## US tariff cut comes at a steep cost

FROM PAGE 1

Zones (EPZs) -- vital to its garment industry -- under the jurisdiction of the general labour law, ending their special regulatory status.

Bangladesh is required to use "digital logistics platforms" for its ports, terminals, and shipping fleet that are not only cyber-secure but specifically built to block "other foreign governments" from accessing the data.

It has to establish measures to restrict the unauthorised export, re-export, and in-country transfer of US-origin or US-controlled items subject to the Export Administration Regulations (EAR) unless they have explicit permission from the US Bureau of Industry and Security.

Dhaka is also required to "screen and share" customs transaction data related to US-origin items with Washington to help identify "transactions of concern," effectively granting the US oversight of Bangladesh's trade flows.

"We have a lot of issues in the agreement to be worried about. Signing such a deal at the eleventh hour of this government is

controversial. They could say, 'let's wait for the elected government,'" said Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling.

He argued that the agreement is heavily skewed, imposing a far longer list of obligations on Bangladesh than on the US, which raises serious questions about whether the minimal tariff relief is truly worth the price.

Selim questioned the broader impact of the deal, specifically citing the plan to purchase 14 Boeing jets. "What about the economic security of Bangladesh and its long-term implications?"

"Our national debt has already increased significantly. If we now have to take on additional debt to purchase Boeing aircraft and cannot reap corresponding commercial benefits, that will put further pressure on us. These calculations need careful consideration."

He highlighted the agreement's failure to safeguard the nation's long-term economic security or preserve its policy independence. Questioning the deal's compatibility with global

trade rules, the Dhaka University professor argued that Bangladesh instead should have pursued a conventional free trade agreement with the US.

Although tariffs on Bangladesh's exports have been reduced somewhat, the cost is too high, he said.

"I am concerned about the kind of pressure we will have to face as a result of the commitments we have made in this agreement."

He warned that the deal sets a risky geopolitical precedent, questioning how the country would cope if other nations were to apply similar pressure to extract comparable benefits -- a scenario he described as a major challenge for Bangladesh.

**NON-TARIFF BARRIERS**  
The deal mentions the reduction of various non-tariff barriers in Bangladesh.

"This is an important issue, because if we want to increase our share in global trade, there is no alternative to this. However, it must be ensured that these non-tariff measures do not apply only to one country, but are applicable to all

countries," said Selim.

In the past, US medical devices and pharmaceutical products faced lengthy delays and costs because they had to undergo local testing and obtain fresh marketing authorisation from Bangladeshi authorities, even if they were already approved in the US. Now, Bangladesh must automatically accept US FDA certifications. It can no longer require further inspection or separate marketing authorisation for US medical products, allowing them direct access to the market.

While not explicitly detailed in the agreement, the purchase commitment for \$3.5 billion in agricultural products (including cotton) typically links to the removal of the long-standing "double fumigation" requirement, where US cotton was subjected to pest treatment upon arrival.

By agreeing to these purchase quotas, Bangladesh is effectively streamlining the entry of US agricultural commodities, removing the procedural delays that previously hampered these imports.

## Police roll out three-tier security plan

FROM PAGE 1

Amid the situation, police said a three-tier security plan has been put in place, with static forces at every polling centre, mobile patrol teams in surrounding areas, and striking units on standby to respond to any emergency.

Additionally, the home ministry has directed the suspension of departure procedures at all land ports from 6:00am tomorrow to 6:00am on Friday to ensure an obstruction-free poll.

On January 18, the interim government set January 31 as the deadline for depositing legal weapons at the respective police stations, and warned that any licence-holder who failed to submit firearms within the stipulated timeframe would face legal action under relevant provisions.

Under the directive, every licensed firearms holder, except financial institutions, candidates, and those engaged in election duty, was required to deposit weapons at police stations. However, only 27,995 licence-holders handed in firearms during the timeframe, according to the Police Headquarters database.

The PHQ data show there are around 53,702 legal firearms licence-holders in the country. Of them, around 5,565 firearms are owned by different financial institutions and banks, while the remaining 48,137 licences were issued at the personal

level. Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday, Khondoker Rafiqul Islam, additional inspector general (crime and operation) of PHQ, said that some 20,000 firearms have not been deposited so far.

"Because they have not yet been handed in does not mean they are illegal.... Some people, including political leaders and election candidates, have valid licences but fall outside the submission requirements at this time," he said, adding that some candidates are among those exempted.

He, however, could not provide separate data on exempted categories. Data show that around 2,034 candidates are contesting the election this year.

Meanwhile, police said a total of 5,760 firearms were looted from the police and their establishments, and 1,330 of them have not been recovered yet. Efforts to recover the remaining weapons are ongoing.

"Any weapon that is illegal and remains outside lawful control poses a serious threat," Baharul Alam, Inspector General of Police, said yesterday, adding that illegal weapons also enter the country through various routes.

To counter the threat, he said a near fool-proof security plan has been put in place for the election, with police

and Ansar forces supported by around 100,000 army personnel conducting intensive mobile patrols.

He said the election would be held securely, regardless of the number of weapons at large.

The joint forces are also conducting a special drive to recover weapons. During a briefing on February 5, the army said that they have so far recovered 10,152 firearms and 291,000 rounds of ammunition, and detained 22,282 criminals, handing them over to the police.

Tawohidul Haque, an associate professor at Dhaka University's Institute of Social Welfare and Research, said law enforcers would play a decisive role in ensuring a free and fair election, but the ground situation since the schedule was announced "has not reflected that."

He warned that looted and illegal firearms were creating a sense of fear in society and could affect the polls if not brought under control.

According to a report by the special branch of police, at least 34 incidents of gun violence have taken place since the election schedule declaration, leaving at least 10 people killed.

**SECURITY AT POLLING CENTRES**  
IGP Baharul Alam said that around 24,000 polling centres are marked as high or medium risk, and police would try to cover these locations with body-worn cameras.

Addressing the media at the Central Command and Control Centre yesterday, he said a total of 157,805 police personnel will be involved in election security.

"Of these, 93,391 will be stationed at polling centres, with the remainder serving in mobile and striking units. An additional 29,798 personnel from police stations and other units will provide election-related support, bringing the total deployment to 187,603."

CCTV cameras have been installed at 80-90 percent of polling centres under an Election Commission initiative, while superintendents of police will operate drones where available, depending on "capacity and necessity," said the police chief.

The election duty will include one lakh armed forces, around 37,453 Border Guard Bangladesh officers, and 5.76 lakh Ansar officials.

Police statistics show that 317 incidents of pre-election violence occurred between December 11 and February 9, leaving 603 injured and five dead, said the IGP.

On militancy, Baharul said there is no "severe" fear of attacks at present but noted precautions remain. He added that threats previously aimed at disrupting campaigns or detonating bombs have largely subsided, and police are now "more or less" assured that polling will proceed safely.

## 37% of buildings at fire risk

### Shows fire service 2025 annual report on 10,533 buildings

DIPAN NANDY

Under the fire safety inspection programme in 2025, the Fire Service and Civil Defence inspected 10,533 buildings across the country.

Of these, 622 buildings (5.91%) were identified as highly risky and 3,316 buildings (31.49%) as risky.

In other words, over 37 percent of the inspected buildings were found vulnerable in terms of fire safety. The remaining 6,595 buildings were reported to be at a satisfactory safety level.

According to fire service sources, the highest number of inspections in 2025 was conducted in garment factories, totalling 1,533.

Among them, 88 were classified as highly risky

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



Shahbagh intersection wore an unusual look yesterday, with little traffic congestion and only a handful of public and private vehicles on the roads. Many residents had already left -- or were leaving -- the capital for home to cast their votes in tomorrow's 13th national parliamentary elections.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## SAGAR-RUNI MURDER

# 14 years of delays and despair

EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

An elderly mother, Saleha Monir, had renewed hope of getting justice for the brutal killings of her son, Sagar Sarowar, and daughter-in-law, Meherun Rumi, after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government on August 5, 2024, following a student-led mass movement.

But the 74-year-old is now devastated, as there has been no headway in the double-murder case in the past one and a half years during the tenure of the Prof Muhammad Yunus-led interim government.

The victims' families now believe justice remains a distant prospect.

Since the journalist couple was killed on a February night in 2012, investigators have failed to complete the probe, which the families describe as 14 years of investigative failure.

According to case records, investigators sought 125 extensions over the last 14 years to submit the probe report, but failed each time.

"I had great hope in the interim government and believed something would finally happen in the case. But they could do nothing. Now it feels like no one can do anything except Allah," Saleha told The Daily Star yesterday.



**I had great hope in the interim government and believed something would finally happen in the case. But they could do nothing. Now it feels like no one can do anything except Allah.**

SALEHA MONIR  
Mother of Sagar Sarowar

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## Against odds, 17 women take on Dhaka polls

### From Mirpur to Ashulia, they campaign for space in a male-dominated race

SHARIF M SHAFIQUE and SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK

On the morning of February 9, a large crowd gathered near the Mirpur-1 Eidgah field.

The air was filled with commotion and the festive rhythm of a band party. Rickshaws and cars came to a halt, and pedestrians stopped to watch.

Suddenly, an open-top vehicle emerged from the crowd. A woman stood inside, waving to people lining both sides of the road.

A five-year-old girl standing with her mother on the sidewalk waved back.

The mother, Swapna Akhtar, said their house

#### AT A GLANCE

Total Dhaka candidates: 190  
Women candidates: 17 (around 9%)  
No women candidates in 7 Dhaka seats

#### KEY ISSUES FACED

Muscle power, money  
Cyberbullying, character assassination  
Security concerns  
Weak institutional response



was nearby. Her daughter insisted on coming out after hearing the band. When they arrived, they realised it was an election campaign procession for Sanjida Islam Tulee.

As part of her campaign in the Dhaka-14 constituency, BNP candidate Tulee was touring several roads in the area.

On the final day of campaigning for the 13th National Parliamentary Election, her procession ended in front of the Mirpur Mazar. She later went to the party's election office for meetings before heading home.

Including Tulee, 17 women candidates have been campaigning across 13 of Dhaka's 20 constituencies since December 22, ahead of the February 12 polls.

Many of them have identities beyond politics. Some are engineers or doctors, others are rights activists, lawyers, businesswomen, or cultural workers. Some are backed by political parties, while others are running independently.

Dr Tasnim Jara, a physician and a familiar face on social media, is contesting as an independent candidate in Dhaka-9.

She has been campaigning with a small team of 10-15 people. With nearly 4.4 million followers on Facebook, Jara draws crowds wherever she goes.

At a recent campaign event in front of the South Banasree 10 storey market, residents approached her with local problems and complaints. Children, youth and women asked for selfies.

Jara listened patiently and obliged.

Dilshana Parul, a candidate from the National Citizen Party (NCP), was seen campaigning under the midday sun on dusty roads in Gazirchat, Ashulia.

While her team distributed leaflets in narrow alleys, a group of European Union observers arrived and spoke with her. She sat down for the interview, giving her team time to rest.

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## FEBRUARY 12 ELECTION

# With Tarique in race, all eyes on Dhaka-17

SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK and SHARIF M SHAFIQUE

Kona and Jannat were strolling through the Banani DNCC Market when they suddenly found themselves amid an election campaign procession.

As slogans echoed around them, one asked the other who she planned to vote for.

Both will cast their votes for the first time on February 12. One has recently graduated, while the other is in her final year of study.

"This election is very important for the country," they told The Daily Star. "Those who form the government will carry huge responsibilities. So voters also have a responsibility to choose a capable and responsible candidate."

These two young voters from the Dhaka-17 constituency are still undecided on whom to vote for.

On one hand, they feel sympathy for BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman, who returned to the country after 17 years in exile.

On the other, they feel like Jamaat-e-Islami -- once banned and unable to operate openly under the previous regime -- also deserves a chance.

The Banani-Gulshan area falls under the Dhaka-17 constituency.

Comprising Wards 15, 18, 19, and 20 of Dhaka North City Corporation, and the Gulshan, Banani, and Cantonment police stations, Dhaka-17 consists of both elite neighbourhoods and slum areas.

On one side are the affluent voters of Baridhara, Mahakhali and Banani DOHS, Baridhara Diplomatic zone, and Niketan; on the other are the votes of the slum dwellers in Bhashantek, Korail, and Mohakhali.

Although 12 candidates are contesting the seat,

national attention is firmly on Dhaka-17 because of Tarique Rahman.

Meanwhile, Jamaat candidate SM Khaliduzzaman is also confident about his chances against the BNP chairman.

Taslima Akter, a resident of Korail slum, said, "The Jamaat candidate has been coming here for a long time and has helped us in different ways. Tarique Rahman also came recently. We have to vote for someone, but we don't know if our situation will really change."

Rezaul Karim, 36, a banker from Niketan, observed, "BNP and Jamaat once did politics together. Now they are rivals. That may be why the election tension feels relatively low."

Tarique Rahman called on people to stay united and build a Bangladesh full of hope.

At a rally in Banani on Monday, "If the people could liberate the country in 1971 and oust autocracy through the mass uprising in 2024, they can surely rebuild the nation," he said.

"We have the capability; all that is needed is for everyone to work together."

While Tarique remains busy campaigning nationwide alongside his party candidates, Jamaat candidate Khaliduzzaman is focusing on his own constituency.

"I have tried to stay close to people from the beginning," Khaliduzzaman told The Daily Star. "There are elite societies here, as well as slums. As a physician, I have connections with the elite, and I have also helped slum residents find employment."

He added, "I am in contact with the residents of the Cantonment and DOHS. I will get the support of a large portion of those voters."

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Tarique Rahman  
BNP



SM Khaliduzzaman  
Jamaat

## 'Polls come and go, but will our fate ever change?'

### Marginalised people urge next govt to work for their betterment

ARAFATH SHETU

Ahead of the 13th national election scheduled for February 12, people from marginalised communities across the country have urged the next elected government to work for the betterment of their lives and livelihoods and to ensure a brighter future for their children. People from different walks of life shared their grievances and aspirations with The Daily Star correspondents while making the call.

**Polls come, polls go. Many promises are made to us during elections, but later we are forgotten.**

TARALA GHATUWAL  
A tea worker from Kulaura



Sathi, a vegetable seller at Fakinni Bazar in Dhaka's Tejkunipara, struggles to earn a living while raising two children. "Even the Rohingya refugees are better off than us. The government has given them houses. We don't even have a proper shanty. Every other day, city corporation officials come and demolish my shop and shelter," she said. "I don't want much from the government anymore. Just rehabilitate floating people like us," she added.

Despite being the country's top export-earning industry, the ready-made garment sector continues to pay its vast workforce a minimum wage of Tk 12,500 a month.

Kajoli Begum, a garment worker at SM Sourcing Garments Factory in Gazipur, said, "With the

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A fisherman prepares to head out for work after finishing his lunch on parched, cracked earth in the Baromile area of Rajshahi's Mohanpur upazila. Prolonged dry conditions have dried up canals, wetlands and rivers across the Barind region, leaving once water-filled areas barren and deeply fissured, and severely affecting livelihoods dependent on fishing and agriculture. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

## Trial of Anisul and Salman begins at ICT

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The formal trial of Salman F Rahman, former adviser to the ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, and former law minister Anisul Huq in a crimes against humanity case began yesterday, with the prosecution placing its opening statement before the International Crimes Tribunal-1.

Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam outlined the charges linked to lethal attacks on unarmed protesters during the July-August 2024 uprising and urged the tribunal to ensure justice.

"Through this tribunal, the martyrs seek justice, the wounded await recognition of state crimes, and the nation hopes that truth and justice will prevail in history," Tajul told the tribunal.

The tribunal set February 22 for recording the first prosecution witness in the case.

The prosecution brought five charges of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

## BRAHMANBARIA-2 JP withdraws from race, backs Rumeen

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

The Jatiya Party (JP) has extended its support to independent candidate Rumeen Farhana in the Brahmanbaria-2 constituency for the 13th national parliamentary election. JP central vice-chairman Abdul Hamid Bhasani made the announcement at a joint press conference in Shahbazpur village under Sarail upazila yesterday.

Rumeen and central JP leaders were present at the event.

Hamid said the party's nominated candidate, Ziaul Haque Mridha, had earlier withdrawn from the race due to false cases and threats. Following instructions from JP secretary general Shamim Haider Patwary, party leaders and activists have been asked to work in favour of Rumeen, he added.

Rumeen said the JP had decided to support her electoral symbol, "duck". Asked whether she would join the



party, she said any decision in this regard would be taken only after the election and a victory.

She also alleged that her supporters were facing intimidation and that muscle power and black money were being used in the polls by the candidate of the BNP-led alliance. She urged the administration to take the matter into consideration.

Rumeen Farhana, an expelled BNP leader, is contesting the election as an independent candidate with the "duck" symbol. Her main opponent is BNP-alliance-backed candidate Maulana Junaid Al Habib, who is contesting with the "date palm tree" symbol.



A farmer tends to strawberry plants in a garden in the Hariar area of Rajshahi's Paba upazila. Despite good harvests, farmers report an overall lower yield than last year. Strawberries are being sold directly from Hariar at Tk 400-500 per kg, while retail prices range between Tk 800 and Tk 900 per kg. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

## MOULVIBAZAR-2 (KULaura)

# Empowering women, Sadia's key pledge

MINTU DESHWARA

In the verdant landscape of Moulvibazar-2 (Kulaura), the campaign of Sadia Noshin Tasnim Chowdhury, candidate of the Socialist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist) in the upcoming 13th national parliamentary election, stands apart from the established norm.

Sadia travels through tea gardens and busy local markets on a scooter or a CNG-run auto-rickshaw, seeking votes for her electoral symbol, "scissors".

She is the only female candidate among the four constituencies in Moulvibazar and one of only two young female aspirants across the 19 seats in Sylhet division.

Her campaign is funded by her own earnings from private tuition and small contributions from ordinary citizens,



including donations collected at street gatherings.

Empowering local women is a central theme of her manifesto. "Women make

up half of the country's population. Development is impossible if they are left behind," she said.

Her campaign speeches reflect the daily struggles of Kulaura, including generations-long deprivation of land rights for tea garden workers and indigenous Khasi and Garo communities, weak health infrastructure, poor connectivity, and mismanagement of rail communication.

Sadia's political consciousness took shape during her student years at Murarichand College in Sylhet, where she joined the Socialist Student Front in 2011 and later rose to become a key organiser.

Born and raised in Kulaura, Sadia is the daughter of the late Saad Lutfur Razzak Chowdhury, a primary school teacher.

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## Security beefed up in Cox's Bazar, Rohingya camps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Security has been strengthened in and around Rohingya camps as well as across the wider Cox's Bazar region ahead of the upcoming 13th national election, said Lieutenant Colonel Tanveer Ahmed of the Army's Ramu 10 Infantry Division.

Speaking at a briefing at Cox's Bazar yesterday, he said additional security measures have been taken inside and around the camps to ensure a peaceful election.

Tanveer said the army, along with the Armed Police Battalion (APBN) and other law enforcement agencies, is maintaining close surveillance in the Rohingya camps. He added that strict vigilance would be ensured so that Rohingyas cannot disrupt the election process in any way.

In a written statement, Lieutenant Colonel Sutapa Jaman said based on intelligence, a joint search operation was carried out on February 8 in the Balukhali area of Ukhya upazila. The operation was conducted by a special army task force in coordination with police and the upazila administration.

## 5,067 inmates cast votes in historic first

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 5,067 inmates exercised their voting rights in the 13th national parliamentary election through postal ballots, marking the first time in Bangladesh's history that prisoners were allowed to vote while in custody.

The voting process formally concluded on Monday, prison officials said.

Of nearly 86,000 inmates in 75 prisons nationwide, 5,990 registered to vote by post. Some 380 applications were rejected due to errors, leaving 5,610 eligible voters. Eventually, 5,067 cast their ballots, while 543 did not vote.

Among those registered were 60 high-profile detainees – 39 political leaders, 11 former secretaries, five police officers, and one university teacher. Of them, 56 voted, officials confirmed.

Assistant Inspector General (Development and Media) of the Prison Directorate, Md Jannat-ul-Farhad, told The Daily Star that ballot envelopes from different prisons had been sent to the returning officers of the respective districts.

## With Tarique in race, all eyes on Dhaka-17 14 years of delays and despair

FROM PAGE 3

Confident about victory, he said, "I am contesting against a giant candidate, but voters now judge individuals by their work and qualities. The new generation does not want the 'son of a king to become a king'."

Abdus Salam, adviser to Tarique Rahman and chief coordinator of the BNP's election management committee for Dhaka-17, said voters see Tarique as the solution to their problems and the future prime minister.

He said Tarique has certain plans for the

development of the slum dwellers and low-income people of Dhaka-17.

"Improved housing, schools, playgrounds, and free medical treatment for the elderly and children will be arranged for the slum residents."

He added that promises have been made to implement modern waste management, keep Gulshan Lake clean, eradicate mosquitoes, and restore law and order by eliminating extortion and terrorism.

"To maintain the democratic process of the

country and recover the destroyed economy and education system, we believe voters will choose the 'Sheaf of Paddy'," said Salam.

Returning to the political reality after years in exile, the Dhaka-17 seat has become a key test of public acceptance for Tarique.

At the same time, Jamaat views the contest as a crucial opportunity to re-establish its standing in elite areas such as Gulshan and Banani.

Dhaka-17 has a total of 333,777 voters – 174,709 male, 159,060 female and

eight hijra.

Others in the Dhaka-17 race include Kamrul Hasan Nasim (Bangladesh Jatiya Party), Manjur Humayun (Insaniyat Biplob Bangladesh), Tapu Raihan (Jatiya Party-JP), Atiq Ahmed (Jatiya Party), Mohammad Ullah (Islami Andolan Bangladesh), Shamim Ahmed (Bangladesh Congress), Muhammad Rashidul Haque (Bangladesh Labour Party), SM Abul Kalam Azad (Bangladesh Nationalist Front), and independent candidates Anisuzzaman Khokon and Kazi Enayet Ullah.

FROM PAGE 3

Saleha is now suffering from multiple health complications, and the prolonged wait for justice has taken a severe mental toll on her.

"The PBI officials came at the beginning. From the way they spoke, it felt like the case might not move in a positive direction. Since then, there has been no follow-up, no news at all," she said.

Runi's brother, Nowsher Alam Roman, who filed the double-murder case with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station on February 12, 2012, said, "We had already given up hope long ago. But after August 5 [2024], we began to hold

on to a little hope in this government. At the very least, we believed we might finally learn the truth about what really happened. But nothing happened, not even the bare minimum."

Sagar was a news editor at Maasranga TV, while Runi was a senior reporter at ATN Bangla. Both were killed in the early hours of February 11, 2012, at their rented flat in the capital's West Rajabazar. Their only child, Mahir Sarowar Megh, who was five at the time, was inside the apartment.

After the killings, eight suspects – Kamrul Islam alias Arun, Abu Sayeed, Rafiqul Islam, Bakul Miah, Masum Mintu, Palash

Rudra Paul, Anamul Haque alias Humayun Kabir, and Tanveer Rahman Khan – were arrested.

Of them, Tanveer and Mintu are now on bail, while Palash went into hiding after being released on bail. The remaining five are behind bars.

After the case was filed, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station was initially assigned to investigate it. The probe was handed over to the Detective Branch of police on February 16, 2012, which investigated the case until April 18 that year.

The case was later transferred to the Rapid Action Battalion, which conducted the investigation

until November 3, 2024.

On November 4, 2024, the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) took over the probe following a High Court order.

Contacted for comment, Investigation Officer Azizul Haque, an additional superintendent of police at the PBI, declined to speak about the progress of the probe.

However, a PBI official said, "We have spoken to more than 80 people regarding the case. Nothing new has been found."

February 9 was the deadline for submitting the probe report. As it was not submitted on that date, the court set April 1 as the new deadline.

### Request for Proposal (RFP)

International Labour Organization (ILO) Dhaka is inviting proposals from interested and Bonafide firms to conduct independent midterm evaluation of Labour Administration and Working conditions (LAWC) cluster. The Terms of Reference (TOR) and RFP documents can be downloaded from the United Nations Global Market Place (UNGM) at <https://www.ungm.org/Public/Notice/290641>. The deadline for submission of proposal is Monday, February 23, 2026, at 04:30 PM (BST time).

### NOTICE

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH  
HIGH COURT DIVISION  
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)  
COMPANY MATTER NO.2296 OF 2025

IN THE MATTER OF: Montex Fabrics Limited  
and another

..... the Petitioners

-Versus-

The Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and others

..... Respondents

Notice is hereby given that an application under section 228 read with 229 of the Companies Act, 1994 ("the Act") for confirmation of the amalgamation of Montex Fabrics Limited with Mondol Fabrics Limited. That a Bench of Hon'ble High Court Division of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of Bangladesh comprising of Her Lordship Ms. Justice Kazi Zinat Hoque was pleased to admit the application upon hearing of the petitioner on 02.02.2026. Any person interested in the said application may appear on the date fixed for hearing either himself or through his Advocate. A copy of the said application may be obtained from the undernamed.

Thanking You,  
Mohammad Whaiduzzaman  
Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

## Trial of Anisul and Salman begins at ICT



FROM PAGE 3

crimes against humanity against Salman and Anisul, accusing them of ordering, abetting, and conspiring in lethal crackdowns on protesters during the uprising.

The prosecution said the alleged acts amount to murder, complicity, and conspiracy, punishable under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973.

Meanwhile, lawyer Palash Chandra Roy, representing both Salman

and Anisul, yesterday dismissed claims circulating on social media that his clients had voted in the upcoming national election while in jail custody.

"There are clear procedures for voting from jail, including advance registration. My clients were not registered. So, there is no question of them voting from jail," Palash told reporters at the ICT premises, adding that the viral claims had created unnecessary confusion.

## FACULTY SEARCH: SUMMER 2026

NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY  
Center of Excellence in Higher Education  
The First Private University in Bangladesh

### FACULTY POSITION

Applications are invited for faculty member positions in the following areas:

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- Accounting (PhD only)
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- AI in Business (PhD only)
- Business Intelligence (PhD only)
- Management Information System (PhD only)
- Supply Chain Management (PhD only)
- Business Statistics (PhD only)
- Operations Management (PhD only)
- Engineering Management (PhD only)
- Business Math (PhD only)
- International Business (PhD only)

#### SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (SHSS)

- Law (PhD only)
- English (Master's/PhD)
- History (Bangladesh History and World Civilization) (PhD only)
- Philosophy (PhD only)

#### SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING & PHYSICAL SCIENCES (SEPS)

- Civil Engineering/Civil and Environmental Engineering (Structure/Transportation)
- Computer Science and Engineering (Theoretical Computer Science, Software and Systems)
- Electrical and Electronic Engineering (PhD only)
- Biomedical Engineering (PhD only)
- Mathematics/Computational Mathematics/Computational Science
- Statistics/Applied Statistics/Computational Statistics (PhD only)
- Financial Mathematics/Applied Mathematics
- Actuarial Mathematics
- Mathematics for Data Science and Machine Learning
- HPC for Applied Mathematics with Data Science

#### SCHOOL OF HEALTH & LIFE SCIENCES (SHLS)

- Epidemiology (PhD)
- Biostatistics (PhD)
- Microbiology (PhD only)

Required Qualifications: Candidates will be considered eligible if they have obtained their degrees from globally reputed universities. A Master's degree is required for Lecturer and Senior Lecturer positions, while a Ph.D. or higher qualification is required for Assistant Professor and above positions. Please note that only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.

Benefits: NSU offers a comprehensive benefits package that includes 50% house rent allowance based on the basic salary, medical allowance, festival bonuses, leave encashment, transport allowance, gratuity, provident fund, and insurance coverage. Salary packages are negotiable for outstanding candidates.

Application Process: Interested applicants are requested to visit the NSU website and submit their applications by the deadline of March 01, 2026, through the following link for faculty positions in the relevant academic field or area. Link: <https://jobs.northsouth.edu/>

Vice-Chancellor  
North South University  
Bashundhara, Dhaka-1229  
[www.northsouth.edu](http://www.northsouth.edu)

## Macron warns of renewed rift with US

Urges EU to use 'Greenland moment' to push reforms

REUTERS, Paris

Europe should brace for more moments of US hostility, French President Emmanuel Macron has warned, and should treat what he called the "Greenland moment" as a wake up call to push through long delayed reforms to strengthen the bloc's global power.

In an interview with several European newspapers, the French leader said the European Union should not mistake a lull in tensions with Washington for a lasting shift despite a pause in US threats over Greenland, trade and technology.

Macron urged EU leaders to use a summit in a Belgian castle this week to inject fresh energy into economic reforms to bolster the bloc's competitiveness and strengthen its ability to stand up to China and the United States on the world



Mourners react during the funeral of Palestinians killed in an Israeli strike, at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City yesterday. Inset, friends and relatives carry the body of one of the victims.

PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

## Nuke talks gauged 'seriousness' of US

Says Iran, warns of 'destructive' influence on diplomacy ahead of Netanyahu's Washington trip

AGENCIES

Nuclear talks with the United States allowed Tehran to gauge Washington's seriousness and showed enough consensus to continue on the diplomatic track, Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

US and Iranian diplomats held talks through Omani mediators in Oman last week in an effort to revive diplomacy, after US President Donald Trump positioned a naval flotilla in the region, raising fears of new military action.

"The Muscat meeting was not a long meeting. In our view, it was to gauge the seriousness of the other side and how to continue this path," Esmail Baghaei said.

"After the talks, we felt there was understanding and consensus to continue the diplomatic process."

The spokesperson said that a trip to Oman yesterday by Ali Larjani, an advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader, was pre-planned to follow up on regional consultations, and

Iran security chief meets Oman ruler after US talks

Uranium dilution hinges on sanctions relief: Tehran

Iran steps up its crackdown after recent protests

that Larjani would next travel to Qatar, reports Reuters.

Larjani and Sultan Haitham bin Tariq "discussed the latest developments in the Iranian-American negotiations", the official Oman News Agency said.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Iran's Secretary of National Security Council, Ali Larjani, meets with Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi in Muscat yesterday.

Regarding the Israeli Prime Minister's expected trip to Washington today, Baghaei said the US "must act independently of foreign pressures, especially Israeli pressures that ignore the interests of the region and even the US."

"The Zionist regime has repeatedly, as a saboteur, shown that it opposes any diplomatic process in our region that leads to peace."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will meet President

Donald Trump in Washington today, seeking to press him to adopt a tougher line on Iran's ballistic missile programme in the next round of talks.

Iran could agree to dilute its most highly enriched uranium in

exchange for all financial sanctions being lifted, its atomic chief said on Monday, one of the most direct indications so far of its position at talks with Washington.

Meanwhile, India's Adani Enterprises said yesterday it was cooperating with a US probe into potential sanctions violations, after a media report alleged that the company had imported Iranian oil products.

Iran stepped up its crackdown on Monday after recent protests, making more arrests, reports AFP.

## Israeli strikes in Lebanon kill 4

REUTERS, Beirut

Israeli forces killed four people, including a child, in southern Lebanon on Monday evening, Lebanon's National News Agency reported, citing the health ministry, in two separate strikes that targeted members of the Shia Muslim armed group Hezbollah.

In a third incident, Israeli forces seized an official from Jama'a Islamiya, a Lebanese Sunni Islamist group, during a raid, according to the group and Hezbollah. The Israeli military described him as a "senior terrorist" and said he was transferred to Israel for questioning.

Israel has carried out regular strikes in Lebanon since its 2024 war with Hezbollah, killing around 400 people since a ceasefire, according to a toll from Lebanese security sources.

Three of the fatalities, including a three-year-old child were killed in an Israeli airstrike in the village of Yanouh, NNA reported, citing the health ministry.

The Israeli military said it had killed a Hezbollah member in a strike in the area of Yanouh, identifying him as the head of Hezbollah's artillery in the area, and saying he carried out numerous attacks on Israel during the war.

## TI sees 'worrying decline' in democracies

Says US slid to lowest-ever score on its 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index

AFP, Berlin

Anti-graft watchdog Transparency International (TI) yesterday warned of worsening corruption in democracies worldwide and said the United States had slid to the lowest-ever score on its 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Berlin-based TI also said the average global score had hit its worst level in more than a decade.

US President Donald Trump, since returning to the White House early last year, has upended domestic and foreign politics while ramping up pressure on institutions ranging from universities to the Federal Reserve.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell is currently under investigation by Trump's Department of Justice after resisting pressure from the president to reduce interest rates.

TI raised concerns over "actions targeting independent voices and undermining judicial independence" in the US.

"The temporary freeze and weakening of enforcement of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act signal tolerance for corrupt business practices," the watchdog said. The Trump administration's gutting of overseas aid has also "weakened global anti-corruption efforts", it said.

## Trump opposes Israeli plan to annex West Bank

AGENCIES

A White House official on Monday reiterated US President Donald Trump's opposition toward Israel annexing the West Bank.

"A stable West Bank keeps Israel secure and is in line with this administration's goal to achieve peace in the region," the official said.

International outrage grew yesterday at Israeli plans to tighten the country's grip over the occupied

West Bank, with the United Nations chief saying he was "gravely concerned".

Earlier, Saudi Arabia and seven other Muslim-majority countries condemned the new Israeli measures, which pave the way for more settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Announced on Sunday by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Defence Minister Israel Katz after being approved by the security cabinet, they include allowing Jewish Israelis to buy West Bank land directly, and extending greater Israeli control over areas where the Palestinian Authority exercises power.

It was unclear when the new rules would take effect but they do not require further approval, reports AFP.

Meanwhile, Israeli attacks in central Gaza killed three Palestinians yesterday. A source at Al-Qsa Hospital has told Al Jazeera that two people have been killed by Israeli bombing on Salah ud-Din Street in central Gaza.

A Palestinian woman has been killed by Israeli forces in al-Masdar village in central Gaza. The sixth batch of returnees, comprising 40 people, arrived in the Gaza Strip via Rafah crossing.



## CONGRESSIONAL HEARING Epstein accomplice seeks clemency from Trump

AFP, Washington

Convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein's accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell refused Monday to answer questions from US lawmakers but her attorney said she was prepared to speak if granted clemency by US President Donald Trump.

Maxwell, 64, who is serving a 20-year prison sentence for sex trafficking, was subpoenaed by the House Oversight Committee to discuss her relations with Epstein.

Rather than answer the committee's questions, however, the former British socialite invoked her Fifth Amendment right to not incriminate herself.

A recording of the deposition released by the committee showed Maxwell speaking via video link, her eyes cast down at the table she was seated at in a Texas prison.

She was asked about her and Epstein's co-conspirators, whether they surrounded themselves with the rich and famous in order to "curry favor" and avoid scrutiny, and whether Trump ever engaged "in sexual activity with an individual introduced to him by you or Jeffrey Epstein."

Wearing a drab, beige uniform, Maxwell repeated the phrase "I invoke my Fifth Amendment right to silence" until the committee gave up and called off their questioning early.

Maxwell's attorney, David Markus, said she would be prepared to speak publicly if granted clemency by Trump.

"If this Committee and the American public truly want to hear the unfiltered truth about what happened, there is a straightforward path," Markus said in a statement.



A Ukrainian service member from the 48th Separate Artillery Brigade fires a 2S22 Bohdana self-propelled howitzer toward Russian positions near the front line in Ukraine's Kharkiv region on Monday. A Russian airstrike killed an 11-year-old girl and her mother and wounded 14 other people in the Ukrainian-controlled part of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Japan's PM Takaichi must show 'actions' for dialogue

Says China

AFP, Beijing

China insisted yesterday that Tokyo must first show "concrete actions" after Japan's newly elected Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said she was "open to various dialogues" with Beijing, effectively rejecting her overtures.

Those actions included a retraction of Takaichi's November comments that Tokyo could intervene militarily in any Chinese attack on self-ruled island Taiwan, which have fuelled a months-long diplomatic stand-off with Beijing.

A day after winning a landslide election, Takaichi told reporters Japan was "open to various dialogues with China".

Asked about her comments yesterday, China's foreign ministry said "genuine dialogue should be built on respect for one another".

## The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

### Why is central bank autonomy elusive?

Interim government's decision to stall it is disheartening

The fragility of our banking sector was one of the most damning legacies of the Awami League government. When the interim government took office and promised reforms, many hoped for sweeping changes in the banking sector, starting with the central bank's full autonomy. But 18 months later, like Governor Ahsan H Mansur himself, we are left disappointed as the finance ministry has opted to pass this agenda on to the next government.

The discussion on BB's full autonomy did not arise in a vacuum. Both the International Monetary Fund and economists have been pushing for the central bank's independence. In fact, many argue that the large-scale irregularities and looting that occurred during the AL era could have been mitigated had BB had the authority to take necessary policy decisions without partisan influence.

In response to these calls, the BB governor sent the draft of the Bangladesh Bank Ordinance, 2025, to the finance ministry in October last year, proposing extensive reforms. These included a decrease in the number of government-appointed directors on BB's board, an increase in the number of independent experts, and elevating the rank of the governor to that of a full-cabinet minister. Besides, the governor would be selected through a search committee and appointed by the president upon the prime minister's recommendation and the parliament's approval. Removal of the governor and deputies would also require parliament's approval. The proposed changes aimed to reduce the finance ministry's influence over the central bank. This is important because when political clearance is required to decide on interest rate and exchange rate adjustments, "credibility erodes and policy effectiveness diminishes," argued economist Fahmida Khatun in an article published last year in this daily.

Unfortunately, the draft ordinance sat with the finance ministry for almost four months, and on Sunday (February 8), the finance adviser issued a letter stalling the ordinance's approval. He argued that such "major amendments" to the Banking Act, 1972, during the interim tenure would not be "realistic." It is noteworthy that the interim administration had not shied away from approving several major infrastructure projects with long-term implications for the country—decisions that should be taken by an elected parliament.

Sadly, the Bangladesh Bank Ordinance, 2025, is not the only draft law to face stalling. Out of the seven draft laws sent to the finance ministry to transform the banking sector, only two have been approved so far. Even the proposed amendments to the Banking Companies Act, 1991, which could have dismantled the sector's opaque corporate structure, have not been implemented yet. It is disappointing that the interim government, which is apparently free from the biases of a political government, could not do more for our ailing banking sector by implementing the proposed reforms. With a few days left before a new government comes to power, we hope that it will take up the challenge of providing BB with its long-overdue independence by passing the ordinance.

### Act decisively against disinformation

EC, political parties must play their role in curbing false content

We are alarmed by the surge of foreign and domestic disinformation campaigns surrounding the election, which threatens to undermine the integrity of the vote. Online platforms are reportedly being used in a coordinated way to mislead voters, inflame communal tensions, and influence political choices. International researchers and fact-checkers have documented a vast volume of disinformation originating largely from India. At the same time, domestic political actors have flooded social media platforms with false statements, manipulated visuals, AI-generated content, and conspiracy narratives aimed at discrediting rival candidates and influencing voters.

Hundreds of thousands of posts, amplified by Hindu nationalist networks abroad, have promoted the so-called "Hindu genocide" narrative, despite official data showing that only a fraction of incidents involving minorities were sectarian. Unlabelled AI-generated videos and images are being widely used to spread fabricated claims and staged testimonies. Monitoring of Facebook activity by *The Daily Star* in the weeks before the polls shows that disinformation has become a deliberate campaign tool across party lines. Pro-Jamaat pages dominate both the volume and reach of misleading content, while BNP-aligned actors mainly targeted Jamaat with defamatory claims questioning its leaders' moral and religious credentials. Awami League-aligned actors focused on the interim government, student coordinators, and Jamaat, exaggerating minority-related incidents and pushing narratives of foreign involvement. Even fake "haha" reactions are widespread on social media, meant to attack political opponents.

Undecided voters are mostly the target of this disinformation, which exploits religion and nationalist sentiment to provoke fear or outrage. Fake quotes, forged documents, and AI-generated visuals portray opponents as criminals or morally corrupt, while real events are often twisted to support partisan stories. In a country where smartphone use is widespread but digital literacy is limited, many voters cannot easily verify such content, allowing disinformation to distort democratic choice.

The Election Commission's (EC) role in this regard is deeply disappointing. While the EC has acknowledged the threat and says it is working with social media platforms to monitor harmful content, the evidence so far suggests these efforts are falling far short of what is needed.

The EC must enforce the electoral code of conduct without any exception, including penalties for parties and candidates found to be orchestrating or benefiting from disinformation campaigns. Greater transparency about monitoring mechanisms and enforcement outcomes is essential to restore public confidence. Political parties, meanwhile, must be held accountable for the conduct of their affiliated pages and supporters. This election carries enormous significance for our democratic future, and ensuring that voters can make informed choices is essential for a credible vote.

# An election of narratives and least scrutiny



Kamal Ahmed is consulting editor at *The Daily Star*. He led the Media Reform Commission under the interim government. His X handle is @ahmedkhal

KAMAL AHMED

Now that campaigning for the February 12 national election has officially ended and the manifestos of all major parties are before the nation, this is the moment—before we head to the polls—to pause and reflect on whether the plans and pledges we have heard have been adequately scrutinised. By global standards, this election so far appears to have relied almost entirely on competing "narratives" crafted and sold by parties and their leaders. Campaign strategists have been largely successful in pushing their respective narratives and counter-narratives, leaving us—the voters—with little choice but to judge personalities and rhetoric rather than policies and substance.

In a democracy, elections are meant to be the ultimate test of politicians, rooted in public accountability. Town hall meetings and meaningful engagement with the media—including interviews and press conferences with question-and-answer sessions—are central to that process. Unfortunately, none of the party leaders offered the opportunity to be examined by their constituents or by journalists acting on constituents' behalf.

The late unveiling of manifestos by all major parties—whether by choice or due to poor planning—meant that the campaign largely devolved into a contest of personalities rather than a comparison of policies. This was further compounded by negative campaigning marked by name-calling and demeaning labels, more reminiscent of sledging than serious political debate. Had there been town hall Q&A sessions, citizens could have asked probing questions: who is financing costly helicopter rides between rallies when one party accuses another of extortion? Or, why is a political alliance once deemed justifiable now being used as grounds for ostracism based on past allegiance? There could be myriad other questions about both politicians and their positions that remain unanswered—not because constituents failed to ask them—but because candidates and party leaders failed to create sufficient space for those questions to be raised,

tested, and answered in the first place.

Tailored election messages are undoubtedly important, but they are often vague, making the accompanying pledges difficult to assess. While it is true that the two leading contenders—the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami—published policy papers ahead of their manifestos, there was little substantive public discussion of those documents. As a result, there was no real pressure to



'Unfortunately, none of the party leaders offered the opportunity to be examined by their constituents or by journalists acting on constituents' behalf.'

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

address criticisms or incorporate new ideas into more realistic, measurable action plans. Unsurprisingly, many experts now view these manifestos as laden with over-ambitious and hollow promises.

These concerns are amplified by the current global economic climate. US President Donald Trump's weaponisation of tariffs and shifting geopolitical dynamics across Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia have made export growth more difficult, imports more uncertain and expensive, and the prospects of attracting investment or aid increasingly bleak. Economists have rightly pointed out that many of the political pledges or

the Charter, citing its note of dissent on certain provisions, despite BNP leader Tarique Rahman's call for a "yes" vote. These accusations underscore the need for deeper probing of leaders across both camps.

A particularly disturbing late development in the campaign was the vague and unexplained warnings from top leaders of multiple parties about "conspiracies" to steal the election, without naming any alleged conspirators. These claims may simply be rhetorical attempts to undermine opponents, but they have nonetheless generated fears of potential violence. Such fear risks discouraging voter turnout, which would be the

Bangladesh's democratic experiment since the end of military rule in 1990. Before electing our representatives in this post-uprising moment, the public deserves to know whether future leaders are willing to respect opposition voices and, when necessary, shoulder that responsibility themselves.

Unfortunately, in the absence of meaningful media scrutiny and critical public engagement, voters are being asked to place their trust in carefully engineered narratives. This election is likely going to be one where politicians have faced the least scrutiny. There is no real way to test them before casting our ballots—and that, ultimately, is the most troubling feature of this election.

## The electoral process has held so far. Can it withstand the final test?



Sayeeful Islam is managing director of SSL, an IT company, former president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI), and former head of the think tank G9. He can be reached at sayeeful@gmail.com

SAYEEFUL ISLAM

Bangladesh's long-awaited 13th parliamentary election is set to be held on Thursday. After the interim government took office in August 2024, it was unclear what an election leading to a real transfer of power would actually look like—whether it would happen at all, how credible it would be, and whether the process could hold together. Now, the atmosphere feels different. Not celebratory, not dramatic, but calmer, steadier, and more grounded than many expected.

What this election has not yet told us is, obviously, who will win, even though we all might have our predictions. What it has shown quite clearly, though, is that the process itself has held so far.

The mechanics have worked reasonably well. Nomination papers were duly filed, candidates were scrutinised, appeals were heard, and decisions—whether popular or not—were largely made within accepted legal frameworks. Election logistics also appear to be under control. Most importantly, the armed forces and security agencies have stood firmly behind the Election Commission to ensure that the vote goes ahead without disruption on February 12. In a country where elections have often unravelled long before election day, this matters.

The presence of foreign observers and a broadly positive diplomatic assessment helped reinforce confidence. After months of doubt and anxiety, the

simple fact that Bangladesh is heading into a nationally competitive election at all is something worth acknowledging.

Party campaigning, too, felt different this time. For once, party manifestos have actually been discussed. Not just announced, but read, compared, and criticised. The conversation has moved—however unevenly—towards

**There's plenty of positioning, tactical noise, and last-minute manoeuvring, of course, but very little sense of a single, defining national battle. Instead of a clean two-party clash, outcomes are likely to be decided seat-by-seat based on local candidates, ground organisation, and credibility within constituencies. Youth politics fits into this pattern as well.**

inflation, jobs, governance, and institutional reform. There has been less reliance on symbolism and far less negative emotional mobilisation than in past elections. Voters seem more interested in what parties claim they plan to do than in what they represent historically.

Negative campaigning hasn't landed the way it once did. Attempts to brand rival parties and candidates with various labels do not appear to have shifted sentiment in any meaningful way. Economic stress and everyday frustrations seem to have crowded out the appetite for character attacks. Fear, as a political tool, has been noticeably

weaker. Overall, the contest feels less like a knockout fight and more like shadow-boxing.

There's plenty of positioning, tactical noise, and last-minute manoeuvring, of course, but very little sense of a single, defining national battle. Instead of a clean two-party clash, outcomes are likely to be decided seat-by-seat based on local candidates, ground organisation, and credibility within constituencies. Youth politics fits into this pattern as well.

Young voters make up a very large share of the electorate, many of them voting for the first time. Internet personalities and online activists played a decisive role during the mass uprising that brought down the Hasina regime—mobilising young people, sustaining

momentum, and keeping pressure alive. But that influence has not translated easily into electoral power. The same voices have struggled to shape a unifying election narrative or meaningfully direct voting behaviour. The lesson is a familiar one. Social media is powerful at disruption, but elections still reward structure, local networks, and trust built on the ground.

Then there is the Awami League and the unspoken question of its supporters. Historically, the party commanded a large share of votes. Barred from participating and unable to articulate a coherent alternative strategy, the party has been totally absent in any

form from the campaign. Sheikh Hasina's calls to reject the election have circulated, but they have not visibly unified the rank and file. Instead of coordinated boycott or resistance, what we see is fragmentation. Some Awami League supporters appear inclined to sit this election out altogether. Others are quietly drifting towards alternative candidates at the local level. Many seem disengaged, uncertain, or simply waiting. Fear may explain part of this silence, but it does not explain all of it.

Awami League's core ideological anchors—liberation identity and secularism—no longer function in the way they once did. Either those ideas have been rejected, or they are simply no longer decisive. This helps explain the broader realignment underway. Politics is becoming less about moral ownership of the past and more about competence, delivery, and future trajectory.

Voters, especially younger ones, are increasingly post-ideological. They are sceptical of the past political framework; they appear more realistic, mostly concerned about their transactional future, and willing to switch loyalties or disengage altogether. These patterns show that meeting the country's needs—a credible process, issue-based scrutiny, limited impact of old attack narratives, restrained influence of social media, and constituency-driven and, above all, development-focused outcomes—is more significant than which party actually wins the election.

National identity does not change overnight. It evolves through repetition. Sustaining these electoral standards will eventually redefine Bangladesh's political identity, proving that the people have learned to reclaim their power through the vote. And that, shall we hope, will be the most important and enduring change of all.

BANGLADESH IN CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX 2025

Fall of kleptocracy, or a temporary setback?



Dr Iftekharuzzaman is executive director at Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).

IFTEKHARUZZAMAN

On February 10, the Transparency International (TI) released the annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2025. Bangladesh has scored 24 out of 100, the 13th lowest in the world, one step lower, counted from the bottom, compared to 2024. This score is only one point higher than what it was in 2024, and the ranking from the top is 150th, one rung higher. The result shows a relatively positive perception of the successful July uprising that defeated kleptocracy, but a negative assessment of the prospect of "dekleptification" due to reform setbacks, sustained corrupt practices, and deficits in transparent and accountable governance during the period after August 5, 2024.

Bangladesh's score is two points lower than its own overall average during 2012-2025. It is five points less than the average for 59 authoritarian regimes of the world, six points lower than the average for 29 countries with Closed Civic Space (30), and eight points lower than the lowest-scoring region of Sub-Saharan Africa (32). In the newest CPI, Bangladesh remains the second lowest in South Asia, better than only Afghanistan. Bangladesh is also globally in the lowest quintile within the list of 182 countries, among 122 that scored below 50, and among 96 that scored below the global average of 42. Accordingly, Bangladesh is in the company of those having a "very serious corruption problem."

To be clear, corruption remains a global menace, and, as on previous occasions, no country has scored full marks. Over 67 percent of countries (or 122) scored below 50 percent in 2025, and 96 countries, or nearly 54 percent, scored below the global average. This means that, like Bangladesh, over 80 percent of the world's population live with a "very serious corruption problem." Overall, global scores have declined compared to 2024. The scores of 68 (37 percent) countries have declined, while 64 countries (35 percent)

have retained their previous score. Only 48 countries (26 percent) have achieved an improved score. For a longer-term analysis, only 21 countries, or 11.53 percent, have "significantly" improved their standing in the CPI since 2012, and 111 countries (or 61 percent) have remained stagnant. Bangladesh is among the 50 countries whose standing has significantly worsened since 2012.

Among Bangladesh's South Asian neighbours, Bhutan continues to be the best performer, scoring 71 and ranking at the 18th position from the top. In the rest of the region, scores have remained well below the global average: India and Maldives both scored 39, Sri Lanka scored 35, Nepal scored 34, Pakistan scored 28, and Afghanistan scored 17. This year's worst performers are South Sudan and Somalia, who share the bottom rung with a score of nine, followed by Venezuela scoring 10, and Eritrea, Libya, and Yemen each scoring 11. At the other end, the list is topped by Denmark (with a score of 89), followed by Finland, New Zealand, and Norway.

The key global message of CPI 2025 is that corruption is worsening worldwide, even in countries claiming to be democracies, due to deteriorating standards of compliance and enforcement. This is also accompanied by a pattern of increased restriction on media and civic space, stronger barriers against openness in public interest decisions, and lack of transparency and accountability. Globally, public frustration is heightened due to corrupt leadership, inequality, and failing public services, while people, especially the youth, are taking to the streets against these evils.

However, CPI 2025 also shows that corruption is not inevitable. Many countries have proved that progress is possible if political leaders and governments act with integrity and take action to tackle corruption beyond rhetoric, implement

robust institutional and political reforms for transparent and accountable governance, effectively prosecute the corrupt (especially those engaged in political, governmental, and corporate corruption), end attacks on media and civic space, and dismantle the secrecy structures and networks that enable illicit flows of corrupt and swindled money within and across borders.

Looking at Bangladesh's performance

This is no unique experience, though. Many countries that previously scored similarly to or even lower than Bangladesh (examples include Nepal, Laos, Vietnam, Timor-Leste, Ukraine, and Angola) have successfully managed to improve their CPI standing thanks to sustained efforts to push comprehensive and strategic institutional reforms and carry out robust digitalisation of public services in tandem with effective prosecution of

was no reform implementation plan, no risk analysis, nor any risk mitigation strategy. The foundation for state reform that has been created through various ordinances has been rendered fragile due to "ad hocism," political and bureaucratic resistance, and a pick-and-choose approach. Almost nothing has been done to reform the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), leaving the aspirations for its independence, accountability, and effectiveness only a pipe dream. The government's failure to walk the talk of transparent, accountable, and conflict-of-interest-free governance has been clear. Inaction and even resistance from the ACC, in collusion with the government bureaucracy, to strategic reform recommendations have largely sabotaged reform prospects. All these against the backdrop of widespread extortionist capture of politico-governance spaces across the country have unfolded an "our turn" syndrome that presents ominous indications of the resistance capacity in the kleptocratic ecosystem.

It will be for the upcoming power-holders to prove that what they have been preaching in their election manifesto and campaigns will be practiced. To do so, they may find some magic bullets in the whole set of recommendations for a corruption-free ACC with a specific focus on its independence, accountability, and effectiveness. Proposals for the constitutional criminalisation of abuse of power, National Anti-Corruption Strategy, Beneficial Ownership Transparency and Public Register, conflict of interest management, Common Reporting Standard, and transparency in political and electoral finance must be components of a delivery plan. These should be in sync with examples of concrete success in holding corruption to account, especially at the highest levels.

No less important is the depoliticisation of all professions and state institutions in order to ensure professional integrity and institutional effectiveness, especially at the judiciary, bureaucracy, law enforcement, and intelligence agencies. No country has been able to control corruption without ensuring media freedom and an open civic space. Above all, Bangladesh needs leadership that will transform the culture and practice of treating political and governmental positions as licenses to abuse power for private gains.



FILE VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

more closely, a score of one point higher compared to the previous CPI represents a recognition of the power of the July uprising that caused the collapse of kleptocracy and created aspirations of "dekleptification." However, the failure to carry forward and build the foundation for transformation has also been evident. Post-uprising Bangladesh has witnessed sustained corrupt practices in political and governance spaces nationally and locally. The failure of the interim administration to set examples of governmental transparency, integrity, and accountability, as well as setbacks in the reform process, also denied us a better overall score.

high-level corruption, especially political, governmental, and corporate. On the other hand, many countries that had around the same CPI score as Bangladesh (or even higher), such as Myanmar, Thailand, Mexico, or Mozambique, have seen worsened scores over the last decade due to democratic backsliding, institutional decay, enforcement deficits, structural erosion of checks and balances, and lack of strategic approaches against corruption.

In the same manner, Bangladesh's interim government has failed to adopt a comprehensive and strategic approach in determining the reform agenda in general and anti corruption in particular. There

An education law – does it matter?



Prof Dr Manzoor Ahmed is the convener of the Consultation Committee on Reform in Primary and Non-Formal Education appointed by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, and the convener of the Consultation Committee on Reform in Secondary Education appointed by the Ministry of Education. Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

MANZOOR AHMED

At the end of the interim government's term, the decision-makers decided to go for an education law by drafting an ordinance. The draft was posted on the education ministry's website on February 1, giving citizens barely a week to submit comments. This breathtaking sense of urgency of the authorities, on a matter that has been under discussion for 15 years, has raised some eyebrows. After all, since the first draft of the law was sent to the cabinet for approval, it was returned at least four times with questions about the provisions. Officials now say that public opinions and official feedback would be analysed and integrated into the final draft, which would require time.

According to an estimate, 149 countries recognise the right to education in their national constitutions, and 155 countries legally guarantee nine or more years of compulsory education for children. The proposed Education Act does neither; it only reiterates a 1990 act on compulsory primary education up to Class 5, which has yet to be fully implemented.

Education is a complex area of service offered through both public and private institutions, serving diverse objectives and populations of various ages, and divided into many sub-sectors. So, what may be the

nature of a national education law, and what purposes may it serve?

Countries have a plethora of laws to regulate and guide their education services. In Bangladesh, apart from the compulsory education law of 1990, we have had other laws, including the 1974 act on the takeover of primary schools by the government; various acts concerning university education and individual public universities; the Non-Formal Education Act, 2014; the Intermediate and Secondary Education Ordinance, 1961; and the Registration of Private Schools Ordinance, 1962, among others.

The point is that complex and diverse education services operate under a variety of legal provisions, and their requirements can hardly be met by a single umbrella law. Nor can a master law replace all other education laws and legal provisions. The government always needs to—and frequently does—issue

additional rules, regulations, and orders governing the operation of educational institutions and services.

What may qualify as a national education law is one that provides for a major national commitment of great magnitude that significantly expands the scope of public provision and marks a fundamental change in educational policy and state obligations

may be reinforced by law to guarantee the realisation of such change.

A case in point is the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 in India. It makes education a fundamental right for children aged 6-14 under Article 21-A of the Indian constitution. This article itself resulted from the 84th Amendment to the constitution adopted in 2002. The RTE mandates free and compulsory elementary education in neighbourhood schools, prohibits capitation fees or interviews for admission, and requires private schools to reserve 25 percent of seats for economically disadvantaged children in the neighbourhood.

The draft education law in Bangladesh does not envisage any significant change in the purposes or provisions of education services. The avowed purpose of the law, as stated in the draft, is to "frame a complementary and

supplementary law by consolidating prevailing laws and rules for greater effectiveness."

The consolidation of existing laws and rules into a new act may offer administrative convenience, but it does little to promote structural and operational reform to make the education system more equitable and inclusive, or to improve its quality and relevance. A framework law that facilitates the much-discussed and much-needed transformation of education would: a) recognise the universal right to primary and secondary education and specify the duties and obligations of various actors; b) create a structure of decentralised school management with greater accountability; c) indicate principles and criteria for the adequacy and efficacy of public funding for education; and d) facilitate new personnel management to enhance the professional status and performance of teachers. None of these issues is addressed in the draft law.

A contentious issue—and apparently the reason for the draft being sent back repeatedly by the cabinet—is that of commercial coaching centres, guidebooks, and notebooks, reputedly a multi-billion-taka industry. Many education activists have seen these as the culprits behind our educational ills and have advocated banning them by law. They have missed the point that guidebooks, notebooks, and coaching centres are symptoms of the disease rather than its main causes. The real causes are poor pedagogy, weak classroom learning, and examinations that reward memorised answers. Attempting to treat the symptoms while neglecting the disease would only create bigger problems.

The new draft law opts for a compromise by proposing the formulation of rules over

the next three to five years to regulate guidebooks, notebooks and private coaching. It does not address the fundamental issues of poor teaching and learning in schools.

The arguments given in favour of the draft law are that something is better than nothing, or that an imagined perfect law should not be the enemy of a good law. It is not clear, however, what is good about the proposed law if it lacks the essential elements of much-needed education reform. Nor is it clear what beneficial actions cannot be taken in the absence of such a law.

The two government advisers to the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and the Ministry of Education have belatedly asked two consultation committees to provide recommendations on necessary reforms in primary and secondary education. Another committee is working on the "vision" for future education.

It is expected that the reform ideas emerging from these committees will form a reform agenda for the newly elected government following the upcoming election and referendum on reforms. One expects education to become a key topic of discourse with the new government. One also wonders whether the current decision-makers are eager to protect the status quo and are concerned about potential reforms and the uncertainties of change. Do they wish to lock in existing structures and provisions through protectionist legal measures? Would it not be more appropriate to consider an umbrella law in light of the anticipated education reform discussions? Those who pursue the cause of change are understandably unhappy about the prospect of potential new obstacles to reform.

**The new draft law opts for a compromise by proposing the formulation of rules over the next three to five years to regulate guidebooks, notebooks and private coaching. It does not address the fundamental issues of poor teaching and learning in schools.**

**CROSSWORD**  
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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10-26

**MONDAY'S ANSWERS**

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WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.



## Moushumi-starrer 'Ordhangini' to premiere on YouTube

Veteran actress Moushumi's latest film *Ordhangini* will be released directly on YouTube after plans for a theatrical run in Bangladesh and the United States failed to materialise. Directed by Syed R Saeed (Emon), the film could not secure support from theatre owners in either country, while political instability in Bangladesh and the approaching Ramadan further complicated its release plans.

Explaining the decision, the director said promotional costs and the lack of distributor backing made a cinema release unfeasible. The film is now set to premiere before Eid on the YouTube channel BDFilms USA.

Shot in New York and New Jersey under harsh winter conditions, *Ordhangini* is a social, family-oriented film reflecting on changing human struggles and social indifference.



## 'KPop Demon Hunters' set for sequel after global success

A sequel to Netflix's hit animation *KPop Demon Hunters* is currently in process, according to the film's songwriter Mark Sonnenblick, capping a remarkable year for the composer marked by major international recognition.

In 2026, Sonnenblick won a Golden Globe and a Grammy and earned an Oscar nomination for co-writing *Golden*, the film's most popular song and the first K-pop track to win a Grammy. He thanked fans for the song's global success. Creator Maggie Kang has also hinted at more story to explore, with Sonnenblick saying any sequel will be fully developed before new music is created.

## DOCUMENTARY SCREENINGS

### Molla Sagar's films on resistance and lived realities

FAIZA RAMIM

A special screening of four documentary films by filmmaker Molla Sagar was held on February 7 at Bengal Shilpalay in Dhanmondi. The event brought together narratives rooted in people's movements, labour struggles, ecological relationships and lived histories, offering a rare opportunity to engage with documentary cinema in a filmmaking landscape where the form remains underrepresented.



PHOTOS: COURTESY



The selected films, *Dudh Koyla*, *Siren*, *Gangaburi* and *Dadu*—span different regions and social realities of Bangladesh. Together, they document how communities negotiate survival under pressures created by state policies, industrial expansion and economic restructuring. From the coal-rich lands of Phulbari to the shuttered jute mills of Khulna, from river-based rituals to the life of a centenarian model at the

University of Dhaka's Faculty of Fine Arts, the films trace stories often marginalised in mainstream visual culture.

Molla Sagar's engagement with documentary filmmaking began in 2002 with *O Pakhi*, a film examining the killing of migratory birds in southern Bangladesh. Trained in graphic design at the Institute of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka, Sagar's early involvement with photography shaped his visual sensibility and later informed his approach to non-fiction filmmaking. Over the years, his work has consistently focused on social movements and cultural practices shaped by structural inequality.

Produced between 2006 and 2007, *Dudh Koyla* documents the Phulbari

coal movement in Dinajpur and centres on the Santal community whose land was acquired for open-cast mining. The film captures the transformation of agrarian life into organised resistance, highlighting how land, livelihood and identity remain inseparable for indigenous communities. Sagar spent several months in Phulbari researching the movement and building relationships with local residents, allowing the camera to enter domestic and communal spaces with trust.

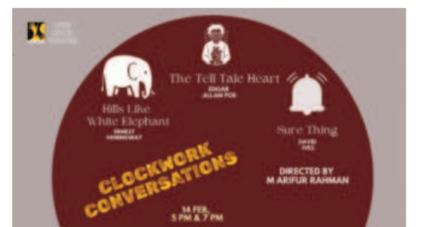
*Siren* focuses on the closure of jute mills in Khalishpur, Khulna, and the economic uncertainty faced by workers and their families. The film documents hunger, unemployment and the erosion

of industrial labour communities once sustained by state-owned mills. Rather than relying on commentary, it allows lived experience, ambient sound and daily routines to shape its narrative.

In *Gangaburi*, Sagar turns to the ritual of Ganga Puja and the spiritual relationship between people and the river. The documentary reflects on water as sustenance, belief and cultural continuity, while acknowledging the vulnerabilities faced by river-dependent communities. *Dadu* portrays the life of Momin Ali Mridha, a long-time model at the Faculty of Fine Arts, whose personal history intersects with broader social and artistic histories of the country.

A recurring feature across Sagar's films is the use of folk songs and soundscapes as narrative elements. Music functions not as background, but as a carrier of collective memory. Influenced by the cinematic ideology of Ritwik Ghatak, Sagar's practice emphasises time spent with communities and a slow, observational process. His films refuse sensationalism, prioritising credibility and emotional proximity. At a time when documentary filmmaking receives limited institutional and commercial support, the screening reaffirmed the form's capacity to record social histories and amplify voices often excluded from dominant narratives.

## WHAT'S THE HAPS?



## 'Clockwork Conversations'

Open Space Theatre presents *Clockwork Conversations*, an evening of three striking dramatic pieces directed by M Arifur Rahman. The production brings together Ernest Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants*, Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, and David Ives's *Sure Thing*—each exploring silence, guilt, love, and the fragile turns of human connection. From unspoken truths and haunting guilt to playful romance, the performance offers an intimate and thought-provoking theatrical experience.

Date: Saturday | Feb 14  
Time: 5:00pm & 7:00pm  
Venue: Studio Theatre Hall, BSA

## NEWS

### Civil aviation ministry's clarification, our reply

FROM PAGE 1  
of their portfolio, ensuring uniform application of standards. CAAB did not alter/modify any of its procedure to facilitate any specific applicant. The ongoing evaluation of Akij Bashir Aviation Limited's application is being conducted in accordance with the same regulatory framework that governs every other applicant. This demonstrates CAAB's commitment to transparency, fairness, and equal treatment in the licensing and certification process.

In addition to that, the advisor does not hold the position of the chairman or a member of the civil aviation authority of Bangladesh. Being a shareholder in a company does not, by itself, imply that the shareholder holds any office of profit. Accordingly, such shareholding should not be regarded as a conflict of interest.

#### BASHIR UDDIN Sits On The Biman Board

The Honorable Adviser has been appointed as Chairman of Biman by the Honorable Chief Adviser in full compliance with the relevant laws and policies governing appointments to Biman. No deviation from, or violation of, the law has occurred in this regard.

The Advisor is serving as the Advisor to three ministries and, in that capacity, is also performing the role of Chairman of various institutions under those ministries. If such arrangements do not constitute a conflict of interest in those cases, then there is no reason why they should be considered a conflict of interest in the case of Biman.

On the other hand, the advisor's appointment has facilitated easy transformations to be incorporated within Biman in several aspects such as ticketing issue which was long been without proper monitoring mechanism. Recent visible downward trend in ticket pricing is the resultant of that monitoring mechanism. Ultimately the additional appointment as the chairman of Biman is for the national interest.

#### A \$3.7 Billion Boeing Rush:

The line mentioned in the report "the administration is exhibiting a frantic urgency to lock the state into long-term obligations before the first ballot is cast" misrepresented the Boeing procurement issue.

Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism as well as Biman Bangladesh Airlines Limited wish to clarify that the ongoing aircraft procurement initiative is being undertaken strictly in accordance with approved government

policy, Board-approved long-term planning, and established public procurement framework. The ongoing initiative was undertaken in 2024 and still ongoing.

The procurement process originated from a duly approved long-term Network and Fleet Plan, which identified future fleet and capacity requirements based on comprehensive operational, financial, and strategic assessments. In line with this plan, proposals were received from two leading aircraft manufacturers and evaluated through a structured, competitive, and transparent techno-financial assessment process.

An independent Techno-Financial Evaluation Committee, supported by specialized sub-committees comprising relevant expertise, carried out a detailed evaluation of all proposals using uniform and pre-defined criteria. These criteria included technical capability, lifecycle cost, financing arrangements, operational suitability, and commercial terms. The evaluation process involved multiple layers of review.

Following completion of the evaluation process, negotiation committee headed by the honorable advisor to ministry of planning, formed by the honorable chief advisor are currently conducting negotiations with the primarily selected bidder with the objective of securing the most economically and operationally advantageous outcome for the national flag carrier. These negotiations remain ongoing, and no final procurement contract has been executed to date.

The ministry reiterates that aircraft acquisition is an inherently complex, multi-stage process that requires extensive technical evaluation, financial modelling, legal scrutiny, and regulatory oversight. Any suggestion that decisions are being taken arbitrarily or without adherence to due process does not reflect the procedural safeguards and governance mechanisms in place.

The ministry and Biman Bangladesh Airlines Limited remains committed to transparency, accountability, and protection of national interest. Relevant information will be shared in accordance with applicable regulatory and governance requirements once the procurement process reaches its formal conclusion.

#### OUR REPLY

We have carefully reviewed the clarification sent by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism regarding our report "Lord of the Wings". While we

appreciate its response, the explanation provided fails to resolve the serious concerns of conflict of interest raised in our report. We stand firmly by our findings and offer the following points from our side:

#### Akij Bashir Aviation licence

The civil aviation ministry defends the application for the issuance of a No Objection Certificate (NOC) and Letter of Intent (LOI) to Akij Bashir Aviation Ltd by citing adherence to due process and ICAO regulations. However, this defence side-steps the core issue of conflict of interest. We maintain that an application for a commercial aviation licence that involves a sitting adviser creates an ethical conflict. The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) operates directly under the ministry's jurisdiction. It is implausible to suggest that a regulator can exercise full objectivity or comfortably reject an application when the applicant is, effectively, their boss. A decision-maker should not be a party to any venture that benefits him, regardless of whether technical procedures were followed. Article 147(3) of the Constitution that deals with a conflict of interest creates two main restrictions: A person holding such a public office cannot hold any other position that provides a financial benefit or profit, and that person cannot be involved in the management or operation of any company or organisation that is run for profit.

#### The adviser on the Biman board

The ministry argues that the adviser's role as chairman of Biman is consistent with his duties in other state institutions. We strongly disagree with this comparison. Biman Bangladesh Airlines was converted into a public limited company (PLC) in 2007 specifically to ensure that it operates with commercial autonomy, distinct from a government department. According to Biman officials, since the airline became a PLC, only one adviser and a special assistant to the chief adviser have served as chairman of the board, and that was solely during the initial transition period. Abandoning the separation of policy-making from commercial operations undermines Biman's corporate governance. If the appointment was approved by the chief adviser, we believe the decision was ill-advised, and that does not make it legal and ethical.

#### Board composition and independence

The ministry's clarification omits significant details regarding the current composition of the Biman board,

which we believe renders the concept of an "independent board" impossible. Of the 12 current members, nine are high-ranking government officials. They are Khalilur Rahman, national security adviser; Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to the chief adviser; Akhtar Ahmed, senior secretary of the Election Commission; Nasreen Jahan, civil aviation secretary; Khairuzzaman Mozumder, finance secretary; Abdur Rahman Khan, NBR chairman; Saifullah Panna, secretary, Office of the Chief Adviser; Air Vice Marshal Javed Tanveer Khan of Bangladesh Air Force; and Humaira Sultana, managing director & CEO of Biman.

In the administrative hierarchy of Bangladesh, secretaries are bound by protocol to follow the minister. When the minister—or in this case, the adviser—sits as the chairman, the board loses its independence and becomes a command structure. It is unrealistic to expect a secretary to vote against, critique or oppose the decisions of their own minister.

#### Boeing procurement contradictions

Finally, the ministry claims that the aircraft procurement is merely an "ongoing evaluation" and that "no final procurement contract has been executed." This statement contradicts the specific details already made public by the adviser and Biman officials. At a press briefing on February 8, the adviser himself stated the government is moving to purchase 14 Boeing aircraft valued between Tk 30,000 crore and Tk 35,000 crore, with a repayment schedule stretching over 20 years. At its annual general meeting on December 30, Biman decided in principle to purchase those aircraft to expand its fleet and modernise operations. The meeting was chaired by Adviser Bashir Uddin, who also serves as the national carrier's chairman. The trade deal signed with the US on February 9 includes the aircraft purchase.

The question is why an adviser, whose term ends in a few days, should sign contracts for 20 years and burden the incoming elected government with such a huge liability.

Speaking at a press conference on February 8, Bashir accused The Daily Star of running a smear campaign against him, claiming himself to be a victim of misinformation. The accusation was unfounded, indicating a lack of understanding on his part about what legally or ethically amounts to a conflict of interest.

### Rice trader

FROM PAGE 2  
The body was sent to the MMCH morgue for autopsy, said the additional SP.

Police have started an investigation into the killing. The victim's son, Sujon Sarker, said, "We have no enmity with anyone. After brutally killing my father, the criminals looted several lakh taka from the shop. We demand exemplary punishment of the killers."

According to police, no case has been filed yet, and no one has been arrested as of filing this report around 5:00pm yesterday.

Bangladesh Hindu Bouddho Christian Oikya Parishad, in a statement, strongly condemned and protested the incident.

The parishad demanded that the government immediately arrest those responsible and ensure exemplary punishment.

### Interim govt

FROM PAGE 1  
Former information adviser Mahfuj Alam's assets grew from Tk 4.2 lakh before taking office to Tk 12.8 lakh by the end of 2025. Former sports adviser Asif Mahmud, who had no taxpayer identification number prior to joining the cabinet, left office with Tk 15.3 lakh.

Local government, rural development, industries, and housing adviser Adilur Rahman Khan reported his assets more than doubling, attributing the increase to inherited residences and land. His wife, Dr Saira Rahman Khan, recorded a 12 percent rise.

Primary and mass education adviser Dr Bidhan Ranjan Roy and religious affairs adviser Dr AFM Khalid Hossain both saw their wealth grow by one third. Dr Roy's increase amounted to Tk 1.36 crore, while Dr Hossain gained Tk 25 lakh in financial assets. Hossain's wife, Kamrunnessa Hasina, reported a 40 percent rise after her non-financial assets grew by Tk 3.5 lakh.

Commerce and aviation adviser Sk Bashir Uddin's wealth remained largely unchanged, though the business magnate, worth Tk 92 crore, added Tk 54 lakh.

Culture adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki's wife, Nusrat Imrose Tisha, saw her assets jump from Tk 1.4 crore to nearly Tk 3 crore.

Bashir remains the wealthiest member of the cabinet, followed by planning adviser Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud and Dr Yunus. Dr Wahiduddin said his increase was due to a developer contract.

Among the advisers, excluding the two youth advisers, fisheries adviser Farida Akhtar is the least wealthy, with a net worth of Tk 1 crore.

### BNP unveils

FROM PAGE 2  
Each polling agent must carry 40 to 50 complaint forms, while Tk 100-150 will be provided per centre.

"If someone is unable to vote or if it is found that another person has voted in place of a voter, a complaint must be filed, and the BNP will support voters in submitting complaints," said a source who attended the meeting.

The party has instructed polling agents to vote first to assess whether the voting process is transparent and to ensure the indelible ink is functioning properly.

The chief polling agent will calculate the number of votes cast every hour and send the figures to the central monitoring cell.

During voting, the BNP's internal count must be matched with the centre's result, and it must also be verified whether the hourly vote figures align with those recorded by the assistant presiding officer. Party leaders said polling centre results must also match those announced by the returning officer.

To ensure voter turnout, the BNP has planned transport support, including rickshaws and vans, to bring voters from distant and nearby areas. One party leader will be assigned as a local coordinator in each area to oversee the transport arrangements.

Leaders and activists have been instructed to stand in voter lines early after Fajr prayers, coordinate with law enforcers, and raise objections and alert election officials if voting proceeds unusually slowly.

"Jamaat will try to go early and stand in the voter line first. They may try to slow down the voting. Leaders and activists must stay alert so that this cannot happen and must protest if needed," said a BNP leader assigned to polling duties.

The BNP warned that local leaders would face expulsion and organisational punitive action if voter turnout is low in party stronghold centres.

The party has also instructed that if anyone arrives to vote wearing a burqa or niqab, their identity must be carefully verified and their face seen to confirm eligibility.

Leaders and activists have also been instructed to remain vigilant to prevent fake ballots from being inserted into ballot boxes and to inform on duty election officials immediately if any irregularities are detected.

Meanwhile, the BNP has set up a call centre at the party's Election Steering Office in Gulshan to receive complaints and information throughout polling day.

## NEWS

Journalist  
Ali Mahmud  
passes away

UNB, Dhaka

Ali Mahmud, city editor of the daily Dinkal, died of a heart attack on Monday. He was 69.

According to family members, he did not return home on Sunday night, prompting concern among relatives. His wife, Jesmin Ara, along with other family members, went to Jatiya Press Club yesterday in search of him.

After waiting there for some time, a member of the cleaning staff informed them that Ali Mahmud had been found lying unconscious in a washroom at the club.

Police later took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

Ali Mahmud is survived by his wife, two sons and a daughter.

Born in 1956 in Paba upazila of Rajshahi, he began his journalism career after graduating from Rajshahi University. His first workplace was the Rajshahi-based daily Barta. He later moved to Dhaka and joined Dinkal, where he worked for many years in several key positions. He was serving as city editor at the time of his death.



Local women make bird nests from coconut husks and thread at home to earn extra income. The decorative nests, used for home decor and bird rearing on verandas, are sold wholesale for Tk 50 to Tk 100 each, depending on size. Each woman earns around Tk 4,000 to Tk 6,000 a month. The photo was taken at a home in Dumuria Bazar, Khulna recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

11 injured in  
explosion at  
Ctg factory

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

At least 11 people were injured in an explosion at the Starship factory of Abul Khair Group in Oxygen area of Chattogram yesterday morning.

The explosion occurred around 10:50am inside a room where bottles for liquefied products are manufactured, officials from the fire service and the company confirmed.

Abdul Mannan, assistant director of the fire service in Chattogram, told The Daily Star that four firefighting units rushed to the scene after receiving the report and brought the blaze under control around 12:00pm.

By the time firefighters arrived, the factory authorities had already rescued the injured workers and sent them to hospitals, he said.

The identities of the injured could not be confirmed immediately.

Imrul Kader Bhuiyan, deputy general manager of Abul Khair Group, said the explosion was triggered by a fire caused by an electrical short circuit.

He said the injured were taken to the group's private hospital. Eight were discharged after receiving primary treatment, while three remain under treatment.

Imrul Kader said officials from several government agencies visited the factory and inspected the site. He denied reports circulating on social media that the incident involved a boiler explosion.

"A group of people spread misleading information on social media claiming it was a boiler explosion, which is totally false," he said.

## 37% of buildings at fire risk

FROM PAGE 3

The 2025 annual report states that 27,059 fire incidents occurred nationwide during the year, averaging about 75 incidents per day. These incidents left 267 people injured and 85 dead. While responding to fires, 17 fire service personnel were injured, and three were killed.

The agency reported that fires caused an estimated loss of property worth Tk 569.97 crore. However, through rapid response, property worth approximately Tk 3,263.62 crore was saved.

A cause-based analysis of the 2025 fires shows that electrical faults accounted for 9,392 incidents (34.71%) – the largest share.

In addition, 4,269 incidents (15.78%) were

caused by lit cigarette remnants, 2,909 incidents (10.75%) by stoves, 920 incidents (3.40%) by gas cylinder leaks, and 562 incidents (2.08%) by gas supply line leaks.

Damage-based statistics indicate that residential buildings experienced the highest number of fires – 8,705 incidents (32.17%).

Fires also occurred in

haystacks (3,922 incidents,

10 involving trains, four

involving launches, and

two involving ships.

Additionally, a training

aircraft crash resulted in

a fire incident during the

year.

Among the 267 injured

in fire incidents, 197 were

men and 70 were women.

Of the 85 fatalities, 46

were men and 39 were

women.

Residential fires resulted

in 77 injuries and 22

deaths, chemical incidents

caused 2 injuries and 18

deaths, and the aircraft fire

incident caused 116 injuries

and 35 deaths.

The annual report

further states that to

strengthen fire prevention,

192 mobile courts were

conducted, resulting in

ines totalling Tk 1.94

crore imposed on 179

establishments. Legal cases

were filed against eight

establishments.

Tajul Islam said,

"During winter,

combustible materials

dry out and become more

prone to ignition. Unsafe

use of fire by people also

increases, leading to a rise

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## Against odds, 17 women take on Dhaka polls

FROM PAGE 3

Although nearly half of Bangladesh's voters are women, female representation among candidates remains low.

Of the 1,981 candidates nationwide, only 78 are women – just 3.93 percent.

In Dhaka, of the 190 candidates, 17 are women – around 9 percent.

Among them are three independents; two candidates each from NCP, Socialist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist), and Ansaniat Biplob

Bangladesh; and one each from BNP, Ganosambhati Andolon, Gono Odhikar Parishad, AB Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Gonoforum, Jatiya Party, and National People's Party.

Dhaka 7, 9, 10, and 12 have two female candidates each. Dhaka 1, 5, 8, 11, 13, 14, 18, 19 and 20 have one each, while seven Dhaka seats have no female candidates at all.

In some constituencies, women are challenging heavyweight contenders; in others, their presence signals alternative politics.

The list of female candidates includes: Antara Selima Huda (independent) in Dhaka-1; Shahinur Akhtar Sumi (SPB-Marxist) in Dhaka-5; Shahana Selim (JSD) and Seema Dutta (SPB-Marxist) in Dhaka-7; Meghna Alam (Gono Odhikar Parishad)

in Dhaka-8; Tasnim Jara (independent) and Najma Akhtar (Gonoforum) in Dhaka-9; lawyer Nasrin Sultana (AB Party) and writer and activist Bohni Bepari (Jatiya Party) in Dhaka-10; Kohinoor Akhtar Bithi (independent) in Dhaka-11; labour activist Taslima Akhter (Ganosambhati Andolon) and Salma Akhtar (Ansaniat Biplob) in Dhaka-12; Fatema Akhtar Munia (Ansaniat Biplob) in Dhaka-13; Sanjida Islam Tulee (BNP) in Dhaka-14; Sabina Javed (NPP) in Dhaka-18; Dilshana Parul (NCP) in Dhaka-19; and Nabila Tasnid (NCP) in Dhaka-20.

Several candidates have long histories of activism. Taslima Akhter, now contesting in Dhaka-12, led multiple movements at Dhaka University, including protests against sexual harassment.

Since 2006, she has worked for garment workers' rights and is now a key organiser of the movement.

Sanjida Tulee founded Mayer Daak while searching for her brother, who was a victim of enforced disappearance. Her activism helped bring international attention to enforced disappearances during the previous regime.

Meghna Alam, contesting from Dhaka-8, previously chaired the Miss Bangladesh Foundation.

She entered public focus last year after being detained without a case under the Special Powers Act. "That incident changed my life," she told The Daily Star, saying it exposed the fragility of citizen protection and pushed her towards electoral politics.

Women's rights activists warn that fewer women in parliament means the absence of half the population's experiences in law-making. In a patriarchal society, women's concerns are often sidelined in policymaking.

Shireen Pervin Huq, head of the Women's Reform Commission, said political parties fail to properly evaluate women leaders. "There is a lack of internal democracy and leadership development for women," she said, noting that no party fulfilled the promised 5 percent female nomination in the July Charter.

Taslima Akhter said contesting elections is extremely difficult for women in a patriarchal system. "Muscle power and territorial control dominate politics. For women, elections are part of the broader struggle for rights," she said.

Candidates also pointed to online bullying, character assassination, and the use of social and

religious bigotry as major obstacles.

Tulee said cyberbullying and fake news have become unbearable for female candidates, adding that the Election Commission lacks effective mechanisms to address the issue.

"Planned cyberbullying is a huge obstacle to the development of female leadership."

Others noted that social conservatism often prevents women from entering large crowds due to the risk of harassment and security concerns, while speaking at rallies invites personal attacks.

Independent candidates face additional hurdles. Tasnim Jara's nomination was initially cancelled as she decided to run as an independent, but later reinstated on appeal. Campaigning with the "Football" symbol, she relies on crowdfunding and volunteers.

"If even one seat proves honest politics can win without muscle power or excess spending, it will change our democratic grammar," she said.

Despite the challenges, many candidates say strong family support keeps them going. They hope the next parliament will better reflect women's voices.

The choice of Dhaka's 8.47 million voters – including 4.12 million

## Polls come and go, but will our fate ever change?

FROM PAGE 3

prices of gas, rice and vegetables, as well as house rent, all rising, this salary is inadequate to survive in a city with a family."

"Whoever comes to power must raise our wages and lower the prices of daily essentials," she added.

Srimati Tripura from Vidaram Para in the Kalagata area of Bandarban, urged the next government to address mismanagement in public hospitals and ensure adequate healthcare facilities in remote areas.

Abhik Chakma, a student of Rangamati Government College, called for modern educational infrastructure and technological facilities in institutions across the remote hill regions.

Farmer Alamgir Hossain from Amtali in Barguna demanded a government guarantee of fair prices for crops. "Aman paddy production costs around Tk 1,200 per maund, but we have to sell it for Tk 1,000 and can't even recover the cost," he said.

Mikhail Hansda, an elderly farmer from

the Santal community in Godagari, Rajshahi, demanded adequate irrigation water at fair prices during paddy cultivation. "The government should pay more attention to farmers and dismantle all syndicates," he said.

Thakur Prasad Ray, a farmer from Batiaghata in Khulna, urged the next government to resolve longstanding waterlogging problems and repair all non-functional sluice gates to prevent saline water intrusion in coastal areas.

Subrata Mistry, from the same area, who works in shrimp enclosures, demanded fixed working hours and wages, along with overtime provisions.

Fisher Ansar Sikder from Amtali called for the enlistment of all fishermen for government support during fishing bans and adequate provisions to help them survive during those periods.

Tarala Ghatuwal, a tea garden worker from Kulaura in Moulvibazar, said workers earn only Tk 179 per day, which is hardly enough to support a family.

"Polls come, polls go. Many promises are made to us during elections, but later we are forgotten. Will our fate never change?" she asked, calling for direct government and legal intervention to improve their lives.

With stone quarries closed, Fazal Mia, a stone crusher worker from Jalong in Sylhet, said workers are facing severe hardship. "There's no work. We're living in extreme distress," he said, urging the next government to reopen the quarries.

People living in 32 border districts – 30 bordering India and three along Myanmar – said they live in constant fear while working on their land.

Hasina Begum, a resident of the Durgapur border area in Aditmari upazila of Lalmonirhat, said, "BSF patrols the Indian border all the time. Out of fear, we can't work properly."

She demanded that uncultivated border land be brought under cultivation while ensuring peace in the

area.

Saidul Islam, a resident of Char Falimari, a shoal in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, demanded a separate ministry to address the problems of remote shoal dwellers.

Justin Mrong, a small trader from the Garo community in Madhupur, Tangail, demanded participation in government jobs through the reestablishment of quotas and measures to prevent influential people from illegally grabbing their land.

[Our Correspondents from Gazipur, Rangamati, Bandarban, Rajshahi, Khulna, Patuakhali, Moulvibazar, Sylhet, Lalmonirhat, Tangail and Mymensingh contributed to this report.]

**PRAYER TIMING**  
FEBRUARY 11

Fajr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha

AZAN 5-25 12-45 4-30 5-57 7-15  
JAMAAT 6-00 1-15 4-45 6-01 7-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

## Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD

Noakhali Road Division, Noakhali

Phone: 02334433670

E-mail: [eeaoa@rhd.gov.bd](mailto:eeaoa@rhd.gov.bd)

Reference No. 35.01.7500.457.11.004.20-308

Date: 09.02.2026

## e-Tender Notice

e-Tenders are invited in National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Noakhali for the Procurement of following works:

Sl No.	Tender ID No.	Package No.	Description of works	Tender last selling (date & time)	Tender closing (date & time)	Tender opening (date & time)
01	1223200	NRD/e-GP/OTM/PMP-Road/2025-2026/04	PMP Work for Strengthening, Rigid Pavement, Surfacing by Premix Bituminous Carpeting with seal coat, Road Marking and Sign-Signal work at 11th Km (Ch. 11+000 Ochkhali Bazar) to 23rd Km (P) (Ch. 22+500 Sagoria) of Hatiya (Bhuiyar Hat)-Jahajmara Road (Z-1439) Under Noakhali Road Division during the year 2025-2026.	08/03/2026 up to 4:00pm	09/03/2026 12:15pm	09/03/2026 12:15pm

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>). Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP helpdesk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)).

The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any Member of Scheduled Banks branches up to 4:00pm on 08.03.2026.

*Md. Farid Uddin*  
ID No. 602218  
Executive Engineer, RHD  
Road Division, Noakhali

GD-297

## ‘BNP confident of decisive victory’

FROM PAGE 12

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

FROM PAGE 12

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

FROM PAGE 12

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

FROM PAGE 12

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’

FROM PAGE 1

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.

## Bulbul relieved but debate rages on

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

No sanctions and the promise of hosting an ICC event -- Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul on Monday was thrilled with the outcomes of his "unbelievably successful" trip to Lahore, but not everyone shared his enthusiasm.

"The ICC was probably considering some decisions that wouldn't have been good for us. But we managed the situation so that our cricketing journey remains smooth in the future," Bulbul said to T-Sports on Monday, looking visibly relieved.

On Sunday, Bulbul had flown to Lahore on very short notice, under the invitation of Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi to take part in a tripartite dialogue with the International Cricket Council (ICC) deputy chairman Imran Khawaja and PCB officials.

The following day, ICC confirmed in a statement that Bangladesh would not face financial or administrative penalties for refusing to travel to India for the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup over security concerns and would also receive hosting rights for an ICC event before the 2031 ODI World Cup, which they are scheduled to co-host with India.

The BCB and its president portrayed the developments as major achievements, and took it as a sign of tensions between them and the ICC easing off after the standoff over the T20 World Cup, which ended with Bangladesh getting replaced by Scotland.

However, former BCB general secretary

Syed Ashraful Huq questioned whether the ICC had ever seriously intended to punish Bangladesh as teams that have withdrawn from World Cup matches or from ICC events in the past have never been sanctioned.

"They have never fined a team before. Perhaps it was mentioned verbally just to create pressure. If we are celebrating this, it suggests our organisers care more

ego-driven stance is far more damaging than losing millions in fines," he said, adding that similar dialogue with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and ICC should have happened earlier. "I've been saying from the beginning -- talk, talk, talk. Everything can be solved through discussion."

Meanwhile, ex-Bangladesh captain and former BCB director Akram Khan urged

spiralled beyond control and agreed that while BCB's security concerns were valid, some decisions may have been made too hastily.

"I support the initial security concerns, but we should have waited for more discussions before taking other steps. The ICC is not like FIFA -- sometimes what is said doesn't immediately materialise. We'll only truly understand the consequences over time," he added.

Another crucial development from the talks in Lahore was the Pakistan government reversing its decision to boycott their group-stage match against India in Colombo on February 15, following requests from many stakeholders, including Bulbul.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had earlier said they were boycotting the match in solidarity with Bangladesh. The primary reason behind ICC's urgent talks in Lahore was to convince Pakistan to reconsider.

Although the ICC did not specify what it had to do to appease PCB in its official statement, it did enough to ensure that the India-Pakistan match, one of cricket's most commercially valuable fixtures, will go on as scheduled.

Ashraful claimed Bangladesh had been used as a "pawn" in a larger geopolitical struggle, suggesting Pakistan had emerged as a key power broker through the episode. After all the hoopla, Pakistan and the other teams will carry on with their World Cup campaigns as usual, while Bangladesh will remain absent from the global stage.



about money than the good of the game," Ashraful told The Daily Star yesterday.

He described the damage to Bangladesh cricket as "irreparable," pointing out that players like Litton Das and Mustafizur Rahman missed a global tournament during their prime.

"Missing a World Cup because of an

caution, fearing underneath ICC's positive announcements, resentment may be simmering.

"The ICC will not take this lightly. Whatever is said publicly, we must be extremely careful in how we deal with them going forward," Akram said.

Akram admitted the situation had



**It's great that the game is back on. It's going to be a challenge going to Colombo, where Pakistan have been for last two weeks.**

India assistant coach **Ryan ten Doeschate** on facing Pakistan in a T20 World Cup group stage game on February 15

## 'Allegations not right': Shooter Koly hits back at suspension

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's premier shooter Kamrunnahar Koly has dismissed the allegations that prompted the Bangladesh Shooting Sports Federation (BSSF) to hand her a one-year suspension, insisting she did nothing wrong and suggesting the move stemmed from resentment over her earlier complaints against a top official.

The federation confirmed the ban on Monday following an executive committee meeting on February 2. Koly had been under temporary suspension since early January for allegedly breaching the national team training camp's code of conduct.

In its letter, the BSSF said Koly violated seven clauses and cited an incident at the federation office on January 25, alleging she displayed "extremely indecent, insulting, threatening, and aggressive behavior" toward the general secretary, executive committee members, officers and staff in the presence of a police officer. The federation said the episode damaged discipline and the institution's reputation, and imposed the ban under Articles 16.20 and 16.21 of its constitution.

Koly rejected that account. "Whatever they mentioned in the letter, things like being very indecent, showing disrespectful and threatening behaviour towards the BSSF officials are not right. I did not do such things. Rather, former shooters pressed them in an attempt to withdraw the temporary suspension placed on me," Koly told The Daily Star on Tuesday in response to the punishment.

She believes the decision is connected to her earlier allegations against BSSF joint secretary GM Haider Sajjad.

"The allegations I brought against one of their bosses were proved by the investigation committee and he was suspended by the National Sports Council. I think they took such a decision based upon anger toward me," she added.

Bangladesh Olympic Association secretary general Jobayedur Rahman Rana echoed that view.

"We were supposed to sit with the shooting officials and the shooters on February 7 to look into the matter. But now we expect to meet them on February 17 to find a solution, because Kamrunnahar Koly is under an IOC Olympic scholarship. I think there are some 'buts' in the sanction the shooting federation handed her. The decision the federation took was an emotional one, driven by anger. We will try to resolve it," he told The Daily Star on Tuesday.



## Hasaranga, Bracewell ruled out of T20 WC with injuries

AGENCIES

Sri Lanka spinner Wanindu Hasaranga and New Zealand all-rounder Michael Bracewell have been ruled out of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 due to injuries, the International Cricket Council (ICC) confirmed yesterday.

Hasaranga sustained a hamstring injury during Sri Lanka's tournament opener against Ireland on Sunday in Colombo, a match in which he played a key role, taking three wickets. Maheesh Theekshana also claimed three wickets in the win.

Sri Lanka have drafted in Dushan Hemantha as Hasaranga's replacement, with the change approved by the Event Technical Committee (ETC). Hemantha has featured in three T20Is since making his debut against Zimbabwe last year.

Sri Lanka will face Oman on Thursday as they push for a Super Eight spot.

The ETC has also approved a replacement for Bracewell, who reinjured his calf during warm-ups ahead of New Zealand's warm-up match against Afghanistan on February 8 in Chennai. He had been recovering from a calf tear suffered during the third ODI against India last month, but experienced a recurrence ahead of the Afghan game. Bracewell's replacement is yet to be named.

## Adapt or perish: Depleted Australia stay confident

AGENCIES

Australia finally begin their T20 World Cup 2026 campaign on Wednesday in Colombo, the last team to do so, as they take on Ireland amid a challenging build-up that has tested both their depth and resilience.

The 2021 champions arrive without several key names and will have only 13 players available for selection in their opener. Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood are sidelined through injury, Mitchell Starc has stepped away from the format, while big hitter Tim David is set to miss the first match as he continues his recovery from a hamstring strain.

Their preparation has been far from ideal. Australia were whitewashed 3-0 in Pakistan, and concerns also lingered over Nathan Ellis and Adam Zampa in recent weeks. Although Ellis has now been cleared to play, the pace attack remains relatively inexperienced, with Xavier Bartlett and Ben Dwarshuis expected to shoulder responsibility alongside him.

Yet, if history is anything to go by, Australia rarely let adversity define them.

Captain Mitchell Marsh struck a calm and defiant note on the eve of the match, urging his side to embrace



adaptability in Colombo's expected turning conditions.

"Look, I think we certainly want to be positive in the way we go about things," Marsh said. "In these conditions, it's just about being really clear on how you're going to go about it and playing what's in front of you."

"The word adaptability has been thrown around in our team meetings so far... just adapt to whatever situation is put in front of us and get the job done."

Marsh also expressed confidence in his reshuffled bowling unit, despite the absence of Australia's established quicks.

"They've all faced different situations in matches and whilst some of them haven't played a lot for Australia, they've played a lot of cricket and we've got great confidence that they're going to be able to do the job for us," he said.

Ellis, now the de facto leader of the pace group, echoed that belief, insisting Australia remain well placed to make a deep run despite missing their frontline fast bowlers.

"We've all got different skill-sets and can gel together on the night in different phases of the game," Ellis said. "A squad with 'Hoff' and Cummo is a strong squad obviously, but without them I feel like we're just as well placed to go deep." Ireland, ranked 11th, will draw confidence from recent match time in Colombo but also carry scars from letting a winning position slip against Sri Lanka in their opener. They dropped seven catches and conceded 59 runs in the final four overs of that match.

While Australia's build-up has been far from smooth, the 2021 champions remain exactly what they always are at World Cups -- a force to be reckoned with.

## Alpi's 'unexpected' season gathers speed

SPORTS REPORTER

Teenager Alpi Akter carried her scorching form into the resumption of the Women's Football League (WFL), as the Rajshahi Stars FC striker netted a hat-trick to power the league leaders to a commanding 8-0 victory over Suddopushkorini Jubo SC yesterday.

Fresh from emerging as both the top scorer and best player of the recently concluded SAFF Women's U-19 Championship, Alpi took her league tally to 28 goals from nine matches -- the third-highest single-season return in WFL history, behind former captain Sabina Khatun's 35 goals in the 2019-20 season and former national player Aungmyraching Marma's 29 in 2012-13.

"I did not expect to outperform senior forwards," Alpi told The Daily Star. "My aim was simply to perform well from the start of the league and make the most of the opportunity to play alongside experienced players. Now I sit on top of the scorer chart. It's a blessing from the Almighty."

"For the first time, I became the top scorer [by scoring seven goals in four matches] and best player of a tournament [SAFF Women's U-19 Championship in Nepal], and I am really happy with this achievement, which I think will inspire me greatly going forward." Rajshahi, who are yet to drop a point,



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

will look to avoid defeat in their final hurdle to clinch the league title in their maiden appearance. However, Bangladesh Army SC, who are breathing down Rajshahi's necks after eight wins in nine games, have the potential to cause an upset and force

play-off fixtures to decide the title.

"A good bonding among experienced and junior players has been the strength behind Rajshahi's nine straight wins. Now we want to win the trophy by winning our last match."

Alpi's rise has been particularly striking given that, despite scoring 11 goals for Siraj Smriti Sangsad in the 2023-24 WFL, she had previously operated in the shadow of established forwards such as Tohura Khatun, Shamsunnahar Jr, Mst Sagorika and Sauravi Akanda Prity.

The Grade 10 student from Boda upazila in Panchagarh traced her goal-scoring instincts back to her early years.

"I used to take a lot of shots at goal, always keeping the goalkeeper in mind. I also practised scoring from free-kicks, and that helped build my confidence," she said. "Now I believe that if I get the ball in front of the goal, I can score."

Her performances in both the WFL and the SAFF U-19 Championship have reportedly earned her a call-up to the senior national team for the upcoming AFC Women's Asian Cup in Australia in March.

"It is really pleasing to receive a call-up to the senior team, but it is not something to take lightly. It is a challenge to stay in the squad and compete with senior players."



PHOTO: AFP/PCB

Both New Zealand and Pakistan openers powered their sides to comfortable victories in their respective T20 World Cup group-stage games yesterday. New Zealand's Finn Allen (84\* off 50) and Tim Seifert (89\* off 42) steered the Black Caps to a 10-wicket win -- only the seventh such result in the tournament's history -- over the UAE, chasing down a 174-run target in just 15.2 overs in Chennai. The pair shared an unbroken 175-run stand, the highest for any wicket in T20 World Cups. Meanwhile, in Colombo, Sahibzada Farhan smashed a 41-ball 73 to help Pakistan post 190/9 in 20 overs before their spinners restricted the USA to 158/8 for a 32-run victory. Usman Tariq took three wickets, Shadab Khan -- who also struck a quickfire 30 off 12 -- claimed two, while Mohammad Nawaz and Abrar Ahmed picked up one each. The win helped Pakistan avenge their shock defeat to the USA two years ago in the last edition of the tournament and move top of Group A ahead of their crucial game against India on February 15.



Vehicle requisition activities were underway at the Polo Ground in Chattogram city yesterday, ahead of the 13th national election and referendum scheduled for tomorrow. Sources said about 700 vehicles have so far been requisitioned, while the process of requisitioning another 200 is ongoing.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

ONLINE POLLS CAMPAIGN

Pro-BNP, Jamaat actors play the religion card

STAR REPORT

Election codes strictly prohibit exploitation of religious sentiments for gaining electoral advantage. These rules apply not only to candidates, but also their electoral agents and supporters, which took effect on December 11, the day election schedule was announced. It will remain in force until the gazette notification of the final results.

In practice, however, parties and candidates from across the political spectrum are running paid ads as well as non-sponsored content on Facebook to prove how the rival camps are "bad Muslims."

Analysis of 50 sponsored ads between December 23, 2025, and February 6, 2026 shows both BNP and Jamaat candidates sling slurs, each calling the other a "munafeq," the Islamic term referring to a person who outwardly professes faith but is actually a nonbeliever.

The Daily Star also analysed 55 similar religiously provocative posts from 33 Facebook pages, groups and profiles. Thirty of them appear to support the BNP and the Jamaat.

BNP supporters and anti-Jamaat activists are heavily promoting the claim that Jamaat-e-Islami leaders are promising "tickets to Jannah (paradise)" in exchange for votes.

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Parties spend crores on Facebook ads

ZYMA ISLAM

As the dust settles on election season with the last day of campaigning officially ending yesterday morning, the street rallies were complemented by a digital battle for the ballot, where political parties poured crores of taka into thousands of Facebook ads.

Many of these advertisers were masked as news outlets to bypass voter skepticism.

This analysis included only advertisers who spent more than \$100 on Meta ads in the last 30 days, because Meta does not disclose spending amounts below that threshold. As a result, the actual volume of spending and the total number of election-related ads are likely significantly higher than the figures reflected in this report.

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'BNP confident of decisive victory'

Tarique tells AFP and DW there are serious challenges ahead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman is confident of a decisive victory in the national election. If his party is voted to power, he says, his first priority will be restoring security to end the political turmoil that has gripped the country since the uprising.

"We need to ensure a normal situation in the country, so that people are safe," he told the AFP yesterday.

Stating that the economy has been destroyed, the party chief accused the ousted Awami League government of neglecting ordinary citizens.

The Sheikh Hasina regime destroyed the health system and energy sector, he said, adding that the task ahead in the South Asian nation of 170 million people would be daunting.

"What we see is that in the name of mega projects, mega corruption has taken place," said Tarique. "A few people were made very rich. But the rest of the country, the whole population, they were left with nothing."

The AFP report said that Tarique's BNP is a frontrunner in the polls, but faces a steep challenge from a coalition led by Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's largest Islamist party.

"We expect that we will have a clear mandate from the people -- a big mandate," Tarique said, adding he did not foresee the need for a coalition beyond his current party alliance.

"We'll have enough seats to form our own government," he added.

Referring to his parents, late president Ziaur Rahman and late prime minister Khaleda Zia, he stressed that he too had spent a lifetime in

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"We are hopeful, and people are hopeful too, that the election will be fair."

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman

Bangladesh fares worse in TI's graft index

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's ranking in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) worsened, with the country placed 13th among the world's most corrupt nations out of 182.

The country ranked 14th in the CPI 2024. Its score increased by one point to 24 this year.

Bangladesh's score had remained between 25 and 28 from 2012 to 2022, before falling to 24 in 2023 and 23 in 2024, said Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, at the report's launch yesterday at its office in Dhanmondi.

Although the score rose by one point this year, trend analysis shows Bangladesh is now two points below its 2012 level, marking the second-lowest score in the past 14 years.

The slight increase reflects short-term optimism following the July uprising and expectations of democratic and accountable governance.

However, the data sources do not yet capture the later realities of the reform process.

The results indicate that despite the fall of authoritarian rule, meaningful changes in state and legal structures have not taken place.

"Over the past one and a half years, the interim government has failed to take effective and exemplary action against corruption. At the same time, proposed reforms by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and other institutions have largely been ignored or left unimplemented, weakening their ability to act independently," he said.

Sri Lanka recorded the greatest improvement with a three-point increase in South Asia, while Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and the Maldives each gained one point.

Bhutan and Afghanistan lost one point and Nepal remained unchanged.

Despite these changes, all South Asian countries except Bhutan scored below the global average, highlighting deep and widespread corruption across the region, the report said.

The global average score dropped to 42, the

- Bangladesh's score improves, ranking worsens
- Bangladesh ranks second-lowest in South Asia
- Denmark tops index, followed by Finland, Singapore
- South Sudan and Somalia jointly rank lowest, followed by Venezuela
- Yemen, Libya, Eritrea jointly ranked third from the bottom

lowest in more than a decade.

Bangladesh is among the countries failing to control corruption and ranks the second lowest in South Asia after Afghanistan, Iftekharuzzaman said.

Bangladesh's score of 24 is 18 points below the global average and 21 points below the Asia-Pacific average. It is also eight points lower than the average of sub-Saharan African countries, making the situation "extremely alarming".

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'People will deliver the right verdict'

Shafiqur says at press briefing after 11-party meeting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday said they have great faith in the people and believe they will deliver the right verdict.

Addressing a press briefing after a meeting with leaders of the 11 party alliance at the party's Maghbar office, he said there is widespread enthusiasm among the people regarding the upcoming election.

"Those whose voter registration is in the villages are returning in groups, almost with the excitement and joy of Eid. They want to cast their votes and see a government of their choice," he said.

"We hope that if the people's verdict is reflected, Bangladesh will move towards a new kind of politics, and the new Bangladesh that the people hold in their hearts will be implemented," he added.

The Jamaat ameer said they believe the youth have not fallen asleep and that, to fulfil their unfinished responsibilities, they will make the election successful at any cost.

"If anyone tries to do otherwise, we will urge the people to stand firmly for their rights and give a clear response."

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"We, the 11-party alliance, are ready to help in every way to hold free and fair polls."

Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman

Limit SSC exams to five core subjects

Education consultation committee proposes

ARAFAT RAHAMAN

A government consultation committee has recommended limiting SSC exams to five core subjects -- Bangla, English, mathematics, science, and social science -- while keeping PSC and JSC exams in classes 5 and 8 scrapped.

It also proposed universal secondary education up to class 12, a unified school system under one authority, and constitutional recognition of education as a fundamental right through an Education Rights Act.

The suggestions were made in a draft report prepared by the Consultation Committee for Improvement of Secondary Education.

The 10-member committee, led by Emeritus Professor Manzoor Ahmed, submitted the draft to Education Adviser CR Abrar yesterday.

Committee member Md Mahboob Morshed, associate professor at Dhaka University's Institute of Education and Research, presented the recommendations.

Morshed explained that public examinations should focus on core competencies rather than testing every subject.

"Subjects such as ICT, religion, physical education and the arts would be excluded from written public exams and assessed by schools through practical, hands-on evaluation."

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An army patrol convoy moves from Kalabagan towards Dhanmondi 32 in the capital yesterday as part of election-time security arrangements ahead of the election tomorrow.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

17 hurt in pre-polls violence in 3 districts

'Mother dies' after BNP leader injured in clash with Jamaat

STAR REPORT

At least 17 people have been injured in electoral violence since Monday night across three districts.

In Bogura, six people were wounded in clashes between BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami activists on Monday night.

The mother of one of the injured -- a local BNP leader -- died reportedly after hearing that her son had lost an eye in the clash.

According to witnesses, a group of Jamaat activists was campaigning at Parshun village in Nandigram upazila around 7:30pm when BNP supporters intercepted them, alleging that Jamaat men were distributing money to buy votes.

The BNP activists then confined the Jamaat supporters and took them to the house of local BNP leader Masud Rana.

Soon after, a larger group of Jamaat activists attacked Rana's

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