

"It feels like our voice matters again... We have waited too long for this day. I am really excited,"
Raihan Bin Sarwar
A first-time voter from Mirpur-15



Nation votes, hope rekindled

JS polls, referendum today set to end long denial of people's right to vote

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and AHMED DEEPTO

Bangladesh has been without a competitive election for so long that almost a third of the electorate has never witnessed genuine polls in which voters elect parliamentarians of their choosing. That is set to change today as thousands queue at polling centres, some since the crack of dawn, to reclaim their franchise. These same voters had taken

nation will wait in suspense over who will emerge victorious.

Alongside the parliamentary election, citizens will also cast ballots in a referendum on constitutional reforms born out of a rare political consensus. The July charter is set to strengthen democratic institutions and ensure they function with greater accountability and effectiveness.

The memories of past elections still weigh heavy. The one-sided contests of



50 POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE RACE

Total seats **300**
Election in **299** seats
Total candidates **2,028**
Candidates from political parties **1,755**
Independent candidates **273**
Female candidates **83**



8 LAKH ELECTION OFFICIALS

Returning officers **69**
Assistant returning officers **598**
Presiding officers **42,779**
Assistant presiding officers **2,47,482**
Polling officers **4,94,964**



CANDIDATES FROM MAJOR PARTIES

BNP **292**
Jamaat **225**
NCP **32**
Jatiya Party (Ershad) **196**
Islami Andolan Bangladesh **259**



OBSERVERS

40 countries and 8 int'l organisations
Foreign observers: **335**
Another 57 on invitation
Local observers **44,995**

42,779 POLLING CENTRES

21,506 are identified as **RISKY** centres

POSTAL BALLOTS
7,72,134 expatriates
7,61,138 local govt, election officials and others

MAGISTRACY

Judicial inquiry committee **299**
Judicial magistrates **657**
Executive magistrates **2,098**



to the streets in July 2024 to overthrow a tyrannical regime. They bled while many others lost their lives.

It had been a monsoon of rupture. But today, they can usher a spring of hope.

Keen to ensure a peaceful election, the Election Commission has taken all-out measures to drape the country in a security blanket. And the voters will be at hand to make it festive. Many have journeyed back to their ancestral homes to take back what had been long withheld – their right to vote.

Bangladesh is witnessing a competitive election again after 17 years as the entire

2014 and 2024 were widely dismissed as shams, while the 2018 edition was marred by allegations of ballot stuffing and intimidation. Together, these episodes destroyed public trust and left an entire generation without the experience of a genuine electoral contest.

"It feels like our voice matters again... We have waited too long for this day. I am really excited," said Raihan Bin Sarwar, a private company executive from Mirpur-15, who will vote for the first time today.

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ROAD TO 13TH JS POLLS

- » **August 5, 2024:** Student-led mass uprising ousts AL-led government
- » **August 8, 2024:** Interim government formed and sworn in
- » **September 11, 2024:** Six reform commissions constituted
- » **February 2025:** Major reform commissions submit proposals to the government
- » **June 13, 2025:** CA Prof Muhammad Yunus and Tarique Rahman meet in London; joint statement issued stating pre-Ramadan polls timing
- » **February 12, 2025:** National Consensus Commission formed
- » **October 14, 2025:** July Charter finalised and sent to all political parties
- » **October 17, 2025:** July Charter signed by political parties
- » **November 25, 2025:** Advisory Council approves draft Referendum Ordinance
- » **December 11, 2025:** CEC declares election schedule
- » **December 29, 2025:** Final date for submission of nomination papers
- » **December 30, 2025 to January 4, 2026:** Nomination papers scrutinised
- » **January 11, 2026:** Appeals filed with the EC against the RO's orders
- » **January 12 to 18, 2026:** Appeals heard and disposed of
- » **January 20, 2026:** Final date for withdrawal of candidacy
- » **January 21, 2026:** Election symbols allocated and final list of candidates published
- » **January 22, 2026:** Election campaigning begins
- » **February 10, 2026:** Election campaigning ends
- » **February 12, 2026:** Election Day/National Referendum



CEC assures people of free, fair polls

Urges all to accept public mandate

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin has assured people that today's elections will be free and fair, urging all parties and candidates to accept the results as part of the democratic process.

In a televised address to the nation yesterday, he said differences of opinion are natural in a democracy and called on voters to turn out in large numbers and cast their ballots peacefully. "You will come to

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Security measures 'unprecedented'

MUNTAKIM SAAD and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Law enforcement agencies have put in place a tight security arrangement across the country for the national election and referendum today, deploying nearly 10 lakh personnel to ensure a free, fair, and uninterrupted vote.

According to officials, the forces, which were deployed on February 8, will remain on full alert until Saturday, as part of a comprehensive plan to maintain law and order, described by many officials as "unprecedented".

The measures include polling centre-based deployment, enhanced patrols, and technology-backed surveillance to monitor sensitive areas and vulnerable polling centres.

Additional forces will be kept ready to respond swiftly to any untoward incident so that the voters can cast their ballots without fear, the officials said.

In the capital, traffic remained light since yesterday morning as many residents left for their village homes to cast their votes. Those who stayed back often faced checks at different points. A handful of buses were running, most of them nearly empty. Army vehicles were seen on patrol, while police vehicles were stationed at several intersections.

On Manik Miah Avenue, members of the army and police stopped vehicles, questioned passengers, and checked identification documents. Similar checkpoints and patrol teams were seen in Kawran Bazar, Mirpur, Uttara, Rampura, Banani, and Badda.

"Checkpoints have been set up and patrol teams deployed at key points to ensure security," said Harun Or Rashid, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Motijheel Division.

He said police assigned for polling centre-based duties were being deployed, while personnel from the army and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) were also on the ground to help ensure a free and fair election.

On election day, judicial magistrates, if they take cognisance of any electoral offence during duty, will dispose of cases through summary trials and send the relevant report, in a prescribed format, to the deputy secretary (Law-1 Wing) of the EC Secretariat.

To monitor the overall situation, the Election Commission has formed a central coordination cell.

The commission also said it is using a special security app to track the situation on the ground in real time. The home ministry has established a separate coordination cell to receive law-and-order-related complaints.

For the first time, police are using bodycams at polling centres, which will also have CCTV coverage.

Live camera feeds will be monitored

directly from the offices of district superintendents of police as well as from Police Headquarters. If violence breaks out anywhere, senior officials will view the live feed from the centre and issue necessary instructions.

Police Headquarters sources said a technology-driven "Operations Command and Control Room" has been set up at each district SP office. From there, risk-based identification of polling centres and live location tracking of mobile and strike teams will be carried out.

They also said mobile teams and strike parties, formed by combining members of all law enforcement agencies and the armed forces, will remain on round-the-clock patrol, with senior officials monitoring them in real time.

To ensure uninterrupted communication with all officers and forces engaged in election duty, walkie-talkie sub-stations have been installed, the sources said. Alongside live location monitoring of mobile and striking teams, directives can be issued to dispatch them swiftly to specific locations as required.

In addition, arrangements have been made to monitor social media and electronic media, and use Google Maps



Cast votes responsibly

Yunus urges all

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus yesterday urged voters to cast their ballots conscientiously in today's 13th parliamentary election and referendum, describing the vote as a defining moment for the nation's future.

In a message on the eve of the polls, he said the election and referendum are a unique and significant chapter in Bangladesh's political history.

Extending greetings to the nation, Yunus called on political parties, candidates and all concerned to

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'Rule of law will be our top priority if voted to power'

Tarique tells Arab News

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

If voted to power, the BNP wants to establish justice in the country, party Chairman Tarique Rahman said.

He said no one is above the law and that anyone who has committed crimes must face trial, adding that the matter is not about any specific political party but about ensuring justice and the rule of law.

Speaking to Saudi Arabia-based English newspaper Arab News, the party chief said he wants his administration to pursue accountability for the former leadership and meet the political and economic expectations of the youth movement that brought about the change.

He is expecting victory in the election following a change in regime that for years restricted his supporters' voting rights.

"BNP is the most popular party in the country. We have been struggling for the people's voting rights for more than 17 years. We represent the people's expectations and aspirations," he told Arab News in Dhaka on Tuesday.

"I believe the people will vote for us and, inshallah, we will achieve a landslide victory," he added.

In the first six months, his party's immediate priorities would include restoring law and order, democratic reform and creating a business-

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'Don't pay heed to propaganda'

Shafiqur urges voters on Facebook

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman on his verified Facebook page yesterday urged voters not to be misled by "disinformation" or to pay heed to "propaganda" and to cast their ballots for their preferred candidates and symbols today.

Several posts were shared on the Jamaat ameer's Facebook throughout the day – some were aimed at youths, some at women, while others were for people from all walks of life.

The page also shared video clips of his speeches at election rallies held across districts during nearly 20 days of campaigning, as well as photocards containing excerpts from his speeches. The posts outlined his party's stance on various incidents.

Around 11:00am yesterday, Thakurgaon district Jamaat Ameer Belal

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DEPLOYMENT BREAKDOWN	
FORCE / AGENCY	NUMBER DEPLOYED
Army	1,03,000
Air Force	3,730
Navy	5,000
BGB (outside Dhaka)	36,013
BGB (in Dhaka)	1,440
Coast Guard	3,585
Police (outside Dhaka)	161,088
Police (in Dhaka)	26,515
Rab	9,349
Ansar	5,76,483
Village Police	45,820

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FOR LIVE COVERAGE AND UPDATES OF THE ELECTION!

NOTICE
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