

## 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".

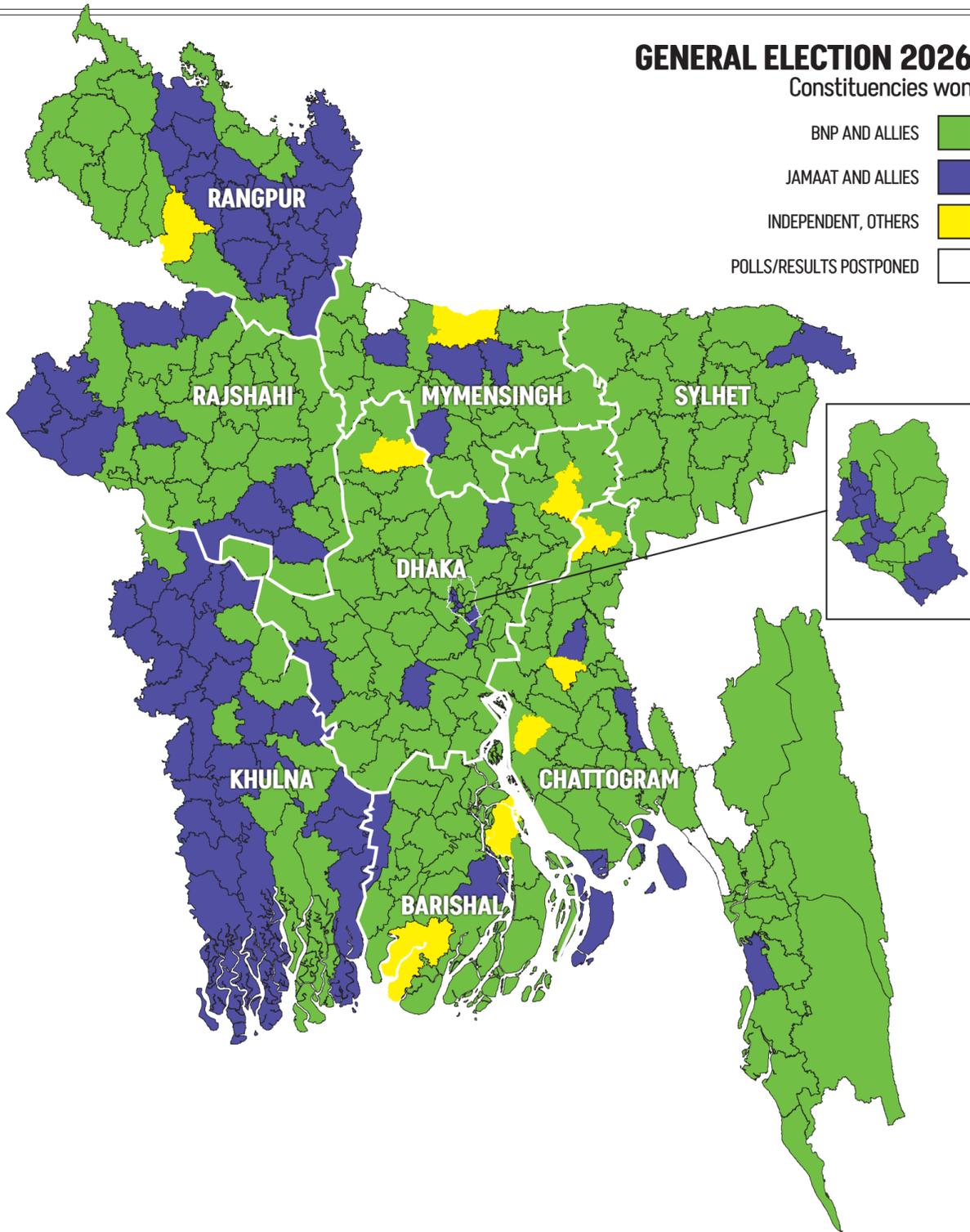
"Those wounds remain very raw, and Rahman will have to rebuild trust in institutions that were totally politicised by Hasina's Awami League party, including the military, courts, civil service and security services."

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

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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

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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

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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