

## Let people

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"The only request is that whichever party wins the election should be accepted by the ones defeated," he said.

After the formation of the government, the focus should be on strengthening state institutions, restructuring the economy, reviving the dignity of the nation, and ensuring its sovereignty and independence, he added.

North South University Vice-Chancellor Prof Abdul Hannan Chowdhury said the new government must uphold the spirit of the July uprising and focus on employment generation for youths.

Rear Admiral M Khaled Iqbal (ret), former vice-chancellor of Bangladesh Maritime University, said the country must uphold the path of moderation, not extremism, in an age of globalisation where all countries are interdependent.

"Bangladesh will definitely be dependent on international trade as well as funding. The developed countries consider the values of gender equality and democratic values when supporting other countries, something that Bangladesh needs to remember," he said.

Former inspector general of police Mazharul Haque said there are three stages of security during the polls: pre-election, election day and post-election.

"Preventing any sort of violence after the polls will be of paramount importance," he stressed.

Dhaka University Prof Sukomal Barua stressed the need to ensure the security of religious and ethnic minorities during the election.

FBCCI former vice-president Abul Kashem Haider said, "We urge the political parties to ensure a fair and peaceful election for our future democracy and development."

FSDS Principal Research Fellow Dr Ishraf Hossain moderated the discussion.

## WB okays

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services to 5.5 lakh people and improve solid waste management for 5 lakh.

"Waterbodies are the lifeline for millions in greater Dhaka. But rapid, unplanned urbanisation and industrial growth have outpaced the city's capacity to manage wastewater and pollution," said Jean Pesme, World Bank division director for Bangladesh and Bhutan. Only about 20 percent of Dhaka residents currently have piped sewer connections, while more than 80 percent of untreated wastewater is discharged into waterways.

Over half of the city's canals have either disappeared or remain clogged.

The industrial sector also contributes significantly to the crisis. More than 7,000 factories discharge an estimated 2,400 million litres of untreated wastewater daily.

The programme will mobilise private sector participation to expand industrial effluent treatment and promote water reuse.

Harsh Goyal, senior water supply and sanitation specialist at the World Bank, said the first phase will prioritise developing a comprehensive water quality index and introducing digital real-time monitoring for four major Dhaka rivers.

The initial phase will cover selected areas in Dhaka and Narayanganj, focusing on upgrading recycling systems and enforcing pollution-control measures to stop solid waste dumping and direct sewage discharge.



Security personnel inspect a passenger bus in the City Gate area of Chattogram yesterday. With a surge in travellers heading to their respective districts to cast their votes today, authorities have ramped up safety measures to prevent any untoward incidents.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

## Dhaka may become the bellwether again

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Aman faces Jamaat's Abdul Haq, a former army officer. Despite Haq's rising profile, Aman's development record gives him an edge.

Dhaka-3 (Keraniganj): Once a BNP bastion, it now sees a contest between BNP leader Gayeshwar Chandra Roy and Jamaat's Shahinur Islam. Gayeshwar appears ahead in campaign visibility.

Dhaka-4 (Shyampur-Kadamtali): BNP's Tanveer Ahmed Robin, son of former MP Salahuddin Ahmed, is the frontrunner. He faces Jamaat's Syed Joynul Abedin. Locals believe the newly added 1,00,000 voters will be the ultimate game-changer.

Dhaka-5 (Demra-Jatrabari): Once Khaleda Zia's seat in 1991, it is now riddled with traffic and drug issues. BNP candidate Nabiullah Nabi holds a strong position but faces serious competition from Jamaat and Islami Andolan candidates.

Dhaka-6 (Old Dhaka): Once represented by Sadeque Hossain Khoka, the seat now sees his son, Ishraque Hossain, in the race. The young BNP leader is contesting against Jamaat's Abdul Mannan. In the narrow lanes of Old Dhaka, the result is

expected to hinge largely on the youth vote.

Dhaka-7 (Lalbagh-Chawkbazar): Results here often hinge on the backing of business leaders. Both BNP's Hamidur Rahman and Jamaat's Enayetullah are businessmen. Internal friction within the BNP, with Ishaq Sarker running as an independent, could split the vote and benefit the Jamaat candidate.

Dhaka-8 (Ramna-Motijheel): One of the most talked-about seats nationwide. BNP veteran Mirza Abbas faces young NCP candidate Nasiruddin Patwari, with their social media exchanges shaping much of the campaign narrative. Locals believe Abbas's longstanding influence gives him an edge.

Dhaka-9 (Khilgaon-Basabo): The race features BNP's Habibur Rashid against independent candidate Dr Tasnim Jara. While Habib relies on party machinery, Jara's popularity has turned it into a tight race.

Dhaka-10 (Dhanmondi): Often seen as a bellwether seat. BNP's Sheikh Rabiul Alam is contesting against Jamaat's Jasim Uddin Sarker. With 63,000 new voters added, the outcome remains uncertain.

Dhaka-11 (Rampura-

Badda-Vatara): NCP convener and July uprising figure Nahid Islam faces BNP's MA Quayum. The contest reflects a clash between revolutionary sentiment and administrative experience.

Dhaka-12 (Farmgate-Tejgaon): Dubbed the "Battle of the Saifuls", independent candidate (and expelled BNP leader) Saiful Alam Nirab competes against BNP-backed Saiful Huq and Jamaat's Saiful Alam Milton. Nirab's local influence makes the contest more complex.

Dhaka-13 (Mohammadpur): A constituency with a diverse demographic mix. BNP's Bobby Hajaj faces Mamunul Huq of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, backed by the Jamaat-led alliance.

Dhaka-14 (Mirpur-1): A three-way contest among BNP's Sanjida Islam Tulee, Jamaat's Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem Arman, and independent Abu Bakar Siddique Saju, an expelled BNP leader. While BNP appears organisationally strong, Arman's past enforced disappearance has generated sympathy, and Saju maintains local influence.

Dhaka-15 (Mirpur-Kafrul): A high-profile contest as Jamaat Ameer

Dr Shafiqur Rahman takes on BNP's Saiful Islam Khan Milton. For Jamaat, this is a prestige battle, heightening the stakes.

Dhaka-16 (Pallabi-Rupnagar): Former footballer Aminul Haque represents the BNP against Jamaat's Abdul Baten, a former army officer. With the Awami League absent, both parties are vying to consolidate the vacant political space.

Dhaka-17 (Gulshan-Banani): All eyes are on this constituency, where BNP Chairperson Tarique Rahman is contesting against Jamaat's Dr SM Khaliduzzaman. Tarique's candidacy has energised supporters, though Khaliduzzaman's year-long social outreach keeps the contest competitive.

Dhaka-18 (Uttara): BNP's SM Jahangir Hossain faces NCP's Ariful Islam Adeb. The race reflects the divide between upscale Uttara and the underserved areas of Uttarkhan and Dakshinkhan. Joint efforts by Jamaat and NCP have boosted Adeb's visibility against BNP's organisational strength.

Dhaka-19 (Savar-Ashulia): The largest electorate, with 7,47,000 voters. BNP's Dewan Mohammad Salahuddin

contests against NCP's Dilshana Parul. The large industrial workforce is likely to shape the outcome.

Dhaka-20 (Dhamrai): A contest between BNP veteran Tamiz Uddin and NCP's young candidate Nabila Tasnid. The race symbolises a broader clash between established political networks and youthful aspirations.

**SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK**  
Overall, the BNP appears strong in several constituencies due to heavyweight candidates and organisational depth. However, the Jamaat-led alliance has mounted serious challenges in multiple seats.

This contest in Dhaka is beyond a routine electoral battle. It reflects a broader struggle between established political forces and emerging aspirations.

Badiul Alam Majumdar said, "Bangladeshi politics has changed significantly. If the youth who joined the mass uprising vote with that same spirit, their impact will be substantial. Growing religious sentiment and the perspectives of women voters will also influence outcomes."

Old political formulas may not fully explain today's reality, he added.

## Feels like Eid holidays

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Although metro rail services and public buses are operating, the number of passengers using both has dropped significantly.

Only a few shops, business centres and offices were found open, while all educational institutions remained closed due to the election holidays.

Some commuters faced difficulty finding transport as services operated with reduced frequency due to low demand and election-related movement restrictions.

Motorcycle movement has been prohibited nationwide from midnight on February 10 until midnight on February 13 as part of election security measures, contributing further to the quieter streets.

Mohammad Farid, a cosmetic shop vendor at Farmgate, said he closed his shop early to travel to Bhola to cast his vote.

"Though I initially had no intention of voting, I am going this time as there is a festive mood surrounding the election. I want to cast my vote for my preferred candidate," he said.

Many residents described the capital's atmosphere as peaceful and festive.

"I am enjoying the city today as it has a flavour of peace. I can move very easily around Farmgate, which usually remains extremely

crowded," said Asma Akhtar, a private sector employee whose office remained open despite the holiday.

CNG-run three-wheeler drivers shared similar experiences. Mohammad Sohag said the empty roads felt like Eid holidays.

"Driving on these empty roads is truly interesting. It took only about 10 minutes to travel from Kamalapur to Mohakhali, which usually takes at least 30 minutes on a busy day," he said.

Another CNG driver, Mohammad Ali, said, "I am really enjoying driving in the city today. Moving through these empty roads is hassle-free and comfortable. It took only 30 minutes to come to Farmgate from Sadarghat, which usually takes around one and a half hours."

However, he said he could not travel home to vote due to financial constraints.

"I wished to cast my vote in Noakhali, but I had to drop the plan as it would cost at least Tk 1,000 for the bus fare. I cannot afford that expense right now," he added.

Some vendors at Farmgate kept their shops open as they had no plan to go home to cast their votes.

Jahanara Aktar, a vegetable vendor at West Rajabazar, said she and her family did not go to Mymensingh to vote as it would cost around Tk 10,000.

## Where will key leaders

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Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar will cast his vote at the No 8 West Shironi Government Primary School centre in Phultala upazila of Khulna.

National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam, who is contesting from Dhaka-11, will cast his vote at AKM Rahmat Ullah University College centre in Beraid, Badda.

Among other NCP leaders, Sarjis Alam will vote at Baman Kumar Rakhal Debhat High School centre in Panchagarh; Akhtar Hossain at Bhayerhat Centre A (Tepa Madhupur) in Rangpur's Kaunia; Abdul Hannan Masud at Burir Char Shaheed Ali Ahmed Memorial High School in Hatiya; Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain at Government Laboratory High School in Dhaka's New Market area;

and Hasnat Abdullah at Gopalnagar High School centre in Cumilla.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh Ameer Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim will cast his vote at Bishwaser Hat centre under Charmonai union in Barishal Sadar.

IAB Senior Naye-e-Ameer Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim will vote at Rupatala Lalar Dighirpar Government Primary School centre in Barishal city.

Among other top political leaders, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Ameer and Dhaka-13 candidate of the 11 party alliance, Mamunul Haque, will cast his vote at the Government College of Physical Education polling centre in Mohammadpur, the party said.

According to the EC, voting will continue from 7:30am to 4:30pm today.

## Local factors may

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"For us, the individual matters more than the party symbol," said Belal Hossain of Halishahar.

Farzana Akhtar Parul said similar sentiments prevailed in Boalkhali and Banshkhali.

"The candidate who gains the advantage of the local vote will win," said Liaquat, a former union chairman.

Voters such as Jasmine Akhtar also emphasised image and accessibility. "We are local people, and we want to vote based on a candidate's image," she said.

In Faridpur-3, BNP candidate Nayeba Yousuf Ahmed is drawing on the enduring popularity of her late father, Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yousuf.

"Kamal Ibne Yousuf still enjoys wide popularity in the area, which gives his daughter a strong chance of victory," said Shahadat Hossain of Halezdangi.

For younger voters, accessibility matters. "We can approach her and talk to her about our problems," said Manjarul Islam, a student from Shyamsundarpur.

Female voters also see symbolic value. "We will vote for her because she is woman," said Rizia Begum of Parchar village.

Her father's long electoral history, elected five times between 1979 and 2018, continues to shape perceptions, showing how family legacy can translate into political capital.

In Mymensingh, eight "rebel" BNP candidates are in the race in eight out of 11

seats in the district, backed by personal image and family backgrounds.

Salman Omar, an ex-member of the BNP district body (now expelled), is one of them.

Ahmed Saifullah, a voter of Nasullah village, said Salman Omar is popular among voters for philanthropic activities, including organising eye camps and distributing relief materials on different occasions during the coronavirus pandemic.

"He has a clean image and has not been involved in any criminal activities. He always lends his hand to the poor and distressed. I want to vote for him," said Saifullah.

Independent candidate Principal Akhtar Sultana, wife of BNP lawmaker late Shamsuddin Ahmed, is also drawing on the local popularity of her late husband.

Abdur Razzaq of Koeyrchala village in Phulbaria said he will vote for her.

"The development work done by Shamsuddin Ahmed is still in the memory of Phulbaria people. We are still hopeful for the future development of the area by Sultana," said Razzaq.

"The female candidate with a clean image has also attracted the general voters and I also support her," said Abul Hossain of Rajgati village.

[Our correspondents from respective districts contributed to this report.]

## Ensure state recognition

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The Islami Andolan Bangladesh's manifesto states that meaningful and honourable representation in political participation and decision-making processes, voter registration, healthcare, and full, non-discriminatory access to social protection for the third gender/Hijra community will be ensured.

The BNP's manifesto mentions prioritising disadvantaged groups for social protection without any discrimination. It, however, does not mention hijras separately.

The NCP's manifesto also does not mention hijras distinctly. It states that legal protection and strict enforcement against all forms of social discrimination and deprivation, as well as education, health, employment, voting rights, skill development, and social protection for persons with disabilities and disadvantaged groups, will be ensured to build a society of equal rights and human dignity.

A top official of a rights organisation working with hijras said, "For decades, hijras have remained neglected. They are not given importance in manifestos. This shows that no one has separate plans for them, even though they are citizens of this country."

Members of the community in different areas said candidates have not been reaching out to

them ahead of the polls.

Tanisha Yasmin Chaiti, 34, a hijra living in Dhaka, said, "No candidate has either reached out to us or made a clear announcement regarding what they will do for us."

Chaiti mentioned that a notification was issued in 2013, based on which the drafting of a law under the Ministry of Social Welfare had progressed significantly.

However, it was never passed as a bill in the Parliament. "Our only main demand was a strong law with a state foundation, so that the benefits we have received from various state institutions are maintained consistently," she said.

Light House, an NGO working with hijras, reported last October that the Department of Social Services introduced a monthly allowance for hijras of Tk 650 per person. Up until that time, the number of beneficiaries was only 3,500.

However, according to the 2022 census by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the number of hijras in the country is 12,629, while private estimates suggest the number exceeds 50,000.

A large portion of the hijra community has not been able to become voters. According to Election Commission 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.

## DU move to promote

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Niaz Ahmed Khan, approved a report recommending promotion of 187 officials. On Tuesday, the syndicate also accepted applications for reconsideration from another 20 officials.

Several officials at the Registrar's Office said the Promotion Board is scheduled to interview applicants on February 16 and 17. If its recommendations are endorsed by the syndicate, the promotions will take effect thereafter.

Some administrative officials warned that implementation of the initiative would raise the university's annual salary expenditure by around Tk 3.5 crore.

Registrar Munshi Shams Uddin Ahmed said the DU Officers' Association had submitted a list of 187 officials who were deprived of promotion over the last 15 years.

"When it was sent to the vice-chancellor, he formed a technical committee," he said.

"The committee's report was placed before the syndicate, and later the syndicate issued us certain directives. We are proceeding according to those directives," he added.

Officers' Association General Secretary Sarwar Hossain said administrative staff had long suffered under the existing promotion framework.

"We have long been deprived due to the current promotion policy. Teachers of this university get 100

percent promotion, whereas we get only one-third," he said.

"So we applied to the vice-chancellor for special promotion so that those who have long been deprived can be promoted. That is why we sought special promotion for 187 officials," he added.

Registrar Munshi Shams further said many of the applicants were already drawing salaries under the pay scale of deputy registrar or equivalent posts.

"This will mainly be an upgrade of designation. Since they have been working in their respective posts for a long time, they have already reached this grade. Their increment will increase slightly," he said.

Asked about the issue at a press conference, VC Prof Niaz said the move was aimed at addressing past deprivation.

"This is a general decision; many government offices have done this," he said. "Like other government offices, if anyone has been deprived, we have decided to promote them once under certain conditions. However, the number of officials to be promoted has not yet been finalised," he added.

**PRAYER TIMING**  
FEBRUARY 12

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