

WB okays \$370m to restore Dhaka rivers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The World Bank has approved \$370 million in financing to improve sanitation and solid waste management services aimed at reducing water pollution and restoring rivers and canals in and around Dhaka.

The Metro Dhaka Water Security and Resilience Program will strengthen the capacity of local and national institutions to curb pollution in greater Dhaka, which generates one-third of the country's GDP and half of its formal employment, according to a press release.

The programme introduces a results-based financing system to help city corporations and the Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) deliver measurable improvements.

It is expected to provide safely managed sanitation

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An empty Naya Paltan area in the capital yesterday. As many left Dhaka to cast their votes in their respective constituencies, the streets were left deserted and devoid of life. With just a day to go before the national election, most areas in the city were empty, almost resembling the scene most commonly seen during Eid. Inset, an empty Hanif Flyover in Jatrabari.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN, ORCHID CHAKMA



Local factors may trump symbols in many seats

STAR REPORT

As the country heads into the 13th National Parliamentary Election today, one factor other than party symbols is likely to influence contests across constituencies: local popularity.

From Chattogram to Sylhet and Mymensingh to Faridpur, voters repeatedly say they want “one of our own”, someone rooted in the community, accessible and responsive to local concerns.

In Sylhet's Sunamganj-2 constituency, politics has long revolved around personalities rather than parties. Late Suranjit Sengupta embodied this tradition, with the seat often referred to as “Babu Suranjit's seat”.

His image remains so omnipresent that two rival candidates, BNP's Nasir Uddin Chowdhury and Jamaat's Barrister Shishir Manir, have repeatedly referred to Suranjit's name during their campaigns.

From Chattogram to Sylhet and Mymensingh to Faridpur, voters repeatedly say they want “one of our own”, someone rooted in the community, accessible and responsive to local concerns.



“Even though Suranjit Sengupta repeatedly won, it was known not as an Awami League seat but as his seat,” said Partha Ray of Jagdal union.

Prashanta Sagar Das said, “Politics in this haor region revolves around individuals, not party identities. In the end, the result here will depend on personal image.”

Both candidates are tailoring appeals to the Hindu community, which makes up nearly half the electorate, underscoring how local networks and reputations shape strategy.

In Chattogram, discussions with voters show many prefer to make candidate-centric decisions, prioritising local issues. In Chattogram-II, Jamaat's Shahul Alam, a former ward councillor, is challenging BNP heavyweight Amir Khasru.

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‘Ensure state recognition, basic rights’

Hijra community members urge next govt

SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK and SHARIF M SHAFIQUE

Meem Hazera, 45, the lone hijra/ third gender voter from Kumarbarila village under Dhaka's Nawabganj upazila, is eagerly waiting to cast a vote in the national election today, like everyone else.

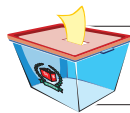
“No government thinks about us distinctly. We are still deprived of basic rights. Even ahead of the upcoming polls no one stated any plans for us. Yet, we vote regularly because it is our right, and we will exercise it this time as well as citizens of this country, no matter whether anyone thinks of us or not. I will go to the centre on time and cast my own vote,” Meem told The Daily Star recently.

A review of the election manifestos of seven major political parties shows that most of them have not separately mentioned the hijra community.

The Jamaat-e-Islami's manifesto mentions that “real” hijras will be identified and rehabilitated, and special training and job quotas will be reserved for them.

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According to EC data, the total number of hijra voters in the country for this election is 1,220 across 272 of the 300 constituencies, including 114 in Dhaka.



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Dhaka vote may act as bellwether again

SHARIF M SHAFIQUE and SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK

A long-standing, unwritten equation has shaped Bangladesh's parliamentary elections — the party that secures a majority in the capital usually finds its path to forming the government.

Since the mass uprising of the 1990s, Dhaka's electoral outcome has mirrored the national mandate. In the 5th National Parliamentary Election in 1991, the BNP swept all 13 constituencies in Dhaka district and went on to form the government.

In June 1996, the Awami League won eight of Dhaka's 13 seats, while BNP secured five — marking AL's return to power after 21 years. In 2001, the BNP-led four-party alliance again swept all 13 Dhaka seats before forming the government.

After constituency delimitation in 2008 increased Dhaka's seats from 13 to 20, the Awami League won 18 of them in the 9th National Election, leading its alliance to power.

Political analysts say Dhaka's impact is largely psychological. Voters in rural areas often respond to the “political wind” blowing from the capital.

As the nation's administrative and commercial hub, Dhaka's electorate is considered politically conscious, and foreign diplomats and observers closely monitor polling in the city. Winning Dhaka,



AT A GLANCE

Dhaka has 20 seats (up from 13 before delimitation in 2008)

Past polls show Dhaka sweeps helped shape govt formation in 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008.

Analysts say Dhaka creates ‘political wind’ that influences rural voters

Diplomatic, observer attention makes Dhaka wins a signal of legitimacy

With AL absent, main fight is BNP vs Jamaat-led alliance

Several Dhaka seats set for tight contests

therefore, also signals international legitimacy.

Badiul Alam Majumdar, chief of the Election Reform Commission and secretary of Shujan, told The Daily Star, “People from all districts reside in Dhaka. So the city's political mood reflects the national mindset. A party winning Dhaka

suggests broader public support nationwide.”

Now with the 13th parliamentary election approaching, the “Dhaka Factor” is once again in focus.

However, the contest has shifted. In the absence of the Awami League, the main battle is between the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-party alliance.

While the BNP aims to reclaim dominance across Dhaka, Jamaat and its allies, along with the National Citizen Party (NCP), are trying to cut into that vote base.

In many constituencies, the key contests are between the Sheaf of Paddy (BNP) and the Scale (Jamaat), Water Lily Bud (NCP), or Rickshaw (Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis). **CONSTITUENCY DYNAMICS** Political observations and voter conversations suggest that at least six of Dhaka's 20 seats will see intense competition.

Dhaka-1 (Dohar-Nawabganj): A former BNP stronghold, this seat now features a contest between BNP's Khandaker Abu Ashfaq and Jamaat's Mohammad Nazrul Islam. Ashfaq relies on organisational strength, while Nazrul has gained traction locally. Antara Selima Huda, daughter of former BNP MP Barrister Nazmul Huda, is also in the race.

Dhaka-2 (Savar partial & Keraniganj): Historically a BNP seat before AL took over in 2008. Here, BNP heavyweight Amanullah

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‘Feels like Eid holidays’

Dhaka turns quiet as scores head home to cast votes

HELEMUL ALAM

With only a day left before the national election, Dhaka wore a deserted look yesterday as many city residents left the capital to cast their votes in their respective constituencies.

As both yesterday and today have been declared general holidays for the election, the exodus began on February 10. Bus terminals, launch ghats and train stations saw heavy passenger movement as people travelled to their hometowns to take part in the voting.

Around 48 lakh mobile phone subscribers left Dhaka from February 9 to yesterday evening, ahead of the national election and referendum, according to mobile operators.

The figures indicate a significant outflow of people from the capital as voters travel to their hometowns to cast their ballots.

An authorised toll collector of the Dhaka North City Corporation at Gabtoli said normally around 1,100-1,200 buses depart daily from the bus terminal. Over the past two days, however, the number of departing buses has surged to 2,000-2,200.

Roads that usually remain clogged with cars, CNG-run auto-rickshaws, battery-operated rickshaws, buses and motorcycles appeared almost empty.

Traffic congestion, a regular feature of the capital, was notably absent, and vehicles were seen moving swiftly through major intersections. The usually chaotic streets, including Farmgate, Shahbagh and Motijheel, experienced an unusual calm.

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Where will key leaders vote today?

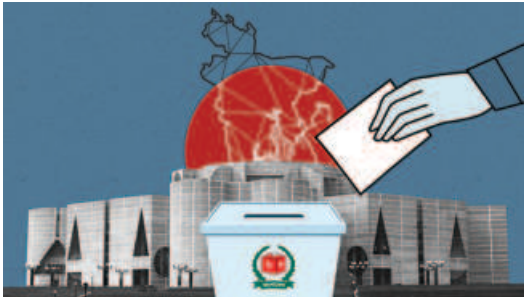
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, advisers of the interim government, and key political figures are set to cast their franchise at their respective voting centres in Dhaka and elsewhere during the 13th National Parliamentary Election and the referendum today.

Yunus will cast his vote at 10:00am at Gulshan Model School and College centre in the capital, the CA Press Wing said in a statement.

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin is scheduled to vote at Eskaton Garden High School centre around 10:00am.

Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan will cast her vote at Adarsha College centre in Dhaka.



Home Adviser Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury is scheduled to cast his vote at Baridhara Scholars International School and College centre in DOHS, Dhaka Cantonment, the home ministry confirmed. BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman, also a candidate from Dhaka-17 and Bogura-6, will cast his vote at Gulshan Model School and College centre in the Gulshan area.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir will vote at Thakurgaon Government Girls' High School centre.

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, who is contesting from Dhaka-15, will vote at Monipur High School (Boy's section) in Dhaka's 60 feet area.

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The pillars of a walkway on the bank of the Turag river in Gabtoli, Dhaka, have eroded, exposing the iron rods inside. The structure risks collapse unless urgent repairs are carried out. Aggravating the damage, boats are illegally anchored to the weakened pillars. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Let people decide who they want in power: speakers

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A free, fair and peaceful election in Bangladesh today is a must for the future of the country's democracy and national security, academics and civil society members said yesterday.

They said the election is consequential for the country as it comes after a mass uprising to end discrimination and restore democracy and human rights for all.

“We are really expecting a free, fair and violence-free election and that the parties will accept the result, whoever wins it,” said Dhaka University former vice-chancellor Prof Anwarullah Chowdhury at a discussion organised by the Foundation for Strategic and Development Studies (FSDS) and Citizens' Forum at a city hotel. FSDS Chairman Maj Gen (ret'd) Fazle Elahi Akbar said a proper election is being held in Bangladesh after 17 years, during which around five crore young voters will cast their franchise.

“Let the people decide whom they want in power,” he added.

Dhaka University former professor Dr Mahbub Ullah said even though the Awami League is not participating in the polls, voter turnout is likely to exceed 60 percent. If that is so, it will be an acceptable election to the international community, he added.

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