

Tarique pulls off a STUNNING SWEEP

Poised to be the prime minister after years of struggle, exile, trauma

WASIM BIN HABIB and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman is set to become the next prime minister after his party swept to a stunning landslide in yesterday's peaceful and festive election, winning more than two-thirds of the parliamentary seats.

The party's resounding victory, along with Tarique's wins in two constituencies in his maiden election, marks one of the most significant political comebacks in recent history. It not only restores the BNP to power after two decades but also closes a long, tumultuous chapter of exile and uncertainty for its top leader.

His party alone won 209 seats and its alliance partners three, show unofficial results from 297 seats. BNP's opponent Jamaat-e-Islami and its allies secured 77 seats, according to the Election Commission.

Jailed and later exiled in the UK, the 60-year-old returned home last December after more than 17 years to contest, for the first time in his political career, one of Bangladesh's most consequential elections.

Tarique took over leadership of the party from his mother, former prime minister Khaleda Zia, a giant of Bangladesh politics, 10 days after her death.

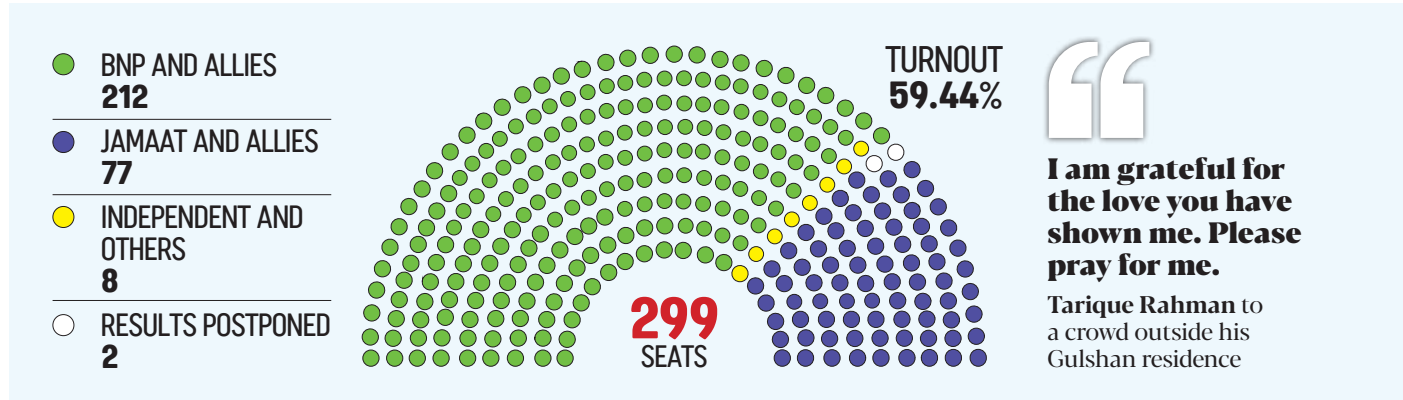
From then on, he worked tirelessly to consolidate BNP's ranks, touring districts with promises of curbing corruption and carrying out electoral reforms and socio-economic development. He mobilised thousands of supporters in what became the most

the long-standing duopoly that has dominated the country's political landscape for almost three decades.

However, his climb to the pinnacle of power was anything but easy, shaped by the trauma of his father's assassination and years of exile, all while facing

1991, 1996 and 2001 under her leadership.

Tarique, who spent his childhood and adolescence in Dhaka, became a member of the Gabtali upazila BNP in Bogura in 1988 at the age of 22. However, he got involved in politics much before he formally joined the party. He took to



vigorous campaign of his career.

He went on to lead his party to a landslide victory in the 13th national election held 18 months after an unprecedented student-led uprising toppled the Awami League government.

Tarique's ascension to the position of prime minister would dismantle

persistent accusations of corruption and nepotism from his political detractors.

His father, late president Ziaur Rahman who founded BNP in 1978, had been assassinated in a military coup in 1981 when Tarique was a teenager.

Since then, Khaleda led the party which went on to form governments in

the streets with his mother during the anti-Ershad movement.

Tarique was made the first joint secretary of the party in June 2002, around a year after the BNP returned to power in 2001 with Khaleda as the prime minister.

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FILE PHOTO: AFP

BNP's long march back to power

Jamaat scores biggest win yet; former allies now face each other across parliament



“Although there were negative perceptions about the BNP's involvement in extortion after August 5, Tarique Rahman's return to Bangladesh had a cooling effect. His presence restrained some of the party's controversial elements...”

DU Political Science Professor **Sabbir Ahmed**

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The 13th national election will be remembered as the one when voters reclaimed their franchise.

But it will also be remembered as a turning point in Bangladesh's political history -- the day the BNP regained power after 17 years, and the day Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's largest

Islamist party, made its most significant stride so far, securing the highest number of seats in its history.

For Jamaat, this was more than just an electoral victory. It marked its transformation into the main opposition, a position it had never

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New govt likely to be sworn in on Monday or Tuesday

BAHARAM KHAN and MD ABBAS

The government is making all-out preparation to conduct swearing-in for MPs-elect after gazette notification within a day or two and the oath-taking of BNP-led government as the interim administration wants to hand over power at the earliest.

Following the 13th national election on Thursday, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has instructed the Cabinet Division and the law ministry to expedite the power transfer process, said multiple officials.

A top government official communicated with the BNP high-ups carrying a message from the head of government, the officials told The Daily Star yesterday.

In forming a new government, the president first administers the oath to the prime minister, followed by ministers. The cabinet secretary is responsible for conducting the ceremony.

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Landslides, close calls define the election

ZYMA ISLAM

The results of the 13th national election reveal a striking mix of nail-biting contests and easy rides.

In many constituencies, candidates did not simply win -- they towered over rivals in strongholds. At the same time, the polls exposed a surprising number of swing seats, where close calls had the potential to tip the scales.

BNP BASTIONS

In all three hill districts, BNP candidates soared far above the reach of their closest rivals.

Dipen Dewan of Rangamati won six and a half times more votes than his closest rival, independent Pohel Chakma, with 2.02 lakh votes to Pohel's 31,222.

In Bandarban, Saching Prue Jerry outpaced NCP's Abu Sayeed Md Suja Uddin by a margin of five and a half times, securing 1.4 lakh votes.

Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan of Khagrachhari more than doubled the tally of independent Dharma Jyoti

Chakma with 1.5 lakh votes.

Similarly, BNP's Md Harun-Or-Rashid from Rajbari-2 and Md GK Gouse from Habiganj-3 each won more than three times the votes of their nearest rivals, NCP's Md Abdullah Al Mamun and Jamaat-e-Islami's Kazi Mohsin Ahmed.

In Brahmanbaria-6, Ganosamhati Andolon's Zonayed Saki secured over 94,000 votes, two-thirds more than Jamaat's Md Mohsin.

Both Chattogram-7's Humam Quader Chowdhury and Chattogram-13's Sarwar Jamal Nizam won by margins of two and a half times over their opponents, Jamaat's ATM Rezaul Karim and Islami Front's SM Shahjahan.

Sunamganj-3's Md Koyson Ahmed, Munshiganj-2's Abdul Salam Azad, and Kushia-1's Reza Ahmed Bacchu Mollah also doubled or more the votes of their rivals.

JAMAAT STRONGHOLDS

Jamaat candidates likewise dominated in several constituencies.

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World leaders congratulate the BNP

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign leaders including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar and Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif have congratulated the BNP and its Chairman Tarique Rahman for the party's landslide victory in the 13th parliamentary elections.

They committed to working with the new leadership of Bangladesh to strengthen bilateral relationships and advance common development goals.

Modi was the first foreign leader to speak with and congratulate Tarique yesterday as the BNP secured 212 parliamentary seats out of 299 in the historic election, which took place 18 months after the July uprising that ousted Sheikh Hasina months into her fifth term as the prime minister.

“Delighted to speak with Mr Tarique Rahman.

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PETALS ON PATROL ... Amid intensive election security duties, female members of the Bangladesh Police share a light moment, tucking yellow dahlia flowers into their hair and taking selfies before returning to the barracks yesterday. With Pahela Falgun today, the scene offered a quiet hint of spring. The photo was taken in the capital's Shahbagh.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

‘Yes’ wins but ...

- “Yes” secures 62.74% support
- Turnout recorded at 60.25%
- 4,80,74,429 votes cast for “Yes”; 2,25,65,627 for “No”
- 74,02,285 ballots cancelled, accounting for 9.61%
- “No” prevails in 11 constituencies, including three Gopalganj seats, hill districts

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and ARAFAT RAHAMAN

The “Yes” vote in Thursday's referendum received comparatively lower support than in the previous three plebiscites.

In the referendum on the constitutional issue of the July National Charter, 4,80,74,429 votes were cast in favour of “Yes”, while 2,25,65,627 voters chose “No”, Election Commission Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed told reporters at the EC office yesterday.

The turnout rate was 60.25 percent.

Later, the EC's public relations office released detailed figures showing that a total of 7,69,51,382 votes were cast.

According to the breakdown, the “Yes” vote secured 62.74 percent support, while the “No” vote obtained 29.32 percent. The remaining 74,02,285 ballots, or 9.61 percent, were cancelled.

EC officials said ballots are usually cancelled if a voter does not mark any option, marks all options, or places the mark incorrectly.

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Global media focuses on BNP’s sweep, Jamaat’s surge

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh’s historic election yesterday drew the attention of the global media, which analysed the poll day environment, the BNP’s victory by more than two-thirds of the seats and the resurgence of Jamaat-e-Islami.

The media outlets largely reported on an overall peaceful election, with some minor allegations of irregularities in the voting.

Thursday’s democratic exercise is a moment of huge potential – and risk – for the country, with one of its two main parties winning such a big victory, said the BBC in its report titled “Bangladesh Nationalist Party sweeps to victory in first election since Gen Z uprising”.

“Tarique Rahman will be under great scrutiny to deliver to a very youthful electorate hungry for change.”

He faces huge challenges in getting the economy back on its feet.

“Reviving the country’s economy, bringing rising food prices under control and creating jobs for Bangladesh’s huge young population are the big challenges facing the new government. Repairing strained ties with giant neighbour India is also high up the list of priorities,” it added.

Up to 1,400 people were killed in the July 2024 uprising, while some 3,500 extrajudicially disappeared during the last 15 years of Sheikh Hasina’s regime, said Time Magazine in its report titled “What Bangladesh’s New Leader Tarique Rahman Means for South Asia and the World”.

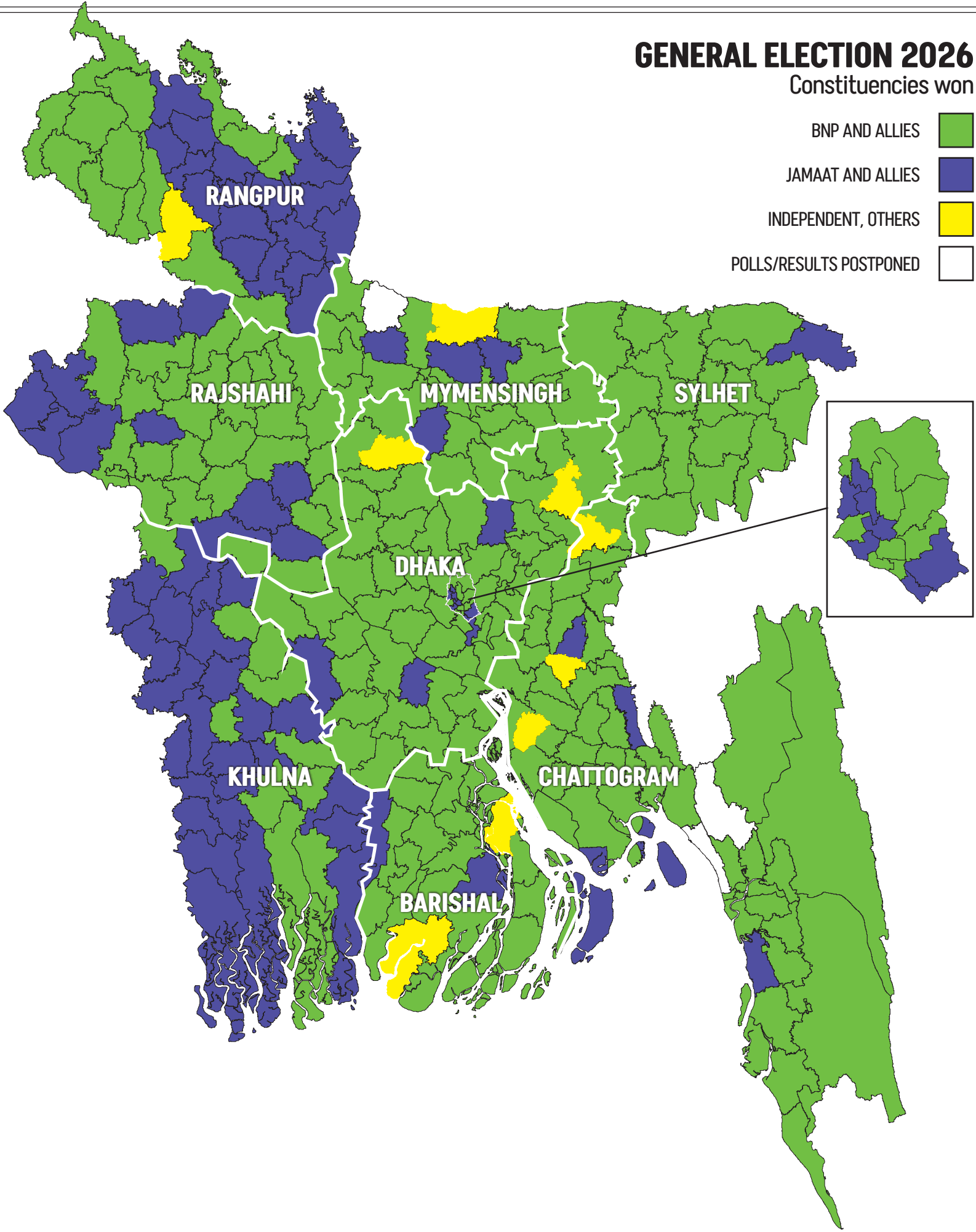
“Those wounds remain very raw, and Rahman will have to rebuild trust in institutions that were totally politicised by Hasina’s Awami League party, including the military, courts, civil service and security services.”

Reminding of violence targeting the AL and religious minorities after the BNP-led coalition took power in 2001, Time said Rahman will have to work tirelessly to keep peace.

Though Bangladesh’s GDP grew from \$71 billion in 2006 to \$460 billion in 2022, soaring costs, inequality and youth unemployment remained major challenges. Bangladesh’s woes have not improved much since Hasina’s ouster.

Some 2 million young Bangladeshis

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CPJ urges next govt to safeguard press freedom

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has called on Bangladesh’s incoming government to uphold constitutional guarantees of press freedom and take urgent steps to protect journalists.

In a Facebook post from its verified page yesterday, CPJ said issues raised in its pre-election letters to major political parties, including the BNP, Jamaat, National Citizen Party, and Jatiya Party, must now be addressed through reforms that ensure accountability and safeguard the news media.

The organisation urged elected representatives to reject violence, intimidation, and misuse of criminal or national-security laws against journalists.

It emphasised that protecting press freedom is a necessity for democracy, and must remain a priority as the country transitions to a new administration.

On January 29, ahead of Bangladesh’s national election, CPJ disclosed that it wrote to major political parties.

In the letters, CPJ highlighted research indicating that risks to journalists had increased in the run-up to the polls.

The letter also referred to mob attacks last December on the offices of two leading newspapers, Prothom Alo, and The Daily Star. CPJ described the incident as a troubling precedent for press safety.

Ukrainian missile attack kills two in Russia’s Belgorod

REUTERS

A Ukrainian missile attack yesterday killed two people and injured three in the Russian city of Belgorod near the border, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

Gladkov, writing on Telegram, said the men were killed at an infrastructure site in the city. All three injured were being treated in hospital and one was in a serious condition.

He said the attack caused serious damage to energy facilities and electricity, heating and water supplies were cut. Three apartment buildings in the city sustained damage.

Tarique pulls off a stunning sweep

FROM PAGE 1

Three years later, he convened a countrywide grassroots forum that covered every upazila. He visited all the upazilas, addressed grassroots leaders and activists, and had one-on-one conversations with locals.

It was during this period that Tarique was hit by controversy. He was accused of running “Hawa Bhaban”, an alternative powerhouse of the BNP-led coalition government. He was also accused of using his power to gain personal advantage.

Tarique consistently refuted all the accusations against him.

He was arrested on corruption charges during the tenure of the military-backed caretaker government in 2007. He reportedly endured torture while in custody for 18 months.

Archival news reports from that year said he suffered fractures in the spine and fell sick during multiple court appearances. He was finally granted bail on medical grounds on August 28, 2008, and was released from jail on September 3 that year.

A week later, he left for London with his wife Zubaida Rahman and daughter Zaima Rahman for medical treatment while facing multiple criminal cases at home.

During his exile, he continued to shape BNP’s strategy and policies and served as the party’s acting chairman after his mother was sentenced to prison in 2018.

Meanwhile, he was struck by a personal tragedy. His brother Arafat Rahman Koko passed away in 2015.

Tarique, according to his associates, gradually grew more measured. The years of exile left a mark on him, shaping his idea of greater tolerance in Bangladeshi politics.

He was convicted in absentia in five cases and faced a large number of lawsuits. All charges and the rulings were dropped after the ouster of the AL government, clearing the legal barrier to his return.

Tarique returned home on December 25 last year to an ecstatic welcome. Addressing a massive crowd,

he said, “...I have a plan for the people of my country, for my country,” indicating that he was ready to run the country. Thus began the party’s campaign.

To strengthen the party’s position, he attended numerous programmes. He toured the country and held at least 64 public rallies, seeking votes for the party symbol, “Sheaf of Paddy”.

During the campaign, he made over a dozen area-specific pledges, assuring people of job creation, welfare, healthcare, and the development of infrastructure and agriculture. His party also pledged to establish an accountable and “just state” directly answerable to people.

Yesterday, when the election results showed his party’s landslide victory, Tarique expressed gratitude to his supporters for their affection and help in securing the win.

“I am grateful for the love you have shown me. Please pray for me,” he said while talking to a crowd outside his Gulshan residence before leaving for Juma prayers.

Landslides, close calls define the election

FROM PAGE 1

In Gaibandha-1, Md Mazedur Rahman secured more than three and a half times the votes of BNP’s Khandoker Ziaul Islam Mohammad Ali, who got 37,997 votes.

In Jashore-5, Gazi Enamul Haque’s margin was two and a half times stronger than BNP’s Rashid Ahmed.

Satkhira-2’s Muhammad Abdul Khaliq won 2.67 lakh votes against BNP runners-up Md Abdur Rouf’s 1.16 lakh.

Jamaat also got twice as many votes as BNP in Rangpur-1, 2 and 3, where Md Raihan Siraji, ATM Azharul Islam and Md Mahbubur Rahman Belal delivered crushing defeats to Md Mokarram Hossain Sujan, Mohammad Ali Sarkar and Md Shamsuzzaman Shamu.

SWING SEATS

The competition between the two parties was most intense in at least 40 battleground constituencies, where victory was decided by a margin of 10

percent or less.

The BNP and allies narrowly held off rivals in 23 seats, while Jamaat-e-Islami and allies secured slim victories in 16 seats.

The most talked-about close call was BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman’s victory in Dhaka-17, where he edged Jamaat’s SM Khaliduzzaman by just 4,399 votes.

In Sirajganj-4, Jamaat’s Md Rafiqul Islam defeated BNP’s M Akbar Ali by a margin of only 0.37 percent.

Similarly, in Rajshahi-1, Jamaat’s Md Mujibur Rahman got only 1.1 percent more votes than BNP’s Md Sharif Uddin.

Similarly, BNP’s Shahjahan Chowdhury won Cox’s Bazar-4 by defeating Jamaat’s Nur Ahmed Anwar by a margin of 1.25 percent.

Jamaat heavyweight Mia Golam Parwar lost to BNP’s Mohammad Ali Asghar by a margin of only 1.75 percent.

BNP’s Md Shamim Kaiser edged

Jamaat’s Md Abdur Rahim Sarkar in Gaibandha-4 with 2.13 percent more votes.

NCP’s emerging heavyweight Sarjis Alam lost to BNP’s Nawshad Zamir in Panchagarh-1 by a margin of only 2.14 percent – less than 2,000 votes.

Bobby Hajjaj, contesting under the BNP banner, secured only a narrow victory over Jamaat ally Mamunul Haque in Dhaka-13, winning by just 2.7 percent.

NCP’s Nahid Islam beat BNP’s MA Quayum in Dhaka-11 by a slim margin of 2.22 percent, while Akhter Hossen beat BNP’s Emdadul Haque Bharasha by a margin of 5.97 percent in Rangpur-4.

In Dinajpur-3, Mymensingh-4, and Thakurgaon-2, the BNP’s lead over Jamaat was narrow – between three and five percent.

Similarly, in Pabna-3, Bagerhat-1, Pabna-4, Dhaka-4 and Dhaka-16, Jamaat’s lead over BNP was also between three and five percent.

New govt likely to be sworn in

FROM PAGE 1

When asked for comment, Cabinet Secretary Sheikh Abdur Rashid declined to provide a specific date, saying, “Let the swearing-in of MPs happen first; the cabinet’s oath-taking will be finalised after that. I cannot make any comment right now.”

However, an official involved in the process told this newspaper, “Preparations are nearly complete for the new government to be sworn in this Monday or Tuesday. It may be announced officially soon.”

Another source said initial preparations were being made for a government similar in size to the one formed in 2001. The Department of Government Transport has already been instructed to prepare around 50 vehicles.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet Division is preparing to invite about 1,500 guests. The guest list typically includes the MPs-elect and their families, members of the current government, judges, heads of constitutional bodies, all secretaries, and top leaders from major political parties.

SWEARING-IN OF MPS-ELECT

On February 5, Law Adviser Asif

Nazrul stated that since there is no Speaker or Deputy Speaker, a person nominated by the president will administer the oath to the MPs-elect. However, no official announcement regarding the nominee was made as of last night.

When asked for comment, former secretary Abdul Awal Mazumder told The Daily Star, “Given the special circumstances, I believe having a presidential nominee administer the oath is a good decision. However, I expect that person to be an MP.”

Explaining the process, the former official, who served long in the Cabinet Division, added, “The rule is that the president will nominate the person proposed by the law ministry with the chief adviser’s approval.”

In response to a question, he said, “MPs are elected representatives of the people; it would look inappropriate if an unelected person administers their oath. Therefore, someone from among the MPs can perform that duty. The constitution provides for such a provision.”

In this context, article 74(4) of the constitution states that the Deputy Speaker shall perform the duties of the Speaker in their absence. If the

Deputy Speaker is also unavailable, a member of parliament may perform the Speaker’s duties according to the Rules of Procedure.

“Just as a Speaker first takes their own oath and then administers it to other MPs, the president can ask a senior elected MP to take their own oath first. I see no obstacle in that person then administering the oath to the other members.”

For example, Mazumder pointed out that during Bangladesh’s first National Assembly in 1972, the most senior MP, Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish, first swore his own oath before administering it to the other members.

“The current government can follow that precedent. Since MPs are elected, an elected person should administer their oath. I believe this will uphold the dignity of the parliament.”

However, a government official, requesting anonymity, said the interim government was formed based on Supreme Court advice during a major national crisis. Therefore, it would not be inappropriate if a current or former chief justice administer the oath to the MPs-elect.



Army personnel check documents of a biker in the Chankharpool area of the capital yesterday, a day after the 13th national parliamentary election, as security measures remained in place across the city.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN



Senior BNP leaders, including Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, congratulate party Chairman Tarique Rahman with a bouquet on the party's sweeping victory in Thursday's national election at his Gulshan office in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

BNP wins on Khaleda's legacy, Tarique's drive

Say party leaders, political analysts

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

BNP's sweeping victory in Thursday's national election is a result of public trust in the party's leadership, spirited campaigning, and voter disillusionment with rival Jamaat-e-Islami, according to party leaders and political analysts.

Strong public sentiment toward former prime minister and party chairperson Khaleda Zia, who passed away just weeks before the polls, together with her son and successor Tarique Rahman's campaign strategy and progressive reform agenda, are being regarded as key factors behind the landslide.

Analysts also point to BNP's prolonged struggle against authoritarian rule and its role in the mass uprising, along with support from minority communities, women voters, and a section of Awami League supporters, as decisive elements.

"Jamaat's positions on women gave rise to fear, shifting public perception toward BNP," said Prof Mojibur Rahman of Dhaka University's Institute of Education and Research.

Former Jahangirnagar University

Professor Al Masud Hasanuzzaman also noted the years of struggle endured by grassroots leaders under the previous regime and said it strengthened BNP's credibility.

"The absence of Awami League in the polls gave BNP space to consolidate its position and expand its voter base," he added.

Unofficial results from the Election Commission show that BNP alone secured 209 seats, with allies bringing the total to 212 -- a two-thirds majority that paves the way for forming the next parliament.

However, the party faced setbacks as well. The nomination of weak candidates and reports of activists engaging in extortion and reckless behaviour in the aftermath of the mass uprising caused BNP to fall short of its expected results, allowing rivals to capitalise on those constituencies.

In many seats, voters expressed dissatisfaction with local BNP candidates, yet their confidence in the party's central leadership remained a decisive factor behind the overall victory.

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Big names, big upsets

Heavyweights who failed to hold ground in 13th nat'l election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several heavyweight and widely discussed candidates have suffered defeats in the 13th national parliamentary election, triggering discussions in political circles.

According to unofficial results, multiple senior leaders from BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, the National Citizen Party (NCP), and among independent contenders failed to win their seats despite high expectations.

Many of those defeated have been active in politics for decades and were considered organisationally strong and locally influential, making their losses particularly notable.

In Khulna-5, Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar lost to BNP candidate Ali Asghar Lobby by a narrow margin.

Porwar received 1,46,246 votes, while Lobby secured 1,48,854 -- winning by just 2,608 votes.

Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish Ameer Mamunul Haque contested the election in Dhaka-13 under the Jamaat-led alliance. He received 86,067 votes.

BNP backed candidate Bobby Hajjaj won with 88,387 votes, leading by 2,320 votes.

In Cox's Bazar-2, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Hamidur Rahman Azad lost to BNP candidate Mahfuzullah Farid by more than 35,000 votes.

The wide margin surprised many, as Azad is a former lawmaker and a long-time influential figure in the area.

Moving towards the north, in Chapainawabganj-3, BNP's multiple-term MP Harunur Rashid was defeated by Jamaat leader Nurul Islam, a former president of Islami Chhatra Shibir.

Rashid won this seat even during the controversial 2018 election, making the current outcome a major upset. He received 1,27,037 votes, while Nurul secured 1,89,640.

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Only 7 women make it to parliament

Six from BNP, one independent; total 85 women contested in this election

STAR REPORT

Seven women candidates -- six from BNP and one independent -- were elected in the 13th national election held on Thursday.

A total of 85 women contested the election this time, including 66 with party nominations and 19 as independent aspirants.

In Sylhet-2 (Bishwanath and Osmaninagar), Tahsina Rushdir Luna, wife of BNP leader M Ilias Ali, a victim of enforced disappearance, won by a margin of 79,321 votes.

Luna, the lone female candidate nominated by BNP in the entire Sylhet division, campaigned with grassroots activists loyal to her husband after facing resistance from segments of local leadership.

She dedicated the victory to her missing husband and the voters of the constituency.

"This victory comes from people's love and emotion for Ilias Ali. People voted to honour his name and expressed their respect and attachment," she said.

Luna previously received a BNP nomination in the 2018 national election, but her candidacy was cancelled at the last moment.

In Brahmanbaria-2 (Sarail, Ashuganj and parts of Bijoyinagar), Rumeen Farhana was elected as an independent candidate.

Rumeen contested as a rebel candidate from BNP after she was defeated the party's nomination for the seat. She was later expelled

from BNP.

Stressing that her victory belonged to her supporters, campaigners and voters, Rumeen pledged to dismantle what she described as entrenched "syndicates" behind repeated violence in Sarail.

She also said BNP leadership contacted her after her victory became inevitable.

"They suggested it would be good to sit together and even hinted that I could get something bigger than an MP post. I declined. They had expelled me. This is not my party



Tahsina Rushdir Luna



Rumeen Farhana



Shama Obaid Islam



Nayab Yusuf Ahmed



Farzana Sharmin Putul



Esrat Sultana Elen Bhutto



Afroza Khanom Rita

"I represent the people of Brahmanbaria-2 -- nearly half a million voters. My responsibility is to them," she said.

Rumeen said as a lawmaker, she would speak the truth, protest injustice and stand against corruption, regardless of who holds power.

any more," she said, adding that her politics was now entirely her own.

In Faridpur-2 (Saltha-Nagarkanda), BNP candidate and the party's central organising secretary, Shama Obaid Islam, won by a margin of 32,953 votes.

Shama said the overwhelming

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Youth votes propel Jamaat into opposition

MAMUNUR RASHID

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami has emerged as the second major political force in the 13th parliamentary election, positioning itself as the principal opposition after the BNP secured more than two-thirds of the seats.

Riding on the momentum following the July uprising, the religion-based party, which has re-emerged as a new political force, has secured 68 seats on its own. Its 11-party alliance bagged 77 seats in total.

Jamaat's highest tally before this was the 18 seats it won in the 1991 election.

Its seat count would have been higher had its candidates not lost narrowly in at least 50 constituencies, according to party insiders.

"An election has taken place after many years, and there are many new voters. Compared to others, Jamaat's influence among young voters has increased somewhat. This was also evident in student union elections, where young voters supported them more," said political analyst and writer Mohiuddin Ahmad.

Also, many who might have once voted for the boat or plough symbols have voted for Jamaat this time. "That is why their vote share has increased," he added.

Furthermore, having been "persecuted" for more than one and a half decades during the AL rule, Jamaat appears to have gained greater public sympathy in the new political reality following the uprising.

Voters were also drawn by the party's organisational strength and its pledge to establish a "new political settlement" beyond the traditional AL-BNP divide.

Jamaat candidates performed particularly well in the border areas of Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur.

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Brothers Pintu, Tuku elected MPs from Tangail



OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

BNP leaders Abdus Salam Pintu and Sultan Salahuddin Tuku, who are also brothers, have won from the Tangail-2 and Tangail-5 constituencies, respectively, in the 13th national election held on February 12.

Pintu, a former BNP vice-president, has been elected MP for the third time from Tangail-2 (Gopalpur-Bhuapur), securing 1,98,867 votes, the highest in the district, defeating a rival Jamaat-e-Islami candidate.

His younger brother Tuku, BNP publicity secretary, has been elected MP for the first time from Tangail-5 (Sadar), securing 1,31,279 votes and defeating a rival Jamaat candidate.

The election of the two brothers, who were among the most persecuted BNP leaders during the previous Awami

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PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Readers browse newspapers at a roadside stall in the capital yesterday morning to follow coverage of the February 12 national election. Amid the surge of misinformation and disinformation online, many still turn to print for reliable and authentic news. The photo was taken in Farmgate area.

Next govt to face graft, economic challenges

Says Fakhru; BNP to seek Hasina's extradition, says Salahuddin

STAR REPORT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday said the next government, to be formed by his party, will face major challenges in maintaining law and order, fighting corruption and reviving the country's economy.

"The biggest challenges for the next government will be to get the economy moving, maintain law and order, control corruption and ensure justice," he told reporters at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka after returning from his electoral area in Thakurgaon.

He also said the BNP, having won a majority of seats in the 13th parliamentary election, will form the next government under the leadership of party Chairman Tarique Rahman, reports UNB.

Commenting on the election results, Fakhru described the moment as both joyous and sad. "There is joy on one

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Tulee seeks re-election in Dhaka-14

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka-14 BNP nominated candidate Sanjida Islam Tulee yesterday alleged vote rigging and election engineering in the 13th national parliamentary election.

Tulee made the allegations at the EC headquarters in Dhaka's Agargaon, demanding immediate suspension of results and a re-election in the constituency.

Tulee said, "The polls ended yesterday [Thursday], the night has passed, and yet till today [yesterday] the results of each centre in Dhaka-14 have not been made clear. What does this mean?"

Accusing the authorities of election engineering, the BNP candidate said, "From the morning, our polling agents were not allowed to sit in some centres. Later, Jamaat-e-Islami activists, aided by a section of the administration, assaulted our workers. Inside many centres, voting was so slow that voters complained of waiting for two to three hours."

She added, "By midday, my polling agents were forced to sign documents by Ansar members. Why were they asked to sign before the election was even over?"

Fire breaks out at jhut depot

UNB, Gazipur

A fire broke out at a jhut godown in Gazipur's Ambagh area yesterday night.

The fire started around 7:30pm, said Md Mamun, assistant director of Gazipur Fire Service.

Five firefighting units have been deployed to control the blaze, he added.

The cause of the fire is yet to be determined, and the extent of the damage will be assessed once the fire is brought under control.

PRAYER TIMING
FEBRUARY 14

Fazr

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

House To-Let

Uttara sector-09, Rd-01. A 4-storied building will be rented for office use. Preference will be given to Banks, Insurance or established and reputed industries or organizations.

Contact: Prof. Dr. Ahmed. Cell: +01805132273, +8801711593134.

প্রতিরক্ষা খাত হতে বেতনভুক্ত অনুপস্থিত অসামরিক কর্মচারীকে কর্তব্যস্থলে যোগদানের বিজ্ঞপ্তি

অর্ডিন্যান্স ডেপো কক্সবাজার, চকরিয়া আর্মি ক্যাম্প

১। আপনি সিএস-৫২৬১১৯ ইউএসএম সাইফুল ইসলাম, পিতাঃ মোহাম্মদ সেলিম, গ্রামঃ খিরিগাতি, ডাকঘরঃ বিলাপাড়া, থানাঃ চট্টবিল, জেলাঃ নোয়াখালী গত ১৯ জুলাই ২০২৫ তারিখ হতে অদ্যাবধি কর্তৃপক্ষের বিনামূলিতে/বিনাচুক্তিতে কর্তব্য কাজে অনুপস্থিত রয়েছেন। কর্তব্যে যোগদানের জন্য রেজিস্টার্ড ডাকযোগে আপনার স্থায়ী ঠিকানায় অর্ডিন্যান্স ডেপো কক্সবাজার হতে পরপর ০৩ টি সনুলিকা প্রেরণ করা হলেও আপনি কর্তৃস্থলে উপস্থিত হননি। এরপর ১১ সেপ্টেম্বর ২০২৫ তারিখে ০৯ নং বিলাপাড়া ইউনিয়ন পরিষদে পর প্রেরণ করা হলে তদারক আপনাকে কর্তৃস্থলে প্রেরণ করতে বার্ষ হয়।

২। অতপর আপনাকে কর্তৃস্থলে হাজির করার জন্য মোহাম্মাদী পুলিশ সুপারের নিকট পর প্রেরণ করা হলে স্থানীয় চট্টবিল থানা-পুলিশ আপনাকে অদ্যাবধি বুকে পেতে সক্ষম হয়নি। কর্তৃপক্ষের আদেশ অমান্য করে যেচ্ছার কর্তব্যস্থলে আপনার এনে দীর্ঘ অনুপস্থিতি SBAO-05/S/80 Rule 7(2) The Civilian Employees in Defence Services (Classification Control and Appeal Rules,1961) অনুযায়ী অসদাচরণ (Misconduct) এবং শাস্তিযোগ্য অপরাধ।

৩। সিএস-৫২৬১১৯ ইউএসএম সাইফুল ইসলামকে এই বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রকাশের ১০ দিনের মধ্যে অর্ডিন্যান্স ডেপো কক্সবাজার, চকরিয়া আর্মি ক্যাম্পে স্ব-শরীরে হাজির হয়ে কর্তৃস্থলে যোগদান করার জন্য নির্দেশ দেয়া হলো। নির্ধারিত দিন/সময়ের মধ্যে আপনি কর্তৃস্থলে যোগদানে বার্ষ হলে আপনার বিরুদ্ধে SBAO-05/S/80 Rule 8(1) 9.11- The Civilian Employees in Defence Services (Classification Control and Appeal Rules,1961) মোতাবেক তদন্ত প্রদানের ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করা হবে এবং আপনার অনুপস্থিতিতেই বিচার কার্য সম্পন্ন করা হবে।

আই এস পি আর/সেনা/১৩৫

চীফ অর্ডিন্যান্স অফিসার
লেঃ কর্ণেল
অর্ডিন্যান্স ডেপো কক্সবাজার
চকরিয়া আর্মি ক্যাম্প



A shoe seller sits dejected during peak hours in the capital's Farmgate area, facing a glaring lack of customers yesterday. Just a day after the national election, Dhaka's streets and roads remained unusually empty.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Big names, big upsets

FROM PAGE 3

Sarjis Alam, one of the key July figures and a member of the top NCP leadership, contested the election from the Jamaat-led alliance in Panchagarh-1.

Securing 1,68,049 votes, he lost the seat to the BNP candidate Barrister Mohammad Nawshad Zamir. Nawshad got 1,76,169 votes.

Meanwhile, in the capital, BNP's Dhaka North convener Aminul Haque – also a former captain of the Bangladesh national football team – lost to Jamaat candidate Abdul Baten by 3,361 votes in Dhaka-16.

Aminul received 85,467 votes, while Baten secured 88,828.

In Dhaka-8, prominent NCP candidate Nasiruddin Patwary – who gained much traction through his active campaigning both online and offline, alongside a war of words against his opponent Mirza Abbas – received 54,127 votes.

BNP's Mirza Abbas won the seat with 59,366 votes.

In Dhaka-9, the much-talked-about female independent candidate Tasnim Jara, who enjoyed massive social media popularity, received 44,684 votes.

The seat's winner, BNP's Habibur Rashid, secured 1,11,212 votes.

In Sunamganj-2 (Dirai and Shalla), Jamaat candidate and Supreme Court lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir lost by a large

margin to BNP candidate Nasir Chowdhury.

Nasir received 99,522 votes, while Shishir Manir got 63,220.

In Khulna-1, Krishna Nandi, Jamaat's only candidate from the minority community, was defeated by BNP contender Amir Ejaz Khan.

Nandi received 70,346 votes, while Amir secured 1,21,352.

In Bogura-2, Nagorik Oikya president Mahmudur Rahman Manna received 3,426 votes.

Islamic Front candidate Md Gias Uddin Taheri also suffered a heavy defeat in Habiganj-4, losing to BNP-nominated candidate SM Faisal.

In Barisal-3, AB Party leader Asaduzzaman Bhuiyan, commonly known as Barrister Fuad, was defeated by BNP candidate Zainul Abedin.

FROM PAGE 3

hand and sadness on the other. Our late chairperson

and national leader, Khaleda Zia, could not see this unprecedented victory, which is very sad," he said.

He said the election was held in a transparent manner amid a festive mood.

Asked about the election being held without the participation of the Awami League, Fakhrul said, "The Election Commission has taken the decision regarding the AL, and the party's activities have been suspended.

PABNA-3, 4 SEATS BNP demands vote recount

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

BNP leaders and activists in the Pabna-3 and Pabna-4 constituencies yesterday afternoon laid siege to the Pabna deputy commissioner's office as well as the district returning officer's office, demanding a recounting of votes in the two seats.

In the constituencies, Jamaat-e-Islami nominated candidates secured win in the 13th national election, defeating two BNP leaders by a very little difference.

Talking to The Daily Star, Ahmed Mostafa Noman, key agent of Pabna-3 BNP candidate Hasan Zafir Tuhin, alleged that their polling agents in few polling centres were sidelined during vote counting. "Results in a few centres were finalised without signatures of the [their] agents."

Md Firoz, a voter from Tilakpur under Pabna-4, alleged that Jamaat men manipulated votes. Habibur Rahman ran as the BNP backed candidate.

The demonstrators, along with the two BNP candidates, submitted applications to the DC, seeking recounting of votes. Executive Magistrate Abdul Alim said those were already sent to the Election Commission.

Next govt to face graft

Further decisions will depend on future political developments."

Fakhrul later went to the BNP chairman's office in Gulshan to congratulate Tarique Rahman with flowers.

Meanwhile, BNP Standing Committee member

Salahuddin Ahmed said his party will formally urge India to extradite deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina to Bangladesh to stand trial, reports our staff correspondent.

"We will press for her [Hasina] extradition in

accordance with the law. It is a matter between the respective foreign

ministries of Bangladesh and India. We will urge the Government of India to send her back to face trial," he told reporters in front of the BNP office in Dhaka's Gulshan.

Salahuddin, who has been declared the unofficial winner from the Cox's Bazar-1 constituency, also said the country had witnessed an inclusive election, with people delivering their verdict to lay the foundations of a strengthened democracy.

Brothers Pintu, Tuku elected MPs

FROM PAGE 3

League government's tenure, has sparked jubilation among their campaign activists and supporters.

Sources said that although the party had initially decided not to nominate two members from the same family, BNP ultimately nominated both Pintu and Tuku, considering their sacrifice and loyalty.

Pintu, also the founding general secretary of the Tangail district unit BNP, previously won from the same constituency in the 1991, 1996 and 2001 national elections.

In 2001, he was appointed deputy minister of education in the BNP-led alliance government.

In January 2008, he was arrested in the August 21 grenade attack case. He was later sentenced to death in the case and remained in prison until his release on December 24, 2024, following the AL government's ouster on August 5, 2024.

In the latest election, Pintu secured a landslide victory, winning by a

margin of around 1,38,000 votes.

Tuku, a former convener of the Dhaka University unit of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, later served as its central president and general secretary, before becoming president of the Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal central unit.

During the previous AL government's tenure, nearly 300 cases were filed against him, and he served at least five years in prison. Following his arrest, he was remanded for 46 consecutive days.

When Pintu was in jail, Tuku contested from Tangail 2 twice but lost on both occasions.

This time, he contested from the Sadar seat and defeated the rival Jamaat candidate by a margin of more than 50,000 votes. He also faced a BNP rebel candidate in the constituency. Talking to The Daily Star, Pintu said, "Setting aside all differences, we will work together peacefully for the development of the area and its people. Attacks on opponents, conflict, violence, assault,

or extortion will not be tolerated."

Tuku said, "I seek everyone's prayers so that I can fulfil the promises I made to the people of Tangail before the election. I pledge that I will neither engage in any wrongdoing nor allow anyone else to do so."

Meanwhile, in the south, the results brought mixed fortunes for two other brothers – sons of late Jamaat leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee.

In Pirojpur-1, Jamaat-e-Islami candidate Masood Sayedee won the seat, building a lead of more than 33,000 votes in Pirojpur Sadar and Indurkani.

He trailed in Nazirpur, where he received 45,621 votes against BNP nominee Alamgir Hossain's 54,154.

However, in Pirojpur-2, his brother Shameem Sayedee, also backed by Jamaat, lost to BNP candidate Ahammad Sohail Monzoor after a significant setback in Nesarabad.

Monzoor secured 69,500 votes there, compared to Shameem's 37,163, sealing the victory for the BNP candidate.

Fazlur vows to uphold spirit of Liberation War

Wins Kishoreganj-4 by 74,643-vote margin

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

Prominent BNP leader and freedom fighter Fazlur Rahman has secured victory in the Kishoreganj-4 (Itna-Mithamoin-Austagram) constituency, winning 1,32,472 votes, 74,643 more than his nearest rival.

After his victory, Fazlur Rahman expressed gratitude to his constituents. "I salute and thank the people of my area who endured many hardships and voted for me despite numerous difficulties," he said after offering Juma prayers at the Shahi Mosque in Borohati village of Itna upazila yesterday.

He said he would work for the development of the area in line with the country's broader interests.

Referring to recent political events, he said, "After August 5, 2024, when anti-liberation forces tried to push the spirit of the Liberation War into darkness, I raised my voice as a freedom fighter."

"I will not step back from my role for the liberation of the people, for non-communalism and

secularism, and for ensuring food, clothing and employment. I will raise these issues in parliament with greater courage and work to implement them," he said.

In the 6th national parliament election in 1996, Fazlur Rahman contested from the same seat against former president Abdul Hamid.



Fazlur ran as an independent candidate with the Television symbol, while Abdul Hamid contested with the Awami League ticket. Fazlur lost that election.

Recalling a vow he made at the time, he said, "Thirty years ago, I promised that if I ever won, I would offer prayers in this mosque. Today, with your support and prayers, Allah has fulfilled that wish."

Youth votes propel

FROM PAGE 3

In addition, Jamaat and its allies secured seven seats in Dhaka this time after failing to win any in previous elections.

According to unofficial results of the 13th parliamentary election, Jamaat candidates won all four seats in Satkhira. The party secured four out of five seats in Gaibandha and five out of six in Rangpur, while its alliance partner NCP won the remaining seat there.

Jamaat's electoral symbol, the scales, won three out of five seats in Pabna. The party also secured two seats each in Rajshahi and Khulna.

However, Mohiuddin believes Jamaat may not have been able to secure significantly more seats than it did this time.

"Had the election been held six months earlier, the BNP might have received more votes. If the BNP had no rebel candidates, its vote share might have been higher."

In that sense, it can be said that Jamaat has benefited considerably.

"Jamaat is the most organised party. Moreover, it had no rebel candidates. This is also a reason behind its increased vote share," he added.

If a political party has clear goals and objectives, and demonstrates sacrifice and dedication, it is natural

for that party to establish itself, said Sabbir Ahmed, a professor of political science at the University of Dhaka.

"Regardless of allegations of anti-independence positions, people have accepted them. A bigger factor than ideology is how they have acted as a human agency. Moreover, they have reaped the results of enduring repression and persecution for 17 years in this election."

They may have infiltrated the Chhatra League, which was a mistake.

But by staying covert, they managed to survive and eventually benefited.

"Morally, it may not have been right."

The repression during the AL rule boosted Jamaat's popularity alongside the BNP.

"This has increased Jamaat's acceptability. I believe this is also the result of their planned efforts."

In the one and a half years following the uprising, Jamaat tried to reach out to people as much as possible.

"They attempted to adopt the kind of political behaviour expected in engaging with voters. Voters also thought that if someone helps them, addresses their economic problems and reasonably tries to resolve their social issues, why wouldn't they support that party?"

Only 7 women make it

FROM PAGE 3

support of the people reflected their love, trust and prayers. "This victory does not belong to any individual. It belongs to every resident of Nagarkanda and Saltha," she added.

In Faridpur-3 (Faridpur Sadar), BNP candidate Nayab Yusuf Ahmed, also joint general secretary of Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal's central committee, emerged victorious by a margin of 24,430 votes.

She expressed gratitude to voters for what she described as an honour bestowed upon her through their support.

Calling the win a responsibility rather than a celebration, Nayab said her priority would be development, security and dignity for the people of the constituency, while upholding the legacy of her party and her family in the area.

In Natore-1 (Lalpur-Bagatipara), BNP candidate Barrister Farzana Sharmin Putul reclaimed the constituency of her father, late BNP leader and former minister Fazlur Rahman Patal.

Beyond competition from other parties, Farzana faced initial challenges within her family. Her elder brother, Yasir Arshad

Rajon, had initially filed his candidacy as an independent candidate from the same constituency before withdrawing to extend support to his sister.

Reflecting on the competitiveness of the election, Putul said, "It was an uphill task, accomplished with the support of my party, my family and the general public."

"I want to serve as a beacon for women in the constituency. I will work to establish a link between women, agriculture and cottage industries to spearhead an economic revolution in the north led by women," she added.

In Jhalakathi-2 (Sadar and Nalchity), Esrat Sultana Elen Bhutto won for the third time to become a lawmaker with BNP nomination, reaffirming voters' continued confidence in her family's political legacy.

Elen was the only female contender across two constituencies in Jhalakathi.

Elen was first elected in a 2000 by-election following the death of her husband, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a three-time Jatiya Party lawmaker from the seat. She was re-elected in 2001 as a BNP candidate. She, however, faced defeat

BNP wins

FROM PAGE 3

Party insiders said BNP deliberately avoided revenge-driven rhetoric that might alienate Awami League voters.

Analysts added that BNP's clear stance on the Liberation War and criticism of Jamaat's role in 1971 resonated strongly, especially with voters who embrace the values rooted in independence.

Prof Mojibur noted, "BNP's nomination of several freedom fighters and its emphasis on independence appealed to a broad base."

BNP leaders also highlighted rival Jamaat's controversial positions on women's rights, cultural activities, and its wartime legacy as factors that pushed voters toward BNP.

"Anti-Jamaat sentiment and the lack of a viable alternative led many to choose BNP, confident it could govern after the uprising," said a BNP Standing Committee member.

The party's campaign also leaned on populist pledges such as the "Family Card" and "Farmer Card", alongside Tarique Rahman's interactive speeches, grassroots outreach, and a roadmap for national welfare.

Sources close to BNP said winning candidates benefited from their deep local roots and long-standing resilience, which voters recognised and rewarded.

in the 2008 national election.

Expressing her gratitude to voters, Elen said, "I will always stand by them and strive to honour the trust they have placed in our family."

In Manikganj-3 (Sadar and Satoria), BNP candidate Afroza Khanam Rita won by a margin of 1,03,103 votes, becoming the lone female lawmaker from the constituency in 55 years of independence.

Rita entered politics following in the footsteps of her father, late industrialist Harunar Rashid Khan Monno, a four-time lawmaker from the seat and a former minister.

Rita is also convener of BNP's district unit and a member of the advisory council of the BNP chairman.

"This is the victory of the people of Manikganj. I want to dedicate my life to their overall development and complete the unfinished work of my late father, playing a role in employment generation, road connectivity, education, health and women's development by establishing factories," she said.

(Our correspondents from the respective districts contributed to this report)

Trump drops key US climate rule

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump on Thursday revoked a landmark scientific finding underpinning US regulations to curb planet-warming pollution, marking his biggest rollback of climate policy to date.

The repeal of the Environmental Protection Agency's 2009 "endangerment finding" was paired with the immediate elimination of greenhouse gas standards on automobiles.

But it also places a host of other climate rules in jeopardy. Legal challenges are expected to follow swiftly.

"This determination had no basis in fact, had none whatsoever, and no basis in law," Trump said at a White House event.

He dismissed concerns that the repeal could cost lives by worsening climate change, reiterating his belief that human-caused global warming is a hoax.

Shooting kills 2, wounds one at southern US university

AFP, Washington

Gunfire killed two people and wounded another in an apartment at a historically Black university in the southern United States on Thursday, officials said, marking at least the third shooting on the campus since October.

The US, where firearms are readily available, has a long history of gun violence that kills thousands of people every year.

The shooting at South Carolina State University's Hugine Suites student residential complex was reported around 9:15 pm Thursday (0215 GMT Friday), the college said in a statement.

The university had two shootings on its campus in October, including one at the same student housing complex, ABC News reported, adding that one person was killed and another wounded.

"University officials have not yet confirmed the victims' identities or the condition of the wounded person," the university said in a social media post early yesterday. "The campus remains on lockdown."

School officials did not say whether anyone was in custody in connection to the shooting, but they announced that Friday classes were cancelled.

CIA releases new video appeal for spies in China

Beijing vows 'measures'

AFP, Beijing

Beijing will take "all necessary measures" against foreign espionage activities, the foreign ministry said yesterday, after the US spy agency issued a recruitment video targeting Chinese military personnel.

The CIA's Chinese-language video, published on the agency's YouTube channel on Thursday, appears to target disaffected officers and appeals for information on China's leaders and armed forces.

China's foreign ministry condemned what it called "anti-China forces" and vowed action to protect national security.

"China will take all necessary measures to resolutely combat infiltration and sabotage activities of foreign anti-China forces and resolutely safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a press conference when asked about the CIA video.

He did not provide any details on the measures Beijing could take.

The video depicts a fictional Chinese officer deciding to contact the US intelligence agency after concluding that "the only thing leaders are protecting is their own interest" and that "their power is based on countless lies".

It shows the officer at home with his family, then driving past a checkpoint in pouring rain before taking out a laptop in the car and typing on it as he says: "Picking this path is my way of fighting for my family and my country."



University students and relatives of detainees march in Caracas, Venezuela, on Youth Day Thursday, calling for amnesty for political prisoners and underscoring ongoing demands for political reform.

PHOTO: AFP

Russia strikes Ukraine energy, port sites

Six killed; peace talks set for Geneva on Feb 17–18

AFP, Kyiv

Six people died in Russian strikes across Ukraine overnight that targeted the southern port city of Odesa and energy infrastructure, officials announced yesterday.

Moscow has stepped up its attacks on Ukrainian critical infrastructure in recent weeks despite pressure by the United States to reach a peace deal with Kyiv.

Russia launched one missile and 154 drones overnight, the Ukrainian air force said, warning that some unmanned aerial vehicles were still in Ukrainian airspace as of yesterday morning.

Three men and one boy were were killed late on Thursday evening in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kramatorsk, local authorities.

Meanwhile, Russia said yesterday that a new round of talks with US and Ukrainian officials seeking to broker an end to the four-year war would take place next week.

Two previous rounds of US-brokered talks in Abu Dhabi have failed to lead to a breakthrough, with Moscow and Kyiv remaining far apart on the key issue of territory.

Russian forces have been pushing towards the industrial hub -- one of the last remaining civilian centres under Ukrainian control in the Donetsk region.

Ukraine's rights ombudsman said yesterday the victims included

19-year-old twins and their eight-year-old brother.

"We are establishing the final consequences of Russian terror," the head of the city's military administration Oleksandr

DTEK, Ukraine's largest private energy company, said the attack had inflicted "extremely serious" damage to its energy facilities there.

"It will take a long time to repair the equipment and restore it to



Rescuers walk past damaged cars at the site of a Russian drone strike in Odesa, Ukraine, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Goncharenko, wrote on social media.

In the Zaporizhzhia region, which the Kremlin claims is part of Russia along with Donetsk, a 48-year-old man was killed in a drone attack, the emergency services said.

The worst damage was reported in the Odesa region, where authorities said one person died in a Russian strike on port infrastructure.

working order," the company said.

Some 300,000 people in the Black Sea city had been left without water following overnight attacks a day earlier.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Friday arrived in Munich to hold rounds of meetings with European and US officials, seeking support from allies ahead of the talks. He also toured a Ukrainian-German drone production facility.

150K Afghans returned from Pakistan, Iran this year: UN

AFP, Geneva

Nearly 150,000 Afghans have returned from Pakistan and Iran this year, with the speed and size of the migration pushing Afghanistan deeper into crisis, the UN refugee agency said yesterday.

After decades hosting Afghans fleeing crises at home, Pakistan and Iran have ramped up deportations and forced millions back across the border to a country struggling to provide for them.

"So far this year, nearly 150,000 Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan," Arafat Jamal, the UNHCR representative to Afghanistan, told a press briefing in Geneva.

"The high number of returns already this year is concerning given the severity of winter, with freezing temperatures and heavy snowfall," he said, speaking from Kabul.

"These arrivals come on top of already unprecedented returns -- 2.9 million people in 2025, bringing the total to some 5.4 million since October 2023." Whether arriving at the frontier surrounded by family or alone, Afghan returnees must establish a new life in a nation beset by poverty and environmental woes.

Thai PM forms coalition with Thaksin party

AFP, Bangkok

Thai caretaker Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul's conservative party, which won a stunning election victory at the weekend, agreed to form a coalition with jailed ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra's party, both announced yesterday.

Anutin's pro-military and pro-monarchy party had its best electoral performance in polls that took place after two rounds of deadly border clashes with Cambodia last year.

It campaigned on a nationalist platform, promising to build a wall on the frontier with Cambodia, keep all border crossings closed and recruit 100,000 volunteer soldiers.

Thaksin's Pheu Thai is Thailand's most successful party of the 21st century but had its worst election result on Sunday, raising questions about the future of the political machine built by the jailed billionaire.

"Although the election results have not yet been officially confirmed, we have a consensus that Pheu Thai will support us in leading the coalition, as planned," Anutin told a news conference at his Bhumjaithai party's headquarters.

Prasert Chanruangthong, secretary-general of Pheu Thai, told reporters the party "is ready to support Bhumjaithai Party in forming the coalition. Other issues will be discussed further".

The latest incarnation of the organisation founded by the telecom billionaire, Pheu Thai came a distant third in Sunday's election, its vote share in the party-list section plunging by more than half.

US OIL BLOCKADE UN 'extremely worried' by Cuba crisis

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations said yesterday it was deeply alarmed by the crisis unfolding in Cuba as the island nation struggles under what amounts to a US blockade of oil deliveries.

President Donald Trump has vowed to starve Cuba of oil after last month's US military ousting of Nicolas Maduro, the leader of Venezuela, which had been communist Cuba's main oil supplier.

"We are extremely worried about Cuba's deepening socio-economic crisis -- amid a decades-long financial and trade embargo, extreme weather events, and the recent US measures restricting oil shipments," UN human rights office spokeswoman Marta Hurtado told a media briefing in Geneva.

"This is having an increasingly severe impact on the human rights of people in Cuba.

UN rights chief Volker Turk "reiterates his call on all states to lift unilateral sectoral measures, given their broad and indiscriminate impact on the population. Policy goals cannot justify actions that in themselves violate human rights," the spokeswoman said.

Hurtado said that given the dependence of health, food, and water systems on imported fossil fuels, oil scarcity in Cuba had put the availability of essential services at risk.

More than 80 percent of water pumping equipment in Cuba depends on electricity, she added. Trump and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the Miami-born son of Cuban immigrants, have made no secret of their desire to bring about regime change in Havana.



People carry bodies during a mass burial of unidentified Palestinians, released after being held in Israel during the war, in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Japan seizes Chinese fishing boat

Arrests its captain

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japanese authorities have seized a Chinese fishing boat and arrested its captain for allegedly fleeing inspection in its exclusive economic zone, an incident that could further inflame tensions between Asia's top two economies.

The captain, a 47-year-old Chinese national, is accused of ignoring orders to stop for an on-board inspection on Thursday in waters off southwest Nagasaki Prefecture, Japan's fisheries agency said.

There were a further 10 people on board at the time, the agency said.

While Japan has seized fishing vessels from South Korea and Taiwan in recent years, the incident is the first involving a vessel from China since 2022 and comes against the backdrop of a major diplomatic dispute between the countries.

Bangladesh renews its democratic journey

BNP's landslide victory marks a turning point in politics

We congratulate the people of Bangladesh for demonstrating the nation's admirable capacity to restore trust in democracy through a peaceful and largely participatory election. We also commend the collective resolve to transform months of public protest into tangible political reform and long-term stability. The electorate has delivered a decisive mandate to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its leader, Tarique Rahman, who, after enduring years of persecution and exile, now carries the responsibility of steering the country towards inclusive prosperity while rekindling hope and energy among the youth.

We also congratulate Tarique Rahman for earning the trust of millions with his pledge to build a government that is accountable to the people and responsive to all citizens, including critics. Despite nearly two decades in exile in London, he demonstrated resilience in keeping his party united following the incarceration of his mother, former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. He revitalised the BNP by promoting younger leaders, reorganising grassroots networks, and sustaining party morale amid intense pressure from the then-ruling Awami League under Sheikh Hasina.

He extended support to the student-led anti-quota movement and, following Hasina's fall, backed the formation of an interim administration led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus. While pressing for a time-bound reform agenda and election within 2025, he ultimately agreed to the February timeline proposed by Professor Yunus.

His return on December 25, 2025, after 17 years in exile, removed lingering doubts about the BNP's commitment to participating in the February 12 elections. As one may recall, more than a million supporters gathered in Purbachal to welcome him home. Just days later, the passing of Khaleda Zia drew over two million mourners who gathered to bid farewell to her. These outpourings of support and sympathy for the Zia family reflected the enduring legacy of BNP's founder, former President Ziaur Rahman, and signalled the party's deep-rooted public support.

The BNP's electoral success may also reflect its prior experience in government—experience unmatched by other major contenders in this election. While many senior leaders with such experience may not serve long in demanding ministerial roles, Tarique Rahman's extended stay in the United Kingdom afforded him the opportunity to observe the workings of Westminster-style parliamentary democracy firsthand. His endorsement of the July National Charter for constitutional and democratic reforms, and his call for a "yes" vote in the referendum, suggest a commitment to institutional reform and more inclusive governance.

By Bangladesh's historical standards, a voter turnout approaching 60 percent underscores the strength of the democratic mandate. Claims questioning the inclusiveness of the election therefore lack credible foundation. The absence of the Awami League in this election was largely due to its failure to own up to past crimes, seek forgiveness for such aberrations, and pursue internal reform. The turnout of over 40 percent in its traditional stronghold constituencies also shows that its supporters have largely deserted them by now.

We also commend the democratic spirit displayed by Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, the second-largest seat winner, in conceding defeat. Under the leadership of Dr Shafiqur Rahman, the party ran an energetic and strategically effective campaign, including forging an alliance with the National Citizen Party (NCP), which emerged from the anti-authoritarian uprising of 2024. This partnership may have broadened its appeal and softened longstanding concerns about aspects of its ideological rhetoric. Voters now expect Jamaat-e-Islami to serve as a constructive and responsible opposition, holding the incoming government accountable through parliamentary processes rather than resorting to destabilising street agitation as some opposition parties did in the past.

Recognising the immense logistical challenge of organising voting for 12.77 crore citizens—many casting ballots for the first time—we applaud the Election Commission for maintaining order and neutrality throughout the process. However, its response to the widespread misuse of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and disinformation on social media was insufficient. Strengthening institutional capacity to address digital threats will be essential to safeguarding future electoral integrity, including in upcoming elections of local government bodies as well as parliamentary by-elections.

The professionalism of the armed forces, led by General Waker-Uz-Zaman, and the police in ensuring a peaceful campaign and voting process is also commendable. Their vigilance and timely interventions prevented isolated incidents from escalating. With the transition to an elected government now underway, we hope their role in supporting civilian authorities concludes with pride and dignity.

Finally, we wish for a smooth and seamless transfer of power. The nation looks forward to the new government under Tarique Rahman focusing on the urgent tasks of governance, reform, and national renewal—aspirations long held by the people of Bangladesh. We also hope that the new ruling party would keep in mind the extra burden of having super majority in parliament that, as we know from experience, may very well cause arrogance and democratic backsliding.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



YouTube registered

On this day in 2005, Steve Chen, Chad Hurley, and Jawed Karim registered YouTube, a website for sharing videos. More than a year later, it was acquired by Google for \$1.65 billion in stock.

V for Victory, V for Valentine: A mandate is not a licence



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
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SHAMSAD MORTUZA

It's perhaps divine timing that V-Day falls just after the confirmation of election results, marked by the public's overwhelming support for the party at the top and the strengthening of support bases for the parties in second place. So, it's a day of victory for BNP, which has been out of power for 20 years, and a day of vindication for Jamaat and its ancillary organisations, which strategically survived the previous regime and emerged as a formidable force. It's also a valiant day for first-time voters, who felt compelled to choose a progressive vision without succumbing to conservatism. There is much to celebrate for a nation that has shown maturity in exercising its voting rights without any violence.

The interim government and the security forces deserve all the credit for delivering a fair, credible election to pave the way for democratic renewal. If we look at the parties, during the last 18 months, grassroots BNP often succumbed to the old political ways of extortion, vendetta, and aggression, but the centre appeared restrained and future-focused, and it worked at the ballot box. The agents of change, the new generation of National Citizen Party (NCP), stirred hope but only to have a late reckoning that they do not have the nationwide support structure to become a formidable force. They aligned with Jamaat-e-Islami, which proved to be the most strategic of the lot. But their combined strategies have still fallen short. Although the BNP's "landslide" victory might not show it, this electoral race has been a wake-up call for both the winners and the wider political class.

These issues move this Valentine's Day away from its typical paraphernalia, like cards, flowers and velvet hearts. A day that celebrates hearts to attain harmony and hope appears before us as a rupture, in the coinage of Slavoj Žižek. For the Slovene political thinker, love is violent because it denies accepting the world as it is. The logic of love is irrational. You have to believe that you are in love. Love is a dangerous commitment; it chooses and moves beyond inertia and cynicism, resulting

in transformation.

So, today, we can wave two powerful symbols in one gesture: "V for Victory" and "V for Valentine." "Victory" refers to the decisive mandate delivered by the public; "Valentine" because it celebrates love in a unique way that has interrupted the logic of choosing someone. The influence that BNP currently holds is not just based on sentiment. It is also a choice under uncertainty. To many, by publicly questioning women's leadership or suggesting curtailing work hours for women, Jamaat displayed the "risk" of its version of democracy. The



The nation exercised its voting rights in a festive mood after almost two decades.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

interviews given by the Jamaat chief and several others probably came as a shock even for the NCP, their electoral ally.

NCP's female candidates, who defected from the party and ran the election independently, exposed the rift within. The tally of votes suggests that some of these candidates would have won the election if they had competed from a single platform. BNP became a beneficiary, but it knows that the public mood is volatile. A generation that has not spared Awami League

for its transgressions will carefully monitor its actions, too. So, the love shown for BNP is not unconditional. It must perform to retain and solidify this love and be wary of post-uprising voters whose political consciousness was shaped in a climate of protest, social media activism, and distrust of institutional continuity. This is a cohort of voters who expect novelty and were willing to give a chance to youth parties, ideological outsiders, and anti-dynastic formations. They are not blindly enchanted by the word "change;" they will examine its substance.

NCP's underperformance is also a warning sign that moral symbolism alone does not secure or retain trust. The scandals of some leaders from the interim government dented the moral high ground they claimed as the authentic voice of generational politics. However, once these leaders aligned themselves with Jamaat, they ventured into an area of ideological ambiguity, a move that voters rejected.

voters are not monolithically secular. Many value religious identity, but there is a qualitative difference between religious identity and restrictive governance. For a country that had more than three decades of female leadership, the lived reality of our politics can be contained neither within ideological nor secular camps. For a developing country that has its economic cushion tied to women workers, the issue became existential across the gender divide. Voting, then, can be read as a refusal of extremes. The V for verdict is not for revolutionary rupture or doctrinal rigidity, but governability. Most voters have rejected ambiguity and chosen to support an established order that can be held accountable. Hints of jurisprudential reservation towards women's top leadership triggered anxiety, not because voters were anti-religion, but because the suggestion disrupted an established symbolic order. The new breed of educated, digitally literate, economically aspirational voters view professional and political advancement as intertwined with gender equality. They have given a verdict for fidelity to the future, not nostalgia for orthodoxy.

Let us address the other V word: violence. This election has demonstrated that even in a polarised landscape, electoral competition need not descend into violence and chaos. That alone is a civic milestone. Maybe the absence of Awami League eased the tension or caused restraint within the participants who were united against the former regime. The heavy presence of the armed forces also acted as a deterrent. But if BNP treats this peaceful tide as entitlement rather than responsibility, it will only invite ruptures. The same goes for the opposition parties. They must recognise that the electorate's support or restraint is conditional. It will endure only if politics and governance in the coming days remain anchored in accountability and a collective refusal to return to the old ways.

Voters have demonstrated relative maturity in their voting behaviours. So, while our leaders show "V for Victory" on this Valentine's Day, they need to be equally alert to the electorate's commitment to a democratic relationship that refuses both violence and regression. This day is not one to romanticise politics but to discipline it. And perhaps that is the most radical form of love available to a democracy emerging from turbulence: not passion, but responsibility.

How BNP can align victory with public aspirations



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SELIM RAIHAN

Congratulations to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on its sweeping victory in the general elections. This result signifies more than a mere electoral outcome. It marks a telling change in our political landscape. By winning over 200 seats, the BNP now holds a clear parliamentary majority. This provides them an opportunity to rule without the unstable coalitions or potential legislative standstill. Such a mandate, if exercised with care and foresight, can restore a sense of policy continuity. It can also help strengthen public institutions and ease the confrontational political climate that has persisted in recent years. Yet the litmus test for stability will lie not solely in the numbers. That will depend on whether the BNP decides to govern democratically, through consultations, with input from diverse quarters, and by constructively working with political rivals.

This victory also appears to reflect a broader public rejection of divisive political narratives—particularly the use of religion as a tool of propaganda, the distortion of the historical legacy of 1971, and rhetoric that demeaned or humiliated women in public discourse. It seems many voters have signalled that they want politics to focus on governance, economic opportunity, and dignity rather than ideological

plotting. If the BNP realises this and actively encourages inclusive and respectful political engagement, it might even steer the tone of national politics in a more positive direction.

Will this majority bring lasting stability? A commanding majority creates space for swift decision-making and allows reforms to move forward without constant obstruction. In the short term, this may bring a degree of political calm and administrative clarity. Yet deeper and more lasting stability will require something more difficult—rebuilding trust. Confidence in electoral institutions must be strengthened, the rule of law must be applied consistently and fairly, and political power must be exercised without a spirit of retaliation. Bangladesh's past offers an important lesson—periods of dominant political control have not always translated into durable stability; instead, when power is used without consensus-building, polarisation often deepens. The present moment, therefore, carries both promise and risk. If BNP opts for dialogue instead of domination, reform in place of repression, and reconciliation rather than confrontation, this majority can initiate a democratic political cycle. Otherwise, instability may persist beneath a surface appearance of order.

Even under auspicious political circumstances, economic stabilisation usually doesn't occur overnight. Can BNP quickly stabilise the economy? Bangladesh's economy is dogged by a series of complex structural pressures. Inflation continues to run high and strain households. Foreign reserves are still improving, but need to be carefully managed. Governance deficiencies and bad loans plague the banking sector. The domestic investment environment is constrained by heightened uncertainty, rising business costs, and an unsatisfactory law-and-order situation. External debt repayments and global economic uncertainty weigh heavily on the balance.

A secure parliamentary mandate allows the BNP to take strong measures like practising fiscal discipline, tightening financial regulation, and dealing with long-standing anomalies in the investment environment. But rebuilding that economic confidence is about more than policy statements. Investors, businesses, and citizens look for consistency, predictability, and signals that rules will not shift abruptly with the political winds. Early steps may improve market sentiment, especially if they demonstrate seriousness and coherence. But lasting stability will take a calm political environment and years of gradual reforms credibly implemented by trustworthy institutions.

BNP's electoral victory also presents a deeper opportunity. It provides the opportunity not just for political change but also for institutional renewal. The public's aspirations that formed in the run-up to and the aftermath of July 2024 reflected citizens' calls for accountability. They demanded fairness and sought

dignity in governance. Many wanted institutions that serve the public interest rather than partisan agendas.

Meeting these expectations will require meaningful reforms across key pillars of the state. The civil service must be strengthened with professionalism and merit-based advancement. Appointments should reflect competence rather than political loyalty to help restore confidence in administrative neutrality. Parliament, too, must reclaim its role as a place of genuine debate and oversight to reduce political tensions and enhance democratic legitimacy. The judiciary's independence must be protected, and legal processes must remain fair, transparent, and free from political influence. Without these deeper reforms, even a powerful electoral mandate may prove temporary. With them, it could become the foundation for lasting democratic stability.

Public expectations, meanwhile, remain high. There is both hope and caution. International partners will also be observing closely. Their confidence will depend not only on economic policy but on the overall direction of governance. The early actions of the new government will matter greatly. The first months in office often shape perceptions that endure far longer. They can signal a commitment to reform and reconciliation. The electoral mandate is unquestionably strong. Yet its true significance will be determined by how it is used. This moment holds the potential to become a turning point that strengthens democratic institutions and economic resilience. Whether it becomes transformative or simply transitional will depend on the choices made now.

REFLECTIONS ON 13TH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

The much-awaited national election concluded with minimal disruptions despite high stakes in most of the constituencies. BNP saw a sweeping victory, while Jamaat-e-Islami and its allies won 77 seats. The referendum question, too, was largely answered in the affirmative by voters. We asked experts for their thoughts on the election and the road ahead.

A test of democratic renewal



Anu Muhammad is former professor of economics at Jahangirnagar University.

ANU MUHAMMAD

On Thursday, Bangladesh held an acceptable election after 18 years, one in which participation was not curtailed by the state itself. It was not an all-inclusive contest, seeing as the Awami League could not take part in it. However, the circumstances that led to the AL's absence were of its own making. In the elections of 2014, 2018, and 2024, coercive, manipulative, and strategic tactics employed by the AL kept its rivals largely out of the race. In continuity with that political trajectory, compounded by the July 2024 uprising that led to its ouster, Awami League now finds itself excluded from the process it once controlled.

Despite its absence in this election, AL still retains a significant support base. That may partly explain why the voter turnout did not reach the level many had anticipated, particularly since this election was relatively peaceful compared to the others in recent years. Even though there were some incidents beforehand, on polling day, there were no reports of widespread violence, no major clashes, and no atmosphere of terror. People who wanted to vote were largely able to do so. There were minor complaints, but no major disruptions.

The situation before the election, however, was marked by uncertainty. During Sheikh Hasina's 15-plus years in power, there had effectively been no credible elections. Under the interim government that was formed following Hasina's ouster, we witnessed the

assertiveness of religious and right-wing hardliners. Over the past year and a half, there have been incidents of vandalism, intimidation, and violence. Women, members of minority communities, and cultural activists felt increasingly vulnerable. Cultural activities such as music, theatre, and folk performances came under attack and declined across the country.

In that context, this election raised a fundamental question about the direction the country would take. Many feared it was heading towards deeper instability. We are now on the verge of getting an elected government and moving away from an unaccountable mode of governance.

Over the last 18 months, the interim administration made several decisions without adequate transparency. Just two days before the election, it signed a trade agreement with the United States that many view as risky for Bangladesh's future. It also made financial allocation decisions for which no one appears willing to take responsibility. Such opaque decision-making cannot continue. Under an elected government, there must be parliamentary scrutiny and public accountability. A government elected through people's vote must remain answerable to the people.

However, our experience with past governments that won overwhelming majority in parliament has not been reassuring. In this election, the BNP has

secured more than two-thirds majority. We have seen similar moments before. In 2001, the BNP-led alliance won an overwhelming majority. In 2008, the Awami League-led alliance did the same. In both cases, the government's conduct raised concerns. The BNP-led government took several undemocratic decisions. The Awami League, after 2008, amended the constitution in ways that many believe weakened democratic balance in the country. A large parliamentary majority creates an opportunity for reform, but also the temptation to centralise power and sideline dissent.

We hope history will not repeat itself this time. BNP must reflect on its past. Allegations of extortion, land grabbing, and political patronage must not resurface. The party

must ensure that the minority communities feel secure and long-standing concerns about their safety are addressed. This overwhelming mandate presents a historic opportunity that should not be squandered.

There are several steps the new government should take immediately.

First, the trial of the killings during the July uprising must proceed fairly. Justice must not become another arena for political manipulation. Writers, journalists, lawyers and others who were detained under dubious charges should be granted bail or released where appropriate.

Second, the government should publish a white paper on human rights violations and anti-public-interest decisions taken during the interim period. Attacks on minorities,

violence against women, vandalism of shrines, attacks on media houses, mob violence, and online abuse demand investigation. The public deserves to know who was responsible and why action was not taken.

Third, international agreements signed over the years with China, India, the US, Russia and Japan must be reviewed transparently. Some of these may create long-term financial and security risks. If any of them appear to be in conflict with national interests, they should be reconsidered and those responsible should be held accountable.

Fourth, cultural life must be revived. Theatre productions, music events, and other artistic activities have declined under pressure and intimidation in recent times. A democratic society cannot flourish without vibrant cultural expression.

Beyond these steps, structural reforms are essential. Previous commissions, including those on media and women workers, should be taken seriously. New commissions on education, healthcare, rivers and agriculture should be formed, and policy reform must be evidence-based. Accountability must be ensured and justice must be served for the crimes committed by the autocratic regime.

Above all, the government must cultivate a democratic culture that tolerates criticism and respects diversity. Dissent and cultural plurality must not be treated as threats. Politicised and unqualified appointments made at universities and public institutions must be reviewed and corrected where necessary.

Ultimately, the direction of the elected government will be determined in its first days in office. Its early actions will shape public trust and define its tenure. With a decisive mandate comes immense responsibility. Whether this moment becomes a turning point towards democratic transformation or another missed opportunity now rests in the hands of those elected.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

'The relatively calm environment this election encouraged people to vote.'

A landmark election with room for improvement



Dr Md Abdul Alim is an elections specialist, currently working as principal director with Democracy International, and previously served as director of the Election Working Group.

MD ABDUL ALIM

I had the opportunity to observe around 15 polling centres on election day, beginning early in Dhaka-14 before polling officially started at 7:30am. By 7:15am, nearly 200 voters were already waiting in a queue outside which grew to about 300 within 45 minutes—it was quite striking to notice.

What stood out immediately was the peaceful atmosphere. Voters were casting their ballots themselves, freely and without interference. I also noticed an exceptionally heavy presence of security forces, more than I had ever seen at polling centres during previous elections. It was a strong and coordinated deployment.

Later, I visited several centres in Dhaka-13 where voters' presence was comparatively

low, still significant, and voting looked peaceful and orderly. In some polling centres, I observed two voting booths. Since there were two ballots this time—one for the candidates and another for the referendum—the arrangement helped ensure voting was completed within the stipulated time. Furthermore, the entire process—voter identification, the application of indelible ink, and the issuance of ballot papers—was carried out properly by the temporary polling officials. I did not witness any irregularities.

Although there had been widespread rumours that violence would erupt and that law and order would deteriorate on election day, what we observed on the ground told a different story. In my opinion, this election

witnessed a remarkable presence of law enforcement agencies—unlike any other in Bangladesh's history. The Bangladesh Army, which was given magistracy power, played a crucial role in building public confidence. In previous elections, the military had sometimes been deployed with such authority, but that changed before the 2014 election. Later, the Election Reform Commission recommended restoring magistracy power to the armed forces during elections, which was accepted. The army's patrols of constituencies and visible presence offered reassurance, since in Bangladesh, people still place considerable trust in the military as an institution. Their involvement helped counter the rumours and eased anxieties.

While there were some isolated incidents of violence and intimidation, those did not impact the overall outcome. People were mostly able to cast their ballots independently. Taken together, this was a peaceful and credible election.

Of course, voter turnout—59.44 percent—has been lower compared to some past elections, particularly the 2008 election, which was 87.13 percent. However, there were two major challenges this time. First, in Bangladesh, major political parties have

established vote banks. Many voters affiliated with a party are unlikely to vote outside that party line. It appears that a portion of the Awami League's traditional vote bank did not turn up this time. That naturally affected turnout.

Second, the persistent rumours about possible violence not only discouraged some voters from going to polling centres, but also created genuine fear among segments of the electorate. Had those rumours not existed, turnout might have been higher.

Still, voter turnout of around 60 percent in Bangladesh cannot be used to raise questions about election credibility. It is because voter turnout, even in the 1991 election—one of the widely considered free and fair polls in the country's history—was about 55 percent. Moreover, the turnout this time is within an internationally acceptable range.

Regarding the allegations of improper vote counting, I did not see any lack of transparency when I personally observed the counting process in some centres. My colleagues who monitored other centres shared similar feedback. Counting took place in the presence of observers, polling agents, and journalists. Transparency was ensured.

Unfortunately, in our political culture,

even a good election is often followed by allegations. Many of these are political statements rather than substantiated claims. That said, any complaint must be investigated. One of the key features of a credible election is that grievances are formally examined and findings are communicated to the public.

Encouragingly, we have seen instances where candidates have accepted results and congratulated winners. Such gestures contribute to democratic maturity.

Although some people have described this as the best election in our history, I would take a slightly more measured position. This was one of the best elections in Bangladesh's history, given the adverse conditions, the climate of uncertainty, and the fears of violence. However, we cannot be complacent. This election should be seen as a starting point, the beginning of institutionalising the electoral process in Bangladesh. We must identify shortcomings, define areas for improvement, and learn from them. The Election Reform Commission proposed around 250 recommendations. Some of these have been incorporated into revised laws, but many remain unaddressed. The task now is to carry forward those reforms and begin preparing for the next election from today.

An election marked by lack of women's representation



Dr Samina Luthfa is professor in the Department of Sociology at Dhaka University.

SAMINA LUTHEFA

The 13th national election on Thursday was fair, and there was significant participation. There were reports of some issues across the country, but most of them were administrative and procedural in nature. These problems could have been avoided had the Election Commission been more professional. Still, the scale of violence and other worrying incidents was far smaller than in many previous elections, which came as a major relief.

The night before polling day was tense. Allegations circulated about ballots being cast in advance and other irregularities. Those claims created anxiety. However, law enforcement agencies responded quickly; their visible and prompt action helped prevent the situation from escalating. As a result, the fear of widespread violence or

large-scale disruption did not materialise.

In fact, the relatively calm environment encouraged people to vote, particularly in the morning. When voters saw that polling stations were peaceful and orderly, they felt reassured enough to come out and cast their ballots.

The absence of the Awami League did affect voter enthusiasm. Many of its supporters felt less motivated to participate. Some did not vote out of fear of retaliation because they had been openly affiliated with the party. Some are currently outside the country, having fled amid political developments. Then there are silent supporters—those who are not publicly vocal about their allegiance. Some of them did vote, which is why the turnout was nearly 60 percent.

One major area of concern in this election

was women's representation. I have been writing about this for a long time. In the July National Charter, parties promised to nominate at least five percent women candidates. Yet, none of the 30 political parties that participated in the consensus-building process fulfilled that commitment. They broke their promise well before voting began. The highest nomination rate was only a little over four percent.

Political parties should be ashamed of such a poor showing when it comes to women's representation. This failure is especially painful because women were central to the July uprising. Their participation helped create the political space in which these parties were able to contest the election. Yet, their voices and presence in the uprising have not translated into institutional or formal political representation.

This backsliding is particularly troubling given Bangladesh's achievements over the past five decades. The country has performed well on several gender and development indicators. The country has often been described as a champion of women's empowerment in the region. It once ranked highest in South Asia on the Gender Parity Index for political participation.

But over the last year and a half, with no parliament and a cabinet that included

only three women, the country was already at risk of slipping. Now, with only seven women elected to parliament—alongside the prospect of around 50 reserved seats—the overall picture remains discouraging. Bangladesh is backsliding in terms of gender parity in political participation and leadership. That is deeply concerning.

As for expectations from the new government, the first and most urgent one is that its celebrations should not incite violence. Historically, Bangladesh has seen episodes of post-election violence, often targeting those who lost, as well as marginalised communities, and women and children. The country cannot afford a repeat of that pattern. The immediate priority must be to ensure peace and protection of vulnerable groups.

The new government must also ensure that law and order are upheld across the country. Beyond that, it must honour the commitments it made in its manifesto, particularly regarding women's empowerment. Promises are easy to make during campaigns; what matters now is how they are implemented. There must be institutional measures that make it possible for women not only to enter politics but to sustain meaningful roles within it.

There are considerable uncertainties as

well. There were promises in the July charter and pledges in the party manifesto, and in some cases, they are in conflict. There is confusion about how these commitments will be reconciled. What the country needs is a clear pathway to democracy and a clear framework for protecting citizens' rights. There must also be clarity on how plans for women's financial empowerment will translate into genuine decision-making power.

For the opposition parties, the results are, in some ways, already a success. Few expected Jamaat-e-Islami to secure as many seats as it has. This appears to be the highest number of seats it has ever won in parliament, often by narrow margins in various constituencies. The NCP, a party that is barely a year old, has also secured several seats. For them, this is already a significant achievement.

The expectation now is that they will act as responsible opposition parties. Criticism for its own sake does not strengthen democracy. What is needed is constructive engagement. They should work with the government to ensure a smooth democratic transition and avoid creating unnecessary obstacles. The shared goal must be to safeguard the country's democratic journey and ensure that all citizens' rights are protected.



বিশেষ ক্রোড়পত্র বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড সহযোগিতায়ঃ তথ্য অধিদপ্তর (পিআইডি) এবং চলচ্চিত্র ও প্রকাশনা অধিদপ্তর (ডিএফপি), তথ্য ও সম্প্রচার মন্ত্রণালয়।



বাণী

বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ডের ৩১তম প্রতিষ্ঠাবার্ষিকী ও 'বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড দিবস ২০২৬' উপলক্ষে আমি এ বাহিনীর সর্বস্তরের সকল সদস্যকে আমার আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন জানাই।

১৯৯৫ সালে 'Guardian at Sea' মূলমন্ত্রকে ধারণ করে প্রতিষ্ঠিত বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড সাগরভিত্তিক অর্থনীতির সুরক্ষা ও উপকূলীয় জনগণের নিরাপত্তা নিশ্চিতকরণ এবং দেশের সার্বভৌম জলসীমা সংরক্ষণের লক্ষ্যে যাত্রা শুরু করে। সীমিত জনবল ও জলযান নিয়ে কার্যক্রম শুরু করে সময়ের পরিক্রমায় সক্ষমতা বৃদ্ধি, কৌশলগত দক্ষতা অর্জন এবং প্রযুক্তিগত উৎকর্ষ সাধনের মাধ্যমে বর্তমানে বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড একটি পূর্ণাঙ্গ বাহিনী হিসেবে আত্মপ্রকাশ করেছে।

সমুদ্রপথে নিরাপত্তা নিশ্চিতকরণ, চোরাচালান ও মানব পাচার দমন, মাদক প্রতিরোধ, মৎস্য সম্পদ সংরক্ষণ, অভয়াবন্য বাস্তবায়ন এবং জাটিকা ও ইলিশ রক্ষায় বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ডের ভূমিকা প্রশংসনীয়। পাশাপাশি ঘূর্ণিঝড়, বন্যা, জলোচ্ছ্বাসসহ বিভিন্ন প্রাকৃতিক দুর্যোগ ও জরুরি পরিস্থিতিতে ত্রাণ ও উদ্ধার কার্যক্রমে এ বাহিনী দ্রুততা ও পেশাদারিত্বের সাথে সেবা প্রদান করে থাকে। জুলাই গণঅভ্যুত্থান পরবর্তীকালে দেশের আইনশৃঙ্খলা পরিস্থিতির উন্নতিতে বিভিন্ন কার্যক্রমে সক্রিয় অংশগ্রহণসহ সর্বসাধারণের নিরাপত্তা নিশ্চিত কোস্ট গার্ডের ভূমিকার জন্য এ বাহিনীকে আমি ধন্যবাদ জানাই।

আমি বিশ্বাস করি, বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ডের সদস্যরা সততা, শৃঙ্খলা, পেশাদারিত্ব ও দেশপ্রেমের সঙ্গে নিজেদের দায়িত্ব পালন করবে। সামুদ্রিক নিরাপত্তা জোরদারকরণ ও জাতীয় মর্যাদা সমুন্নত রাখতে এ বাহিনীর অবদান আগামী দিনগুলোতে আরও বিস্তৃত ও কার্যকর হবে বলে আমি আশা করি।

বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ডের ৩১তম প্রতিষ্ঠাবার্ষিকী ও 'বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড দিবস ২০২৬' উপলক্ষে গৃহীত সকল কর্মসূচির সার্বিক সফলতা কামনা করছি।

প্রফেসর মুহাম্মদ ইউনূস



প্রধান উপদেষ্টা
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
০১ ফাল্গুন ১৪৩২
১৪ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬

বিগত ০৩ (তিন) দশকে কোস্ট গার্ডের সাফল্য	
বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ডের অপারেশনাল কর্মকান্ড বর্তমান সরকারের সঠিক দিক নির্দেশনার আলোকে বিগত বছরগুলোর তুলনায় অনেক বেশি বেগবান হয়েছে এবং সাফল্যের হারও আশাপ্রদভাবে বৃদ্ধি পেয়েছে। বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড জন্মলগ্ন থেকে ২০২৫ সাল পর্যন্ত প্রায় ৫১ হাজার ৯২৩ কোটি টাকার অধিক মূল্যমানের অবৈধ দ্রব্যসামগ্রী আটক করেছে।	
বিস্তারিত বিবরণ নিম্নে প্রদত্ত হলোঃ	
অভিযান/ অপারেশনের নাম	সাফল্যের খতিয়ান
চোরাচালান প্রতিরোধ	চোরাচালান প্রতিরোধ অভিযানে বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড জন্মলগ্ন থেকে ২০২৫ সাল পর্যন্ত প্রায় ১,৫০৪ কোটি ১৬ লক্ষ টাকার বিভিন্ন প্রকার চোরাচালান পন্থা আটক করেছে।
মৎস্য সম্পদ রক্ষা	৬৯ হাজার ২১৭ কোটি টাকা মূল্যমানের নিম্নলিখিত অবৈধ সামগ্রী আটক করা হয়ঃ ১। জাটিকা: ৪২,৩৮,০৬৪ কেজি ২। কার্পাস জাল: ৭৭৮,৭৪,৪৩,২৫৭ মিটার ৩। অন্যান্য জাল: ২৭৯,২১,৫৫,৩৫৫ মিটার ৪। বেহুন্দী/মশারী জাল: ২৫২,৩৪,২৯,৬৯২ পিস ৫। চিড়ি/ফাইসা পোনা: ২,০৮২,৩০,২৯,৭১০ পিস
মাদকদ্রব্য নিয়ন্ত্রণ	মাদকদ্রব্য নিয়ন্ত্রণ অভিযানে বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড নিয়মিতভাবে বিশেষ অভিযান পরিচালনা করে জন্মলগ্ন থেকে ২০২৫ সাল পর্যন্ত নিম্নলিখিত মাদকদ্রব্য আটক করেছেঃ ১। ইয়াবা: ৪,০৪,৬০,৪৯৬ পিস ২। বিয়ার এবং ছইসি: ১,৯৬,৪৩৮ ক্যান/বোতল ৩। ক্রিস্টাল মেথ আইস: ১৯.৭ কেজি ৪। দেশি/বিদেশি মদ ৬৬,২৬৬ লিটার ৫। গাঁজা: ১,০৪১,৮৫২ কেজি ৬। ফেনসিডিল: ৪৭৮ বোতল ৭। বিদেশি সিগারেট: ৩৬,২৫,৩৮৩ শলাকা ৮। মদক ব্যবসায়ী/ পাচারকারী: ১,২৫৯ জন
বনজ সম্পদ রক্ষা	বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড কর্তৃক বনজ সম্পদ রক্ষায় ১১১ কোটি ০১ লক্ষ টাকা মূল্যের প্রায় ৪,৯০,৬১০ ঘনফুট কাঠ উদ্ধার করা হয়
পরিবেশ রক্ষা	১। হরিণের মাংস: ৫,৭৭৪.৫ কেজি ২। হরিণের চামড়া: ৩৪৯টি ৩। হরিণের মাথা: ২২৭টি ৪। তক্ষক: ৫০টি ৫। চোরাকারবারী: ৫,৫১৮ জন
উদ্ধার অভিযান	১। অপহৃত জেসে/ বাওয়ালী ৪,১২১ জনকে জীবিত উদ্ধার করা হয়। ২। নৌ-পথে দুর্ঘটনা কবলিত ৩১১ জনের মরদেহ উদ্ধার করা হয়। ৩। ৪৩২টি অপহৃত বা ভাসমান নৌকা উদ্ধার করা হয়।





বাণী

বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ডের ৩১তম প্রতিষ্ঠাবার্ষিকী ও 'কোস্ট গার্ড দিবস ২০২৬' উপলক্ষে আমি এ বাহিনীর নিবেদিত প্রাণ সদস্যদের প্রতি জানাই আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন। এই শুভক্ষণে আমি গভীর শ্রদ্ধার সঙ্গে স্মরণ করছি মহান মুক্তিযুদ্ধের অমর শহিদদের এবং ২০২৪ সালের বৈষম্যবিরোধী ছাত্র জনতার ঐতিহাসিক জুলাই গণঅভ্যুত্থানের আন্দোলনে শহিদ ও আহত হওয়া অসংখ্য শিক্ষার্থী ও সাধারণ জনগণকে। তাদের ত্যাগ, সাহস ও অদম্য মনোবল সমগ্র জাতিকে আজও প্রেরণা জোগায় এবং ন্যায়ের পথে একাবদ্ধ থেকে সমৃদ্ধ বাংলাদেশ গঠনে অনুপ্রাণিত করে।

মাননীয় প্রধান উপদেষ্টার প্রজ্ঞাপূর্ণ নেতৃত্বে দেশের উন্নয়নযাত্রা অব্যাহত রাখতে উপকূলীয় অঞ্চলে আইন-শৃঙ্খলা নিশ্চিতকরণ, সমুদ্রবন্দরসমূহে নিরাপত্তা প্রদান, মাদক ও মানব পাচার দমন, অবৈধ অনুপ্রবেশ প্রতিরোধ, স্বাস্থ্যসেবা মোকাবেলা এবং মৎস্য সম্পদ সংরক্ষণে বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড যে অন্যতম ভূমিকা পালন করে চলেছে, তা সত্যিই প্রশংসার দাবিদার। একই সঙ্গে বিভিন্ন প্রাকৃতিক দুর্যোগে উপকূলীয় জনগণের পাশে দাঁড়িয়ে কোস্ট গার্ড, জনমানুষের আস্থা ও নির্ভরতার প্রতীক হিসেবে দেশে এবং আন্তর্জাতিক পরিমণ্ডলে সুখ্যাতি অর্জন করেছে।

০৫ আগস্ট ২০২৪ পরবর্তী দেশের উদ্ভূত পরিস্থিতিতে আইন-শৃঙ্খলা পরিস্থিতি স্বাভাবিক রাখতে বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড অত্যন্ত নিষ্ঠা ও সফলতার সঙ্গে দায়িত্ব পালন করেছে। বর্তমান অন্তর্বর্তীকালীন সরকারের গৃহীত সমন্বয়যোগ্যতা সংস্কার কার্যক্রম বাস্তবায়নের অংশ হিসেবে অপারেশন ডেভিল হান্ট পরিচালনা, বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয় ও বিভিন্ন বিদেশী দূতাবাসসমূহের নিরাপত্তা প্রদান, অবৈধ অস্ত্র উদ্ধার, গণতন্ত্র ও সচেতনতা বৃদ্ধিসহ বিভিন্ন অপারেশনাল কর্মকাণ্ডে বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড প্রশংসনীয় অবদান রেখেছে। বাংলাদেশের বিস্তৃত সমুদ্র এলাকার নিরাপত্তা নিশ্চিত করতে এবং একবিংশ শতাব্দীর চ্যালেঞ্জ মোকাবিলায় কোস্ট গার্ডের জনবল বৃদ্ধি, আবাসন সংকট মোকাবিলায় পাশাপাশি উন্নত প্রযুক্তির জাহাজ ও হেলিকপ্টার সংগ্রহে বর্তমান অন্তর্বর্তীকালীন সরকার বৃদ্ধিপরিকর। বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ডকে আরও আধুনিক ও প্রযুক্তিনির্ভর করে গড়ে তুলতে এ সরকার সর্বাঙ্গিক পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণ করেছে। ভবিষ্যতেও, কোস্ট গার্ড একটি আধুনিক, সুসংগঠিত ও দক্ষ সামুদ্রিক আইন-শৃঙ্খলা রক্ষাকারী বাহিনী হিসেবে অর্পিত দায়িত্ব পালন করবে বলে আমার বিশ্বাস।

দেশপ্রেম ও কর্মনিষ্ঠায় উদ্ভূত হয়ে এ বাহিনীর সদস্যরা দেশের জাতীয় সমুদ্র সম্পদ সংরক্ষণে আরও বলিষ্ঠ অবদান রেখে এবং সুশীল অর্থনীতি বিকাশে অগ্রণী শক্তি হিসেবে নিজেদের প্রতিষ্ঠিত করবে বলে আমি প্রত্যাশা করি।

“বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ডের ৩১তম প্রতিষ্ঠাবার্ষিকী ও 'কোস্ট গার্ড দিবস ২০২৬' এর সফলতা ও কল্যাণ কামনা করছি। মহান আল্লাহ তায়ালা আমাদের সকলের সহায় হোন।

সিনিয়র সচিব



সিনিয়র সচিব
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার



বাণী

বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ডের ৩১তম প্রতিষ্ঠাবার্ষিকী ও 'কোস্ট গার্ড দিবস ২০২৬' উপলক্ষে আমি এ বাহিনীর সকল সদস্যকে জানাই আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন। এ উপলক্ষে গভীর শ্রদ্ধার সঙ্গে স্মরণ করছি মহান মুক্তিযুদ্ধের বীর শহিদদের এবং ০৫ আগস্ট ২০২৪-এর বৈষম্যবিরোধী ছাত্র আন্দোলনে শহিদ ও আহত অসংখ্য ছাত্র জনতাকে। তাদের আত্মত্যাগ, দৃঢ় মনোবল এবং জাতিকে একাবদ্ধ করার শক্তিই আজকের এ নতুন বাংলাদেশ গড়ার ভিত্তি স্থাপন করেছে।

প্রতিষ্ঠালগ্ন হতে গত ত্রিশ বছরে বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড সমগ্র উপকূলীয় ও সমুদ্রগামী মানুষের নিরাপত্তা, আস্থা ও নির্ভরতার প্রতীক হিসেবে সুপ্রতিষ্ঠিত হয়েছে। উপকূলীয় অব্যবহৃত অঞ্চল, নদীপথ ও সমুদ্রসীমায় সার্বক্ষণিক উপস্থিতি থেকে জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা, স্বার্থ-সংরক্ষণে এ বাহিনী বিশেষ ভূমিকা পালন করে আসছে। জলসীমায় সার্বভৌম অধিকার রক্ষা, উপকূলীয় নিরাপত্তা ও সামুদ্রিক সম্পদ সংরক্ষণের ক্ষেত্রে কোস্ট গার্ডের অবদান অনস্বীকার্য।

বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড-এর সদস্যরা উপকূলীয় ও অভ্যন্তরীণ জলসীমায় নিরলসভাবে দায়িত্ব পালন করে দেশের সমুদ্র ও নদী বন্দরসমূহের সার্বক্ষণিক নিরাপত্তা নিশ্চিত করেছে। একই সাথে সমুদ্রপথে মাদক পাচার, অবৈধ অনুপ্রবেশ ও জলসীমাকেন্দ্রিক অপরাধ প্রতিরোধে এ বাহিনীর ভূমিকা অত্যন্ত প্রশংসনীয়। দেশের দক্ষিণ-পশ্চিমাঞ্চলে অবস্থিত সুন্দরবনে দীর্ঘদিন ধরে সক্রিয় থাকা বিভিন্ন ডাকাতি চক্র দমনে কোস্ট গার্ড সফল ও ঐতিহাসিক ভূমিকা পালন করেছে, যা এই অঞ্চলে বসবাসরত জেলে ও বনজীবী মানুষের জীবনমান উন্নীতকরণসহ নিরাপদ বসবাস নিশ্চিত করেছে।

এ বাহিনীর সক্ষমতা বৃদ্ধি ও আধুনিকায়নের অংশ হিসেবে পুরোনো নৌযান প্রতিস্থাপন করে নতুন ও উন্নত জাহাজ/বোট সংযুক্ত করার কার্যক্রম চলমান রয়েছে। একইসঙ্গে আধুনিক অফশোর প্যাট্রোল ভেসেল, হোভারক্রাফট, হেলিকপ্টার, মেরিটাইম সার্ভাইল্যান্স সিস্টেম এবং দ্রুতগতির বুলেটপ্রুফ বোট সংযোজনের পরিকল্পনা গ্রহণ করা হয়েছে। যুগের সাথে তাল মিলিয়ে কোস্ট গার্ডের অপারেশনাল সক্ষমতা বাড়তে এ বাহিনীতে যুক্ত হয়েছে ডিস্যান্টনেট প্রযুক্তি, যা গভীর সমুদ্রে টহলরত জাহাজের সঙ্গে স্যাটেলাইটভিত্তিক দৃশ্যমান ও নিরবচ্ছিন্ন যোগাযোগ বজায় রাখার মাধ্যমে অভিযান পরিচালনাকে আরও সুসংহত করেছে।

অবৈধ ও লুট হওয়া অস্ত্র উদ্ধার, অপারেশন ডেভিল হান্ট পরিচালনা, সচিবালয় ও দূতাবাসসমূহের নিরাপত্তা প্রদান, মাদক বিরোধী অভিযান, আন্তর্জাতিক প্রটোকল ফুটে জাহাজ তল্লাশি, কৃত্রিম পণ্য সংকট রোধ, জরুরি সেবা (১৬১১১) চালু, তারুণ্যের অভিযান পরিচালনা, গণতন্ত্র ও সচেতনতা বৃদ্ধিসহ বিভিন্ন কার্যক্রমে সক্রিয় অংশগ্রহণের মাধ্যমে বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড উপকূলীয় অঞ্চলসহ দেশের সার্বিক উন্নয়ন ও নিরাপত্তা বিধানে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা রাখছে।

আমি বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ডের সর্বাঙ্গীয় সাফল্য কামনা করছি।

লেফটেন্যান্ট জেনারেল মোঃ জাহাঙ্গীর আলম চৌধুরী (অবঃ)



স্বরাষ্ট্র উপদেষ্টা
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার



বাণী

বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ডের ৩১তম প্রতিষ্ঠাবার্ষিকী ও 'বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড দিবস ২০২৬' উপলক্ষে মহাপরিচালক হিসেবে এ বাহিনীর সকল কর্মকর্তা, নাবিক ও সদস্যদের জানাচ্ছি আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন। দীর্ঘ তিন দশকেরও বেশি সময় ধরে বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড পেশাদারিত্ব, শৃঙ্খলা ও দায়িত্ববোধের মাধ্যমে দেশ ও জনগণের আস্থার প্রতীকৈ পরিণত হয়েছে। প্রতিবারের ন্যায় এ দিবস আমাদের অতীত অর্জনের পাশাপাশি ভবিষ্যৎ দায়িত্ব পালনের ক্ষেত্রে নতুন অঙ্গীকারের সুযোগ করে দেয় বিধায় দিবসটি সমগ্র কোস্ট গার্ডের জন্য বিশেষ গুরুত্বপূর্ণ।

প্রতিষ্ঠাবার্ষিকীর এ গৌরবময় মুহূর্তে আমি গভীর শ্রদ্ধাভরে স্মরণ করছি মহান মুক্তিযুদ্ধের বীর শহিদদের এবং ০৫ আগস্ট ২০২৪ এর বৈষম্যবিরোধী ছাত্র আন্দোলনে আত্মত্যাগী শহিদ ও আহত ছাত্র-জনতাকে। তাদের আত্মত্যাগ ও বীরত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা জাতির ইতিহাসে চিরস্মরণীয় হয়ে থাকবে। দেশের ক্রান্তিকালে শান্তি ও স্থিতিশীলতা বজায় রাখতে তাদের ত্যাগ, আমাদের ন্যায়, সাম্য ও দেশপ্রেমের আদর্শে অবিরল থাকতে আজও অনুপ্রেরণা জোগায়।

মাননীয় প্রধান উপদেষ্টার দূরদর্শী নেতৃত্বে এবং মাননীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র উপদেষ্টার সুস্পষ্ট দিক-নির্দেশনায় দেশের উন্নয়ন ও অর্থব্যাঘ্রা অব্যাহত রাখার লক্ষ্যে বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড, উপকূলীয় জলসীমা ও সমুদ্র এলাকার আইন-শৃঙ্খলা নিশ্চিতকরণে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা পালন করে যাচ্ছে। অবৈধ মৎস্য সম্পদ শিকার রোধ, মাদক পাচার প্রতিরোধ, অবৈধ অনুপ্রবেশ নিরসন, স্বাস্থ্যসেবা দমন এবং সমুদ্রবন্দরসমূহ ও অভ্যন্তরীণ নদীপথসমূহের নিরাপত্তা নিশ্চিতকরণে এ বাহিনীর কার্যক্রম জাতীয় নিরাপত্তা সংরক্ষণ এবং সামুদ্রিক সম্পদসমূহের কার্যকর ব্যবহার নিশ্চিত করে জাতির টেকসই উন্নয়ন অর্জনে অপরিসীম ভূমিকা পালন করেছে।

দেশের অভ্যন্তরীণ জলভাগ ও বিস্তীর্ণ উপকূলীয় অঞ্চলে বসবাসকারী জনগণের জানমাল রক্ষা এবং আইনশৃঙ্খলা বজায় রাখার দায়িত্বে নিয়োজিত বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড আজ সাফল্যের ধারাবাহিকতায় ৩২তম বছরে পদার্পণ করেছে। প্রতিষ্ঠালগ্ন হতে এ বাহিনীর সদস্যগণ অটল মনোবল, কঠোর পরিশ্রম, পেশাগত দক্ষতা ও বিচক্ষণতার মাধ্যমে জনগণের আস্থা অর্জন করেছে। কোস্ট গার্ডের দৃঢ় উপস্থিতির ফলে দেশের সমুদ্র বন্দরসমূহে নিরাপদ কর্মপরিবেশ নিশ্চিত হয়েছে এবং সমুদ্রপথে মাদক পাচার রোধে উল্লেখযোগ্য সাফল্য অর্জিত হয়েছে। দায়িত্ব পালনের পথে যে সকল সাহসী সদস্য জীবন উৎসর্গ করেছেন, আমি তাদের রুহের মাগফিরাত কামনা করছি। এছাড়াও, জুলাই গণঅভ্যুত্থানের পর বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ডের উপর অর্পিত দেশের অস্থিতিশীল পরিস্থিতি ও স্বাস্থ্যসী কার্যক্রম দমনের মতো চ্যালেঞ্জিং দায়িত্ব অত্যন্ত নিষ্ঠা ও সফলতার সঙ্গে পালন করেছে। কোস্ট গার্ডের বাস্তবমুখী ও যুগান্তকারী পদক্ষেপের অংশ হিসেবে দেশের বিভিন্ন গুরুত্বপূর্ণ স্থানে টহল কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা, অপারেশন ডেভিল হান্টে অংশগ্রহণ, দেশের বিভিন্ন স্থানের থানাসমূহ হতে লুটকৃত অস্ত্র উদ্ধার এবং সচিবালয় ও দূতাবাসসমূহের নিরাপত্তা নিশ্চিতকরণ বিশেষভাবে উল্লেখযোগ্য।

গত তিন দশকের ক্রমবিকাশে বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড আজ উপকূলীয় এলাকায় জনগণের কাছে নির্ভরতার প্রতীক হিসেবে পরিগণিত হচ্ছে। এ বাহিনীকে আরও সক্ষম ও আধুনিক করতে দেশের বিভিন্ন স্থানে নতুন বেইস, স্টেশন ও আউটপোস্ট স্থাপনসহ অবকাঠামোগত উন্নয়ন কার্যক্রম চলমান রয়েছে। একইসঙ্গে আধুনিক জলযান, হেলিকপ্টার, হোভারক্রাফট, বুলেটপ্রুফ হাই-স্পিড বোট এবং মেরিটাইম সার্ভাইল্যান্স সিস্টেম সংযোজনের মাধ্যমে বাহিনীর সক্ষমতা উত্তরোত্তর বৃদ্ধি পাচ্ছে। দেশের বিশাল জলসীমা বিবেচনায় ভবিষ্যতে বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড আরও শক্তিশালী ও যুগোপযোগী বাহিনী হিসেবে আত্মপ্রকাশ করবে এটাই আমার বিশ্বাস।

আমি দৃঢ়ভাবে প্রত্যাশা করি, বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড তার উপর অর্পিত সকল দায়িত্ব সর্বোচ্চ পেশাদারিত্ব, নিষ্ঠা ও গভীর দেশপ্রেমের সাথে পালন করে দেশ ও জাতির কল্যাণে সদা নিয়োজিত থাকবে। পরিশেষে, বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ডের সকল সদস্য এবং তাদের পরিবারবর্গের সুস্বাস্থ্য, সার্বিক সাফল্য ও মঙ্গল কামনা করছি।

মহান আল্লাহ তায়ালা আমাদের সকলের সহায় হোন।

মোঃ জিয়াউল হক রিয়াজ এডমিরাল



মহাপরিচালক
বাংলাদেশ কোস্ট গার্ড



A man carries flowers at a market ahead of Valentine's Day in Manila yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

BNP’s long march back to power

FROM PAGE 1
held before.

BNP and Jamaat’s paths have long been intertwined. Once allies, they shared power and took to the streets together against the Awami League government.

Their partnership reached its peak in 2001, when the four-party alliance swept to power with a two-thirds majority, bringing two Jamaat leaders into BNP’s cabinet. Both were later hanged for war crimes.

However, the 2024 mass uprising changed everything.

The political terrain, in the absence of the Awami League, shifted as the two parties became rivals in the electoral arena in the election that paved the way for democratic transition following the uprising.

Dhaka University Political Science Professor Sabbir Ahmed and Jahangirnagar University Government and Politics Professor Al Masud Hasanuzzaman both emphasised that the BNP endured 17 years of repression and hardship.

This long period of struggle generated a strong sense of public sympathy toward the party. The recent passing of its long-time leader Khaleda Zia further deepened that sympathy, creating a favourable environment for the BNP in the election.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Sabbir said, “Although there were negative perceptions about the BNP’s involvement in extortion after August 5, Tarique Rahman’s return to Bangladesh had a cooling effect. His presence restrained some of the party’s controversial elements, while also calming the media hype that had built up.”

According to the unofficial results declared by the Election Commission in 297 seats, the BNP alone won 209.

Its allies Ganosamhati Andolan, Bangladesh Jatiya Party and Gono Odhikar Parishad won one seat each.

Jamaat secured wins in 68 seats, while its allies National Citizen Party bagged six, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis two, and Khelafat Majlis one.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh won only one seat, while independent candidates secured seven seats.

The BNP’s journey back to power has been arduous.

Founded by Ziaur Rahman in 1978, the party burst into the scene with a sweeping victory in 1979, winning 207 seats. Over the decades, it alternated between electoral triumphs and boycotts – refusing to contest the 1986 and 1988 polls, returning to power in 1991, winning a short-lived two-thirds majority in February 1996, and then losing in June of the same year.

Its alliance with Jamaat in 2001 brought another landslide, but the momentum faded with a poor showing in 2008. Boycotts in 2014 and 2024 kept the BNP out of the race, while its participation in 2018 was overshadowed by allegations of ballot-stuffing by the Awami League, which firmly held the reins of power.

Yesterday’s victory finally ended its longest stretch out of power and restored its place at the helm.

Both Sabbir Ahmed and Al Masud Hasanuzzaman noted that Tarique’s leadership during this critical phase provided the party with much-needed guidance. His campaign style was interactive and engaging, breaking away from the traditional one-way speeches of political leaders.

Another factor was the absence of the Awami League from the electoral field, which made the BNP’s path to victory easier.

The professors argued that the BNP’s manifesto, along with its earlier 31-point reform proposals, attracted voters by promising governance reforms and institutional restructuring. The July Charter and BNP’s notes of dissent also signalled their reformist stance, which they are likely to pursue in parliament now that they have a public mandate.

Hasanuzzaman said the BNP’s election manifesto managed to attract the electorate by offering a variety of commitments. “Earlier, its 31-point programme had laid out a broad framework of reform proposals. Following that, their emphasis on reform commissions further strengthened their position. Together, these elements contributed to a favourable verdict from the voters

in support of the BNP. In summation, its success was crafted through these combined efforts.”

Banned after independence for collaborating with Pakistan, Jamaat was revived in 1976 and contested elections under different banners before re-emerging under its own name in 1986, winning 10 seats.

Its best performance until now came in 1991, with 18 seats and 12.13 percent of the popular vote.

The party bagged three seats in June 1996. In the next election in 2001, it won 17 seats, and also got into the cabinet. It won only two seats in 2008.

The party’s fortunes fluctuated in subsequent elections, and in 2013 its registration was cancelled through a High Court order.

Yet, Jamaat remained a force in street politics and alliances, even contesting the 2018 polls under BNP’s symbol while being banned officially.

Thursday’s breakthrough marked its beginning as a formidable opposition.

The BNP-Jamaat alliance, once a four-party bloc, expanded into a 20-party combine in 2012 but dissolved in 2022 after BNP distanced itself.

Despite this, both parties played significant roles in the mass uprising of 2024, which reshaped Bangladesh’s political order.

Yesterday’s results now bring them back into prominence – though not as partners, but as rivals whose resurgence will define the contours of Bangladesh’s democracy in the years ahead.

According to Sabbir, Jamaat’s rise was the result of long-term preparation and a shift in its ideological positioning.

“Jamaat moved away from rigid conservatism towards a more moderate stance, which increased their acceptability. Their nomination strategy was calculated, even including minority candidates, though they failed to nominate women. Jamaat’s urban influence has grown, and in some constituencies, they benefited from the BNP’s rebel candidates.”

Time also identified managing Islamism a challenge for the BNP.

Other than the BNP, the other main beneficiary of Thursday’s election is Jamaat e-Islami, which, along with its alliance partners, bagged 77 seats.

While Jamaat has the goal of Shari’a law in its party constitution, it moderated its more radical rhetoric, focusing on social welfare and rebranding itself as “anti-fascist”.

“However, critics say a leopard can’t change its spots. Jamaat will remain a significant force in the country going forward,” it added.

British daily Guardian said the election was the “first truly competitive vote in the country in years” and the largely peaceful nature of polling day was seen as a huge step forward for the country.

The new government, however, faces an uphill task of restoring democracy, law and order and economic growth to the country.

“To some, the return of the BNP – a dynastic party whose previous regime was riddled with rampant corruption – did not represent the spirit of reform and hunger for change that had driven the student-led uprising against Hasina,” it said.

The media outlets also highlighted the congratulations coming from foreign countries, including India, Pakistan, the US and China, while also identifies repairing relation with India as a challenge.

India’s state news agency PTI reported that the BNP thanked Indian Prime Minister Modi for congratulating Tarique and believes that under the prime minister-elect’s leadership, the relationship between these two countries will be strengthened.

12 Italians convicted for trying to revive Fascist party

AFP, Rome

Twelve members of Italy’s fringe group CasaPound have been jailed for seeking to revive the Fascist Party, which ruled from 1922 to 1943 under dictator Benito Mussolini.

It is the first time a law which bans the “reorganisation of the dissolved Fascist party”, has been applied to the neo-fascist group, the Repubblica daily said yesterday.

The case dates to 2018, when CasaPound members attacked people who attended a protest against Matteo Salvini, head of the anti-immigrant League party and then interior minister.

All defendants were convicted on Wednesday by a court in Bari in southern Italy and given 18 months in jail.

Seven were also sentenced to 12 months for assault.

Elly Schlein, head of the centre-left opposition Democratic Party, called on Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni’s hard-right government to ban the group.

“Now that there’s a ruling that establishes it, the government has no choice but to do what we’ve been asking of it for a long time: dissolve Casapound, dissolve neo-fascist organisations as laid out in the constitution,” she said.

CasaPound, which is based in Rome, takes its name from Ezra Pound, the modernist American poet who collaborated with Fascist Italy during World War II.

In parliamentary elections in 2013 and 2018, the group won less than one percent of the vote. It subsequently decided not to contest polls.

CasaPound members have been filmed making the Fascist salute in Rome, an action that current Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi condemned in 2024 as “contrary to our democratic culture”.

However, he said at the time that it was complicated to ban such groups, saying the law only allowed for this in very limited circumstances.

Meloni’s far-right Brothers of Italy party has its roots in the MSI, a party founded by supporters of Mussolini after World War II.

However, the prime minister has condemned Fascism and acknowledged Fascist Italy’s complicity in the Holocaust.

‘New world disorder’ threatens co-op

Says UN climate chief

AFP, Istanbul

The UN’s climate chief on Thursday urged countries to unite against an “unprecedented threat” to international cooperation from pro-fossil fuel forces – issuing the appeal as US President Donald Trump rattles the global order.

Simon Stiell, the head of the United Nations climate body, spoke in Istanbul as Turkey prepares to host the COP31 climate summit on its Mediterranean coast later this year, with Australia leading the negotiations.

“COP31 in Antalya will take place in extraordinary times. We find ourselves in a new world disorder,” Stiell said in an address alongside the president designate of COP31, Turkish environment minister Murat Kurum.

“This is a period of instability and insecurity. Of strong arms and trade wars. The very concept of international cooperation is under attack,” he said.

He did not name any countries but his plea comes as climate action is competing with concerns over security and economic growth around the world.

Trump has championed oil, gas and coal while moving to withdraw the United States from the UN’s bedrock climate treaty after pulling out of the Paris Agreement, the landmark deal reached in 2015 on curbing global warming.

Stiell said in a news conference that the “door remains open” to welcoming the United States back to the fold.

The American leader, who has called global warming a “hoax”,

revoked on Thursday a landmark scientific finding that underpins US regulations aimed at curbing planet-warming pollution.

Trump has also rattled European allies with his desire to acquire Greenland, as shrinking Arctic sea ice is turning the region into a strategic battleground.

Other nations have resisted moving away from oil, gas and coal.

The COP30 summit in Brazil late last year ended with a modest deal that lacked any explicit mention of fossil fuels amid opposition from oil giants such as Saudi Arabia, coal producer India and others.

The United States, the world’s top economy and second-biggest polluter after China, shunned COP30.

The last three years have been the hottest globally on record, driven by rising greenhouse gas emissions that are causing climate change.

Stiell warned that international climate cooperation was “under unprecedented threat: from those determined to use their power to defy economic and scientific logic, and increase dependence on polluting coal, oil and gas”.

“Those forces are undeniably strong. But they need not prevail. There is a clear alternative to this chaos and regression,” he said.

“And that is countries standing together, building on all we have achieved to date, to make it (international global cooperation) go further and faster.”

He noted that investment in clean energy was more than double that of fossil fuels last year, while renewables overtook coal as the top electricity source.

month led to a wave of criticism.

Homan raised the prospect that the officers would move to another location but gave no details, and speculation is rife about which city might be targeted next.

“In the next week, we’re going to deploy the officers here on detail, back to their home stations or other areas of the country where they are needed. But we’re going to continue to enforce immigration law,” he said.

Campaigning against illegal immigration helped Trump get elected in 2024, but daily videos from Minnesota of violent masked agents, and multiple reports of people being targeted on flimsy evidence, helped send the president’s approval ratings plummeting.

The case of Liam Conejo Ramos, five, who was detained on January 20, also stoked anger.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said the ICE operation in his city “had been catastrophic for our neighbors and businesses, and now it’s time for a great comeback.”

secured 1,44,355 votes.

In Rangamati, the margin was significantly wider. The “No” polled 1,79,805 votes compared to 71,699 for “Yes”.

In Bandarban, “No” secured 90,156 votes against 71,417 for “Yes”, out of 3,15,422 total votes.

From this perspective, many in the hills may have voted in favour of “No” in the referendum, said Aung Chaw Mong Marma, a human rights activist and president of the Bandarban district unit of the Anti-Corruption Committee.

Each of the three earlier 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 regarded as attempts to validate the military governments of Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Muhammad Ershad.

In the first referendum in 1977, the total number of voters was 3,83,63,858, with a turnout of 88.05 percent. The “Yes” vote secured 98.88 percent support, while “No” received 1.12 percent.

In the second referendum in 1985, there were 4,79,10,964 voters and the turnout was 72.44 percent. Of them, “Yes” secured 94.11 percent support, while “No” obtained 5.50 percent.

The third referendum in 1991 was a constitutional exercise that marked Bangladesh’s return to parliamentary democracy.

There were 6,22,04,118 voters, with a turnout of 35.19 percent. The “Yes” vote secured 84.38 percent support, while “No” received 15.64 percent.



Local residents evacuate by boat after the Garonne River overflowed and flooded a residential area in Tonneins, south-western France, yesterday, following strong winds from Storm Nils.

PHOTO: AFP

Jatiya Party ‘crushed’

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supporters gradually drifting to other parties -- a decline reflected in this election.

The AL was banned from contesting this election, and most parties in its 14-party alliance stayed out of the polls.

Moreover, heavyweight JP leaders such as Anisul Islam Mahmud, Mujibul Haque Chunnu, Ruhul Amin Hawlader and Kazi Firoz Rashid announced separate parties ahead of the election. However, they could not contest due to complications over symbols.

In the 11th parliamentary polls in 2018, JP bagged 23 seats. It secured 34 seats in the 10th general election in 2014, which was boycotted by the 18-party alliance led by BNP. JP won 27 seats in the 9th general election in 2008.

In the 8th general election in 2001, it won 14 seats, and in the 1996 polls, it secured 32. JP and most opposition parties boycotted the 6th general election on February 15, 1996. In the 5th general election in 1991, JP won 35 seats, its highest.

Political analysts said the party has historically maintained good relations with the AL. In the 1986 election held during Ershad's

rule, the BNP boycotted while AL participated. In 1996, after 21 years, AL returned to power with JP's support. In 2006, JP joined the Awami League-led movement against the BNP-Jamaat alliance government and later contested the 2008 election in alliance with AL, becoming part of the government.

After the July uprising, JP's central office in Kakrail was vandalised and set on fire several times. Like Awami League, the party faced pressure from the National Citizen Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and others to be banned.

Analysts said in northern districts including Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha and Nilphamari, there had long been sympathy among voters for Ershad's party. Considering the plough symbol and Ershad's appeal, it was assumed that GM Quader's Jatiya Party would retain some ground in the greater Rangpur region. But the results overturned those calculations.

Rangpur division was once known as the party's fortress. In 1991, the plough symbol won 17 of 22 seats in greater Rangpur; in 1996, it won 21; and in 2001, 13.

Ahead of the 13th parliamentary election, Ershad's party faced another split. A new Jatiya Party was formed

under Anisul Islam Mahmud's leadership. Even during Ershad's lifetime, the party split several times, but the faction led by him remained dominant.

Asked about the defeat, Secretary General Patwary said that in the last one and a half years, the party could not carry out organisational activities and was labelled a "collaborator of fascist Awami League".

He alleged that the local administration, with Jamaat's support, engaged in "election engineering" to defeat them.

"Can you believe that GM Quader and several of our senior leaders will come third in the election in their own constituencies? It was possible because of meticulous design by the local administration," he alleged.

"We are collecting data from the local levels, and we will inform the nation about these anomalies through a press conference," he added.

A senior JP leader admitted to The Daily Star that the party is facing an existential crisis.

Mahmud Alam, joint secretary of JP, said the party has almost no organisational presence at the grassroots.

"We have got the result we deserved," he added.

NCP eyes bigger role after bagging 6 seats

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short of expectations and indicated they would review results in constituencies where doubts were raised over the voting process.

Asked whether the outcome was encouraging, Abdullah said, "The NCP did not get all the seats we expected. We do not think the election was fully free and fair in some constituencies. Questions have arisen in many places, and our analysis is ongoing."

He said the party would issue an official statement to clarify its position. "We think the NCP should have won a few more seats, but we are analysing the overall situation. Let's see what happens."

Abdullah said the party would now operate as an opposition force. "As an opposition party, the NCP will play a leading role in constructive reforms and improving the political environment."

"In the next five years, the NCP will become Bangladesh's main party," he added.

FROM JULY UPRISING TO PARLIAMENT

The party, which has its roots in the July 2024 uprising, spearheaded the student-led movement under the banner Students Against

Discrimination.

After the uprising toppled the then government, several key figures from that platform took part in initial discussions on forming the interim government's advisory council. Two student leaders -- Nahid and Asif Mahmud -- later joined the council as advisers.

Nahid resigned from the interim government in February 2025 to help launch the new party. They aimed for an alternative to traditional party structures and promised a "Second Republic" alongside far-reaching constitutional and governance reforms.

To create a national footprint, the NCP travelled across the country as part of what it described as the "July Podojatra", which party leaders said helped generate momentum and expand its base.

As it moved from street politics to electoral contests, questions emerged over whether protest mobilisation would translate into votes.

In late December, the party signalled it would join the Jamaat-led 11-party alliance, a move that drew widespread criticism. It later joined the alliance and secured 30 constituencies to contest.

The decision triggered backlash

Polls result a step closer to stability

FROM PAGE 12
ratings to B2 from B1 and said the outlook was changed to "negative" from "stable". The downgrade reflected heightened political risks as well as lower growth, which increases government liquidity risks, external vulnerabilities and banking sector risks.

Yesterday, the agency warned that while the election of a permanent government ends a period of drift, the country's B2 credit rating remains tethered to the new administration's policy execution.

"Broader credit implications for the country will largely depend on the new administration's ability to maintain political stability."

The election of BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman as the likely new prime minister follows a turbulent period under an interim government, during which "investment has remained subdued as businesses delayed decisions amid political

volatility and uncertainty over the policy direction of the incoming government".

Moody's observed that while "large-scale violence and supply disruptions have largely subsided," the economy is still hampered by "localised lapses in law and order and sporadic protests -- particularly in the garment sector".

The report, however, emphasised that political stability alone is insufficient for a credit upgrade. "The incoming government will need to restore reform momentum and policy continuity," Moody's said, specifically pointing to the need to address "weak corporate governance and a fragile banking sector."

The interim government started many reforms that helped stabilise the economy, even though growth was slow. These actions included improving governance in banks, moving toward a more flexible exchange rate, and making it easier

to do business. For example, they made it easier for companies to send profits abroad and simplified customs procedures at shipping ports.

The report highlighted that "further policy support from the new government will be required to undertake major banking sector reforms, including recapitalising the sector, resolving stressed assets, and strengthening governance".

Voters also approved a referendum on the July charter alongside the general election. Moody's said that "if implemented successfully, these reforms could gradually enhance institutional quality and governance".

Looking ahead to Bangladesh's reliance on international support, the agency issued a reminder about financial aid. "The outlook for reforms will also depend on continued engagement with international financial institutions," it said, adding that future disbursements are likely to depend on the pace of reforms.

REUTERS, Cape Canaveral

A SpaceX rocket soared into orbit from Florida early yesterday with a crew of two US Nasa astronauts, a French astronaut and a Russian cosmonaut headed to the International Space Station (ISS) for an eight-month science mission in microgravity.

The two-stage Falcon 9 rocket, topped with an autonomously operated Crew Dragon capsule dubbed "Freedom", was launched from the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, along Florida's Atlantic Coast, at about 5:15 am EST (1015 GMT).

A live Nasa-SpaceX webcast showed the 25-story-tall vehicle rising from the launch tower as its nine Merlin engines roared to life, gulping 700,000 gallons of fuel per

second, emitting clouds of vapor and a reddish fireball that lit up the predawn sky.

Nine minutes into its flight, the Falcon 9's upper-stage rocket had accelerated to more than 17,000 miles per hour (27,360 kph) before thrusting the Crew Dragon into orbit. By then, the reusable lower-stage booster had flown itself back to Earth and touched down safely at a Cape Canaveral landing pad.

The four crew were set to reach the space station this afternoon after a 34-hour flight, docking with the orbiting laboratory platform some 250 miles (420 km) above Earth.

The mission, designated Crew-12, marks the 12th long-duration ISS team that Nasa has flown aboard a SpaceX launch vehicle since the private rocket venture founded in 2002 by billionaire Elon Musk began

sending US astronauts to orbit in May 2020.

Crew-12 was led by Jessica Meir, 48, a veteran astronaut and marine biologist on her second trip to the space station, nearly seven years after making history with Nasa colleague Christina Koch by completing history's first all-female spacewalk.

"Thank you team, that was quite a ride," Meir radioed to the SpaceX flight control center near Los Angeles. "Crew-12 is grateful and ready for the journey ahead. We're on our way."

Joining her on the flight was Jack Hathaway, 43, a former US Navy fighter pilot and rookie astronaut; European Space Agency astronaut Sophie Adenot, 43, a master helicopter pilot from France; and Russian cosmonaut Andrey Fedyaev, a former military pilot on his second mission to the ISS.

1 killed, 36 hurt in post-polls violence

FROM PAGE 12

involved in the clash were affiliated with the BNP, adding that legal action would be taken and those responsible arrested.

Jasim's father, Mafiq Nayeab, and his brother, Mashiur Rahman, were also injured in the incident.

In Jhenaidah, at least 25 people were injured in five separate incidents involving clashes, vandalism of houses and election camps, and an attack on a press club office.

Two groups of BNP supporters clashed in Shrirampur village under Shaikupa upazila around 9:00am, leaving 12 people injured, said Shakil Ahmed, inspector (investigation) of Shaikupa Police Station.

Officer-in-Charge Md Jellal Hossain of Kaliganj Police Station said two separate incidents occurred between 11:00am and 11:30am, leaving seven people injured.

In Jhenaidah Sadar upazila, rival supporters attacked houses and clashed at three locations between 9:00am and 11:30am, injuring six people, said Md Sabbir, sub-inspector of Jhenaidah Sadar Police Station.

On Thursday night, unidentified attackers also vandalised the Maheshpur Press Club office.

In Patuakhali, at least five people were injured in separate incidents of violence between BNP and Jamaat activists.

In Khayer Bazar area under Bauphal upazila, Jamaat activists allegedly beat two BNP men around 8:00am, according to locals and police.

Around 9:15am, a local Jubo Dal leader allegedly attacked the business

establishments of two Jamaat activists at Konokdia village under the same upazila. In retaliation, Jamaat activists attacked the house and office of a Jubo Dal leader and vandalised 10 motorbikes and furniture.

In another incident at Mominpur village around 10:00am, a BNP activist allegedly hacked a Jamaat man.

Three of the five injured were hospitalised, said Atikul Islam, inspector (investigation) of Bauphal Police Station.

In Dumki upazila of the district, miscreants vandalised seven rice-puffing stoves belonging to four Hindu families at South Pangashia village on Thursday night, hours after voting ended.

"We were watching election results on television when a group of miscreants attacked the stoves outside our house around 8:30pm," said Fatik Saha, one of the victims.

Officer-in-Charge Md Selim Uddin of Dumki Police Station said legal action would be taken following investigation, while Deputy Commissioner Dr Mohammad Shahid Hossain Chowdhury said security measures had been taken for the affected families.

Separately, Jamaat activists allegedly attacked and vandalised the house of Bauphal upazila Jubo Dal leader Gazi Gias Uddin. Confirming the matter, Bauphal Police Station OC Siddiqur Rahman said the victim filed a case naming several Jamaat leaders as accused.

In Pabna-1 constituency, defeated BNP candidate Shamsur Rahman alleged that around a dozen of

his supporters were attacked by supporters of the winning Jamaat candidate Mohammad Nazibur Rahman in at least three localities between Thursday night and Friday morning.

However, no complaint was filed with police, said OC Rafiqul Islam of Santhia Police Station.

Nazibur later held a courtesy meeting with Shamsur at the latter's residence. A video of the meeting went viral on social media, showing Nazibur assuring BNP supporters that such incidents would not recur.

In Saltha upazila of Faridpur, three people were injured in a clash between two BNP factions, reportedly stemming from an argument over voting, said Officer-in-Charge Md Babulur Rahman Khan of Saltha Police Station.

Police and army personnel rushed to the scene and brought the situation under control. Legal action is underway, the OC added.

In Fulgazi upazila of Feni, a local Krishak Dal leader was expelled following an attack and vandalism at three shops belonging to a Jamaat leader.

The expelled leader, Md Sumon, 35, is general secretary of Munshirhat union Krishak Dal.

Officer-in-Charge Md Mizanur Rahman of Fulgazi Police Station said police visited the spot after receiving information and the matter is under investigation. Necessary steps will be taken based on the findings, he added.

[Our correspondents in respective districts contributed to this report]

Jamaat threatens to take to streets

FROM PAGE 12

seats, compared with 77 for the Islamist-led Jamaat-e-Islami alliance.

Shafiqur reiterated that vote counting was abruptly halted and manipulated during the declaration process.

"We have documents showing that result sheets were tampered with in various places," he said, accusing the EC of applying a double standard in some constituencies.

"You all saw what happened in the case of Nasiruddin Patwary. You have seen how polling centres were occupied under the leadership of a relative of a leader. The whole nation witnessed it."

The Jamaat chief said those whose rights were forcibly taken away would seek redress.

"If we get redressal within a specified time, that is one thing. If not, we will be compelled to follow our own course. We hope the Election Commission will exercise good judgment and ensure justice. Otherwise, they will have to bear the responsibility," he added.

The Jamaat chief alleged that there had been attempts by a political party "to rehabilitate the fascists", a phrase often used to refer to the Awami League, which was ousted in the 2024 uprising. He said Jamaat would stand firm against any bid to bring back the old regime.

"Our youths will not spare anybody who attempts to compromise the sacrifices made in July. For July, we got 2026 (the election)."

Theories vs facts

FROM PAGE 12

these 50 seats, Jamaat and its allies won 24, BNP and its allies won 22, independent candidates won three, and Islamic Andolan Bangladesh secured victory in one seat, Dismislab's analysis based on the Prothom Alo report shows.

The viral post referencing Khulna-5 contains inaccuracies. According to the official results, the margin between the winner and the main rival in that constituency was

2,608 votes. While this number is under 5,000, it does not match the vote figures cited in the claims, the Dismislab report says.

Similarly, multiple posts have claimed that Delwar Hossain Sayeedi's son was defeated in Pirojpur-2 by just 70 votes. This is also incorrect. The actual margin was 8,288 votes. According to the result, the winner, Ahmad Sohel Manjur, got 1,05,185 votes and Shamim Sayeedi got 96,897 votes.

Multiple users echoed such conspiracy theories in comments under various posts. For example, a Facebook page called "Jobians-JnU'ins" had a post stating, "I saw a few from the Jamaat Shibir camp claiming that a media coup is altering the results of their ameer and others."

Under this, a user wrote: "Why did Dr Shafiq accept election engineering?"

Note: For this report, Dismislab used only the constituency-level results published by Prothom Alo.



An upset, delivered with DOMINANCE

On paper, Zimbabwe beating Australia in any format is usually considered a shock. But in yesterday’s T20 World Cup group-stage clash in Colombo, the African side’s 23-run victory over the 2021 champions never looked like a contest between the world’s second-ranked team and the side placed 11th. Despite the huge gap in rankings, Zimbabwe dominated throughout, losing just two wickets on their way to setting a 170-run target, before bundling out Australia for 146 in 19.3 overs to register the biggest shock of the tournament so far.

- Zimbabwe are the only team with a 100 percent win record against Australia in T20 World Cups, having won both encounters so far -- including their victory in the inaugural 2007 edition.
- This was also the fifth instance of Zimbabwe beating Australia in any format, with the other three victories coming in ODIs.
- It marked Zimbabwe’s fourth win over a Full Member side in T20 World Cups -- two against Australia and one each against Pakistan (Perth, 2022) and Ireland (Hobart, 2022).
- Player-of-the-match Blessing Muzarabani registered career-best figures

of 4/17 -- also the best bowling figures by a Zimbabwean in a T20 World Cup match. It is also the second-best bowling figures against Australia in the tournament’s history, behind Ravichandran Ashwin’s 4-11 in Mirpur in 2014.

➤ With two wins from two matches, Zimbabwe are second in Group B, just behind co-hosts Sri Lanka, who have also won both of their games. Zimbabwe are now on the verge of qualifying for the Super Eight stage, while Australia -- third in the table with one win from two matches -- must defeat both Sri Lanka and Oman in Pallekele to ensure safe passage to the next phase.

USA, UAE get off the mark

AGENCIES

The United States, powered by Saiteja Mukkamalla’s 79 and Harmeet Singh’s 4-21, thrashed the Netherlands by 93 runs, while UAE staged a strong comeback to secure their first win of the ongoing T20 World Cup yesterday.

The emphatic margin boosted USA’s net run rate in Group A and kept alive their slim hopes of repeating their Super Eights qualification from two years ago.

Asked to bat first in Chennai, USA piled up 196-6 before bowling out the Netherlands for 103 in 15.5 overs. It was their first T20I victory over the Dutch and earned them their first points of this year’s tournament. Bas de Leede top-scored for the Netherlands with 23 in an otherwise disappointing batting display.

In New Delhi, half-centuries from Aryanesh Sharma and Sohaib Khan guided UAE to a thrilling five-wicket win over Canada.

Chasing 151, UAE were struggling at 66-4 in the 13th over before Sharma (74 not out) and Sohaib (51) added 84 to steer them home with two balls to spare. Sohaib reached his fifty off 28 balls but fell in the final over, leaving Muhammad Arfan to hit the winning run.

Earlier, Junaid Siddique claimed 5-35 to restrict Canada to 150-7 and was named player of the match.

Will politics spill onto the pitch again?

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

After an eventful buildup, ripe with cricketing diplomacy and geopolitical implications, perennial enemies India and Pakistan are set to face off in Colombo in their Group A match of the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup tomorrow.

However, questions remain whether politics will stay out of the field during the India-Pakistan encounter this time or will it find a way to creep in, like it did in last year’s Asia Cup T20.

In that tournament in the UAE, both teams faced off thrice, with India coming out on top in all three. The first two victories were straightforward ones, but the third, which was also the final, went down to the last over, with India reaching home with two balls to spare.

After a considerable while, an India-Pakistan encounter had produced a close finish like that. But by the end of the night, the biggest talking point was not the game. It was India’s refusal to receive the trophy from Asian Cricket Council (ACC) president and Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsi Naqvi, who, in return, decided to end the ceremony without handing over the silverware.

Political tensions were palpable in all three matches, with Indian players refusing to shake hands with Pakistani opponents, and players from both sides taunting opposing teams and fans with gestures hinting at the recent military



clashes between the countries.

The entire episode left a sour taste in the mouths of all cricket fans, and the ethereal ‘Spirit of Cricket’ took a hiding.

Around five months have passed since then. The Asia Cup trophy is still collecting dust in the ACC offices, as both sides are again set to face off following an extremely rocky buildup.

The fate of this group-stage meetup was up in the air for weeks, and was finally given the green light on last Monday when Pakistan government reversed its decision to boycott the match following multilateral discussions and requests from different stakeholders.

Bangladesh was a key factor in the turmoil, as Pakistan issued the boycott in solidarity with Bangladesh after they were replaced by Scotland in the T20 World Cup by the ICC for refusing to play in India over security concerns.

The deadlock ended following a tripartite meeting between ICC, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), and Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) in Lahore last Sunday, after which, ICC assured no sanctions for BCB and promised the hosting rights to an ICC event between 2028-2031.

As per reports, PCB had tried to twist the arm of ICC by holding their most lucrative match hostage. Many demands were speculated -- like a more equitable ICC revenue sharing model, a restoration of bilateral series with India, and making post-match handshakes mandatory.

But in ICC’s official statement, none of the speculated demands were mentioned. However, that doesn’t rule out the possibility of some undisclosed understanding between PCB and ICC.

After so much hoopla, the India-Pakistan match will go on as originally scheduled.

Going only by past head-to-head record between the sides in T20Is, this is a lopsided battle with India having won 13 of the 16 past meetings and Pakistan not having beaten India since 2022.

Much is being said about Pakistan’s mystery spinner Usman Tariq, and defending champions India have also shown some signs of weakness, getting reduced to 77-6 against USA in their first game. Still, Pakistan will start the match as underdogs, and cricket fans will tune in on Sunday hoping to see an intense match, not political posturing.

Proteas, Black Caps eye Super Eight spot

AGENCIES

South Africa will have little time to breathe after their heart-stopping escape against Afghanistan as they face fellow high-flyers New Zealand in a Group D clash of the ICC T20 World Cup at the Narendra Modi Stadium today.

Both teams have two wins from two and look primed for safe passage into the Super Eights, with the winners of the contest set to progress today. With pre-tournament seedings already determining the next-round groups, Saturday’s contest carries limited jeopardy -- beyond momentum, fine-tuning and bragging rights.

Yet context gives the meeting bite.

New Zealand are winless in four T20 World Cup matches against South Africa, including one- and two-run heartbreaks in 2009 and 2014. However, they have won all three T20Is between the sides in this decade, and more than 10 years have passed since their last clash at the global showpiece in 2014.

The Proteas may draw comfort from familiarity. Both their victories -- over Canada and Afghanistan -- came in Ahmedabad. The 57-run win against Canada was under lights, offering valuable lessons about handling dew. Should they progress, they are slated to play two of their three Super Eights matches at this venue.

There are, however, wrinkles to smooth out.

Lungi Ngidi’s slower balls in the Powerplay have made him an unlikely leader of the attack but pace ace Kagiso Rabada has struggled for rhythm. His two no-balls in the final over against Afghanistan



- New Zealand are winless in four T20 World Cup matches against South Africa.
- However, New Zealand have won all three T20Is between the sides in this decade.

dragged the game into the Super Over, and he leaked 1 for 40 from four overs against Canada. Since 2025, Rabada averages 34.55 with an economy of 9.82, though injuries and workload have limited him to nine T20Is.

New Zealand’s pace unit tells a similar story. An injury-hit Lockie Ferguson has struck early, while top-ranked Jacob Duffy has looked off-colour.

Spin has been tidy rather than decisive. South Africa average 51 in overs 7-15 in this tournament; New Zealand 79. Keshav Maharaj and Mitchell Santner have just one wicket apiece, and at a ground where pacers have 17 wickets to spinners’ eight, their challenge only stiffens.

Expect fireworks with the bat. Tim Seifert and Finn Allen are fresh from an unbroken 175 in a 10-wicket hammering of the UAE, while Quinton de Kock and Ryan Rickelton smashed 114 off 61 balls against Afghanistan here.

Someone’s unbeaten start will end. Who blinks first may be all that separates them.

Meanwhile, in the day’s other two fixtures, England will face Scotland in Kolkata, while Ireland will take on Oman at the SSC Cricket Ground in Colombo.

Perfect 10 for Rajshahi Stars

SPORTS REPORTER

Debutants Rajshahi Stars completed a remarkable unbeaten campaign to lift the Bangladesh Women’s Football League title, defeating Bangladesh Army 3-0 to seal the crown with a perfect 10 wins from 10 matches. While they required only a draw to become champions, Rajshahi chose to finish in emphatic fashion, underlining both their authority and the growing competitiveness of this year’s league.

Speaking after the match, Bangladesh captain and Rajshahi skipper Afeida Khandaker stressed how different this edition had felt compared to previous seasons. “Compared to the last three years, this year the league has been more competitive. Previously, the national team players were in one team or maybe two teams. This time, the national team players have been distributed across almost all teams, which has made the league more competitive.”

That redistribution of talent meant that even an eventual 3-0 win in the decisive match did not come without tension. Defender Sheuli Azim reflected on the challenge posed by Army, saying: “Football is unpredictable. No matter how good a team is, any team can be stopped. We saw in the World Cup that Argentina were stopped by Saudi Arabia. We kept that in mind when we took the field.”

Rajshahi’s flawless record might suggest dominance, but players insisted the

campaign was far from straightforward. Winger Ritu Porna Chakma pointed to structural changes in the competition as a key factor behind the higher standard. “Yes, that was a positive aspect. Previously, the national team players were all in one team, so there was not much competition. After introducing the pool system and distributing players, the league became more competitive.”



Beyond the title celebrations, attention quickly turned to the upcoming continental assignment. Bangladesh will soon compete in the AFC Women’s Asian Cup, where they are scheduled to face heavyweights including China and North Korea. For Afeida, the timing of a demanding domestic season could prove vital.

“It has been very beneficial because we

have the Asian Cup ahead. If we can stay within matches and get game time, we can learn from our mistakes in matches -- where we are making errors -- and correct them to prepare ourselves for the Asia Cup,” she said. On the challenge awaiting in Australia, she added:

There have been comparisons with India’s more extensive preparations, but Azim dismissed suggestions of regret.



ALVAREZ ENDS DROUGHT AS ATLETICO HAMMER BARCA

Atletico Madrid delivered a dominant display as Julian Alvarez ended his 11-game scoring drought in a 4-0 demolition of holders Barcelona in the Copa del Rey semifinal first leg at the Metropolitano on Thursday. An Eric Garcia own goal gave Diego Simeone’s side an early lead before Antoine Griezmann, Ademola Lookman, and Alvarez struck to hand Atletico a commanding halftime advantage. Garcia was sent off late on for Barca, with Atletico carrying their significant edge over the record 32-time winners into the second leg at Camp Nou on March 3.

PHOTO: AFP



‘VOTE COUNT IRREGULARITIES’ Jamaat threatens to take to streets

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday alleged that the results of the 13th parliamentary election were altered through “irregularities and manipulation” during vote counting, warning of street protests if the grievances are not addressed.

“Though the polling was fair, there were massive irregularities in vote counting,” Shafiqur told reporters at a press conference held on behalf of the 11-party electoral alliance at the party’s central office in Moghbazar in the evening.

“We will seek redress from the Election Commission,” he said, adding that they are “prepared to take to the streets” if the EC fails to provide the desired response.

“Elections naturally involve wins and losses, and if those occur naturally, people accept them. But if there is major discrimination irregularity, it raises questions,” he said.

The Jamaat chief also alleged that there have been attacks on the homes of leaders, activists, agents and voters of the alliance in different parts of the country. “Those who engage in such wrongdoing must bear full responsibility.”

It was not clear whether the party conceded defeat, and the Jamaat chief did not clarify whether they would join parliament. He declined to answer questions.

According to Election Commission figures, the BNP alliance won 212

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Due to the election holidays, the usual bustle of the capital has disappeared, leaving normally crowded flyovers almost empty. The photo was taken from the Mouchak area yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Polls result a step closer to stability

Rating agency
Moody’s says clear
mandate reduces
uncertainty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The decisive outcome of Bangladesh’s general election will help dissipate volatility that has gripped the nation since the 2024 uprising, and is “an important step toward political normalisation,” Moody’s Ratings said yesterday.

In an assessment, the rating agency said the victory of the BNP and its allies “could help ease political uncertainty, potentially supporting a recovery in investor confidence and a reduction in political and social tensions”.

In November 2024, Moody’s downgraded Bangladesh’s long-term

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Theories vs facts on Jamaat leaders’ narrow defeats

STAR REPORT

Conspiracy theories over some Jamaat leaders’ narrow defeat have been circulating on social media since yesterday morning.

Take this example: “Why did Dr Shafiq accept election engineering? In Pirojpur-2, Delwar Hossain Sayeedi’s son was handed a defeat by only 70 votes. In Khulna, Mia Golam Porwar was forced into a loss by just 2,000 votes. The number of seats where Jamaat lost by fewer than 5,000 votes is 53. Essentially, Jamaat was defeated in these 53 seats because of rigging. In reality, Jamaat won 135 seats. But the deep state is trying to reduce that number to 70-80.”

Victory/defeat by less than 5,000 votes	22 seats
Jamaat, allies won	11 seats
BNP, allies won	9 seats
Others	2 seats

Dismislab, a fact-check organisation, investigated at least a dozen such posts and comments found across various social media platforms, claiming that candidates from the Jamaat alliance would have secured more seats if there were no rigging or conspiracy against the coalition.

Dismislab’s analysis shows victory or defeat was determined by a margin of less than 5,000 votes in 22 seats, not 53. In these seats, the margins range from 385 to 4,702 votes.

A coalition-wise analysis of the results in these 22 constituencies shows that Jamaat and its allies won 11 seats, while the BNP and its allies secured nine. One seat was taken by an independent candidate and another by Islami Andolon Bangladesh. In other words, candidates from the Jamaat-led alliance prevailed in half of the constituencies decided by margins of fewer than 5,000 votes.

When the results of all 297 constituencies announced so far (out of 300 seats) are arranged in ascending order of vote margins, the 50 seats with the narrowest margins range from 385 to 9,581 votes. Among

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1 killed, 36 hurt in post- polls violence

STAR REPORT

At least one person was killed and 36 others injured in incidents of post-election violence across the country between Thursday night and yesterday evening, amid allegations of intra-party clashes, attacks by rival groups, and vandalism.

The lone fatality took place in Char Abdullah village under Sadar upazila of Munshiganj, where a young man was beaten during a clash between rival factions reportedly affiliated with the BNP.

Md Jasim Nayeib, 30, a supporter of independent candidate and expelled BNP district member secretary Md Mohiuddin, was critically injured in the violence yesterday afternoon and later died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital in the evening.

According to police, prior tensions between rival groups in the area escalated into a violent altercation over election-related issues. At one stage, Jasim was struck on the head with a sharp weapon, leaving him gravely injured.

Munshiganj Superintendent of Police Md Menhazul Alam said both factions

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Despite a bumper mustard harvest in various upazilas of Rajshahi district this season, farmers are not getting the prices they expected. The crop is selling in local markets at Tk 2,700–2,800 per maund. Farmers say that although prices are somewhat low, the good yield will make up for it. The photo was taken yesterday in the Bagmara-Bhabaniganj area of Rajshahi.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

‘It’s going to be very traumatic’ for Iran

Trump warns if no nuclear deal; second US
carrier group to be deployed in ME

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump threatened Iran Thursday with “very traumatic” consequences if it fails to make a nuclear deal – but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was skeptical about the quality of any such agreement.

Speaking a day after he hosted Netanyahu at the White House, Trump said he hoped for a result “over the next month” from Washington’s negotiations with Tehran over its nuclear program.

“We have to make a deal, otherwise it’s going to be very traumatic, very traumatic. I don’t want that to happen, but we have to make a deal,” Trump told reporters. “This will be very traumatic for Iran if they don’t make a deal.”

The Pentagon has ordered a second aircraft carrier to deploy to the Middle East, US media reported yesterday.

Late last month, Trump sent the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier and accompanying warships to the Gulf as Trump ramped up threats against Iran over its deadly crackdown on anti-government protests. The vessels remain in the region.

“We’ll see if we can get a deal with them, and if we can’t, we’ll have to go to phase two. Phase two will be very tough for them,” Trump said.

Netanyahu had travelled to Washington to push Trump to take a harder line in the Iran nuclear talks, particularly on including the Islamic Republic’s arsenal of ballistic missiles.

But the Israeli and US leaders apparently remained at odds, with Trump saying after their meeting at the White House on Wednesday that he had insisted the negotiations should continue.

Meanwhile, the Iranian government yesterday announced the establishment of a commission of enquiry to look into protests against the high cost of living that turned into anti-government rallies that left thousands dead.

“A fact-finding committee has been formed with representatives from relevant institutions and is collecting documents and hearing statements,” Iranian government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani told the local news agency ISNA.

Israeli PM skeptical about
quality of any such deal

Iran announces enquiry team
to probe protests

The spokeswoman did not specify whether the commission would only focus on the economic demands that triggered the protests, or whether it would also investigate deaths during the protests.

“The final report will be published for public information and further legal action after the process is completed,” she stated.

On Thursday, the government website published comments by President Masoud Pezeshkian saying “We have assigned teams to investigate the causes (of the unrest), without providing further details.

The protests, which began in late December before escalating on January 8, left more than 3,000 dead, according to the official count.

Jatiya Party ‘crushed’

Draws blank for the first
time in polls; analysts say
party lacks ‘identity’

RASHIDUL HASAN

The Jatiya Party suffered a complete rout in the February 12 polls.

For the first time since the restoration of parliamentary democracy, not a single candidate of the party secured a seat, a stunning collapse that some political analysts say signals an ominous future for the party.

Of its 196 candidates, the highest number after the BNP, Islami Andolon Bangladesh and Jamaat-e-Islami, all but 20 lost their deposits. None even emerged as a principal contender.

The party, founded by HM Ershad, was also routed in Rangpur, considered its main stronghold. In the 2024 election, Jatiya Party secured 11 seats, its previous lowest tally since its formation in 1986.

Among its heavyweights, Chairman GM Quader and Secretary General Shamim Haider Patwary both finished third in their respective constituencies – Rangpur-3 (city corporation and Sadar) and Gaibandha-1. Both lost to Jamaat-e-Islami candidates, with the BNP candidates finishing second.

Though the party faced an uphill battle going into the polls and its leaders claimed “election engineering”, analysts said the scale of its defeat reflects its eroded public connection and fading political identity.

“By aligning with Awami League over the past 18 years, Jatiya Party has lost its distinct identity,” political analyst Mohiuddin Ahmad told The Daily Star.

“The party became isolated from the people by playing a role in legitimising Awami League’s misuse and controversial elections,” he added.

Analysts also said over the past two decades, JP has become a leader-centric party, with activists and

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NCP eyes bigger role after bagging 6 seats in debut

SHAMIMA RITA and ARAFAT RAHAMAN

Amid doubts over its political future and alliance choices, the youth-led National Citizen Party (NCP) has made an eye-catching debut, winning six seats in its first parliamentary election.

Calling the results proof of voter trust in the party, NCP leaders pledged to pursue what they called “action-oriented politics” inside and outside parliament.

The party contested 30 constituencies under the Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-party alliance in the 13th parliamentary election and won six seats, according to unofficial results. The party also claimed it received 21 lakh votes nationwide.

Party convener Nahid Islam won Dhaka-11 with 93,872 votes, defeating BNP candidate MA Quayum, who secured 91,833, according to preliminary results.

Member secretary Akhter Hossen won Rangpur-4, while south organiser Hasnat Abdullah won Cumilla-4. Senior joint convener Hannan Masud won Noakhali-6, joint member secretary Abdullah Al Amin won Narayanganj-4, and joint convener Atiq Mujahid won Kurigram-2, according to the party’s preliminary tallies.

Despite the victories, NCP leaders said they had fallen

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Beauty thrives amid mounting threats

Market, roads and rising crowds raise fresh conservation concerns

MINTU DESHWARA

At dawn, when the mist hangs low over the canopy and the first call of the gibbon echoes through the trees, Lawachara feels untouched by the world beyond its borders. Filtered sunlight falls on damp forest trails, butterflies drift between fig and chapalish leaves, and for a moment the hum of the city seems impossibly far away.

Yet this fragile calm masks a growing tension. Lawachara is one of Bangladesh's most accessible tropical rainforests, drawing thousands who seek respite in its greenery. But accessibility comes at a cost.

The question now is whether Lawachara can balance tourism with true conservation. Without stricter enforcement of speed limits, clear land demarcation and sustainable visitor management, this "piece of paradise" risks losing the very wilderness that makes it extraordinary.

For now, the forest still stands, breathing, whispering and waiting, its fate tied to how carefully we choose to tread beneath its trees.

Located in Kamalganj upazila of Moulvibazar, about 200 kilometres northeast of Dhaka and just 8 kilometres from Srimangal, the park was declared a reserve forest in 1917 and officially became a national park in 1996. Once known as West Bhanugach Reserve Forest, it remains part of the greater Bhanugach forest area.

Second only to the Sundarbans in ecological significance, Lawachara hosts around 460 species. Within its 1,250 hectares live 167 species of trees, 26 species of mammals, 29 reptiles, six amphibians, 246 birds and more than 160 species of butterflies.

Among its most iconic residents is the critically endangered western hoolock gibbon, locally known as the uluk, one of the country's last remaining ape species. Capped langurs, slow lorises, barking deer, fishing cats, hornbills, pythons and cobras also inhabit the forest.

The canopy is diverse, with fig, chapalish, teak, amla, bahera and kadam trees dominating the landscape. A once-famous African teak tree, locally dubbed the "chlorophyll tree", collapsed during a storm in 2005, adding to the park's folklore.

Researcher Sabit Hasan said, "In my latest survey, 48 primates from 13 gibbon families were found in the Lawachara forest. However, there is room for more apes to thrive in Lawachara. Proper habitat management initiatives for apes in this semi-evergreen habitat are essential."

He said the population density of apes in

placing increasing pressure on the sanctuary.

Railways, roads and power lines pass through the forest, fragmenting habitat and creating daily risks for wildlife. Campaigns have been conducted on the issue, but vehicles continue to run at previous speeds. Wild animals are often crushed under vehicle wheels.

Swapan Deb Sajal, director of the Wildlife Service Foundation, a voluntary organisation for the conservation and rescue of wild animals, said many people are concerned about the death of wildlife in Lawachara. "The speed limit of 20 kilometres is not being observed on the road. If it had been accepted, many animals would have been saved," he said.

Although the boundary of the Lawachara reserved forest has not been fully marked, much of the park's land has been encroached upon over the past 29 years.

On October 24, 2017, the boundary demarcation process began in Lawachara National Park in the presence of the then former Assistant Conservator of Forests of the Wildlife Department, Tabibur Rahman. However, the process was later stopped



for unknown reasons.

Lawachara Range Officer of the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Department Nazmul Haque said it is not possible to determine the boundaries due to the lack of a survey. "Since the boundaries of the area being vacated are not defined, I cannot even drive a stake in it," he said.

Visitor management has also been inconsistent. Recently, car parking was banned at the entrance of the park, but was later reintroduced.

Matin Mia, in charge of the ticket counter at the national park, said since the Forest Department banned car parking, the sale of vehicle parking tickets was stopped, but it was later reintroduced.

Shamsul Haque, general secretary of Lawachara People's Forum, said the arrival of numerous tourists and vehicles every day, along with the resulting noise and smoke, is hindering the reproduction, movement and search for food



The question now is whether Lawachara can balance tourism with true conservation. Without stricter enforcement of speed limits, clear land demarcation and sustainable visitor management, this "piece of paradise" risks losing the very wilderness that makes it extraordinary.

of wildlife.

However, he questioned the decision-making process. "This decision should not have been taken in a hurry. As a former member of the Lawachara National Park Co-Management Committee, I think that if the decision had been taken after discussing with all the stakeholders, it would have been more effective and acceptable. Everyone could have benefited from it," he said.

A market has been operating inside the national park for almost a decade. Environmentalists and forest officials say it has become a major threat to the forest. The natural environment of the wildlife and forest area is being disrupted due to the crowd of tourists, noise from vehicles and commercial activities.

Local environmentalists and forest officials said the market was held inside the forest with the permission of the Forest Department.

A former member of the park's co-management committee said the shops were built around 2014 and that most were constructed irregularly. They would not have been built if the Divisional Forest officer of the time had not given approval. In most cases, these shops were allotted by the powerful, he said.

Swapan Deb Sajal, director of the Bangladesh Wildlife Care Foundation, said so many tourists come because of permission from the Forest Department that wildlife runs away in fear.

According to the Forest Department, 222 wildlife were rescued in Srimangal in 2024, of which 104 were dead. Along with the Forest Department, the Bangladesh Wildlife Care Foundation and Stand for Our Endangered Wildlife play an important role in rescue work.

A forest officer of the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Department, who did not want to be named, said setting up shops inside the reserved forest was not right and is destroying the natural environment of the forest and wildlife.

Saju Marchiang, publication secretary of the Khasi Social Council, said Lawachara National Park is already under threat. Over time, the forest is

decreasing, tourists are increasing and commercial activities are expanding. Having a market inside the forest for a decade is not acceptable at all, he said.

Hatim Ali, a resident of Lawachara Punji, said he set up a shop in Punji in 1964 and later had to change location several times. Currently, he has been asked to sit outside in front of the gate.

He claimed his shop was set up by the Forest Department and is legal, and alleged that other shops have been taken over by influential people.

Sohel Shyam, founder of Stand for Our Endangered Wildlife, said plastic waste is spreading throughout the forest because of these shops. If the shops remain open for a few more days, the forest and wildlife will be filled with plastic, putting them in serious danger, he said.

Abul Kalam, divisional conservator of forests of the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Department, confirmed that car parking was stopped in Lawachara by order of the ministry.

He said that after a meeting in the ministry on September 14, various instructions were issued for Lawachara and Sathkira forests. A total of eight instructions were issued for the protection of the environment and wildlife of Lawachara, and stopping parking was one of them. The main purpose was to protect wildlife and reduce tourists, he said, adding that parking was later reintroduced after considering various issues.

Nurul Mohaimin Milton, general secretary of the Moulvibazar unit of the Bangladesh Environmental Journalists Association, said active wildlife rescue efforts, awareness campaigns and research initiatives are generating data and public interest, both essential for long-term protection.

The involvement of local communities, researchers and voluntary organisations reflects broader recognition that preserving Lawachara is a shared responsibility, he added.

"If coordinated action continues, combining stricter enforcement, scientific management and community dialogue, Lawachara can evolve into a model where tourism and conservation coexist. With sustained commitment, this rainforest sanctuary may not only endure but emerge stronger, ensuring that its gibbons continue to call and its canopy continues to shelter life for generations to come," he added.



Lawachara is higher than in other forests.

Shyamal Debbarma, who is involved in several studies on primate species and also works as a tour guide, said despite many problems in Lawachara, the beauty of the forest continues to attract people.

That attraction, conservationists warn, is



Dyslexia: A blind spot in Bangladesh’s education and child development system



The silence reflects a deeper problem: lack of awareness. Dyslexia is still an unfamiliar term to many parents. When a child struggles academically, they are often labelled lazy or inattentive rather than assessed for a learning difficulty.

YSTIAQUE AHMED

Many of us remember the child in *Taare Zameen Par*—misunderstood, labelled lazy, punished for academic failure—only begins to flourish when a teacher recognises his dyslexia. In Bangladesh, such endings are rare. Countless children struggle quietly in classrooms that are not designed for them, facing neglect and misunderstanding from families, peers and teachers.

An often-cited study, *Prevalence of Dyslexia in Primary School in Dhaka: Its Effects on Children's Academic and Social Life* which was published a decade ago found that 9.02% of fourth-grade students in Dhaka were diagnosed with dyslexia. Surely the figure changed in the last several years but there is no concrete data.

The most recent study regarding the subject is almost 2 years old. A 2024 study by Md. Sahajal Badsha, *Mainstreaming Slow-Pace Learners Through Mobile Assisted Language Learning: A Case of Bengali Primary Level Students with Dyslexia*, explored support strategies for Bengali primary students with dyslexia.

The silence reflects a deeper problem: lack of awareness. Dyslexia is still an unfamiliar term to many parents. When a

child struggles academically, they are often labelled lazy or inattentive rather than assessed for a learning difficulty. One representative of an organisation admitted that they did not know what dyslexia was despite working in the similar field.

The word dyslexia comes from the Greek *dys* (impaired) and *lexis* (word). It is a neurobiological disorder affecting the development of reading and spelling. It does not mean all reading problems. Many children with dyslexia have strong language comprehension but struggle with decoding. They may understand a text when it is read aloud yet find reading words independently extremely difficult.

A MOTHER'S STORY

Nazisa (pseudonym as requested by the parent), mother of a dyslexic daughter, recalls early signs. Her child was underweight at birth, and doctors advised close monitoring. As she grew, she could read and rhyme but struggled with writing and direction, unable to distinguish left from right. After consulting with a doctor, it was confirmed she had mild dyslexia.

“At first, we admitted her in a special school but the situation got worse. She was more scared than before. After consulting with the doctor, he suggested we should

admit her in a mainstream school. So, after 3 months in a special school, we moved her to a mainstream school. And now things are looking better for her.”

Support from one teacher proved transformative. “One of the teachers helped her with writing which I couldn’t do earlier. She is in Grade 2 now. When she was in special school, she was afraid but now in the school if she misses a day, she gets upset. She is one of the toppers in her class. She struggles with math but very good at creative learning. She loves literature.”

However, challenges persist. “While her friends help, some other kids in her class bully her as she is a slow learner. Still, she struggles with putting on sandals and clothes.”

The financial strain has been severe. “We have to check up every month and keep her in constant observation. We were broke but through our family support we survived.”

She also reflects on environmental constraints. “I tried to make a small playground in front of my house but my daughter couldn’t cope with it as constant

“Many parents are confused about whether their child needs special schooling or just therapy. Some don’t even realise their child is different from others,” she says. “One major myth is the belief that the child will ‘fix themselves’ as they grow up. Neurodevelopmental problems do not simply go away; they require early intervention. While awareness has increased recently, even families of doctors sometimes struggle to accept that their child needs special schooling.”

Her school now in its eighth year, but operational challenges remain. Landlords refuse to rent due to concern about noises, and a crisis of professional therapist remains another challenge. Kiddie Rocks follows the Autism Partnership Singapore curriculum and transitions several students to mainstream schools each year. “Seven students transitioned this year alone,” she notes.

On affordability, she says, “I believe our fees are reasonable compared to the quality of service we provide, though it may be difficult for lower or middle-class families.” Most parents are professionals—doctors, university teachers, military

as he was failing in multiple subjects. The foundation started from this concern,” he says.

Over the past five years, he has visited 37 schools to raise awareness and train teachers. “Teachers didn’t have sound knowledge about dyslexia. I was trying to make them understand about the importance and effect of dyslexia. After two years of constant trying, they felt it’s important.”

Huda resists framing dyslexia as a disability. “I don’t think it is a disability. For me, it is a learning difficulty. So, there is no cure; they have to overcome this obstacle and for that they need guidance and care.” He claims more than 200 children have improved under his guidance, yet systemic barriers persist.

He is currently focused on research and parental consultations. “The first thing I want is to include dyslexia in educational policy. Most of the teachers in our country have no idea about dyslexia or how to handle it. We need more and more awareness about dyslexia, basic screening and its overcoming method.”



PHOTO: FREEPIX

construction is going on surrounding the neighbourhood and also the air isn’t fresh there either.”

Her advice to other parents who are in similar shoes, delivered half in jest and half in despair, is stark: leave the country if possible.

INSIDE A SPECIAL SCHOOL

Sabrina Akter, Managing Director of Kiddie Rocks Ltd. Special School, describes common misconceptions among parents.

personnel. The institution remains entirely private and self-sustaining.

ADVOCACY FROM THE GROUND

Muhammad Shamsul Huda founded Suraiya Afaz Dyslexiabd, first special school for dyslexia, dysgraphia & dyscalculia in Bangladesh, after witnessing a student fail nine subjects in his Secondary School Certificate examination. “When I asked the school principal to check his scripts they refused and insulted me. They beat him

THE ACADEMIC VIEW

Professor Dr Mahjabeen Haque of the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology at the University of Dhaka underscores the diagnostic vacuum.

“I don’t think at the moment there is any proper system or panel in Bangladesh that diagnose dyslexia,” she says. “We did some screening 10/15 years ago but now there is no study, research or survey in our country regarding dyslexia.”

Her recommendation is clear: “We need to incorporate diagnosis of dyslexia in our country’s child development systems and raise awareness in education sectors to overcome this.”

A SYSTEM YET TO LEARN

Dyslexia in Bangladesh remains largely invisible absent from policy, under-researched and misunderstood. Parents shoulder financial and emotional burdens, private institutions fill gaps at significant cost, and academics call for systemic reform.

For children who learn differently, the problem is not intelligence or effort. It is a system that still does not know how to read them.

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The hidden cost of battery-run rides

MIPTAHUL JANNAT

The rise of battery-run auto rickshaws has changed the rhythm of Bangladesh’s streets. They are fast, affordable, and everywhere. But for those behind the handlebars, the rides come with a cost. “I’ve been driving a battery-run auto rickshaw for the last two years. I often have joint pain after driving all day long,” said 26-year-old Zakir Hossain.

The Rickshaw, Van, Easy Bike Labourer Union estimates nearly 7 million such vehicles nationwide, about 1 million in Dhaka alone. Many can reach speeds of 40 km/h, far beyond what their light frames and basic brakes were built for. While much of public debate around them often centres on traffic, safety, or environmental concerns, far less attention is paid to the drivers who spend long hours on rough roads in these vehicles rarely designed for comfort or safety.

“The vehicles are not really designed with drivers’ physical wellbeing in mind. Many drivers come into this work after years of poverty, malnutrition, and heavy manual labour, which already take a toll on their bodies,” mentioned Ariful Islam Nadim, General Secretary of the Rickshaw, Van, Easy Bike Labourer Union. “So, when they begin driving, those vulnerabilities become more visible, as they spend long hours in vehicles that are not built for comfort or ergonomic support.”



Medical research shows that prolonged sitting, constant vibration of the vehicle, especially when speeding over uneven roads, and poorly designed seating significantly increase the risk of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) among drivers. Neck pain and low back pain are also widely reported among drivers who work extended hours. For many, the pain is not minor, it interferes with their daily activities. Drivers report difficulty lifting heavy loads or even walking long distances without discomfort. In some cases, long-term strain contributes to spinal problems



PHOTOS: STAR

or postural deformities, particularly among older drivers or those with years in the profession.

Dhaka consistently ranks among the world’s most polluted cities, and auto rickshaw pullers spending 10–12 hours daily on the roads exposed to traffic fumes, face further health risks due to that. Prolonged exposure to air and noise pollution contribute to high blood pressure, respiratory problems, asthma, skin ailments, and digestive issues. Additionally, working long hours under extreme heat further increases the risk of dehydration and heatstroke, a situation worsened by limited access to WASH facilities, which can lead to longer-term health problems such as urinary tract infections (UTIs), kidney stones, and bladder complications.

Beyond physical strain, drivers also face psychosocial stress. Long hours in traffic, passenger disputes, short breaks, and restricted access to restrooms contribute to chronic stress and fatigue, which can intensify muscle tension and worsen existing pain according to research.

These risks are compounded by a lack of formal training. Many drivers enter the profession without a clear understanding of traffic rules or the technical aspects of operating a motorised vehicle, leaving them highly vulnerable to road accidents. The wide variety of unsafe models on the streets—vehicles with thin tyres, unstable frames, or inadequate braking systems—makes collisions and tipping over a frequent hazard, putting drivers’ lives at serious risk.

“There are at least 16 different models on the road, with varying type of tyres, foot brakes, hand brakes, even hydraulic brakes,” said Nadim. “Among these, models with thicker tyres, lower height, smaller size but heavier weight tend to be safer. With the right setup, they could operate safely and stay stable even at higher speeds without tipping over.”

However, shifting to safer models requires investment — and investment, he stressed, depends on legal recognition. Despite their vast numbers, drivers do not fall neatly under existing labour law frameworks, and there is no standardised licensing system for them.

AKM Nasim, Country Program Director of Solidarity Center Bangladesh and former member of the Labour Reform Commission, said that a dedicated labour framework is needed to bring battery-run auto rickshaw drivers under labour protections. “They are not like factory or shop workers, so there is no simple solution—working hours, wages, and overtime are complex to monitor in this sector and not easily covered by existing labour laws,” he explained.

Another serious risk to drivers comes from the very power source that keeps these vehicles running. Each auto rickshaw typically relies on four lead-acid batteries, which last only six to twelve months. Their frequent replacement keeps drivers in regular contact with a supply chain that is largely informal and weakly regulated. Many are produced, repaired, and recycled by informal operators who may not fully understand the toxic dangers of lead and acid exposure. For drivers, this often means handling components that can release harmful substances into their immediate surroundings.

Drawing attention to the rapid surge in battery-run autorickshaws, Nadim warned, “This issue is already at a critical stage. If regulation is delayed, it will only worsen. It may not take long for the number to reach one crore, and then control will be extremely difficult.”

Experts point to the need for immediate and credible government action, and suggest several recommendations:

Standard design principles

Vehicles should meet baseline design requirements, including at least two hydraulic rear brakes, a functional front brake, defined length and weight limits, and components sourced from BSTI-certified manufacturers.

Speed regulation

Mandatory speed governors should cap maximum speeds — around 30 km/h in Dhaka and up to 50 km/h in rural areas for larger models like easy bikes.

Phased compliance

All existing vehicles should be licensed, and those failing to meet safety and design standards should be given a clear compliance deadline (e.g., three years) or be phased out.

Battery handling oversight

While old batteries are typically resold and recycled, the intermediate handling stages remain poorly regulated. Stricter monitoring is needed to prevent unsafe chemical exposure and environmental contamination.

Switching to lithium-ion batteries

Lithium-ion batteries offer longer lifespans, faster charging, lighter weight, and eliminate the risk of lead contamination. However, their higher cost and lack of proper recycling infrastructure pose challenges. A gradual transition with financial support and recycling oversight is needed to ensure safety and feasibility.

While safety concerns often prompt calls for bans, experts say eliminating them altogether is unrealistic in Bangladesh’s socio-economic context. The sector provides livelihoods for thousands, but long hours, unsafe vehicles, and exposure to pollution and heat take a serious toll on drivers’ health. The challenge lies in regulating the sector, improving vehicle safety, and providing occupational health protections so that reforms safeguard both drivers’ wellbeing and their livelihoods.

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Untreated wastewater is being channelled into the Buriganga through an outlet in Old Dhaka's Badamtoli area, aggravating river pollution.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

How is ignoring safe water and sanitation slowing sustainable growth?

NASIR UDDIN KHAN

Bangladesh has around 180 million people living in a small land area and ranks 8th in the world by population, though the GDP of the country was USD 2551 in 2023. The country has not established any sewage treatment system or safe water supply system for the entire nation. In Bangladesh, waterborne diseases and dengue are the main diseases due to the disposal of untreated sewage all over the country, the lack of supply of reliable, safe drinking water. The country is mostly dependent (more than 90%) on groundwater as potable water, which is abstracted through shallow-type tubewells mostly fitted with a hand pump. Usually, the Public Health Engineering Department (DPHE) supplies these hand pumps and sanitary latrines in the rural areas. The hand pumps are normally 100-120 ft deep, fitted with a 20-30 ft strainer at the bottom. On the other hand, the sanitary

treatment. Other districts and subdistrict cities do not have a sewerage network or sewage treatment at all; they use septic tanks for sewage treatment. Honestly, the septic tank system is not a true sewage treatment system at all; it is a kind of primary treatment and retains the sewage for some period, but the discharge water quality remains untreated and pollutes the surface and groundwater of the whole country from generation to generation. The water supply of the urban and suburban areas is also dependent on the untreated groundwater supply, except for some parts of Dhaka and Chattogram city, which have a partial surface water treatment system through the transportation pipelines. Most people either boil or filter the water before drinking. By boiling or filtering the water, most of the essential minerals in the water become settled down or retained in the filter, and people are drinking almost dead water. Moreover, a huge amount of natural

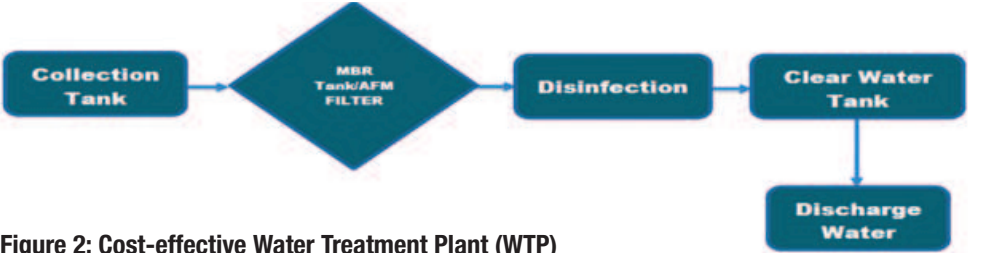


Figure 2: Cost-effective Water Treatment Plant (WTP)

latrines are made by burying 3-4 concrete rings fitted with an Indian type of pan on top. The joints of the rings and the bottom are not sealed, so the sewage is mixed with the soil and groundwater easily. The situation becomes more hazardous during the monsoon when the surface and groundwater are all mixed with the sewage. These latrines are usually constructed in close proximity to the hand pump tubewell, which is common in rural areas, increasing the chances of fecal contamination in the tube well water. On the other hand, the tube well water is used directly without treatment for drinking and other purposes, which is also a great threat to human health. Usually, groundwater in Bangladesh has a significant amount of iron, hardness, silica and arsenic (in some areas) and is not safe for drinking without treatment. These contaminants cause different long-term diseases such as diarrhoea, constipation, diabetes, dry skin & hair loss, nausea, cardiovascular disease, disorders in liver & kidney function in the human body, which ultimately disrupts ecological balance. The situation in urban and suburban areas is a little different, though they are also not safe from sewage contamination and a lack of safe water supply. Dhaka WASA has only a sewerage system at a partial capacity in the city, but the remaining sewage is collected through a pipe network and disposed to the nearest rivers without

gas is also wasted every day for boiling water. For ages, this primary demand of the people was not given priority, and a proper sewage treatment system has not been developed, though the sewage treatment is not a complex issue. Anyone can do this with limited resources and capabilities. For this, government initiatives and awareness are essential. **SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT IN BANGLADESH** Sewage treatment plants collect, treat, and discharge wastewater, providing a service essential to environmental and public health. The national Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) system in Bangladesh is gradually expanding, primarily to address the growing sanitation needs in urban areas, especially Dhaka. The Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority is leading the effort, with key projects like the Dasherbandi STP, which is the largest in the country and the first of its kind on a large scale. The Dasherbandi STP, inaugurated in 2023, has the capacity to treat 500 million liters of sewage per day, covering a population of approximately 5 million people. It uses modern biological treatment processes to significantly reduce environmental pollution by treating domestic wastewater before it is discharged into rivers. This project is part of the broader government strategy under the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100, supported by development partners

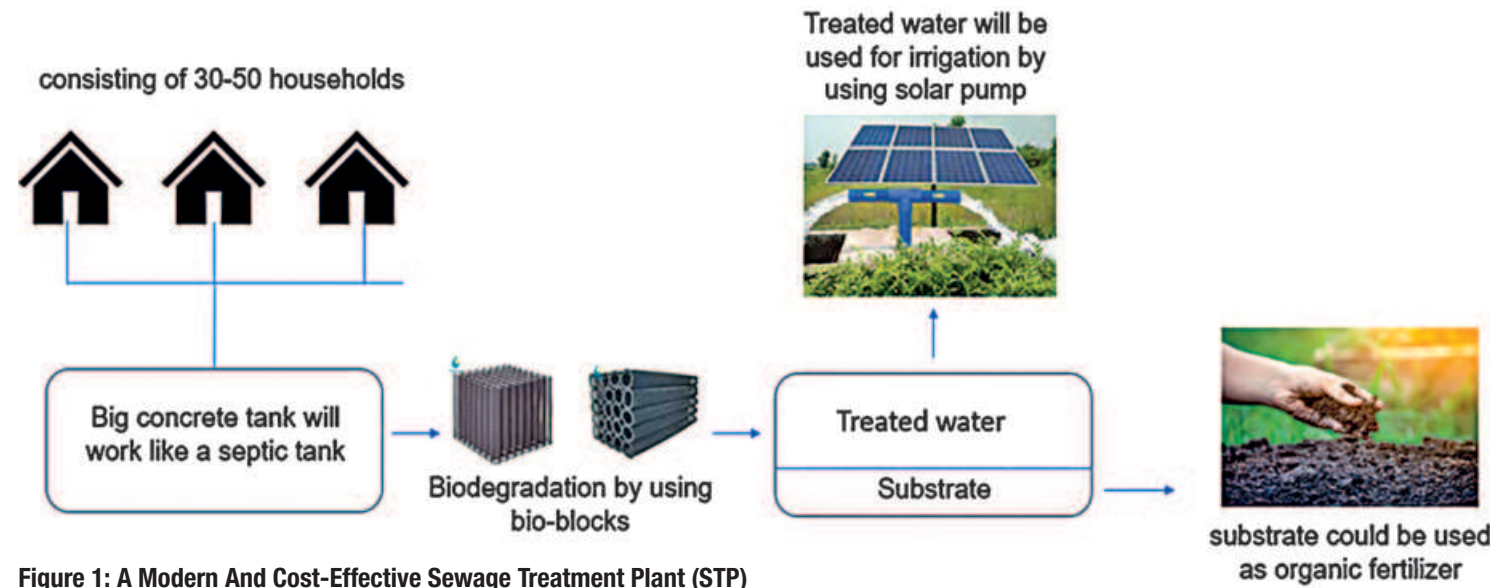


Figure 1: A Modern And Cost-Effective Sewage Treatment Plant (STP)

like Asian Development Bank (ADB) and China CAMC Engineering Co. Ltd., aiming to improve urban sanitation and protect public health. However, challenges remain in terms of expanding similar facilities to other cities and integrating decentralised systems for rural areas.

SUGGESTIONS ON MODERN AND COST-EFFECTIVE STP



PHOTO: COLLECTED

In response to this pressing challenge, a modern and cost-effective Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) for rural areas is suggested below. First, we must isolate the sewage from the surrounding soil, which could be done by using a plastic tank instead of rings. The plastic tank should be half-buried under the ground, and the commode/pan should be placed over that tank. This individual plastic tank should be connected to a bigger concrete retention tank (should be in a common place consisting of 30-50 households in the rural community) by pipeline to carry the sewage into that bigger concrete tank, as shown in Figure 1. This bigger tank will work like a septic tank. The

overflow from the concrete tank should then be taken for biodegradation by using bio-blocks and solar pumps. Treated water from the bio-degradation tank will be safe for disposal or for use in irrigation. The substrate from the biodegradation tank could be used as organic fertiliser after dehydration. The technology for sewage treatment is easy, and the equipment is available in the local market. This biodegradation system could also be used in the urban and suburban areas where there are no sewerage systems, and people are using only septic tanks. This initiative could be implemented as a small community-based project consisting of 30-50 or a maximum of 100 households where the community members will take the responsibility to operate and maintain the system on their own. The total system will be operated by solar electricity. **SUGGESTIONS ON MODERN AND COST-EFFECTIVE WTP** A water treatment plant could also be designed for the targeted people in the community-based project based on groundwater or surface water treatment basis. Figure 2 shows that the primary step in treating the water involves screening, where large debris and objects are removed to prevent equipment damage. After screening, water will be taken to a holding tank and later pumped to ultrafiltration or activated filter media (which consists of recycled glass sand). Finally, the treated water will be collected in a treated water tank for distribution after passing through disinfection by chlorination or UV filter. The entire water treatment system could be operated by solar electricity, so that the WTP could be placed anywhere to meet the SDG goal, which should highlight the proximity to residence, availability onsite and free from pollution & germs. This is the best way to treat well water, groundwater, or surface water. This water treatment plant will supply only the drinking water from the

project and the residents under the project should collect their daily drinking water from there on a daily basis. Contaminated water sources degrade ecosystems, increase disease burden, and disproportionately affect vulnerable communities, thereby hindering inclusive growth. Addressing these challenges through integrated water resource management, investment in sustainable sanitation technologies, and strong governance is essential for achieving long-term environmental sustainability and meeting national and global development goals in Bangladesh. By implementing such an initiative step by step, we can bring the whole nation under the sewage treatment and safe water supply network, which also saves huge amounts of money from the health sector by eliminating or reducing the waterborne and other diseases every year. It is evident that sewage treatment and safe water are not luxuries for Bangladeshi citizens, but they are civil rights irrespective of people's race, religion, and geographical boundary. This proposal outlines a comprehensive plan for establishing a modern Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) and Water Treatment Plant (WTP) aimed at improving wastewater management, reducing environmental pollution, and contributing to the national goals outlined in the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 and Sustainable Development Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). This document presents the technical approach, expected outcomes, and implementation strategy to support long-term sustainable sanitation infrastructure in Bangladesh.

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Fruits, now always in season

Year-round harvests have made local fruits cheaper and exotic options commonplace

MOSTAFA SHABUJ

At night along the Bangladesh-India border, a glow emanates from the darkness in Adalpur village of Naogaon, resembling numerous candles flickering in the wind. On closer inspection, one finds 10,000 LED lights bathing dragon fruit plants in artificial daylight, their crimson crops hanging heavy on green vines.

This is the work of Abul Kalam Azad, a former rural electrification engineer who decided that electricity could do more than power homes.

His three orchards in Sapahar upazila, with an estimated minimum market value of Tk 4 crore, sprawl across 45 bighas, where the lights burn through the night to trick the plants into producing year-round.

The technique works. Azad harvests 300 tonnes annually, earning profits exceeding Tk 2 crore. Not bad for a fruit that barely existed in Bangladesh a decade ago.



DAE data shows that national fruit production has surged from 1.03 crore tonnes in fiscal year 2008-09 (FY09) to 1.51 crore in FY25, even as the land devoted to fruit cultivation shrank from 9.35 lakh hectares to 7.79 lakh

PHOTOS:
MOSTAFA SHABUJ AND
AZAHAR UDDIN

Azad's success with dragon fruit, also known as pitaya, is merely the most dramatic example of a broader transformation. Across Bangladesh, a nation of some 17 crore people is rethinking what it grows and eats.

Exotic fruits – Dragon fruit, avocado, Thai guava and many more – once found only in upscale Dhaka supermarkets now thrive in local soil. Local fruits such as papaya and pineapple are now available year-round.

The economics are compelling enough that farmers are abandoning traditional crops for fruit orchards.

THE PARADIGM SHIFT

The shift can largely be attributed to a 10-year project by the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE). Between 2015 and 2025, it ran the “Year-Round Fruit Production for Nutrition Improvement Project”, aiming to make fruits available all year round, not just during brief harvest seasons. A decade later, the results speak for themselves.

DAE data shows that national fruit production has surged from 1.03 crore tonnes in fiscal year 2008-09 (FY09) to 1.51 crore in FY25, even as the land devoted to fruit cultivation shrank from 9.35 lakh hectares to 7.79 lakh.

Productivity gains explain the paradox.

Mango output nearly doubled from 15 lakh in FY13 to nearly 27 lakh tonnes in FY25. Guava production more than doubled from 3.14 lakh tonnes to 6.64 lakh tonnes. Pineapples increased from 2.39 lakh tonnes to 6.07 lakh tonnes.

Litchi increased from 1.19 lakh tonnes to 2.32 lakh tonnes, Banana increased from 15 lakh tonnes to 25 lakh tonnes, Papaya increased from 4.5 lakh tonnes to 7.75 lakh tonnes

Dragon fruit, virtually non-existent in 2012, now yields one lakh tonnes annually.

Perhaps more telling than production figures is what happened to imports. Fruit brought from abroad fell from 8.22 lakh tonnes in FY22 to 5.25 lakh tonnes in FY25, a drop of 36 percent.

Serajul Islam, president of the Bangladesh Fresh Fruits Importers Association, attributes much of this decline to import duties rising from Tk 25 to Tk 40 per kilogramme in 2023.

But duties alone cannot explain the trend. Local fruit is simply becoming more competitive.

THE KATIMON CONQUEST

In the Rajshahi region (including Natore, Chapainawabganj, and Naogaon), famous for mangoes, a

new variety has brought about a silent revolution.

The Katimon mango variety, introduced recently, produces fruit outside the traditional summer season. This matters because off-season mangoes fetch three to five times the normal price.

Raihan Siddique understood the opportunity.

He now grows mangoes on 500 bighas. Despite now being the off-season, his eight bighas of BARI-11 mango trees are laden with fruit as if it were peak summer. Nearby, two bighas of Katimon mangoes also hang from the branches.

He times his Katimon harvest to coincide with Ramadan when demand peaks and consumers are willing to pay premium prices.

“These mangoes will ripen during the upcoming Ramadan,” he told The Daily Star. “We expect to get a high price in the market.”

The numbers bear this out. Katimon cultivation exploded from a single hectare in FY21 to 4,757 hectares by FY25, producing over 55,600 tonnes, according to Rajshahi DAE.

Md Shamsuddhoha, a horticulturist in Chapainawabganj, confirms that farmers are abandoning traditional varieties wholesale.

He said, “Mango farmers are opting to grow the Katimon variety because they produce year-round fruit. Selling these in Dhaka and premium super shops during the off-season is proving highly profitable.”

Naogaon district stands as a prime example of the country-wide transformation. Traditionally known for rice cultivation, it now boasts 30,000 hectares of mango orchards, a fivefold increase from 6,000 hectares a decade ago.

TECHNOLOGY AND HORMONES

Technology is also rewriting the rules of cultivation.

In the Rajshahi region, improved guava varieties, mostly Thai imports like Golden 8 and various numbered Thai strains, pushed productivity from 12 tonnes per hectare to 33 tonnes in just five years since FY22.

Farmers now cultivate across 3,512 hectares in four districts, producing 1.15 lakh tonnes.

Mehedi Masood, the former project director who oversaw the decade-long DAE initiative, attributes the success to the project.

“We initially launched the project focusing on Thai guavas with a budget of only Tk 195 crore. Today,

the market value of the annual guava production across the country stands at a staggering Tk 6,000 crore,” he said.

Md Selim Reza, a guava farmer who won an “Agriculturally Important Person” award in 2020, notes that Thai varieties dominate the market.

“Guava is a highly profitable yet capital-intensive crop,” he says. The timing of harvest depends entirely on the farmer’s management skills, more specifically, understanding when markets will pay premium prices.

Pineapple production reveals another technological shift, one that makes some purists uncomfortable.

Output nearly tripled between

FY13 and FY25, jumping from 2.39 lakh tonnes to 6.07 lakh tonnes, despite the cultivation area expanding only modestly from 19,465 to 21,676 hectares, shows DAE data.

The secret component behind the explanation is growth hormones.

Rakib Al Rana, agriculture officer of Madhupur upazila in Tangail, the heart of pineapple production, is frank about the change. “Ten to twelve years ago, the use of hormones in pineapple farming was non-existent.”

Now they are standard practice in Madhupur region, the heart of Bangladeshi pineapple production, where 7,000 hectares are devoted to

varieties like Honey Queen, Giant Q, and the Philippine MD 2.

THE DEMOCRATISATION OF FRUIT

Urban Bangladesh is experiencing a dietary shift thanks to the improvements in fruit cultivation. At busy Dhaka intersections, makeshift stalls sell ready-to-eat bowls of seasoned pineapple and papaya for Tk 20-30. Vendors weave between buses offering guava slices for Tk 10. This is fruit as fast food, accessible to people who once considered fresh fruit a luxury.

Matin Mollah, a rickshaw-puller from Gaibandha, captures the change. “I cannot afford expensive fruits such as apples or oranges for children. I buy guava for them as it is much more affordable.”

Majid Mondal, who works at a government office in Bogura, said, “Local fruits like guavas, bananas, and seasonal fruits like litchi, plums have become popular official refreshment options alongside imported fruits.

The economics favour local options. Guavas and bananas cost a fraction of imported apples and oranges. Year-round availability means no seasonal price spikes.

For a country where roughly 20 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, this matters.

BEYOND THE BORDER

Azad, the dragon fruit pioneer, is not resting on his LED-lit laurels. He has moved into cultivating Baikonur grapes across 25 bighas and Bhagwa pomegranates across 20 bighas after successful pilot projects.

In Chuadanga, farmers are cultivating grapes, oranges, malta, and avocados across thousands of hectares, district DAE Deputy Director Masudur Rahman said.

“The soil here is exceptionally suited for fruit farming. Moreover, our farmers are willing to invest crores of money, which is driving the success of high-value crops,” he said.

Patuakhali saw 30,000 hectares devoted to watermelon this year alone, mostly hybrid varieties, said Mohammad Amanul Islam, deputy director of the district DAE.

Masood, the former DAE project director, believes Bangladesh is approaching a tipping point.

He now consults on a tissue culture laboratory project and predicts domestic production will hit 3 crore tonnes within five years, meeting all national demand.

“At that point, we will be able to export, particularly papaya and jackfruit, which are grown without pesticides,” he says.

The comparison he reaches for is Vietnam, which built a multi-billion-dollar fruit export industry.

Bangladesh could follow a similar path, Masood argues, if it addresses one major problem: waste.

Roughly 30 percent of fruit spoils due to inadequate post-harvest processing. “If we can curb these losses through processing, we can earn billions of dollars from exports like Vietnam.”

The Year-Round Fruit Production project has ended, but its infrastructure persists.

Abdur Rahim, the DAE’s director general, notes that horticulture centres continue distributing saplings nationwide.

“To further strengthen these centres, we are working on a similar subsequent project,” he says.

Masood predicts that grapes, oranges, malta, pomegranates, rambutans, longans, and Vietnamese jackfruit will become commonplace in the coming years, driving prices down further.

