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KSRM
শেকড় থেকে শিখরে

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Unity, not divisions or vengeance

Says Tarique in first press conference after victory

KEY POINTS

- Reviving economy, ensuring law and order, depoliticising institutions, establishing good governance top priorities
- Will facilitate more businesses so that they can create jobs, boost the economy
- Pledges Bangladesh-first foreign policy
- Will hold talks with neighbours on reviving SAARC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Calling for national unity, BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman has said that any division will weaken Bangladesh at a time when the country, faced with numerous challenges, is entering a new phase after the parliamentary election.

"Our paths and opinions may differ, but we must remain united in the interest of the country. I firmly believe that national unity is our collective strength, while division is our weakness," Tarique said at a post-election press conference in a city hotel following his party's landslide victory.

He noted that political forces must stay united so that "no evil force" can re-establish autocracy, and Bangladesh is not turned into a "subservient state".

Tarique said while competing against one another, misunderstandings or discord may have arisen in some places during the election. "I urge everyone to ensure that such disputes do not turn into revenge or retaliation," UNB quoted him as saying.

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City dwellers who had travelled to their constituencies to vote in Thursday's national election return to the capital, as offices are set to reopen today. The photo was taken at Kamalapur Railway Station yesterday. PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

BNP's average win margins dwarf Jamaat's

ZYMA ISLAM

In the 13th National Parliamentary Election, the two main political alliances produced sharply different patterns in their winning margins, revealing a clear imbalance in electoral dominance.

The BNP-led alliance swept to power with a commanding landslide, recording a median winning margin of 45,214 votes across the 212 seats it secured.

On average, BNP candidates won with 53.54 percent more votes than their nearest rivals, underlining the scale of its nationwide victory.

By contrast, the Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-Party Alliance posted more modest margins. Across its 77 seats, the alliance achieved a median winning margin of 23,787 votes, with an average vote advantage of 23.57 percent over runners-up.

Several of Jamaat's victories were narrow. The alliance won by fewer than 1,000 votes in two constituencies -- Madaripur-1 and Sirajganj-4, with margins of 384 and 594 votes respectively.

VOTES FOR BNP, ALLIES	3,73,41,504
VOTES FOR JAMAAT, ALLIES	2,73,10,687
DIFFERENCE	1,00,30,817

In four seats -- Rajshahi-1, Rangpur-6, Dhaka-11, Dhaka-4 and Netrokona-5 -- the winning margin for Jamaat alliance candidates ranged between 1,000 and 3,000 votes.

They won another four seats -- Bagerhat-1, Pabna-3, Dhaka-16 and Pabna-4 -- by margins between 3,000 and 5,000 votes.

Taken together, these seats recorded percentage margins of victory below 5 percent.

In nine seats, Jamaat won by margins between 5,000 and 10,000 votes, translating into percentage margins of 5 to 13 percent.

At the other end of the spectrum, the alliance won by over 50,000 votes

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'Will be in JS, on the streets'

Shafiqur says Jamaat accepts outcome

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-Party Alliance will jointly pursue a dual strategy -- acting as an opposition in parliament and in street protests -- while seeking legal redress over alleged irregularities in the 13th parliamentary election, the coalition said yesterday.

Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Hamidur Rahman Azad announced the decisions at a briefing at the party's central office in Moghbazar, Dhaka, following a meeting of the alliance's liaison committee.

The alliance would act as a constructive opposition in parliament, but if lawful avenues are blocked, the option of taking to the streets would remain open, he said.

"It was decided that our electoral alliance will act jointly both inside and outside parliament. Since we contested the election together, we will also perform our parliamentary role jointly," he said, adding that the alliance would take unified decisions in line with the country's political context and act in the interest of the nation and the public.

Alleging "election engineering" and result manipulation, Azad said several seats were lost by narrow margins or recorded questionable victory gaps. Although applications seeking recounts were filed in those constituencies, many candidates could not complete the process as the gazette was published late at night on Friday, he claimed.

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THE THIRD VIEW

MAHFUZ ANAM

The likely PM's first crucial challenge

Choose cabinet with utmost care, for it may determine success or failure

READ THE FULL ARTICLE ON PAGE 8

US trade deal: devil hidden in the fine print

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The real problem for Bangladesh's $47 billion garment industry lies deep in the technical details of the new trade deal with the US. When Dhaka and Washington signed the reciprocal trade agreement on February 9, it was celebrated as a diplomatic success. But that early optimism has now turned into confusion over the "cotton clause" -- a vague rule that waives "reciprocal tariffs" only if garments are made with American cotton.

NEWS ANALYSIS

For a country where garments make up 86 percent of total merchandise exports to the US, this deal has created uncertainty that threatens its expected benefits.

The main concern is how the new tariff system works. Under the deal, Bangladesh faces a 19 percent reciprocal tariff on top of the existing most-favoured-nation (MFN) duty of about 16.50 percent. Without any relief, the total tax on Bangladeshi garments entering the US market rises sharply to 35.5 percent.

Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin tried to reassure the industry at a press conference on February 10, saying the reciprocal tariff would be removed for garments made with US cotton. However, industry leaders warn that removing the reciprocal tariff does not mean the products become duty-free.

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MPs, cabinet to take oath at South Plaza on Tuesday

BAHARAM KHAN

Breaking tradition, the cabinet swearing-in will not be held at Bangabhaban's Darbar Hall. For the first time, an incoming government will begin its journey under the open sky, with cabinet members taking the oath of office at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad on Tuesday afternoon. The newly elected MPs will also be sworn in at the same venue in the morning.

Multiple sources from the Chief Adviser's Office, Cabinet Division, and Parliament Secretariat confirmed the matter to The Daily Star last night.

Officials are moving forward with plans to hold the MPs' oath at 10:00am and the cabinet's oath at 4:00pm on Tuesday.

Traditionally, MPs are sworn in at the parliament's oath room and the cabinet at Bangabhaban's Darbar Hall.

However, this time, both ceremonies will be held at the parliament's south plaza, as preferred by the incoming government, officials said.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin will administer the oath to the prime minister and cabinet members. While either Chief Election Commissioner

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A man examines result sheets from the 13th national election, displayed for all constituencies on a wall outside the Election Commission headquarters in the capital's Agargaon. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

This election has set a 'new benchmark'

Say foreign observers, flag gaps in inclusion

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The EU Election Observation Mission described Thursday's parliamentary election as credible and competently managed, while noting concerns over limited political space for women and persons with disabilities that undermined equal participation.

Chief Observer Ivars Ijabs said the polls set a new benchmark for future elections in Bangladesh and marked a pivotal step towards restoring democratic governance and rule of law.

The Commonwealth Observer Group similarly termed the election peaceful but stressed the need for progress on inclusion and accessibility.

The group also noted isolated reports of post-election tensions and urged stakeholders to maintain calm and resolve disputes through legal channels.

Both missions presented their findings at separate press conferences at the InterContinental Dhaka yesterday.

About 200 EU observers and 12 Commonwealth experts monitored the election and referendum held nationwide on February 12.

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Taiyeb's surprise departure

He left for Germany in an Emirates flight yesterday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to the chief adviser of the interim government on ICT and telecommunications, departed Bangladesh for Germany yesterday, sources at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka confirmed.

He left the country on an Emirates Airlines flight (EK-583), an associate of his said, adding, "Sir [Taiyeb] took leave from office on February 9 and 10. He was formally given a farewell by both the ICT and Telecom divisions of the ministry. He will now return to normal life, so he left today [yesterday]."

Taiyeb was appointed special assistant to the chief adviser with the status of a state minister on March 5, 2025.

Earlier, in November 2024, Taiyeb, an electrical engineering graduate of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, was appointed as an ICT policy adviser.

BNP Chairperson Tarique Rahman addressing journalists during a post-polls briefing at the Intercontinental Hotel in the capital yesterday, after his party achieved a landslide victory in the 13th national election on February 12.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

World hails Bangladesh on polls success

UN, EU, foreign govts pledge support for reforms, national unity

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations, the European Union, and several other countries have congratulated the people of Bangladesh on holding successful elections, pledging support for national cohesion, democratic rights, and the rule of law.

Stéphane Dujarric, spokesman for UN Secretary-General António Guterres, said on Friday that the UN chief has encouraged all political stakeholders to build on the momentum generated by the polls to strengthen national cohesion and the rule of law.

Guterres congratulated the people of Bangladesh on holding the elections and a referendum and reaffirmed the UN's commitment to supporting the country's efforts to build a peaceful and prosperous future, Dujarric said.

He added that the UN expects that the elections will lead to ensuring human rights for all, including the minorities, as Bangladesh advances its transition and pursues inclusive, sustainable reforms.

Meanwhile, the European External Action Service yesterday welcomed the holding of genuinely competitive parliamentary elections and a referendum in a peaceful atmosphere.

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BNP's average win margins dwarf Jamaat's

BNP, ALLIES

Division	Seats won	Median of Difference	Average % victory margin
Barishal	16	41,483	66.29%
Chattogram	48	48,656	54.27%
Dhaka	58	45,447	54.61%
Khulna	11	24,750	26.39%
Mymensingh	18	47,361	70.14%
Rajshahi	28	42,571	38.49%
Rangpur	14	26,540	18.87%
Sylhet	18	55,477	83.25%
Grand Total	211	45,214	53.54%

JAMAAT, ALLIES

Division	Seats won	Median of Difference	Average % victory margin
Barishal	3	26,229	38.63%
Chattogram	5	50,577	43.55%
Dhaka	11	11,389	12.60%
Khulna	24	27,448	25.80%
Mymensingh	4	25,879	34.22%
Rajshahi	11	6,993	5.56%
Rangpur	18	23,690	27.23%
Sylhet	1	9,581	13.73%
Grand Total	77	23,787	23.57%

FROM PAGE 1

in 14 constituencies. In four seats -- Gaibandha-1, Cumilla-4, Rangpur-3 and Satkhira-2 -- the margin exceeded 100,000 votes.

The largest gap was in Satkhira-2, where Jamaat triumphed by 150,666 votes. In these landslide seats, the average margin of victory stood at 252.15 percent.

The BNP-led alliance, despite its sweeping success, also faced close contests in several constituencies.

Its narrowest victory margin was just over 1,000 votes. It won by between 1,000 and 2,000 votes in three seats -- Chattogram-14, Brahmanbaria-5 and Cox's Bazar-4.

In another six seats -- Dhaka-13, Khulna-5, Gaibandha-4, Dhaka-10, Dhaka-17 and Dinajpur-3 -- the margin ranged from 2,000 to 5,000 votes. Dhaka-17 was won by BNP chairperson Tarique Rahman.

The average percentage margin of victory in these close BNP wins was just 2.17 percent.

The BNP alliance won by margins of 5,000 to 10,000 votes in 18 seats.

In total, it recorded landslide victories -- margins exceeding 100,000 votes -- in 27 constituencies.

The largest margin was in Rangamati, where BNP won by 170,322 votes, followed closely by Rajbari-2 with a margin of 169,955 votes.

On average, in these big wins, BNP candidates secured over 200 percent more votes than their closest rivals.

Overall, 24 constituencies across the country saw percentage winning margins below 5 percent.

These were almost evenly split between the two camps -- 11 seats went to the BNP and 13 to the Jamaat-led alliance.

As the margin brackets widen, the gap between the two alliances becomes more pronounced.

A total of 25 seats had winning margins between 5 and 10 percent, with BNP winning 15 and Jamaat eight.

Similarly, 35 seats recorded margins between 10 and 20 percent; BNP and its allies captured 22 of these, while Jamaat and its partners secured 13.

Regionally, Jamaat faced its toughest competition in the Rajshahi division, where it won 11 seats with an average margin of just 5.56 percent.

The BNP, meanwhile, encountered its strongest resistance in Rangpur division, winning 14 seats there with an average margin of 18.87 percent.

Jamaat's most comfortable victories came in the Chattogram division. Although it won only five seats in the region, the alliance posted an average margin of 43.55 percent -- its highest regional performance.

The BNP, on the other hand, dominated Sylhet division, achieving an overwhelming average winning margin of 83.25 percent across 18 seats, marking it as the party's strongest regional bastion.

This election has set a 'new benchmark'

FROM PAGE 1

Ijabs said the electoral framework largely accords with international standards and praised the Election Commission for working independently and transparently.

He highlighted the role of citizen observers, fact-checkers, and youth and women activists in rebuilding public trust and enhancing transparency.

He commended poll workers for managing voting and counting efficiently, noting that the presence of party agents at all stages enhanced integrity.

Regular updates on tabulation by returning officers and legacy media also helped maintain public confidence, he added.

However, Ijabs pointed out that independent participation of persons with disabilities was not always ensured. Women accounted for only four percent of candidates, with seven elected, while youth activism did not consistently translate into influence within party structures.

"Limited participation by women affects the quality of democratic decision-making," he said, urging Bangladesh to fulfil its commitments under international conventions on women's rights.

He also noted under-representation of indigenous communities and minorities.

Tomáš Zdechovský, head of the European Parliament Delegation, said Bangladesh is entering a crucial new phase and urged the new parliament and government to implement approved reforms.

Commonwealth Observer Group Chairman Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo commended the peaceful election while highlighting areas where further progress on inclusion and accessibility could strengthen the democratic process.

"The people of Bangladesh have exercised their democratic rights to seek the fulfilment of their aspirations. We encourage them to be magnanimous and united in their shared democratic future," said the former president of Ghana.

He raised concerns about online misinformation, cyber harassment and hate speech, which continue to affect public discourse, while noting that officials assisted elderly voters and persons with disabilities, but many polling stations remained inaccessible, particularly on upper floors, and lacked provisions for other forms of disability.

"Women's and youth participation emerged as key concerns in the electoral process," Nana Addo said.

"Meanwhile, although young people were visibly active throughout the process, it did not consistently translate into meaningful participation within formal political party structures."

On the referendum, the group said it recognises the July charter as a response to multiple and urgent demands for reform.

Asked about the ban on Awami League activities and its absence in the election, Nana Addo said this reflects the recent political history of the country.

"One of our most important recommendations to the new government will be to pursue measures that enable all political actors within Bangladesh's polity to participate in future elections. This would strengthen the democratic process demonstrated on election day."

He encouraged the Bangladesh Election Commission to conduct a post-election review, including all observer recommendations, as is consistent with good practice.

Unity, not divisions or vengeance

FROM PAGE 1

Stating that justice will be the guiding principle of his future government in ensuring the rule of law, Tarique sought cooperation from all political parties and forces in building a "safe and humane Bangladesh".

The BNP chairman also placed the highest importance on maintaining peace and order in the country, saying law and order must be kept normal at any cost and that no form of violence, retaliation, provocative activities, or wrongdoing will be tolerated.

Tarique pointed out that the next government will inherit a "fragile economy", weakened constitutional and statutory institutions and a "deteriorating" law and order situation left behind by an authoritarian regime.

Earlier, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir introduced Tarique Rahman as the "Prime Minister-in-waiting".

Tarique said, "This victory belongs to Bangladesh. This victory belongs to democracy. This victory belongs to the people who aspire to and have sacrificed for democracy. From today, we all are free, with the restoration of freedom and rights."

Noting that the mandate belongs to the people, he said, "You have paved the way for the establishment of democracy in the country."

"Your spontaneous participation will lead to the re-establishment of a parliament and government accountable to people...," he said, adding that the will of the people must be upheld.

The BNP chairperson congratulated all candidates regardless of the election results. In a democratic state, political parties are the true beacons of democracy, he said.

"If both the government and the opposition play responsible roles from their respective positions, democracy will surely take an institutional form in the country."

Addressing the political parties that participated in the election, he said, "Your ideas and views are important to us..."

Later, Tarique and BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury took questions from journalists.

Asked whether any "engineering" was needed to win more than 200 seats, Tarique said, "Convincing the people was our engineering. All we did was bring the people to our side. Alhamdulillah, we succeeded."

Ensuring a "proper environment" was also part of that effort, he said.

On whether the election was difficult, he said it was. "If you want to do good work or achieve any good, you have to work hard. It will be difficult".

About reconciliation with the supporters of the Awami League, Tarique said, "[It would be done] by ensuring the rule of law."

Referring to the immediate challenges, Tarique said the main tasks include reviving the economy, maintaining law and order, and addressing what he described as politicisation of institutions.

"We have to ensure good governance."

In reply to a query, Tarique said his government would "definitely" listen to the youth but would also address issues related to other sections of society.

About steps the BNP will take to revive the economy, Tarique said his government will facilitate more businesses and create jobs.

"We want to have an economy where everyone, based on their qualifications and merit, can do business, trade and thrive... We do not want to give opportunities to any special group. That is not good in the long term," he said.

About foreign policy plans, including relations with India, Tarique said, "I think we have made ourselves clear regarding foreign policy. The interests of Bangladesh and the Bangladeshi people come first. We will decide our foreign policy while protecting those interests."

Referring to ties with China, Tarique said, "We'll try to protect the interests of the people of Bangladesh. If there is something that will not be in favour of Bangladesh, naturally we cannot do that."

"I'm sure mutual interest is the first priority we will go by," he added.

Adding to Tarique's answers, Khosru said, "The BNP follows the principle of multilateralism. We don't have any country-centric policy as such. Relations will be based on mutual respect, mutual interest, non-interference and strategic autonomy for Bangladesh."

Replying to a question about reviving the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Khasru said, "SAARC was initially initiated by Bangladesh. Naturally, we want to revive it... We will hold discussions with our friends once we form the government."

In response to a question on whether they would demand the extradition of ousted former prime minister Sheikh Hasina from India, Amir Khosru said, "It depends on the legal process."

When asked if the government would seek a review of the verdicts of the International Crimes Tribunal, he said it was "a matter for the judiciary".

"We would like to leave the judiciary separate from the functions of the executive and the legislature," he added.

Ismail Jabiullah, member of the BNP chairperson's Advisory Council, moderated the programme.

'Will be in JS, on the streets'

FROM PAGE 1

According to him, assistant returning officers advised candidates to approach the Election Commission, but when they did so, their applications were rejected on the grounds that the gazette had already been published, effectively depriving them of their rights.

With the gazette now in place, Azad said the only remaining option was to seek remedy through election tribunals, and if necessary, to file writ petitions with the High Court.

He also said that as the "Yes" vote prevailed in the July charter referendum, the provision for nominating 100 upper house members based on proportional votes is now in effect. According to him, the people have rejected the scope for a "note of dissent", making proportional representation by popular vote mandatory in forming the upper house. During the July charter reform discussions, the BNP had argued that the upper house should be formed based on the proportion of seats won, not total votes.

Addressing the BNP, which secured a parliamentary majority, Azad said the party now bears greater responsibility and should act accordingly.

Referring to post-election violence, he warned that the alliance would be compelled to announce political programmes if such incidents continue. A draft of possible programmes has already been prepared and will be finalised after consultations at the highest level.

Azad also claimed that in some constituencies the number of "No" votes in the referendum was unusually high. He added that detailed allegations of irregularities, including claims of manipulation in 30 seats, would be placed before the Election Commission at a meeting today.

At a press conference earlier in the day, the Jamaat demanded recounts in the 30 constituencies, alleging "fraud".

The constituencies are Dhaka-7, 8, 10, 13 and 17; Panchagarh-1; Thakurgaon-2; Dinajpur-3 and 5; Lalmonirhat-1 and 2; Gaibandha-4; Bogura-3; Sirajganj-1; Jashore-1; Khulna-3 and 5; Barguna-1 and 2; Jhalakathi-1; Pirojpur-2; Mymensingh-1, 4 and 10; Kishoreganj-3; Gopalganj-2; Brahmanbaria-5; Chandpur-4; Chattogram-14; and Cox's Bazar-4.

A recount, the party claimed, would change the results in many of these seats.

JAMAAT ACCEPTS OUTCOME

Earlier in the day, Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman said his party recognises the overall outcome of the election and will serve as a "vigilant, principled, and peaceful opposition" in parliament.

In a post on his verified Facebook page, Shafiqur said Jamaat remained committed to a stable and functioning democratic order and would respect the rule of law.

"In any genuine democratic journey, the true test of leadership is not only how we campaign, but how we respond to the verdict of the people," he wrote. "We recognise the overall outcome, and we respect the rule of law."

Highlighting the party's performance, he said Jamaat secured 77 seats, nearly quadrupling its parliamentary presence and emerging as one of the strongest opposition blocs in contemporary Bangladeshi politics.

"That is not a setback. That is a foundation," he said, describing the result as a base for future political growth.

He thanked party activists and volunteers who, he said, worked tirelessly during the campaign, noting that some faced intimidation and harassment for exercising their democratic rights. Their "courage", he added, "has strengthened our democracy".

In a separate post, Shafiqur condemned incidents of violence allegedly targeting Jamaat supporters and other political activists after the polls, warning the incoming government that the people's mandate is "not a licence" but a conditional trust.

"The core conditions of that trust are maintaining law and order, ensuring equal protection for all, and guaranteeing the safety of every citizen regardless of political identity."

At the briefing in the afternoon, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General and head of its central publicity department Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair demanded that oath-taking of the declared winners in those constituencies be suspended until the recounts are completed.

According to Zubair, the results were "deliberately altered to defeat the candidates of Jamaat and the 11-party alliance". He further alleged that a section of officials from the administration and the Election Commission were involved in the "fraud", adding that Jamaat is taking legal steps over the issue.

After the briefing, in a post published at 6:24pm on Jamaat's official Facebook page, Shafiqur wrote, "The BNP alliance has secured a majority of seats. We recognise this result and respect the constitutional process. However, the national vote outcome also reflects a deeper and more complex reality."

The post was taken down within seven minutes, but by then had already been shared more than a hundred times and drawn over a hundred comments.

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SPRING IN THE AIR

Soft sunlight filters through rustling leaves as the country slips into spring mode. In bright yellows, reds and greens, people stepped out with family and friends to welcome Pahela Falgun, carrying the scents of 'Shimul' and 'Palash' and the promise of warmer days. For many, the first day of spring is not just a date on the calendar, but a sensory ritual: flowers in the air, songs in the background, and familiar traditions that feel like home. Yesterday, from campuses to parks and institutions, programmes across the country marked the season's arrival, turning ordinary spaces into pockets of colour and joy. This year, Valentine's Day coincided with Pahela Falgun, adding an extra glow to the celebrations.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN, ORCHID CHAKMA, RASHED SHUMON, AZAHAR UDDIN, TITU DAS

Major publishers warn of boycott, seek reschedule

- 36 of 37 pavilion-allotted publishers demand fair be held after Eid
- 321 publishers made similar demand Feb 8
- 14 publishers sent open letter to Tarique Rahman yesterday, reiterating call
- Publishers cite post-election uncertainty, Ramadan as reasons
- Bangla Academy says no scope to change date

MAHATHIR MOHAMMED

A large number of prominent mainstream publishers have decided to abstain from participating in Amar Ekushey Book Fair -- the country's largest book fair -- fearing economic losses due to the post-election situation and the overlap with the upcoming month of Ramadan.

At the fair, leading publishers are allocated pavilions, while others are given stalls.

This year, of the 37 publishers allocated pavilions, 36 have decided not to participate and have demanded that the fair be rescheduled to after Eid-ul-Fitr. UPL, Mawla Brothers, Ananya Prokashoni and Onno Prokash are among them.

In a joint statement on February 8, 321 publishers demanded that the inauguration of the fair be rescheduled to after Eid-ul-Fitr.

Yesterday, 14 publishers sent an open letter to BNP Chairperson Tarique Rahman, reiterating the same demand.

To confirm stall and pavilion allocations, Bangla Academy extended the payment deadline from February 9 to February 11. However, sources said many publishers have not yet submitted their payments.

Speaking to The Daily Star, publishers expressed concern about possible instability after the national election.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

Seat-sharing brings little for BNP

Party loses nine out of 14 seats

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Nine of the 14 constituencies that BNP left to its partners under a seat-sharing arrangement were won by its main rivals, the Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-party alliance.

In these seats, BNP did not field its own candidates and instructed its grassroots leaders and activists to work for its allies.

However, final results show that the strategy did not work as intended, said party leaders.

Of the 14 seats shared with allies, partners won only five, while nine were lost.

The Jamaat-led bloc emerged as the biggest beneficiary. Of the nine lost seats, Jamaat candidates won four. One each was won by the National Citizen Party (NCP) and Khelafat Majlis, both part of the Jamaat-led alliance.

Meanwhile, three seats went to BNP rebel candidates.

BNP leaders described the outcome as disappointing, saying the rivals consolidated their position in areas where BNP had stepped aside.

AT A GLANCE

Total seats shared: **14**

Partners won: **5**

NINE LOST SEATS

Jamaat **4**

NCP **1**

Khelafat Majlis **1**

BNP rebels **3**

It raised questions within the party about the effectiveness of its seat-sharing strategy and grassroots coordination, they added.

One of the most notable defeats occurred in Dhaka-12.

In this seat, Saiful Haque, general secretary of the Biplobi Workers Party and a BNP ally, received 30,963 votes.

He lost to Jamaat candidate Saiful Alam Milon, who secured 53,773 votes -- a margin of 22,810 votes.

Meanwhile, BNP rebel Saiful Alam Nirob received 29,869 votes here.

BNP leaders said that if Saiful Haque and Nirob united behind a single contender, the seat might not have been lost.

BNP allocated four seats to Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam -- the highest number given to any ally -- but none of its candidates won. BNP did not field candidates in those constituencies.

In those constituencies, one seat went to Khelafat Majlis, one to a BNP rebel, one to Jamaat, and one to the NCP.

In Brahmanbaria-2, BNP rebel Rumeen Farhana won with 1,18,547 votes. Junayed Al Habib, the candidate fielded by Jamiat, received 80,434 votes and lost by 38,113 votes.

In Sylhet-5, Jamiat

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

BNP sweeps Ctg, wins 12 of 16 seats

ARUN BIKASH DEY, *Chattogram*

In a major electoral shift following the February 12 polls, the BNP has emerged as the dominant force in the port city and its surrounding upazilas, securing 12 out of the 16 seats in Chattogram district.

Jamaat-e-Islami, contesting as the primary challenger in several constituencies, clinched two seats, including a hard-fought victory in Satkania-Lohagara and a surprise win in Banshkhali.

The declaration of the result of two constituencies -- Chattogram-2 and Chattogram-4 -- has been postponed due to the order of the court.

The results, announced late Thursday night and early Friday, reflect a landscape redefined by the return of fair voting and the emergence of a new generation of leaders.

THE GOHIRA PHENOMENON

Perhaps the most extraordinary highlight of the 13th parliamentary election is the record-breaking feat of a single village. Gohira village, under Raozan upazila, has sent three representatives to the national parliament simultaneously -- all elected on the BNP ticket.

Gias Uddin Quader Chowdhury (Chattogram-6), his nephew Hummam Quader Chowdhury (Chattogram-7), and Sayeed Al Noman (Chattogram-10) all hail from this politically storied village. While Gias is a veteran, for

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Hand in hand through darkness, 25 years on

MINTU DESHWARA

At the edge of a small market in Palkichhara tea garden under Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila, a couple walks hand in hand every morning. For 25 years, that clasped grip has been their strength against hunger, humiliation and heartbreak.

Basmati Rani Rabidas, 45, was cast out of her family home for choosing love. Her husband, Ramnarayan Rabidas, born blind, faced a similar fate. When their relationship became known, his family also turned him away.

Their love story began along the dusty paths of the tea garden. Ramnarayan, 54, had already endured tragedy. His first wife died during childbirth nearly three decades ago. Grief left him isolated in his household.

Then he met Basmati.

"We used to talk on the road to the tea garden," Basmati recalled. "But my family could not tolerate it. One day, they threw me out."

With nowhere to go, she sought shelter in Ramnarayan's home. But his father refused to accept her. Soon, Ramnarayan too was forced out.

Since then, they have walked road of life together.

For months, Basmati lived under a tree in the local bazar, surviving on alms. Relatives and their own community shunned them.

"I would cry and ask God why He gave me so much suffering," she said.

Basmati Rani and Ramnarayan Rabidas. PHOTO: STAR

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Asif alleges post-polls violence, blames BNP men

STAFF CORRESPNDENT

National Citizen Party spokesperson Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan yesterday alleged widespread post-election violence across the country, accusing BNP activists of involvement.

He said BNP leaders have remained silent over the incidents, which he claimed suggests their earlier movement was merely eyewash intended to influence public perception ahead of the polls.

He made the remarks last evening at Ibn Sina Specialized Hospital after visiting those injured in clashes on election day and in the days that followed.

Asif alleged that assaults on voters, vandalism of homes, and looting of cash and valuables were reported from different parts of the country. In one instance, he claimed, an individual was killed for voting in favour of an independent candidate.

He said they had expected firm directives to restrain party activists, along with announcements of disciplinary action against those involved.

However, no visible punitive measures have yet been taken in connection with the incidents, he alleged.

He demanded a clear statement from the BNP outlining what action it will take against any party members found responsible for the violence.

KUSHTIA REGION

Internal rifts cost BNP as Jamaat wins most seats

ANIS MONDOL, *Kushtia*

The BNP, poised to form the government, has lost seven out of eight parliamentary seats in Kushtia, Chuadanga and Meherpur, largely due to internal rifts, alleged land grabbing and extortion by party activists, and the nomination of unsuitable candidates.

In contrast, Jamaat-e-Islami, which had secured only two seats in the region since independence, has won seven seats this time.

In recent times, the negative activities of BNP leaders and activists and the party's internal conflicts worked to our advantage. At the same time, our leaders' engagement with the public helped us reach the shore of victory.

SUJA UDDIN JOARDAR, secretary of Kushtia Jamaat

The lone BNP candidate to win in the three districts is Reza Ahmed Bacchu Molla in the Kushtia-1 (Daulatpur) constituency. He, too, blamed internal division for the party's overall defeat.

"I cannot comment on Chuadanga. But in Kushtia and Meherpur, the sole reason behind the defeat of our five candidates was internal

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

Teen stabbed to death in Bogura

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bogura*

A 17-year-old boy was stabbed to death in Bogura Sadar upazila yesterday morning, police say.

The attack took place around 8:30am near the Upazila Parishad building in Matidali area of Bogura town. The victim, Fahim Hossain, a labourer at a local foundry, was rushed to Bogura Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital, where he died around 11:30am, confirmed Monirul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Bogura Sadar Police Station.

The OC said that, based on preliminary information provided by the victim's family, they suspect Fahim was stabbed by an individual who had previously harassed the victim's sister.

"We are conducting a drive to arrest the suspect, and legal proceedings are underway," he told reporters.

Shahin Hossain, Fahim's elder brother, alleged that a local youth had wanted to marry his younger sister, but the family refused because he is a drug addict and she was married elsewhere.

Shahin alleged that the youth had previously stabbed his sister's husband. "Today, he attacked my brother from behind while he was going to work and stabbed him three times. We were unable to save him," Shahin said.

Court assistant hacked to death in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bogura*

A legal assistant (Muhuri) was hacked to death by unidentified miscreants at his home in Gaibandha's Sadar upazila on Friday evening, police said.

The victim, Amitava Chandra Sujan, 40, worked as a "muhuri" at the Gaibandha District and Sessions Judge Court.

Gaibandha Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Abdullah Al Mamun said Sujan was attacked in the courtyard of his house in Khamar Ballamjhar area around 7:00pm. He later died while being taken to Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

Quoting family members and witnesses, the OC said Sujan was standing in the courtyard when a group of attackers entered through the main gate. They assaulted him and struck him on the head with an axe before fleeing the scene.

Sujan's brother, Sudhan Chandra Roy, alleged that there had been a longstanding land dispute between them and a neighbour for the past three to four years and said that the family suspected that neighbours could be behind the attack.

OC Abdullah said the axe used in the assault was recovered from the scene and the motive had not yet been established.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Traffic congestion peaks during rush hour in the capital's New Market area on Mirpur Road yesterday. After several days of nearly empty streets in Dhaka because of the 13th national election, the weekend saw the city return to its usual hustle and bustle.

5 CONSTITUENCIES IN NARAYANGANJ

36 of 48 candidates lose security deposits

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Narayanganj*

A total of 36 out of 48 candidates who contested in five constituencies of Narayanganj in the 13th parliamentary election have forfeited their security deposits after failing to secure at least 12.5 percent of the valid votes cast.

Among those who lost their deposits are five rebel candidates from the BNP, including two former lawmakers and a former state minister.

District Election Officer Alomgir Hossain said candidates submit a fixed amount of money as a security deposit while filing nomination papers, which is refunded only if they secure at least 12.5 percent of the valid votes.

In Narayanganj-1, five of the seven candidates lost their deposits.

They are independent candidate and former Jubo Dal leader Mohammad Dulal; Wasim Uddin of Gono Odhikar Parishad; Md Imdadullah of Islami Andolan Bangladesh; Md Moniruzzaman Chandan of the Communist Party of Bangladesh; and Rehan Afzal of Insaniyat Biplob Bangladesh.

BNP candidate Mustafizur Rahman Bhuiyan won the seat with 1,46,358 votes, while his nearest rival, Jamaat-e-Islami candidate Anowar Hossain Molla, secured 91,690 votes.

In Narayanganj-2, all but the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami candidates forfeited their deposits among the seven contestants.

Those losing deposits include independent candidate and former BNP MP Ataur Rahman Angur; Md Habibullah of Islami Andolan; Hafizul Islam of CPB; Abu Hanif Hriday of Bangladesh Republican Party; and Kamrul Mia of Gono Odhikar Parishad.

A total of 2,33,906 votes were cast in the constituency. BNP's Nazrul Islam Azad was elected with 1,25,063 votes, while Jamaat candidate Ilias Molla obtained 82,987.

In Narayanganj-3, all but two of the 11 candidates are set to lose their deposits in the constituency comprising Sonargaon and Siddhirganj.

BNP candidate Azharul Islam Mannan won with 1,55,400 votes, while Jamaat's Iqbal Hossain Bhuiyan received 1,34,918 votes.

In Narayanganj-4, former BNP MP Muhammad Gias Uddin lost his deposit, where he ran as an independent candidate. Nine other candidates also forfeited their deposits.

National Citizen Party candidate Abdullah Al Amin won with 1,06,171 votes, followed by Monir Hossain Kasemi of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam with 80,619 votes.

In Narayanganj-5, BNP's former three-time MP Abul Kalam was re-elected with 1,14,799 votes. His nearest rival, ABM Sirajul Mamun of Khelafat Majlish, received 1,01,196 votes. Seven candidates lost their deposits.

Political courtesy after defeat

Jamaat candidate visits BNP winner with sweets, flowers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Kishoreganj*

Despite being defeated in the Kishoreganj-3 (Karimganj-Tarail) constituency in the 13th national election, Jamaat candidate Dr Jehad Khan has set an example of political courtesy, decency and tolerance.

After the results were announced, he went to the house of the winning candidate, BNP candidate Dr Muhammad Osman Farruk, with sweets and flowers at his village home in Karimganj on Friday night.

There, they exchanged greetings and spoke about Farruk's family, they fed each other sweets, and the defeated candidate congratulated the winner with flowers.

They also spent some time discussing personal matters, including the parliamentary seat. Farruk sought the cooperation and blessings of Jehad to make his parliamentary constituency a model one.

Local resident Anwar Sadat and some prominent figures said the promise to work together for the development of the area, setting

SEE PAGE 9 COL 5

MOULVIBAZAR-4

Mujibur leads poster clean-up after victory

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Moulvibazar*

Two days after securing the largest victory margin in Sylhet division, BNP candidate Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury began removing his campaign posters and banners with his own hands, urging party leaders and activists to follow suit.

The Moulvibazar-4 constituency, comprising Sreemangal and Kamalganj, had long been considered a stronghold of the Awami League.

Yesterday, around 3:00pm, Mujibur removed campaign materials in the Lalbagh and Sabujbagh areas along the Sreemangal–Habiganj Road. He also called on party leaders and activists in both upazilas to clear posters and banners from their respective areas.

Sreemangal and Kamalganj are tourist destinations, he said. "I want tourists to experience the beauty here without the clutter of campaign materials."

Locals also lauded the move.

Ayan Chowdhury, headteacher of Sreemangal

SEE PAGE 9 COL 8

Seat-sharing brings little for BNP

FROM PAGE 3

candidate Ubaydullah Faruk received 69,774 votes and lost to Khelafat Majlis candidate Abul Hasan, who secured 79,355 votes -- a margin of 9,581 votes.

In Nilphamari-1, Jamiat candidate Monzurul Islam Afendi received 1,18,160 votes but lost by 31,054 votes to a Jamaat candidate, who secured 1,49,214 votes.

In Narayanganj-4, Jamiat candidate Monir Hossain received 80,619 votes and lost by 25,552 votes to NCP candidate Abdullah Al Mamun, who won with 106,171 votes.

Meanwhile, four leaders dissolved or left their own parties to join BNP and contest under its symbol, following amendments to the Representation of the People Order, 1972, which required alliance candidates to run under their own party symbols.

Among them, the biggest loss was in Jhenaidah-4. Rashed Khan, a leader of Gono Odhikar Parishad who ran with the BNP symbol, finished third with 56,224 votes. Jamaat's Abu Talib won the seat with 1,59,099 votes, a margin of 1,02,875 votes. There, BNP rebel Saiful Islam Firoz secured second position with 77,104 votes.

In Kishoreganj-5, Ehsanul Huda officially dissolved his own party, the Bangladesh Jatiya Party, to contest with the BNP ticket.

However, despite securing 66,450 votes, he lost to BNP rebel candidate Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who secured 79,604 votes -- a margin of 13,154 votes.

Another leader who faced a similar fate was Redwan Ahmed in Cumilla-7. He had been a member of parliament four times before and left the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to join the BNP.

However, he lost to BNP rebel Atikul Alam by 43,181 votes.

In Narail-2, Farhad, chairman of the National People's Party, joined BNP after leaving his own party. He received 45,463 votes and lost to Jamaat candidate Ataur Rahman, who secured 1,18,142 votes -- a margin of 72,679 votes.

Despite the setbacks, five alliance-backed candidates secured their constituencies.

In Bhola-1, Bangladesh Jatiya Party Chairman Andaleeve Rahman Partho won with 1,05,543 votes, defeating Jamaat candidate Nazrul Islam, who received 75,337 votes -- a margin of 30,206 votes.

In Brahmanbaria-6, Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolon, won with 95,342 votes. Jamaat candidate Mohsin secured 39,967 votes, giving Saki a margin of 55,375 votes.

In Patuakhali-3, Gono Odhikar Parishad President Nurul Haque, contesting with the party's Truck symbol, received 97,323 votes. He defeated BNP rebel Hasan Mamun, who secured 81,361 votes -- a margin of 15,962 votes.

In Dhaka-13, Bobby Hajjaj, who left his position as chairman of the Nationalist Democratic Movement (NDM) to join BNP, won with 88,387 votes.

He defeated Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis candidate Mamunul Haque, who contested under the Jamaat-led alliance and received 86,067 votes -- a margin of 2,320 votes.

In Lakshmipur-1, Bangladesh Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP) Chairman Shahadat Hossain Selim joined BNP after dissolving his party. He secured 85,457 votes and defeated Mahbub Alam, who received 56,437 votes -- a margin of 29,020 votes.

Selim was among the few leaders who left another party to join BNP and successfully retained his seat.

Hand in hand through

FROM PAGE 3

Yet, through it all, neither left the other's side.

"After my wife's death, no one cared for me. When I realised someone loved a blind man like me, I felt grateful," Ramnarayan said, his voice trembling.

Basmati became his eyes. From preparing meals to guiding him from village to village seeking alms, she has carried the responsibility alone.

"I walk with my hand on her shoulder. I put my trust in her," he said.

Their first son was born within a year of marriage. But often there was not enough food.

"Many times I had no milk to feed my child," Basmati said quietly.

Neighbours occasionally helped, but often the child slept hungry.

A second son followed, bringing renewed hope. Kind-hearted traders at Samshernagar market would sometimes offer meals for the family.

Despite the hardship, they dreamed of putting away the begging bowl forever.

After years of scraping together savings and taking out a loan of Tk 1 lakh, they bought an auto-rickshaw, with the plan being that their son would drive and help secure the family financially.

But the dream lasted merely six months.

On the morning of December 31, Ramnarayan discovered the lock on their tin shed broken. The auto-rickshaw, their only asset and hope, was stolen.

"I thought we would not have to beg anymore. But God did not give us that happiness," he said, fighting back tears.

Wiping her eyes with the end of her sari, Basmati added, "It was our hope. I thought our family would stand on its own. It's all finished."

Yet, even in despair, the couple remain inseparable.

Suman Yadav, a local, said, "So much poverty, humiliation, suffering -- yet for love, they have held on for more than 25 years. Unless you see Basmati, you won't understand how strong a wife's love can be. Their love continues to defy the darkness."

AHQ, E IN C'S BRANCH, WORKS DIRECTORATE, DHAKA CANTONMENT

INVITATION FOR TENDERS

Notice no. 300/Ad/68/E-3/21 Dated: 03 Febraury 2026.

MILITARY ENGINEER SERVICES

1.	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Defence
2.	Agency	Military Engineer Services
3.	Procuring Entity Name	E in C
4.	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka
5.	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method (OTM)
6.	Budget and source of Funds	GOB
7.	Development Partners (if applicable)	None
8.	Project/Programme Name (if applicable)	**Relocation of 'Command and Staff Training Institute (CSTI)' at BAF Base Bashar, Tejgaon to BAF Base, Cox's Bazar).**
9.	Selling of tender will commence from	**16 February 2026 (During Office hour).**
10.	Selling of tender will Close on	**26 February 2026 (During Office hour).**
11.	Last date & time of submission of Tender	**01 March 2026 at 1200 hours.**
12.	Date & time of opening of Tender	**01 March 2026 at 1230 hours.**
13.	Name & Address of the Office(s)	
	- Selling Tender Document	Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka & AHQ, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment.
	- Receiving Tender Document	Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka
	- Opening Tender Document	Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka
14.	**Eligibility of Tenderer**	**a. MES enlisted contractors Class 'C' & 'D' for lot no. 15(a).** **b. On receipt of DGFI clearance with others Department (equivalent classes) contractors may also apply for tender.** **c. Contractors having experience in similar works with enlistment in other Govt., Semi, Government & Autonomous Organization may also apply.** **d. Having experience of similar work mentioned in Lot No 15(a) amounting Tk. 70,00,000.00 in a single tender during last 05 (Five) years.**
15.	Brief Description of Works	

Lot No	Identification of Lot	Location	Price of Tender Document (Non Refundable)	Tender Security in the form of Bank Draft/ Pay order in favour of AHQ, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantt. (Taka)	Completion Time in weeks/ Months
1	2	3	4	5	6
a.	Manufacture & Supply of Furniture for Command and Staff Training Institute (CSTI) at BAF Base Coxs' Bazar (GP-02).	AGE (Air) Cox' Bazar	3000.00	3,00,000.00	04 (Four) Months

16.	Name of Official Inviting Tender		Director of Works	
17.	Designation of Official Inviting Tender		Director of Works	
18.	Address of Official Inviting Tender		Army Headquarters, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment. Web address : **www.army.mil.bd**	
19.	Contact details of Official Inviting Tender	Tel No. 9832870	Fax No. 9832882	e-mail- wksdte@army.mil.bd
20.	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders			

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Works Directorate
Engineer in Chief's Branch
Dhaka Cantonment
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Civil: 9832886

GD-299

A mother and her daughter walk holding a heart balloon on Valentine's Day at the Lychakiv Military Cemetery in Lviv, Ukraine, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Don't blame China for EU's problems'

AFP, *Beijing*

China's foreign minister told his French and German counterparts that Beijing was not to blame for Europe's economic and security problems as he pushed for more cooperation at a summit in Munich, a foreign ministry statement said yesterday.

Wang Yi made the comments at a meeting with France's Jean-Noel Barrot and Germany's Johann Wadephul on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on Friday.

He sought to promote China as a reliable partner of the European Union at a time when the bloc is trying to reduce its dependence on both Beijing and an increasingly unpredictable Washington.

"China's development is an opportunity for Europe, and Europe's challenges do not come from China," Wang said, according to the statement.

Warning that "unilateralism, protectionism, and power politics" were on the rise globally, he said he hoped Europe would "pursue a rational and pragmatic policy towards China".

"The two sides are partners, not adversaries; interdependence is not a risk; intertwined interests are not a threat; and open cooperation will not harm security."

The meeting came against the backdrop of trade tensions between the two giant economies and disputes over what the EU sees as China's support for Russia's war in Ukraine.

The EU is seeking to cut its reliance on China for strategic goods like rare earths while also rebalancing a trade relationship that sees it run a large deficit with the world's second-largest economy.

GAZA CEASEFIRE

Abbas urges removal of all Israeli 'obstacles'

AFP, *Addis Ababa*

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas yesterday called for the removal of "all obstacles" he said Israel has imposed on implementing phase two of the Gaza ceasefire.

"We emphasise the need to lift all obstacles imposed by the Israeli occupation on the implementation of the provisions related to the second phase of the agreement," Abbas said, in a speech read by his prime minister Mohammed Mustafa at an African Union summit in Ethiopia.

This included the work of a technocratic committee established to oversee the daily governance of Gaza, he added.

'West's decline' not in US interest

Amid tensions, Rubio casts US as the 'child of Europe'

REUTERS, *Munich*

Secretary of State Marco Rubio cast the United States as the "child of Europe" in a message of unity yesterday, offering some reassurance as well as levelling more criticism at allies after a year of turmoil in transatlantic relations.

Rubio was addressing the annual Munich Security Conference, where Europe's leading powers have tried to project their own independence and strength while straining to keep an alliance with the US under President Donald Trump alive.

The speech delivered a degree of reassurance to European countries who fear being left in the lurch on anything from the war in Ukraine to international trade ructions in a rapidly shifting global order.

But it was short on concrete commitments and made no mention of Russia, raising questions on whether Rubio's more emollient tone than that of Vice President JD Vance at the same event a year ago would change the underlying dynamics.

"In a time of headlines heralding the end of the transatlantic era, let it be known and clear to all that this is neither our goal nor our wish, because for us Americans, our home may be in the Western Hemisphere, but we will always be a child of Europe," Rubio said.

"For the United States and Europe, we belong together," he said in a speech that drew a standing ovation at the end.

While European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said she was "very much reassured" by the speech and German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul called him a "true partner", others struck a more cautious tone.

"I am not sure that Europeans see the announced civilisational decline, supposedly caused mainly by migration and deindustrialisation, as a core uniting interest. For most Europeans, the common interest is security," said Gabrielius Landsbergis, former foreign minister of Nato member Lithuania.

Munich security meet dominated by changing world order

Zelenskiy says US asks Ukraine too often for concessions

China's Wang Yi warns against decoupling

Son of Iran's last shah urges US action against regime

AFP, *Munich*

The exiled son of Iran's last shah called on US President Donald Trump on Saturday to help the Iranian people, a day after the American leader said a change of power would be the "best thing".

US-based Reza Pahlavi, who has not returned to Iran since before the 1979 Islamic revolution that ousted the monarchy, added it was "time to end the Islamic republic" while speaking to reporters at the Munich Security Conference.

Outside, around 200,000 of his supporters thronged the streets near the gathering of world leaders, calling on them to ramp up pressure against the Islamic republic after the deadly repression of nationwide protests in January.

"Javid shah" (long live the shah)," the crowd chanted as they waved green-white-and-red flags with a lion and a sun -- the emblem of the toppled monarchy.

"The Iranian regime is a dead regime," a 62-year-old protester originally from Iran who gave his name only as Said told AFP. "It must be game over."

Pahlavi has urged Iranians at home and abroad to continue demonstrations against the authorities, calling on them to chant slogans from their homes and rooftops at 8:00 pm Saturday and Sunday, to coincide with protests in Germany and elsewhere.

Trump had said on Friday that a change of government in Iran would be the "best thing that could happen", as he sent a second aircraft carrier to the Middle East to ratchet up military pressure on Tehran.

He had earlier threatened military intervention to support a wave of street protests in Iran that peaked in January.

"To President Trump... The Iranian people heard you say help is on the way, and they have faith in you. Help them," Pahlavi told reporters in Munich.

"It is time to end the Islamic republic. This is the demand echoing from the bloodshed of my compatriots who are not asking us to fix the regime but to help them bury it," he added.

MPs, cabinet to take oath

FROM PAGE 1

AMM Nasir Uddin or Chief Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury will administer the oath to the MPs.

The Election Commission issued a gazette notification last night confirming winners in 297 of the 299 constituencies where polling was held.

BNP is set to form the government after its alliance secured 212 seats -- more than a two-thirds majority in Thursday's election. The 11-party alliance led by Jamaat-e-Islami, with 77 seats, will form the opposition.

Cabinet Division sources noted that since independence, every government has been sworn in at Bangabhaban. An official involved in the preparations, speaking anonymously, said the MPs' oath involves minimal formality.

"A cabinet swearing-in requires inviting local and foreign guests, providing hospitality, and managing various stages for the prime minister, ministers, and state ministers," the official added.

Due to this last-minute decision, officials are redesigning every phase of the ceremony. Another source involved in the process stated, "It is the tradition to work according to the wishes of those coming to power. However, organising such a large event in so little time is quite challenging. We are putting in our best efforts to ensure a quality ceremony."

Commenting on the matter, writer, researcher, and former Secretary Abdul Awal Mazumder noted that the July charter was signed at the parliament's South Plaza.

"The post-uprising government likely wants to take their oath in front of the people," Mazumder told The Daily Star.

"It is true that no government in the past has been sworn in outside of Bangabhaban, but there is no obstacle to starting a new tradition."

He added, "The US president addresses the people immediately after taking the oath under the open sky. I'm waiting to see if Bangladesh's next prime minister, Tarique Rahman, does the same."

World hails Bangladesh on polls success

FROM PAGE 2

"The people of Bangladesh have exercised their democratic rights in large numbers," it said, calling on stakeholders to work together to deliver constitutional, judicial, and other key reforms backed by the referendum, and noting the vital role of the new parliament.

It added that the EU looks forward to working with the new government to deepen relations and stands ready to support reforms grounded in democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law.

In a statement, Canada's foreign ministry described Bangladesh as one of its longest-standing friends and partners and congratulated its people. "Canada remains committed to working with the newly elected government and all Bangladeshis to advance our shared priorities in a spirit of mutual prosperity and a better future for our peoples," it said.

The Australian High Commission in Bangladesh congratulated Tarique Rahman and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party on their victory in the 13th parliament election, as well as the people of Bangladesh. It reaffirmed Australia's commitment to strengthening its long-standing partnership built on deep ties between the two peoples.

Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Susan Ryle also congratulated the BNP on its success and pledged to work on enhancing bilateral ties.

The German Embassy in Dhaka said Berlin looks forward to working closely with the new government to strengthen political and economic ties. "We commend the people of Bangladesh for their participation in the electoral process -- a meaningful expression of democratic engagement -- and extend our congratulations to all newly elected Members of Parliament," it said, adding that Germany would continue supporting Bangladesh's democratic reforms and development.

Congratulating the BNP and the people of Bangladesh, the Embassy of the Netherlands in Bangladesh praised the strong bilateral relationship and expressed commitment to deepening cooperation.

The High Commission of Singapore in Bangladesh also said it looks forward to working with the new government.

The Turkish foreign ministry said it welcomes the peaceful elections.

"We hope that the results of the elections and the referendum, which observers from Türkiye also monitored, will contribute to democracy, stability and prosperity in Bangladesh," it said.

Turkey reaffirmed its commitment to further developing bilateral relations with Bangladesh.

Navalny poisoned with dart frog toxin in Russian prison

Say European states

AFP, *Munich*

Five European states, including Britain, France and Germany, said Saturday that Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was killed by a "rare toxin" from a dart frog and that the Russian state was the prime suspect in the death.

Navalny, a staunch critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin, died in an Arctic prison on February 16, 2024, while serving a 19-year prison sentence on charges widely seen as retribution for his opposition.

"The UK, Sweden, France, Germany and The Netherlands are confident that Alexei Navalny was poisoned with a lethal toxin," the countries said in a joint statement released at the Munich Security Conference. It said the results followed "analyses of samples" from his body.

According to the European states, a toxin found in the skin of South American dart frogs known as epibatidine was found on laboratory analyses of samples from his body.

"Russia claimed that Navalny died of natural causes. But given the toxicity of epibatidine and reported symptoms, poisoning was highly likely the cause of his death," said the statement.

"Navalny died while held in prison, meaning Russia had the means, motive and opportunity to administer this poison to him," the countries said.

Britain's foreign office said separately that "only the Russian state had the means, motive and opportunity to deploy this lethal toxin". It added: "We hold it (Russia) responsible for his death".

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নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

স্মারক- পাবিপ্রবি/সংস্থাপন/২৮২/২১০ তারিখ: ১৪ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ খ্রি.

পাবনা বিজ্ঞান ও প্রযুক্তি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে ব্যবসায় প্রশাসন বিভাগের **'প্রভাষক (হিসাববিজ্ঞান)'** পদে এবং সমাজকর্ম বিভাগের জন্য **'প্রভাষক'** পদে নিয়োগদানের উদ্দেশ্যে প্রকৃত বাংলাদেশী নাগরিকদের নিকট হতে আবেদন আহ্বান করা হচ্ছে। আবেদনের শেষ তারিখ: ০১ মার্চ ২০২৬ খ্রি.। উল্লেখ্য, গত ১৫ এপ্রিল ২০২৩ খ্রি. তারিখের পাবিপ্রবি/সংস্থাপন/২৮২/৪৯৩ স্মারকমূলে প্রকাশিত নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি অনুযায়ী ইতোপূর্বে যারা ব্যবসায় প্রশাসন বিভাগের প্রভাষক (হিসাববিজ্ঞান) পদে আবেদন করেছেন, তাঁদের পুনরায় আবেদন করার প্রয়োজন নেই। তবে, কোন প্রার্থীর যদি উক্ত আবেদনে প্রেরিত তথ্যাদি আপডেট করার প্রয়োজন হয়, তবে তাঁর আপডেটেড তথ্যসহ ০৮(আট) সেট আবেদনপত্র জমা দিতে হবে; সেক্ষেত্রে কোন ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/ পে-অর্ডার প্রয়োজন হবে না।

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GD-301

The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR: **LATE S. M. ALI**

Reject political violence

Political parties must commit to mutual respect and tolerance

Three deaths so soon after an otherwise largely peaceful election are a grim reminder that Bangladesh's toxic political culture has not disappeared. At a moment when the nation should be looking ahead to a newly elected government and a vibrant parliament, violence has once again cast a shadow over democratic hopes. On Friday, 30-year-old Md Jasim Nayeb was killed in a clash between rival factions in Munshiganj. He had supported an independent candidate expelled from the BNP. In a separate incident in Chapainawabganj, two people were killed and three others injured when a crude bomb exploded inside a house, blowing off its tin roof and leaving bodies charred. On Saturday, a clash between local BNP and Jamaat supporters left several people injured.

There have also been reports of Jamaat-BNP clashes in various districts which left people injured and properties destroyed. Though isolated, these incidents reveal how quickly political tensions can escalate. The Chapainawabganj blast is still under investigation; whether accidental or deliberate, it exposes a disturbing reality: that crude but lethal explosives and illegal firearms remain in circulation, and can be used to target opponents or spread fear.

An investigation by *Prothom Alo* found that illegal arms are entering via at least 30 points along the Bangladesh–India and Bangladesh-Myanmar borders. Authorities believe many of these weapons were brought in to fuel election violence. Their interception no doubt helped prevent wider violence during polling. Yet, numerous illegal firearms, along with weapons looted from police stations after the July uprising, remain unaccounted for. In the wrong hands, they pose a continuing threat.

The deeper concern is cultural. Bangladesh's entrenched politics of revenge and retaliation must end. Between September 2024 and January 2026, at least 195 people were killed and 11,229 injured in political violence nationwide, according to the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS). During that period, internal feuds within the BNP and its affiliates reportedly led to 121 deaths and 7,131 injuries. Activists across party lines have fallen victim to unidentified assailants. Inquilab Moncho leader Sharif Osman Hadi, an independent candidate, was fatally shot in broad daylight on December 12 last year, with two suspects reportedly fleeing across the border.

These frightening statistics demand introspection. As a new government prepares to take office and a parliament reconvenes, we urge all political parties to remember the spirit and unity of the July uprising, which they are morally committed to. To do that, they must cleanse their parties from within and remove all criminal elements. BNP and Jamaat must immediately take exemplary actions against members responsible for any kind of violence and criminal behaviour. Leaders bear responsibility not only for strategy but also for creating a culture of restraint, tolerance, and respect—both within their ranks and towards opponents. Political disagreement must be played out through vigorous debates in parliament, not through bitter clashes that turn violent and deadly.

Politics remains rigged against women

Low female candidacy is a concern for democracy

As the dust settles on Bangladesh's 13th National Parliamentary Election, with the Election Commission (EC) declaring the 297 candidates elected to our parliament, a major source of disappointment remains: the systematic lack of women's political participation. While a total of 85 women contested the polls last Thursday, including 66 with party nominations and 19 as independent candidates, only seven have been elected. Of the seven candidates, only one is independent; the rest are from BNP. Furthermore, as per pre-election stats from the EC, nearly a third of female candidates were relatives of influential men. Although in the ninth parliament, 21 women were directly elected, the total number of female contestants in this election was the highest on record. These numbers put the low participation of women politicians in perspective.

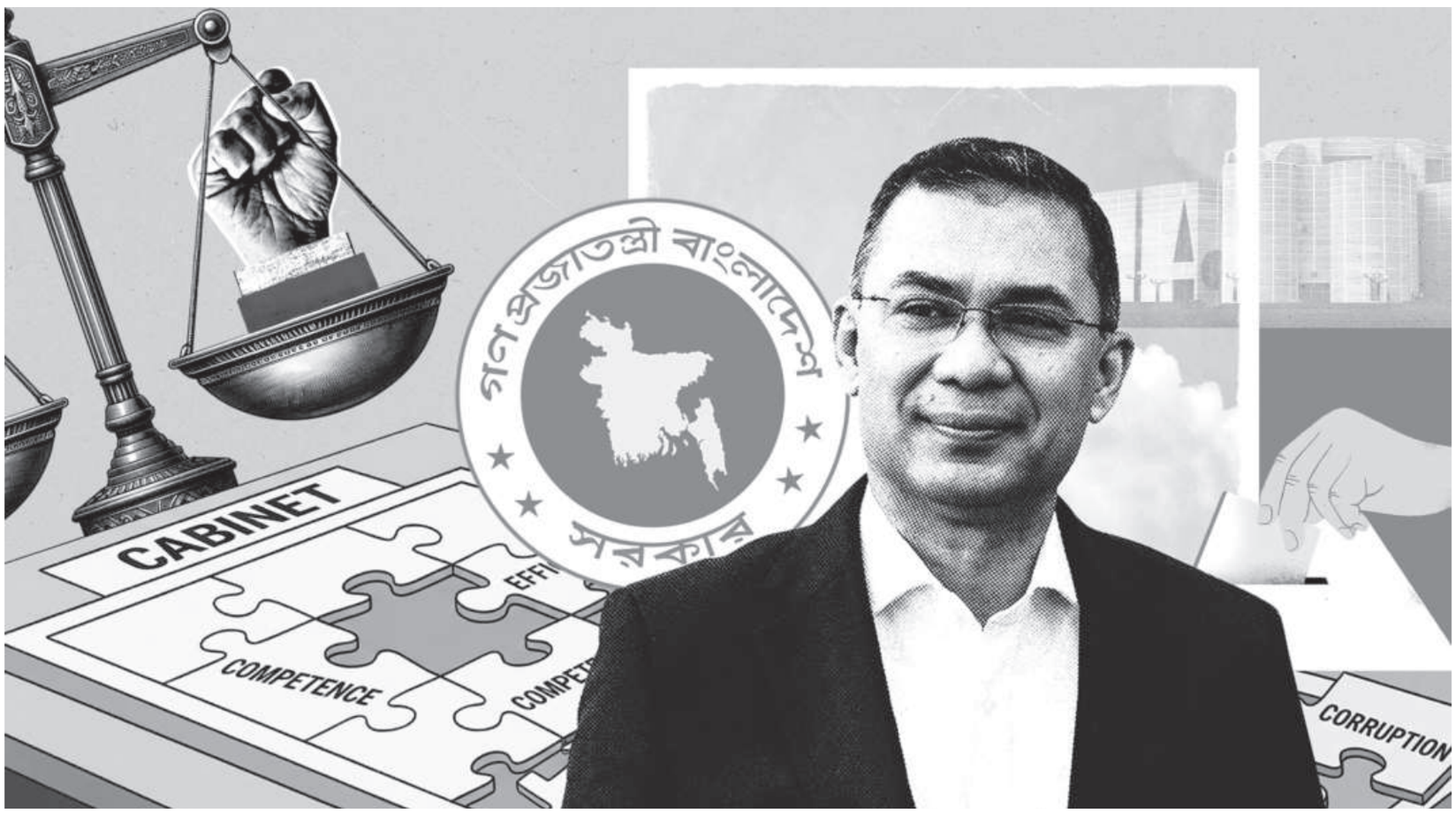
Myriad factors are cited by those who attempt to deny that a systemic exclusion of women persists in Bangladesh's politics. But when a party announces outright that it will not include women in roles of leadership in a post-uprising Bangladesh, we must acknowledge the urgency of this problem.

Women played a crucial role in the ousting of the Awami League regime in 2024, yet hardly any female representatives were included in the July National Charter consensus discussions. When male politicians were subjected to enforced disappearance by Sheikh Hasina's regime, it was the women in their families who led the fight for justice for years. The requirement by the Representation of the People Order, 1972, for political parties to reserve at least 33 percent of committee posts for women, including at the central level, was also not heeded by the major political parties in this election. Unsurprisingly, the recommendation by the Women's Affairs Reform Commission to increase the number of reserved seats for women to 100 with direct elections was not accepted by political parties. Meanwhile, promises and sentiments about women's empowerment by contesting politicians sound more like rote than out of a genuine wish to improve the persisting imbalance.

We hope the new parliament will actively work to advance women's political participation as per the existing legal framework, including ensuring significant participation in local government polls. It should go without saying that this is expected of all parliamentary members, not just female representatives. When women are kept out of parliament by design, women's issues move further down the government's list of priorities. It is a dire threat to the practice of democracy itself when the inclusion of one half of the population is treated as optional.

The likely PM's first crucial challenge

Choose cabinet with utmost care, for it may determine success or failure



VISUAL: **ANWAR SOHEL**

THE THIRD VIEW

Mahfuz Anam
is editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

MAHFUZ ANAM

Hearty congratulations to the BNP as a party and to its leader, Tarique Rahman, for a magnificent win. This is not just the win of a political party in an election. It is the taking up of political power at a crucial moment in Bangladesh's history. We have had successes but also significant failures, the most devastating of which was destroying institutions and not allowing them to function independently and professionally. Sadly, this has become part of our political culture.

The ruling parties of the past always tried to dominate every branch of government, not for the sake of the country but for the party and mostly for personal gains. Thus, as they got richer, the common people got poorer, resulting in the most cruel and destructive rich-poor gap in Bangladesh today. The politicisation of the administration and the budgeting process, among many others, is so deeply entrenched that the prime minister-in-waiting will find it most difficult to challenge. In this effort, his own party is likely to be his biggest obstacle. Many leaders from all tiers will plead and ask for rewards, citing their loyalty to the party for the last 17-18 years, despite suffering, the destruction of their businesses and financial losses. Although such an argument is both real and emotional, giving in to this will be the beginning of corruption and misgovernance, which have plagued most of our past governments.

People will not accept it, and neither will the independent media. The ruling party must also remember that the opposition will be quite powerful—77 members—and it will use, as it should and must, every parliamentary procedure to hold the government accountable and expose even the slightest sign of corruption. Given what he said so far, Tarique Rahman will most likely not allow it. But he will find it most challenging to resist. And resist he must.

To win this struggle, Tarique Rahman will have to select the right cabinet. Of course, loyalty and service to the party will be important factors, but they shouldn't be the deciding ones. Rather, honesty, integrity and efficiency should be given priority. The new cabinet must be highly competent, modern, decisive, and management savvy; the last quality is something we always under-rate.

Tarique Rahman may already have made his choices for the cabinet. However, we would like to suggest that he takes a little more time in finalising his team. He may take an immediate oath—as soon as the process permits—with a small cabinet consisting of the best ones and those he has already decided upon. As for the rest, he should take his time, which will give our prospective prime minister a valuable opportunity to fine-tune his final selection. This is vital because the new government has an enormous task at hand. Bangladesh is at a critical phase of development. With broken institutions, a high level of corruption and widespread inefficiency, the incoming cabinet will have to play a far more effective and insightful role than usual.

There is also intense partisanship in bureaucracy, various administrative branches, law enforcement agencies, etc. Such a phenomenon has a long past and getting rid of it quickly will be almost impossible. But Tarique Rahman's government may have an advantage. His declaration that "I have a plan," one which he made public during the presentation of BNP's manifesto, gives us the confidence that the new BNP government will consist of "doers and not talkers." People who will work closely with him are already known to him; they have been tested by him and on whom he has faith. That's excellent. But he must remember, however closely he knows them, they must be competent enough to implement the plan they helped him formulate. In Bangladesh, a "plan" and its "implementation" belong to two different worlds. This is very important to remember, otherwise the risk of failure multiplies manifold.

In my view, an underlying reason for the interim government's miserable failure in terms of good governance was Prof Yunus's wrong choices of his cabinet, except perhaps for a select few. He made two blunders: one, choosing the wrong team and the other, not reshuffling it. In fact, he never held them responsible for their performance. Why he just allowed them to drag his reputation down to the ground is something only he can tell. However, his contribution to an excellent election will be gratefully remembered by the nation.

Perhaps it is a bit premature, but the incoming prime minister must remember that reshuffling a cabinet is no sign of weakness or admission of fault. To ensure better performance, a prime minister must always be open to changing members of his cabinet. On the other hand, the prospect of a reshuffle keeps ministers on their toes and ensures better and honest performance.

Of the three factors that should determine the choice of the cabinet—loyalty, honesty, and efficiency—only the first played any role in the past.

After the loyalty factor comes honesty. Fighting corruption has to start at the very top, which we hope will be ensured. Then comes the question of the integrity of the ministers. On this score, the new government will be closely monitored and the slightest deviation will hurt the government badly. However, the sternest message from the prime minister-in-waiting should be zero tolerance on corruption and the harshest punishment should be meted out if it occurs. Lee Kuan Yew, the former leader of Singapore, should serve as a model, not in terms of citizens' freedom but in terms of honest and efficient governance.

Third comes the question of competence. A minister in a modern government needs to be far more knowledgeable, efficient and decisive than in earlier times. Political acumen is necessary, but it is far from sufficient in today's world. He or she has to be open to diverse views and ideas that contest practice and be modest enough to admit mistakes and quickly correct the course. A minister needs to be like a CEO of a company with the party manifesto as his or her "mission and vision." A modern minister needs to be well-versed in management, which in today's world is a science and an ever-evolving one. Again, the Lee Kuan Yew-led Singapore government is a model to learn from with its globally recognised success mainly springing from competent management. This is where we fail most of the time, as we do not give sufficient importance to it.

Perhaps it is a bit premature, but the incoming prime minister must remember that reshuffling a cabinet is no sign of weakness or admission of fault. To ensure better performance, a prime minister must always be open to changing members of his cabinet. On the other hand, the prospect of a reshuffle keeps ministers on their toes and ensures better and honest performance.

There are veteran BNP leaders who will have to be rewarded for their lifelong role in the party, especially during Sheikh Hasina's oppressive rule. But luckily for Tarique Rahman, there are only a handful of them. So, in the case of a large number of ministries, the party leader can appoint young, committed, energetic, competent, and academically qualified individuals with modern mindsets as ministers. The danger here is that many such young and qualified individuals may not be connected with the people and well-versed in the realities of Bangladesh. We have seen in the past that scholars who return to serve the country from abroad exhibit an inner arrogance of "know-it-all" that prevents them from appreciating local scholars and experts. This, thereby, creates a destructive rift that prevents the much-needed collaboration between global scholars and local academicians, both of whom need to learn from each other.

As Tarique Rahman declared, "I have a plan," we assume he also has a clear idea of how to implement it and with whom to do so. Here is where we want to sound some alert bells. When he was planning, he was the thinker. Now that people of Bangladesh have given him power, he is now the "implementer," the main one at that. There is an ocean-wide difference between these two realities. How should he transform into his new role? First, as the unchallenged leader he has to resist all temptation and be truly modest. This is very challenging. In my mind's eye, I can see the type of adulation and praise that has already been showered on him and which is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Even with the strongest determination to resist all these, it will prove to be highly challenging. We wish him, most sincerely, genuine success here. He must constantly remember that there is almost no "check" on him in terms of power. This is a very dangerous place to be in. His senior political colleagues could play a restraining role, but our political culture neither permits nor encourages it. He and his family are the only "check" that can work as some sort of restraint to his literally unlimited power. And, of course, the independent and ethical media can also play an effective role, but only if he allows them a free play without prejudice—to which he has committed—and takes them seriously.

In everything the new government does, the election slogan "Bangladesh First" should play a pivotal role. As each of the BNP leaders become ministers, they must take to heart the fact that the moment they take the oath of office, they transform themselves from BNP leaders to "people's" leaders. They no longer represent only those who voted for them but also those who voted against them— supporters of Jamaat-e-Islami, National Citizen Party, Islami Andolon Bangladesh, as well as every other candidate who may have won or lost. If Tarique Rahman can put into his every action his party's slogan "Bangladesh first," meaning Bangladesh before personal interest and Bangladesh before party interest, and if he can ingrain in the mind of every cabinet member that, once in government, they must treat every citizen equally—something he asserted in his press conference yesterday—then he will be able to ensure the success of his government. Nothing else can.

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Bangladesh has spoken. Now it's time to deliver

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SHAHAB ENAM KHAN

Let's congratulate Dr Muhammad Yunus first. I have been a critic of the interim government and not kind to its missteps. But one thing we knew for certain was that his legacy of presiding over Bangladesh's most consequential election in a generation would change the course of politics in the country.

To aid the election on February 12, General Waker-uz-Zaman's team worked tirelessly to make this extraordinary event happen. The police and bureaucracy followed suit with equal resolve. Nearly 10 lakh security personnel deployed across 42,651 polling centres, not a single lethal bullet fired, and yet peace prevailed. That is no accident; it is a genuine commitment to the republic. While Dr Yunus took the podium, the Election Commission built the stage. Credit where it is due.

And what a spectacular stage it was. Around 12.77 crore voters, nearly 60 percent turnout, and a verdict that needs no spin. The BNP-led alliance swept at least 212 of 299 contested seats while Jamaat-e-Islami's 11-party coalition secured 77, as of February 14. Tarique Rahman, back in Dhaka after 17 years in exile, won both his constituencies and is on course to form the next government with a commanding two-thirds majority. The referendum passed with 68.1 percent approval. Bangladesh did not just vote—it voted as it meant it.

The milestones deserve public memory. Not a single organised act of election violence spiralled into a crisis. Tarique Rahman told reporters after casting his vote, "For more than a decade, the people of Bangladesh have been waiting for this day," pledging to "prioritise improving law and order so that people feel secure." Jamaat Ameer Dr Shafiqur Rahman called the election a "turning point." "People demand change. They desire change. We also desire change," he said. Both camps, for once, read from the same script: the people's script.

The public voted in a festive mood during Thursday's election and many said they felt it was like Eid. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

The political maturity shown by both BNP and Jamaat in accepting the verdict is the real victory. Shafiqur Rahman confirmed his party's graceful acceptance of results "regardless of whether others choose to do so or not." If this maturity is genuine, Bangladesh will go a long way. The people voted in a festive mood; first-time voters said it "felt like Eid." A former teacher who had not voted since 2008 laughed in the queue, saying that standing in line was nothing compared with the joy of casting his own ballot.

The BNP, the power-to-be in parliament, will need a solid cabinet that works beyond partisan interests, with zero tolerance for corruption, impunity, and violence. Every BNP member should have tattooed somewhere visible the lesson from why the Awami League fell: its arrogance of power. Be open to constructive criticism and meritocracy, and deliver to the public, not to the party. And keep the military, bureaucracy, and law enforcement apolitical.

Jamaat did comparatively well: 77 alliance seats is a historic high. But the verdict carries a message: society is still not ready for theocracy, to put it politely. Their role as responsible opposition will define the country's democratic future. This verdict is about restoring democracy where everyone's voice matters—including women and minorities, who remain apprehensive. It is time to ensure that inclusivity, accountability, and the rule of law are at the heart of governance, so that every citizen can participate fully in the country's new democratic journey.

This is also the NCP's chance to rebrand as a full-grown political party without being a junior partner. Work hard, stay with the public, and make yourselves visible through meaningful parliamentary contributions, not TikTok manifestos. Any whiff of corruption will only keep you junior.

Now, the question that people would ask out loud: what on earth does the Awami League do next? Its exiled leadership is already denouncing the election as "one-sided," which is a bit rich from a party that won 257 (281 if we count Jatiya Party's 24 seats) out of 300 seats in 2018 and saw nothing one-sided about that. Will it choose genuine reform and reorganisation, or keep running a party-in-exile from talk shows, sitting in someone else's guest room? The choice is there, but history suggests they will pick the option with the most dramatic background music.

And to our beloved social media misinformation industry—the deepfake merchants, the bot armies, the "breaking news" pages run from home and abroad: over 700,000 propaganda posts since August 2024, and the people still saw right through you. The shelf life, my friends, has expired. The public upgraded their misinformation detector faster than you upgraded your bots.

A necessary word on the interim reform commissions is also needed. They proved to be, diplomatically, underwhelming—and, honestly, weak in parts. Grand ideas drafted in seminar rooms with little connection to the constitutional and political realities of a functioning parliament. The new parliament must continue but rethink reform from scratch: what is implementable, what is aspirational fantasy, and what belongs in the dustbin.

Let us not forget that most interim affiliates were chosen by the students and Dr Yunus. That selection process explains a fair share of the governance hiccups. The show is not over; the transparency of their 18 months is yet to be judged. History is keeping notes.

Meanwhile, BNP will enjoy the most comfortable international position of any Bangladeshi government. Delhi has agreed to work with any elected government; Beijing and Islamabad respect the people's mandate; Washington, Tokyo, Brussels, London, Ankara, Geneva, the Middle East and beyond will stay supportive as long as transparency is delivered. But every handshake now comes with a price tag. Prepare for it.

Bangladesh spent 18 months in the waiting room of democracy. On Thursday, the doctor finally called our name—and people walked in, heads held high, ink on their fingers, and a verdict in their hearts that no algorithm, no exile, and no autocrat can override. The prescription is simple: govern like the people are watching, because this time, they actually are.

Reviving RTI a test for the new government

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SHAMSUL BARI AND RUHI NAZ

The long-anticipated and widely speculated national election has concluded. Contrary to many predictions, voters delivered a decisive mandate to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). People's participation signals their endorsement of a platform framed around institutional stability, rational governance, and inclusivity. The party leadership has reiterated its commitment to strengthening the rule of law and combating corruption—priorities that, if pursued consistently and with integrity, will shape both the credibility and durability of the incoming administration.

The result also holds significant implications for the future of the Right to Information (RTI) regime in Bangladesh. The year and a half of the interim government (IG) elicited both praise and criticism for reasons widely known. For many who viewed the July 2024 uprising—driven largely by a politically awakened younger generation—as a turning point aimed at restoring popular sovereignty and revitalising democratic institutions, the IG's record on transparency and accountability proved deeply disappointing.

For the entirety of its tenure, the IG allowed the Information Commission—the statutory guardian of the RTI framework under the RTI Act, 2009—to lapse into paralysis. During the previous 15 years, however imperfectly, the commission had been among the very few institutions willing to assert a measure of democratic oversight in the face of executive overreach. That modest but important role came to a halt when the IG failed to appoint the three commissioners required by law, including the chief information commissioner, after the previous incumbents resigned. As a result, the commission was unable to perform its quasi-judicial functions: hearing appeals, enforcing compliance, and holding public authorities accountable for unlawful refusals to disclose information. For RTI activists and civil society organisations who regard the act as a central tool of democratic oversight, this institutional vacuum generated deep frustration.

The failure to reconstitute the commission cannot easily be dismissed as administrative oversight. At minimum, it reflected institutional neglect; at worst, it suggested ambivalence towards the very transparency mechanisms the uprising had sought to strengthen. At a moment when public expectations of reform were at their peak, revitalising the Information Commission would have been one of the clearest demonstrations of a commitment to open, citizen-centred governance. Unfortunately, that opportunity was not seized.

The reform of the law also did not progress. Civil society groups and RTI advocates participated in the process in good faith, submitting detailed proposals to make the act more accessible, citizen-oriented, and enforceable. However, their recommendations received little substantive engagement. When draft amendments were made public towards the end of the IG's tenure, they inspired neither confidence nor serious public debate, appearing disconnected from the reformist energy that had animated the July uprising. The transitional period thus ended without either a strengthened statute or a functioning oversight body.

Transitional authorities carry a heightened moral and political burden. Lacking an electoral mandate, they derive legitimacy from public trust and from their adherence to reformist principles. To sideline the principal legal instrument that enables citizens to scrutinise the state is therefore not a neutral act; it is a consequential choice. There are two plausible explanations for it. Either the RTI regime was treated as a secondary concern amid competing priorities, or it was viewed as inconvenient—capable of revealing truths that a transitional administration might have preferred to avoid. If the latter is true, it should prompt concern. A government confident in its integrity has little reason to fear transparency. The ultimate test of commitment to reform lies not in rhetoric but in a demonstrable willingness to submit to scrutiny. In this respect, the IG's record warrants critical reflection.

FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

The advent of a new government thus opens a renewed window of opportunity. BNP campaigned on a 31-point reform programme, which was later incorporated into its election manifesto, and had reaffirmed its commitment to the July Declaration. It will therefore fall to the citizenry—and to civil society institutions—to hold the new administration to these pledges during its formative months. The BNP must be reminded of its electoral commitments, and citizens should carefully assess the extent to which those promises are translated into concrete action.

One immediate, concrete step for the new government would be the prompt, transparent reconstitution of the Information Commission. The RTI Act itself provides guidance on the qualifications and selection of commissioners. An objective, merit-based appointment process would send a powerful signal that the government intends to restore institutional integrity rather than merely fill vacancies. Independence, competence, and credibility must be the guiding criteria.

Parallelly, the government can strengthen the law substantively. Particular attention should be paid to the provisions governing exemptions from disclosure, especially those framed broadly in terms of national security and public interest. Narrowing and clarifying these exemptions, and introducing a robust "public interest override" clause, would better align the act with international best practice. The law would mandate the release of information whenever the public's need to know is more important than the government's preference for confidentiality.

Restoring the Information Commission and refining the RTI Act would not merely rehabilitate a neglected statute but also reaffirm a constitutional principle—that sovereignty ultimately resides with the people, and that transparency is the lifeblood of democratic governance. The new administration now has both the mandate and the opportunity to demonstrate that commitment in practice.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Surrender
5 Recipe instruction
9 Flatten
10 Sharpens
12 Even a little
13 Muscat native
14 It's earlier on school nights
16 Way off
17 Magnetite, e.g.
18 Hobby
20 Salad bar item
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34 Museum focus
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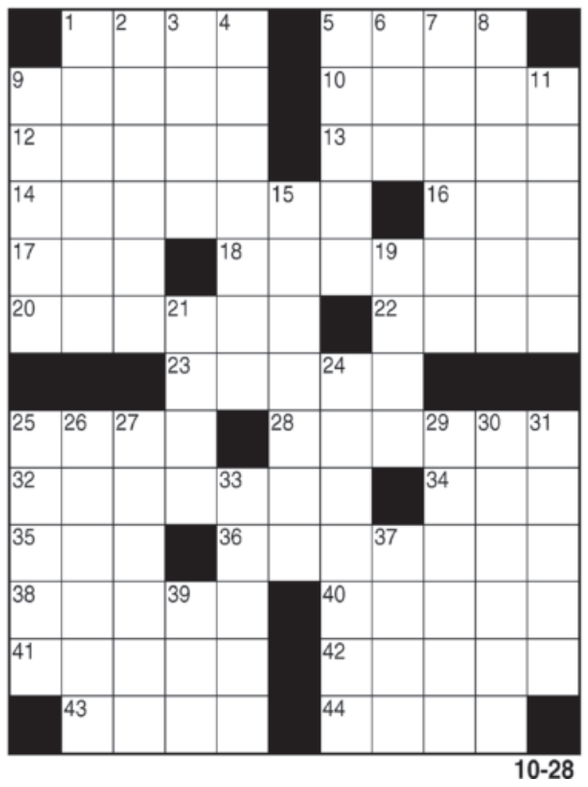
36 Joplin field
38 Baja buddy
40 Belly button type
41 Mortise's mate
42 Spot seller, for short
43 Frontiersman Crockett
44 Casual tops

DOWN
1 Et _____
2 Steered clear of
3 Shoulder muscle, for short
4 Oval's cousin
5 Loafers, e.g.
6 Male cat
7 Facing trouble
8 Update, in a way
9 Toil away
11 Ambulance sound
15 Title for Mohandas
19 Visitor to Oz
21 "Yeah, right!"
24 Nanny
25 Ready to hit
26 Smiled broadly
27 Thin layer
29 Title for un professeur
30 Warring groups
31 Exorbitant
33 Bitter humor
37 Brashness, informally
39 Web address ending



10-28

THURSDAY'S ANSWERS

S	T	E	P			S	A	V	E	
E	E	R	I	E		U	S	I	N	G
A	N	N	E	X		C	I	N	C	O
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The age-old debate over celebrities in politics

Will perception change?

DESIGN: **DOWEL BISWAS**

The long-standing debate over whether celebrities should join politics has once again become relevant — particularly in the context of the 13th parliamentary election, where, despite widespread buzz around celebrity engagement as voters and their noticeable participation in promotional campaigns, no major showbiz personality stood as a candidate this year. The absence is striking in a country where cultural figures have previously transitioned into formal political roles.

SHARMIN JOYA

Many artistes have faced backlash for switching party support or for their prior political involvement. Before the election, singer Rabi Chowdhury, for instance, had to explain his participation in Bangladesh Nationalist Party's (BNP) promotions in Dhaka-17 after previously supporting singer and former MP Momtaz for Awami League. He stressed that he is "not an agent" and acted solely at fellow artistes' requests, not for personal gain. "I sing when invited, irrespective of the party," he told Prothom Alo. Payments received were for performances, not campaigning, reflecting civic responsibility rather than political ambition.

At the same time, actors Shimla, Omar Sani, and others faced similar scrutiny, highlighting the tension between personal choice and public judgment. They were trolled for switching their support and tagged as "opportunists".

Allegations of misuse of influence persist, from lobbying for film grants and National Awards to forming industry syndicates, though these claims remain unsubstantiated and lack valid evidence.

Over the years, celebrities have undeniably been drawn into politics, sometimes for personal benefit. Actor Azmeri Haque Badhan bravely admitted to the media her association with the "power abusers". She claimed, "I personally witnessed the corruption and manipulation in the 2018 and 2024 elections. To be honest, I was also a part of it... because I was actively involved in the campaigns and very close to key figures of the previous government," referring to the Awami League. Her candid admission is commendable, a practice that reflects both political awareness and accountability– traits many of her colleagues avoid discussing.

Historically, celebrities have found both opportunities and challenges in Bangladeshi politics. After a long wait of seventeen years, veteran singers Baby Naznin, Kanak Chapa, Monir Khan, Asif Akbar, and Nazmun Munira Nancy were speculated to receive BNP nominations this election, but none were ultimately fielded. Many of these artistes opened up after the July uprising about the repression and neglect they faced for supporting particular political banners, which even hampered their careers.

In contrast, the previous Awami League–led parliament featured numerous representatives from entertainment and sports, including the late actor Farooque (Akbar Hossain Pathan, 1948–2023), actor and cultural activist Asaduzzaman Noor, who was elected as a member of parliament multiple times, and former cricketer Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, all of whom were widely loved by the public.

In the 2024 national election, actor Ferdous Ahmed and cricketer Shakib Al Hasan won their respective seats with strong public support, yet the subsequent political transition prevented them from enjoying a full parliamentary tenure.

The perceived 'opportunistic' faces of celebrities were on display during the July Uprising, when several artistes were accused of blindly supporting the ruling party instead of speaking against the killings of innocents amid unrest.

Controversial incidents in the past and the absence of celebrity participation in this election creates a linkage and brings questions– Are political parties recalibrating strategies? Has public perception of celebrity-politicians shifted? Or are artistes themselves reconsidering the risks of crossing into partisan politics?

Popularity and emotional capital often translate into political influence in Bangladesh. Parties frequently rely on well-known figures to attract youth and floating voters, boost cultural legitimacy, and gain media visibility.

Yet celebrity involvement carries reputational risks, as public assessment often judges political choices more harshly than artistic achievements.

Several Bangladeshi artistes argue that remaining beyond politics allows them to preserve neutrality and trust. Ekushey Padak-winning icon Babita has stated she is strictly against artistes joining politics, warning that it may compromise integrity and push them into corruption. "Why would artistes join politics? I don't like this at all! They must remain in art, not in politics," she said to the media.

On the other hand, veteran singer Asif Akbar is open about his motivations. "Politics runs in my family. I was the youngest member of BNP's central executive committee and one of its most loyal supporters. I have been a lifelong admirer of Shaheed Ziaur Rahman, and my support for BNP is rooted in respect for him rather than personal gain... I have never flattered or pandered to anyone, and I never will."

Globally, entertainers who enter politics often face scepticism. Ronald Reagan moved from acting to become Governor of California and later the 40th US President, proving the "just an entertainer" label wrong. Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a comedian and actor, became President of Ukraine and showed strong leadership during a crisis. In South Asia, M G Ramachandran (1917–1987), N T Rama Rao (1923–1996), and J Jayalalithaa (1948–2016) turned their film fame into political power, showing that artistes can also govern. Often, criticism reflects society's concern over celebrity influence rather than real political ability.

Restricting artistes based on profession alone risks narrowing democratic representation. Professionals from journalism, law, medicine, or religious leadership routinely transition into politics. Why should entertainers be barred? Integrity, competence, and vision matter more than celebrity status. Political misconduct is determined by character, not fame.

The stereotype of calling politics "bad" will only change once it is practiced consciously by all. As Aristotle observed, "Man is by nature a political animal." In Bangladesh, where cultural figures wield immense trust and influence, the intersection of arts and politics remains compelling. Whether through direct participation or civic engagement, artistes can contribute meaningfully to societal and political transformation — if the public and parties judge them on ability, not image.

Young leaders like Nahid Islam, Hasnat Abdullah, Tasnim Jara, and Monisha Chakraborty show that political commitment and public service can come from diverse backgrounds, encouraging fresh entrants to participate despite politics' heavy stigma of corruption, extortion, and power abuse.

At its core, politics should be about patriotism, integrity, and giving a voice to those who cannot speak for themselves. The tension between this ideal and public perception makes the debate over leadership and who belongs in politics so pressing.

The debate continues. Politics carries risks for everyone, but the focus should be on moral clarity, competence, and dedication to public service — not the glamour of past achievements. Artistes, like citizens from any profession, deserve the right to engage in politics without stigma, as long as their aim is to serve the nation.

Chanchaldebuts as playback singer for his Tollywood film

Alongside acting, Chanchal Chowdhury is also known for his singing. At almost any event, he is often requested to perform a song. He has also been seen covering popular songs by various artistes.

Now, for the first time, Chanchal Chowdhury has sung for a Kolkata film. His voice will be heard in Bratya Basu's film ***Shekor.*** This marks Chanchal's debut as a playback singer in a movie.

Chanchal has recorded two songs for the film ***Shekor***. The production house Friends Communication shared the update on social media yesterday.

Chanchal Chowdhury has re-recorded two popular Baul songs for the film ***Shekor.*** One is Bijoy Sarkar's "Ei Prithibi Jemon Ache Temni Thik Robe" and the other is Gostho Gopal Das's "O Jibon Re Chhariya Na Jao More."

ARUNDHATI ROY walks out of Berlin Film Festival over Gaza stance

Indian author Arundhati Roy has pulled out of the Berlin Film Festival after the event's organisers refused to speak about the war in Gaza.

Arundhati Roy, who won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1997, said she was "shocked and disgusted" by comments made at a press conference on Thursday.

During the press conference, jury president Wim Wenders was asked about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. He responded by saying cinema should "stay out of politics." Another jury member called it "unfair" to expect them to take a position on the issue.

She was to present a restored version of her 1989 film ***In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones*** in the festival, which marked Shah Rukh Khan's debut.

The Berlin Film Festival is known for addressing political and social issues, making the jury's refusal to comment on Gaza particularly controversial.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'Rashomon'

Open Space Theatre brings a powerful stage adaptation of ***Rashomon***, inspired by the stories of Ryunosuke Akutagawa and the iconic cinematic vision of Akira Kurosawa. Directed by M Arifur Rahman, the production explores truth, memory, and the shifting nature of human perspective through layered storytelling and intense dramatic performance. Audiences can expect a thought-provoking theatrical experience that questions reality and moral judgment.

Date: Friday | Feb 20

Time: 4 pm & 7 pm

Venue: Experimental Theatre Hall, BSA

'In Search of Heritage': Artists revisit Varendra at Gallery Chitrak

AISHWARYA RAIHAN

Gallery Chitrak is currently hosting ***In Search of Heritage: A Travel to Varendra***, a group exhibition by some of the country's most celebrated artists, led by Professor Emeritus Rafiqun Nabi. The exhibition draws from their recent journey to the Varendra region of Chapainawabganj and surrounding areas.

Artist Prof Syed Abul Barq Alvi, Chairperson of Durjoy Bangladesh Foundation Durjoy Rahman, Vice Chairperson of DBL Group M A Rahim Feroz, and Chairperson of Pashmi Sweaters Limited Md Mashiul Azam attended the inauguration as special guests. Rafiqun Nabi and his wife, Nazma Begum, jointly inaugurated the exhibition on January 30, 2026.

Born in Chapainawabganj, Rafiqun Nabi spent his childhood between his maternal and paternal grandparents' homes, absorbing the rural beauty of the region; an experience that shaped his artistic sensibility. Seeking to reconnect with those roots, he led a group of fellow artists, whom he fondly described as "always easily convinced", on a creative expedition across Varendra.

The participating artists include Prof Syed Abul Barq Alvi, Mahfuzur Rahman, Rezaun Nabi, Ahmed Shamsuddoha, Sheikh Afzal, Nisar Hossain, Shishir Bhattacharjee, Muniruzzaman, and Shamsul Alam Innan.

The exhibition unfolds like a visual travel diary. The iron-rich reddish-brown soil, rural landscapes, animals, architecture, and the indigenous communities of Varendra feature prominently. Prof Nabi, known for his figure drawings, portrayed local inhabitants and families engaged in everyday life. A child eating watermelon evokes the familiar warmth of his illustrations once seen in Bangla textbooks.

PHOTOS: **AISHWARYA RAIHAN**

Ahmed Shamsuddoha's portrait of a Santal man and his home, along with pastoral scenes of cattle in open fields, are rendered with striking realism. Mahfuzur Rahman's top views and façade studies reflect architectural precision.

Prof Alvi presented abstract compositions in soothing palettes, while Rezaun Nabi employed translucent strokes to capture rural simplicity. His understated portraits, including that of a Santal woman and a family on a bicycle; bring warmth to the gallery space. Sheikh Afzal painted a Santal woman alongside a scene of the artists walking along the banks of the Mahananda River.

Shishir Bhattacharjee depicted Santal homes and cultural elements, while Nisar Hossain highlighted the abundance of mangoes in Chapainawabganj through bold forms. Shamsul Alam Innan illustrated mango-picking traditions, and Muniruzzaman used muted grey tones to portray Varendra's landscape and people.

Overall, the exhibition not only reflects the topography and cultural richness of Varendra but also showcases the distinct artistic expressions of some of Bangladesh's most established artists.

The exhibition will run until February 20, 2026, at Gallery Chitrak.

People issued

FROM PAGE 12

between these. That responsibility lies with politicians." When asked whether the party preparing to form the government -- the BNP -- has any legal obligation to carry out the reforms, he said that the referendum represents the will of the sovereign people.

"Therefore, all political parties, including BNP, have a moral and political responsibility," said Riaz, also the former vice president of the National Consensus Commission.

The parties should not focus only on written laws, but must seriously consider political realities.

The proposals presented in the referendum are what the people directly approved.

The BNP has always claimed to represent public wishes, so Riaz hopes the party would respect these expectations when running the country and reforming the constitution.

The political parties had already included the issues in their election manifestos, and senior leaders openly asked people to vote 'Yes'.

So, the referendum result is not just the government's agenda -- it is now the agenda of the state and all political parties.

While the manifestos gave indirect approval from voters, this referendum gave direct public approval for major constitutional reforms.

"This should clearly be seen as a people's mandate."

About priorities in implementing reforms, Riaz said it depends on how the process moves forward.

However, since there is a specific order to form an upper house of parliament, that must be completed within six months.

The ruling party and other political parties will decide the detailed priorities, he said.

"Through the referendum, a clear public mandate for reform has been expressed. Political parties are responsible for implementing it. All parties are committed to state reform. We call on the ruling party, parties represented in parliament and the constitutional reform council, and even parties outside parliament to come together through dialogue and ensure this mandate is carried out."

When asked if he would take on any new role, Riaz said he wants to return to his profession as soon as possible.

1 killed, 5 hurt in 5

FROM PAGE 12

Zakir Hossain and rebel candidate MAH Selim at Chitabari village, a border area between Kachua and Sadar upazilas, on Friday evening.

"At one point, they [Zakir's supporters] hit my brother's head with sharp weapons. He was taken to Bagerhat Sadar Hospital and later shifted to Khulna Medical College Hospital, where he died around 11:30am today [yesterday]."

Contacted, the Bagerhat BNP Convener ATM Akram Hossain Talim, also a supporter of the party-nominated candidate, said none of their activists was involved in any such incident. "It might be a result of an internal feud between supporters of the independent candidate."

Contacted, Bagerhat Additional Superintendent of Police Md Shameem Hossain confirmed the death and said one person was detained in this connection. "A case will be filed today [Sunday] in this connection," he told The Daily Star last night.

In Feni's Daganbhuiyan upazila, Jamaat-e-Islami activist Jaynal Abedin Dulal was injured in an attack by BNP activists on Friday, after which his mother Rowshan Ara, 65, died yesterday.

Their family members said Jaynal used to live in the UAE. He came to Bangladesh recently and campaigned for the Jamaat-nominated candidate. He was attacked by BNP members in the Selonia Bazaar area and was taken to Feni General Hospital.

Speaking to journalists, Jaynal said, "My mother collapsed at the news of me being attacked. She then passed away."

The BNP's newly elected lawmaker from Feni-3 Abdul Awal Mintoo expressed shock at the death in a statement and pledged to bring the attackers to book.

Contacted, Feni Superintendent of Police Md Shafiqul Islam confirmed the death and said a case was filed in this connection.

In Pabna's Boraigram upazila, at least two people were injured and several houses were vandalised during a clash between BNP and Jamaat activists in Dhanaidah village yesterday.

Police and locals said tension prevailed between the two groups over the past few days since the conclusion of the election.

Md Abdus Salam, OC of Boraigram Police Station, confirmed the incident.

In Sunamganj, Emonudduza Ahmed, a leader of Jatiya Jubo Shakti, the youth wing of the National Citizen Party, was injured in an attack by unidentified miscreants on Friday night. He is currently undergoing treatment at the Sunamganj 250-bed District Sadar Hospital.

The incident occurred at the city's Kazir Point area at around 10:30pm, said police. "The victim filed a written complaint and police are investigating," said Ratan Sheikh, OC of Sunamganj Sadar Police Station.

In Netrokona's Purbadhala upazila, Jubo Dal leader Kamal Hossain, 45, was injured in a clash between BNP and Jamaat supporters on Friday evening.

Police and locals said Jamaat men brought out a victory procession as their party's candidate won the election in Netrokona-5. When they were near Narayandahar Bazar area, they came face to face with BNP activists and locked in a clash, leaving a Jubo Dal leader injured.

"The victim filed a police complaint in this regard," said Purbadhala Police Station's OC Md Didarul Islam.

In Jashore Sadar, miscreants set fire to a bus belonging to the election coordinator of a BNP candidate in Bahadurpur (Mehogoni Tola) area early Saturday.

The bus owner, Abu Bakkar Siddiqui, was the coordinator of the BNP's newly elected Jashore-3 lawmaker Anindya Islam Amit.

Jashore Kotwali Police Station's Inspector (Investigation) Kazi Babul confirmed the incident and said an investigation is underway.

(Our Correspondents from Bagerhat, Feni, Sylhet, Netrokona and Benapole contributed to the report.)

Tarique to call

FROM PAGE 12

reiterated his call for national unity, peaceful conduct, and the rule of law, outlining priorities for rebuilding the country following his party's electoral victory.

Delivering a post-election speech before journalists at a Dhaka hotel, he also said the victory belongs to the people and pledged to work towards restoring institutions and improving citizens' lives.

Tarique also urged all political parties to remain united in the national interest, warning against divisions that could undermine democracy.

US trade deal

FROM PAGE 1

"The US will not waive the previous duty that was in place before signing the deal," said Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

He explained with a simple example: if a US retailer buys a T-shirt from Bangladesh for $2, the 19 percent reciprocal tariff may be removed if US cotton or man-made fibre is used. But the export will still face the basic 16.50 percent duty. So, even with the concession, the cost of entering the US market remains high.

Another issue, according to trade analysts, is the unclear wording of the concession. Article 5.3 of the agreement says the US will create a system for "zero reciprocal tariffs", but only for a "to-be-specified volume" of imports. This limit will depend directly on how much US cotton and man-made fibre Bangladesh imports. In simple terms, the duty benefit is not unlimited -- it is tied to the amount of raw materials Bangladesh buys from the US.

This effectively means that for every dollar of tariff the US removes, the benefit goes back to its own cotton producers.

"We are waiting for clarification as we need further interpretation of how this method will work," Khan told The Daily Star, noting that many details remain unclear.

Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of the think-tank RAPID, said the agreement text is "full of ambiguity" and "not well negotiated". He warned that the deal appears to be a strict trade-off: Bangladesh gets tariff relief only if it uses American raw materials. He also pointed out that it is still unclear whether the full waiver applies to garment accessories, or whether those items will face separate tariffs.

The geopolitical risks are also significant. Analysts warn that if India receives the same "cotton clause" benefits, Bangladesh could lose its competitive advantage in the US market. "If India gets the same benefit, Bangladesh may not remain in a strong position in the US market," said Razzaque.

For Bangladesh, the path remains perilous. If the government can clarify the textile clause, the country may still benefit. But if the system proves too complicated, or if competing countries receive similar terms, the much-celebrated deal may offer little real protection for Bangladesh's garment industry, according to analysts.

Cabinet secy

FROM PAGE 12

Administration issued a notification yesterday appointing M Siraz Uddin Miah, principal secretary to the chief adviser, to the additional charge of cabinet secretary. Earlier, the ministry had cancelled Rashid's contract.

The cabinet secretary, the highest-ranking official in the republic, oversees the entire process of a new government's swearing-in and is also responsible for conducting the oath-taking ceremony.

Many in the administration have expressed surprise at his resignation just two days before the next government takes office.

After Muhammad Yunus's interim government took charge, Rashid was appointed secretary of the Secondary and Higher Education Division on a contractual basis.

On October 14, 2024, he was appointed cabinet secretary on a two-year contract.

Yunus thanks

FROM PAGE 12

calm environment across the country during the polls.

He first spoke with Tarique and congratulated him on his party's victory with an overwhelming majority.

The CA then congratulated Shafiqur and Nahid for their success and thanked them for their responsible roles in the post-election period.

He expressed hope that the political parties would continue to play a cooperative and positive role in the future to uphold the democratic process.

He also called on them to work together in unity to meet the expectations of the people.

US readies

FROM PAGE 12

nuclear program, after Trump amassed military forces in the region, raising fears of new military action.

US officials said on Friday the Pentagon was sending an additional aircraft carrier to the Middle East, adding thousands more troops along with fighter aircraft, guided-missile destroyers and other firepower capable of waging attacks and defending against them.

Trump, speaking to US troops on Friday at a base in North Carolina, said it had "been difficult to make a deal" with Iran.

"Sometimes you have to have fear. That's the only thing that really will get the situation taken care of," Trump said.

Asked if he wanted regime change in Iran, Trump responded that it "seems like that would be the best thing that could happen." He declined to share who he wanted to take over Iran, but said "there are people."

"For 47 years, they've been talking and talking and talking," Trump said after a military event at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. "In the meantime, we've lost a lot of lives while they talk. Legs blown off, arms blown off, faces blown off. We've been going on for a long time."

Asked for comment on the preparations for a potentially sustained US military operation, White House spokesperson Anna Kelly said: "President Trump has all options on the table with regard to Iran."

"He listens to a variety of perspectives on any given issue, but makes the final decision based on what is best for our country and national security," Kelly said.

The Pentagon declined to comment.

The United States sent two aircraft carriers to the region last year, when it carried out strikes against Iranian nuclear sites.

PRAYER TIMING
FEBRUARY 15

	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

Major publishers warn

FROM PAGE 3

Monirul Hoque of Ananya Prokashoni said there was uncertainty about the situation following the parliamentary polls.

Ramadan is expected to begin on February 17, subjects to sighting of the moon. Publishers fear turnout will be low as people will spend time on iftar, Taraweeh prayers and other religious observances.

Mazharul Islam of Onno Prokash said it can be easily anticipated that the turnout will be low during Ramadan.

The number of students, who are a major part of the fair's audience and also work part-time at many stalls, may also decline, as educational institutions usually close weeks before Eid, he added.

He questioned, "How will the staffers at the stall manage to work while fasting?"

However, if the Ekushey Book Fair continues to take place in February as per tradition, the next three editions of the fair will also be held during Ramadan.

Adarsha Prakashani Publisher Md Mahabubur Rahman said around 280 stall-holding publishers have announced they will abstain, fearing financial losses.

"Every publisher is suffering economically, more or less. If the book fair is held from February 20, over three hundred publishers will not take part in it," he added.

He also alleged that pavilion allocations were being given beyond regulations to continue the fair without mainstream publishers.

Mahabubur said publishers submitted memorandums and letters to relevant authorities, including Bangla Academy, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the chief adviser's office, requesting rescheduling.

Several publishers, requesting anonymity, alleged that new publishers were being allocated pavilions and stalls without approval from the book fair committee and in violation of seniority rules.

"A dangerous precedent is being set. Later, they will claim these allotments as a 'legal right', paving the way for chaos and litigation," said a publisher.

This "frantic rush" to fill empty slots will jeopardise the fair's business environment and the entire publishing ecosystem, said another publisher.

Responding to the allegations, Bangla Academy Director General Mohammad Azom said stall and pavilion allocations are reviewed annually based on standards among applicants.

Also, there is no scope to change the scheduled date, as the proposal came after preparations were well underway, he told The Daily Star.

Azom said numerous government approvals had already been obtained, and significant expenditure had been made.

He also denied that the date was chosen arbitrarily, saying it was decided in the presence of publishers and approved unanimously by the book fair committee.

"Every decision has been made in the presence of a large number of publishers of the book fair committee, and this time, even more publishers were included in the committee than in previous years," he said.

Earlier, Bangla Academy had announced that the 2026 Ekushey Book Fair would begin in December last year, considering the election and Ramadan, but later reversed that decision.

Mujibur leads

FROM PAGE 4

Victoria High School, said, "Removing his posters immediately after the election is a commendable step."

According to the district election office, Mujibur secured 1,70,877 votes. His nearest rival, Sheikh Noor-e-Alam Hamidi of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis (rickshaw symbol), got 50,204 votes.

Among other candidates, BNP rebel Mohsin Mia (Football) got 33,911 votes; Pritam Das of Jatiya Nagorik Party (Shapla Koli) received 4,875; Md Abul Hasan of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (Moi) secured 969; and Mohammad Zarif Hossain of Jatiya Party (Plough) got 910 votes.

BNP sweeps Ctg, wins 12 of 16 seats

FROM PAGE 3

Hummam and Noman, this marks a successful debut in parliamentary politics.

"It is a rare honour for our village," said Shahadat Hossain, a local resident, noting that Gohira's legacy now spans generations of the Chowdhury and Noman families.

Contacted, Gias Uddin Quader Chowdhury said Gohira has long been a fertile ground for the country's political history.

"This is not the first time several candidates from our village have won at once," he said. "In a previous election, a total of six lawmakers from this village represented the same parliament."

"It's a matter of pride for us," he added.

Meanwhile, the victory of Nurul Amin in Chattogram-1 (Mirsarai) has become a local legend of perseverance. Amin, who started his political career as a ward member of Osmanpur union in 1998, defeated Jamaat's Mohammad Saifur Rahman by a margin of 44,261 votes.

Amin, a former upazila chairman who was removed by the previous regime in 2014, received 1,28,799 votes.

"The people of Mirsarai have seen my work from the union level to the upazila. Their trust is my only strength," Amin said after being declared the winner.

MAIDEN WINS, URBAN MANDATES

This election saw the rise of several new faces who converted their first-time candidacies into parliamentary seats.

In Chattogram-5 (Hathazari), Mir Mohammad Helal Uddin, son of BNP Vice Chairman Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin, won decisively with 1,47,054 votes.

In the city's Chattogram-10 constituency, Sayeed Al Noman secured 1,22,978 votes, riding on a campaign that focused on environmental protection and culture, which resonated strongly with the urban middle class. He is the son of late BNP leader Abdullah Al Noman.

For Hummam Quader Chowdhury, the win in Chattogram-7 (Rangunia) was a convincing entry into the Jatiya Sangsad. He bagged 1,01,445 votes, defeating his nearest rival, Jamaat-e-Islami's ATM Rezaul Karim, who received 41,719 votes.

In contrast, the most nail-biting finish was witnessed in Chattogram-14 (Chandanaish). BNP candidate Jasim Uddin Ahmed, a former upazila chairman making his first run for parliament, faced significant internal friction and a strong challenge from the 11-party alliance.

Despite the controversy surrounding his nomination, Jasim emerged victorious with 76,493 votes, edging out LDP's Professor Omar Faruque (75,467 votes) by a razor-thin margin of just 1,026 votes.

BNP'S BANSHKHALI BLUNDER

The biggest upset for the BNP occurred in Chattogram-16 (Banshkhali), a constituency the party historically won in 1996, 2001, and 2008.

Jamaat's Zahirul Islam (93,167 votes) capitalised on a fractured BNP base to defeat official candidate Mishkatul Islam Chowdhury (83,105 votes), where Mishkatul faced a strong challenge from rebel candidate and former union chairman Leyakat Ali.

Leyakat's 55,071 votes effectively split the BNP base, allowing Jamaat to claim the seat for the first time. Analysts also pointed toward Jamaat's disciplined door-to-door campaigning since August 2024 as a deciding factor.

Idris Miah, convener of Chattogram South District BNP, admitted that the presence of rebel independent candidate Leiyakat Ali, who drew over 55,000 votes, was the deciding factor.

"Although the party high command expelled Leyakat, expulsion does not always bring the solution," Idris told The Daily Star. "If the party could have made him withdraw his candidacy, our candidate would have surely won."

In Chattogram-15 (Satkania-Lohagara), as expected, Shahjahan Chowdhury of Jamaat-e-Islami maintained his dominance.

A former ameer of the party's city unit and a tested veteran, Chowdhury secured 1,72,061 votes, defeating BNP's Nazmul Mustafa Amin by over 45,000 votes.

Internal rifts cost BNP

FROM PAGE 3

conflict within the party. Besides, they were also misled after expecting votes from Awami League supporters."

A similar view was expressed by Zakir Hossain Sarkar, the defeated candidate from the Kushtia-3 (Sadar) seat and member secretary of Kushtia district BNP.

"There were problems within our party. At the beginning, many did not join the campaign. Some even opposed the candidates as their preferred leaders were not nominated," he said.

Talking to at least 50 general voters across the Kushtia region, it was found that leaders and activists of the winning party, Jamaat-e-Islami, visited them five to six times. In contrast, many voters said BNP leaders did not reach out to them even once. They appeared indifferent to both victory and defeat.

Bottail, a suburban village under Kushtia Sadar upazila, lies just six kilometres from the town. In an area called Shishir Math in that village, several residents, including Sharif, Zahir and Salma, claimed no one came to seek their votes.

Abu Bakar Siddique, head of the BNP media cell formed during the election campaign, said there was resentment among party leaders and activists over the district, upazila and union committees formed after August 5. That frustration was reflected in the election results.

Since independence, Jamaat had won only once in the Kushtia-2 (Mirpur, Bheramara) constituency in the 1986 election. This time, the party secured three seats in the region.

Asked about the reasons behind the success, Suja Uddin Joardar, secretary of Kushtia district Jamaat-e-Islami, said, "In recent times, the negative activities of BNP leaders and activists and the party's internal conflicts worked to our advantage. At the same time, our leaders' engagement with the public helped us reach the shore of victory. Broadly speaking, these three factors played a major role in our win."

Obaidul Haque, a teacher at Islamic University, said campaigning often plays a crucial role in elections.

"Perhaps this time Jamaat leaders and activists were able to reach more voters and communicate their goals effectively. Ultimately, voters made their choice. Beyond that, I do not see any sweeping reason," he said.

Political

FROM PAGE 4

aside divisions and the outcome of the election, carried a positive political message.

"We are all from the same area. In the interest of development, we will work together for peace and order in the area, regardless of party or opinion, and will provide all-out support to the newly elected candidate," he said.

In Kishoreganj-3 constituency, Farruk received 1,12,466 votes while Jehad got 1,02,476.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Bangladesh Police
Rapid Action Battalion-7
Patenga, Chattogram
www.rab.gov.bd

Invitation for e-Tender (Re-Tender)

For financial year 2025-2026, e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of:

Sl	Tender ID No. & Reference No.	Description of goods	Last selling date & time	Closing/ opening date & time
1.	1226521, RAB-7/7453/Q/RAB/Part-1/565 Date: 05 Feb 2026	High Quality Local Mashur Dal	22 Feb 2026 09:00	22 Feb 2026 12:00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branches.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Tenderer having clarity requirements are requested to contact at 01777-710705 (Assistant Director, Quartermaster).

Md. Hafizur Rahman, PSC
Lt Col
Commanding Officer
Rapid Action Battalion-7
Tel: 023-33300400

GD-300

DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly four in ten cancers could have been prevented globally!

Almost four in ten cancer cases worldwide could have been prevented, according to a major new analysis by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and its cancer research arm, the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

Released ahead of World Cancer Day on 4 February, the report estimated that 37% of all new cancer cases in 2022 – around 7.1 million people – were linked to causes that could have been avoided. That meant millions of families might never have faced a diagnosis if stronger prevention measures had been in place.

The study examined 30 risk factors across 185 countries. Smoking remained the single biggest preventable cause, responsible for 15% of new cancer cases globally. Infections came next at 10%, followed by alcohol at 3%.

Lung, stomach and cervical cancers made up nearly half of all preventable cases. Lung cancer was largely tied to smoking and air pollution. Stomach cancer was mainly linked to Helicobacter pylori infection, while cervical cancer was overwhelmingly caused by human papillomavirus (HPV).

Men were more affected by preventable cancers than women, with 45% of male cases linked to avoidable risks, compared with 30% in women.

Health experts said the findings showed that practical steps – cutting tobacco and alcohol use, improving air quality, promoting vaccination and encouraging healthier lifestyles – could dramatically reduce the global cancer burden and save millions of lives.

Source: *World Health Organisation*

INTERNATIONAL CHILDHOOD CANCER DAY 2026

TURNING AWARENESS INTO LIFESAVING ACTION

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Every year on 15 February, countries around the world mark International Childhood Cancer Day (ICCD) — a global campaign dedicated to raising awareness about cancers affecting children and adolescents. In 2026, the theme *"Demonstrating impact: From challenge to change"* places the spotlight firmly on moving beyond words and turning commitments into concrete improvements in care.

Childhood cancer is rare compared with adult cancers, yet its impact is devastating. An estimated 400,000 children and teenagers worldwide are diagnosed with cancer each year. The most common types include leukaemia, lymphoma and brain tumours. While medical advances have transformed survival in many high-income countries—where more than 80% of children now survive—outcomes remain far poorer in lower-income regions. In some places, survival drops below 30% due to late diagnosis, shortages of medicines and limited specialist services.

Unlike many adult cancers, most childhood cancers cannot be prevented through lifestyle changes alone. However, experts emphasise that early detection can dramatically improve outcomes. Parents and carers are encouraged to pay attention to warning signs such as persistent fever, unexplained weight loss, unusual swelling, constant fatigue, prolonged bone pain, frequent bruising or a white reflection in a child's eye in photographs. Seeking medical advice early can make a critical difference.

Prevention also involves reducing known risk factors. Routine hepatitis B vaccination helps prevent liver cancer later in life, while human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination protects against cervical and other HPV-related cancers. Improving air quality, limiting children's exposure to harmful chemicals and ensuring safer environments are additional protective measures that benefit overall health.

Health systems themselves play a decisive role. Training frontline health workers to recognise symptoms quickly, establishing efficient referral pathways and ensuring consistent access to affordable cancer medicines are essential steps. Expanding specialised paediatric oncology units and providing psychosocial support for families are equally important, as treatment can be long, emotionally exhausting and financially overwhelming.

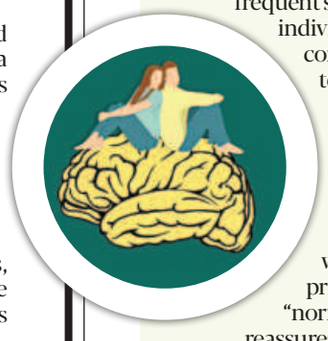
International cooperation has also become a key driver of progress. Global partnerships work to strengthen supply chains for essential medicines, improve cancer registries and share expertise across borders. Such efforts aim to ensure that children in lower-resource settings receive care that meets international standards.

Beyond hospitals and policymakers, communities have a part to play. Schools, local leaders and media outlets can help spread accurate information about childhood cancer, reduce stigma and encourage families to seek care promptly. Public awareness campaigns during ICCD often highlight stories of young survivors, offering hope while reinforcing the message that early treatment saves lives.

International Childhood Cancer Day 2026 is not simply about marking a date. It is about recognising that childhood cancer is a global health challenge — and that solutions already exist. With stronger health systems, better awareness and sustained political will, survival rates can continue to rise.

For families everywhere, the message is clear: action — from vaccination and early diagnosis to fair access to treatment — can change the course of a child's life. And when action is inspired, hope becomes possible.

What your personality says about your sexual fantasies — and why it matters



Sexual fantasies are something many people experience but rarely talk about openly. That is precisely why new research exploring the link between personality and fantasising is likely to catch attention — it speaks to quiet, personal questions people often keep to themselves.

A study published in *PLOS One* analysed responses from 5,225 adults in the United States and examined how personality traits relate to how often people experience sexual fantasies. The researchers focused on the widely recognised "Big Five" traits: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and open-mindedness.

One key finding stood out. People who scored higher in neuroticism — a trait linked to emotional sensitivity, anxiety and mood fluctuations — reported more frequent sexual fantasies. In contrast, individuals who were more conscientious and agreeable tended to report fantasising less often. Traits such as responsibility and respectfulness appeared to be associated with lower fantasy frequency.

Many people quietly wonder whether their private thoughts are "normal". Research like this reassures readers that variation is common and often connected to broader personality patterns rather than anything unusual or unhealthy. It also challenges stereotypes. Being outgoing or adventurous did not necessarily mean someone fantasised more frequently.

Beyond curiosity, the findings have practical value. For clinicians and therapists, understanding how personality traits relate to sexual imagination can improve conversations about intimacy and wellbeing. For individuals, it offers insight rather than judgement.

POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

The silent struggle many new mothers face

DR TAREQ SALAHUDDIN

Childbirth is often portrayed as a time of immense joy, celebration, and fulfilment. Yet for many women, the period following delivery can be emotionally overwhelming, confusing, and deeply distressing. Postpartum depression (PPD) is a common but frequently misunderstood mental health condition that affects women after childbirth—and its consequences can be serious if left unrecognised and untreated.

Postpartum depression is not the same as the "baby blues," which many new mothers experience in the first few days after delivery. While baby blues usually resolve within two weeks, postpartum depression persists longer and is more intense. Women with PPD may experience persistent sadness, anxiety, irritability, excessive crying, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, or difficulty bonding with their baby. In severe cases, thoughts of self-harm or harming the baby may occur.

Globally, it is estimated that one in seven women experiences postpartum depression. Cultural stigma, lack of awareness, and the expectation that motherhood should be purely joyful often prevent women from seeking help. In many societies, including ours, mental health struggles are still seen as a personal weakness rather than a medical condition—further silencing affected mothers.

The consequences of untreated postpartum depression extend beyond the mother. It can interfere with mother–infant bonding, disrupt breastfeeding, and affect the child's emotional, behavioural, and

cognitive development. Partners and families may also suffer, as relationships become strained under the weight of unaddressed emotional distress. In extreme cases, untreated PPD can lead to chronic depression, substance misuse, or suicide.

Several factors increase the risk of postpartum depression, including a history of depression or anxiety, lack of social support, marital or financial stress, complications during pregnancy or childbirth, hormonal changes, and sleep deprivation. Importantly, postpartum depression can affect any woman—regardless of age, education, or socioeconomic status.

The good news is that postpartum depression is treatable. Early recognition is crucial. Treatment options may include counselling or psychotherapy, social support, lifestyle adjustments, and, when necessary, medication prescribed by a qualified physician. Support from family members—especially partners—plays a vital role in recovery.

Recognising postpartum depression is the first step towards protecting mothers and their children. By encouraging open conversations, reducing stigma, and ensuring access to mental health care, we can help new mothers navigate this vulnerable phase with dignity, support, and hope.

In a small number of cases, untreated or severe postpartum depression may progress to postpartum psychosis, a rare but extremely dangerous psychiatric condition. This can develop rapidly, often within the first few weeks after childbirth, and may involve hallucinations, delusional thoughts, severe confusion, extreme mood changes, or a loss of contact with reality. When this happens, the consequences can be devastating, placing both the mother and the baby at serious risk.

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Food insecurity linked to rising anxiety and depression

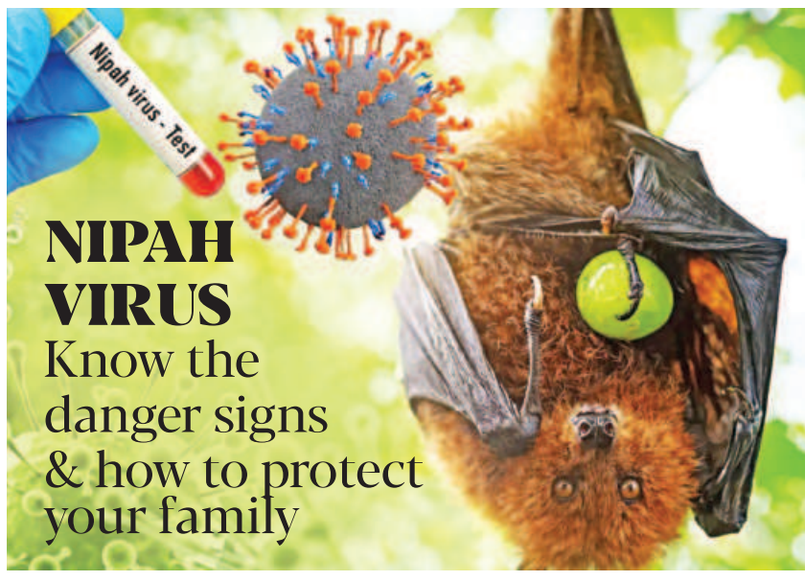
Changes in food insecurity may quickly affect mental health, according to new research published in PLOS Mental Health. The study found that when people struggled to access enough food, symptoms of anxiety and depression tended to increase — often within a month.

Researchers led by Melissa Bateson of Newcastle University, alongside colleagues in France and the UK, collected monthly data from nearly 500 adults between September 2022 and August 2023. Participants reported whether they had experienced food insecurity in the previous week and completed two widely used mental health

assessments.

The findings revealed that 39.5% of participants experienced food insecurity at least once during the study period. Among those individuals, shifts in food security were closely followed by changes in mental health. When food insecurity worsened, symptoms of anxiety and depression increased the following month. When food security improved, mental health symptoms also eased.

Governments should treat food security as a core part of mental health strategy. Strengthening social safety nets, expanding access to affordable food programmes, and ensuring stable, predictable support for low-income households could reduce not only hunger but also anxiety and depression. Screening for food insecurity in healthcare settings and responding quickly during economic shocks may help prevent rapid declines in mental wellbeing. In short, stabilising access to food is not just social policy — it is preventive mental health policy.



NIPAH VIRUS
Know the danger signs & how to protect your family

DR NUR-A-SAFRINA RAHMAN

Nipah virus is a rare but potentially deadly disease that has caused repeated outbreaks in parts of South and Southeast Asia, including Bangladesh. While cases are not common, the virus has a high fatality rate, which makes awareness and prevention extremely important.

Nipah virus is a zoonotic virus, meaning it spreads from animals to humans. Fruit bats, often called flying foxes, are the natural carriers. People can become infected through direct contact with infected bats or animals such as pigs.

The virus can also spread through contaminated food — especially raw date palm sap or fruits that have been partially eaten or contaminated by bats. In some outbreaks, the virus has spread from person to person, particularly among family members and healthcare workers who were in close contact with infected patients.

Recognising the danger signs: Symptoms usually appear between 4 and 14 days after exposure, though in some cases they may develop later. The illness often begins with general, flu-like symptoms, which can make early recognition difficult.

Early signs may include fever, headache, muscle pain, sore throat, cough, vomiting, difficulty breathing, etc. As the infection progresses, it can affect the brain and nervous system.

More serious symptoms include drowsiness or dizziness, confusion or altered consciousness, seizures, signs of brain inflammation (encephalitis).

In severe cases, patients can rapidly fall into a coma within 24 to 48 hours. The fatality rate during past outbreaks has ranged from 40% to 75%, depending on how quickly patients received supportive care and how effectively outbreaks were controlled.

Anyone who develops a fever along with breathing difficulties or neurological symptoms — especially after exposure to bats, sick animals, raw date palm sap, or an infected person — should seek medical attention immediately. Early supportive treatment, including hydration and respiratory care, can improve survival chances.

How to prevent nipah virus infection: There is currently no specific antiviral treatment or licensed vaccine for Nipah virus. Prevention is therefore the most effective defence.

- Avoid consuming raw date palm sap. In areas where outbreaks have occurred, raw sap has been a major source of infection. Boiling sap before drinking reduces risk.
- Wash and peel fruits thoroughly. Avoid fruits that show signs of bat bites or contamination.
- Limit contact with bats and sick animals. Do not handle animals that appear ill, and avoid areas where bats are known to roost.
- Practise regular hand hygiene. Wash hands with soap and water, particularly after caring for sick individuals or handling animals.
- Take precautions during outbreaks. Avoid close, unprotected contact with anyone showing symptoms. Carers and healthcare workers should use masks, gloves and protective equipment when dealing with suspected cases.

Why vigilance matters: Nipah virus outbreaks tend to be localised, but their severity demands attention. Quick identification of symptoms, early medical care and community awareness can significantly reduce transmission.

Simple preventive steps — such as avoiding contaminated food, maintaining hygiene and reporting suspected cases promptly — can protect families and communities. Although rare, Nipah virus remains a serious public health concern, and staying informed is one of the strongest tools in preventing its spread.

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Reproductive rights under siege as organised political backlash spreads worldwide

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Hard-won sexual and reproductive rights are facing fresh political threats, according to global advocacy group Women Deliver.

In a media release issued on 2 February 2025, the organisation warned that progress achieved over the past three decades through sustained feminist mobilisation is increasingly being challenged. Access to abortion and emergency contraception is coming under renewed pressure in several countries.

Paola Salwan Daher, Women Deliver's Senior Director of Collective Action, said some nations are experiencing "significant retrogression under religious influence", including the United States, with the impact extending beyond national borders.

Women Deliver pointed to developments in parts of Europe as well. In Slovakia, repeated parliamentary attempts to restrict or ban abortion have intensified, alongside constitutional amendments weakening reproductive rights protections. In Hungary, additional barriers to abortion, contraception and family-planning services have been introduced. The organisation also highlighted the growing coordination of anti-rights movements across borders, supported by well-resourced international networks.

Advocates argue that attacks on reproductive rights often signal broader challenges to democratic principles, including the rights to health, privacy, equality and freedom from discrimination.

These concerns are shaping consultations ahead of the Women Deliver 2026 Conference (WD2026), scheduled to take place in Narrm (Melbourne) in April 2026. The event will launch the Feminist Playbook — described as a practical roadmap aimed at strengthening accountability, solidarity and collective action across regions.

Women Deliver says renewed collaboration is essential to safeguard reproductive freedom and reinforce commitments to gender equality worldwide.

City Edition

Star SPORT

DHAKA SUNDAY FEBRUARY 15, 2026, FALGUN 2, 1432 BS

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
Men's T20 World Cup
Nepal vs West Indies
Live from 11:30 am

Namibia vs USA
Live from 3:30 pm
India vs Pakistan
Live from 7:30 pm
Women's Asia Cup Rising Stars

Nepal vs UAE
Live from 8:30 am
SONY SPORTS 2
FA Cup
Arsenal vs Wigan
Live from 10:30 pm

Rain looms over BLOCKBUSTER CLASH

After a turbulent build-up marked by geopolitical tensions and concerns within the International Cricket Council over potential revenue losses -- following Pakistan's initial threat to boycott their Group A match in solidarity with Bangladesh, who were excluded after refusing to play in India over security concerns -- the much-anticipated India-Pakistan clash is finally set to go ahead. However, the blockbuster encounter in Colombo may face an uncontrollable opponent: the weather. Unlike off-field disputes, this is beyond cricketing diplomacy and the control of all stakeholders.

PHOTO: AFP/BCCI

- The Sri Lanka Department of Meteorology has warned of a low-pressure system forming over the Bay of Bengal, raising a high risk of rain that could disrupt Sunday evening's marquee T20 World Cup match.
- Forecast models predict scattered heavy showers in the afternoon and early evening, potentially delaying the toss or forcing a shortened game under the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method. Even if rain eases before play, lingering dampness could still affect tactics and pitch behaviour.
- With no reserve day for this group match, a washout that prevents a minimum five-over contest would see both teams share a point. That scenario could still send both India and Pakistan -- each on four points from two wins, with Pakistan trailing on net run rate -- through to the Super Eight.
- The flock of fans already in Colombo for the game may take comfort from the facilities at R Premadasa Stadium, whose drainage system and full ground covers are among the region's best, typically making the field playable within about an hour after heavy rain stops.
- On paper, India remain overwhelming favourites, having won seven of their eight meetings. Pakistan's only victory was a 10-wicket win in Dubai in 2021, while their first encounter in 2007 ended in a tie before India prevailed in a bowl-out.

"We'll find out tomorrow (if India and Pakistan players shake hands before or after the game)...I expect the game should be played in the spirit that it has always been played since its inception."
Pakistan captain **Salman Ali Agha**

"When you play an India-Pakistan game, it is more about the occasion. It is a platform. You can say what you want, like it is just another game. But you know which game you are going to play. And we don't play them often."
India captain **Suryakumar Yadav**

BCB boss turns down India-Pakistan match invitation

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul has declined an invitation to attend today's India-Pakistan clash in Colombo, saying it would not feel right to be present while Bangladesh are absent from the ICC T20 World Cup.

"I was supposed to go to Colombo. But then I thought, our national team isn't there, so what would I do if I went?" Bulbul told The Daily Star yesterday.

Aminul is currently in Dhaka after returning from Kuwait, where he attended a meeting of Asian Cricket Council (ACC).

"Even today, they requested me to come by tomorrow morning's flight, but I said no. Since our team isn't playing, me going there just to sit around -- does that make sense?"

The 20-team tournament had been clouded by political tensions after Bangladesh declined to travel to India over security concerns and were replaced by Scotland, prompting Pakistan's initial refusal to play India before reversing their decision following ICC assurances. The breakthrough came after intense negotiations involving ICC deputy chairman Imran Khwaja, Aminul, and Mohsin Naqvi, chairman of Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), during talks in Lahore.

The BCB boss said International Cricket Council (ICC) had requested his presence, especially after he played a key role in facilitating Pakistan's participation.

"They were a bit upset [at turning down invitation] -- said you helped organise the India-Pakistan match and did so much. But to me, my team is more important."

Windies look to seal Super Eight spot

SPORTS REPORTER

Former champions West Indies will be eyeing to seal their place in the Super Eights when they take on Nepal in their Group C match in the ICC T20 World Cup at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai today.

The Caribbean side will come into the match on the back of a comfortable 30-run win over England on Wednesday.

They had earlier won against Scotland by 35 runs and are now at the top of the five-team Group C with four points.

Meanwhile, their opponents have lost both their matches so far, suffering a heartbreaking four-run defeat against England and then getting pummeled by newcomers Italy by 10 wickets.

Nepal have the edge over West Indies in head-to-head count in T20Is, having won two of their three meetings so far.

This is the first time the two sides will faceoff in a T20I in a World Cup.

Meanwhile, before the high-stakes India-Pakistan Group A tie in the evening in Colombo, their group-mates USA and Namibia will face off in the afternoon in Chennai.

After defeats against Pakistan and India, the USA bounced back with a 93-run win over the Netherlands in Chennai on Friday and are third in the group table right now. A defeat today would end the USA's hopes of progressing to the Super Eights. Whereas Namibia, having lost to the Netherlands and India, will be eyeing for their maiden win today.

Undercooked for Mission Australia?

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team have entered the final phase of their home preparation for next month's AFC Women's Asian Cup, with no further international fixtures scheduled before the tournament kicks off on March 1 -- raising fresh concerns over their readiness.

According to a highly placed Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) official, the team will fly to Sydney on February 20 and play a single practice match against a local club, likely on February 27, before beginning their campaign.

Bangladesh are placed in Group B of the 12-team competition and will open their campaign against record nine-time champions China in Sydney on March 3. They will face North Korea at the same venue three days later before concluding the group stage against Uzbekistan in Perth on March 9.

The scaled-down preparation stands in stark contrast to the ambitious roadmap unveiled last August, shortly after the team secured historic qualification for the continental showpiece in June–July.

"Mission Australia", as the campaign was branded following the team's triumphant return from Myanmar, has gradually lost momentum since its announcement.

Speaking to the media on August 27, BFF women's wing chairman Mahfuza Akter Kiron had outlined plans for "six international matches and a training camp in Japan", adding that the team would either play "two matches against New Zealand" or face "other countries such as Malaysia, Singapore or Hong Kong en route to Australia".

In reality, only four international matches have been arranged since qualification. Bangladesh suffered two heavy away defeats to Thailand -- 3-0 and

5-1 -- during the October FIFA window, before losing 1-0 to Malaysia and 2-1 to Azerbaijan at home in early December.

The proposed three-week training camp in Japan in December was also scrapped, replaced by a domestic camp at the Korean EPZ in Chattogram.

Preparation has further been fragmented by club commitments. Most of the national team players spent months competing in the Bhutan Women's League, a competition publicly criticised by head coach Peter Butler for its lack of intensity and competitiveness.

Over the past month and a half, the players have featured in the domestic Women's Football League on the artificial turf at Kamalapur. The competition frequently produced lopsided, high-scoring matches -- often in double digits -- echoing concerns previously raised about the standard of football in Bhutan.

Following the conclusion of the league, forward Ritu Porna Chakma declined to comment on the team's preparation gaps or the potential impact of prolonged exposure to artificial turf ahead of a major international tournament.

Bangladesh will head to Australia having lost all four international matches since qualifying for the Asian Cup, with just one practice game scheduled before taking on some of Asia's most formidable sides.

In contrast, neighbours India recently completed a three-week tour of Turkey, playing six matches against local clubs, while Group B opponents Uzbekistan played two international friendlies against Vietnam. Against that backdrop, questions over Bangladesh's match readiness, preparation standards and overall competitive edge are bound to cast a shadow over their historic campaign.

Women's 'A' edge SL in tense opener

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's 'A' team secured a narrow four-run win over Sri Lanka 'A' in their opening Group B match of the ACC Women's Asia Cup Rising Stars 2026 in Bangkok yesterday.

After electing to bat, Bangladesh made a brisk start as openers Ishma Tanjim (30) and Shamima Sultana (17) added 48 before a run-out ended the stand on the penultimate ball of the powerplay at the Terdthai Cricket Ground.

Sarmin Sultana struck 29 off 25 balls, but Bangladesh collapsed from 104 for four in the 17th over, losing their last six wickets to be bowled out for 115 in 19.5 overs. Sri Lanka's Sachini Nisansala claimed 4-14, while Malsha Shehani took two wickets.

In reply, Sri Lanka lost five wickets for 65 runs in 13 overs. Ama Kanchana (23) and Sachini Nisansala (20) then put together a crucial 30-run stand for the sixth wicket to bring their side back into contention.

However, the Bangladeshi bowlers held their nerve in the decisive overs, with left-arm spinner Sanjida Akter Meghla leading the charge. She grabbed two quick wickets and finished with figures of 3-20. Skipper Fahima Khatun and Lata Mondol chipped in with two wickets apiece as Bangladesh restricted Sri Lanka to 111 for nine.

Earlier in the day, Thailand beat Malaysia by 99 runs. Bangladesh face Thailand next on Monday, when Sri Lanka take on Malaysia.

PHOTO: AFP

England snap 17-year European jinx

AGENCIES

England finally buried a long-standing European hoodoo as they clinched a five-wicket victory over Scotland on Saturday, marking their first-ever win against a European side in T20 World Cup history -- a breakthrough that ended a 17-year wait.

For all their pedigree as two-time champions (2010 and 2021), England had previously stumbled every time they faced European opposition at the tournament. The drought began with defeat to the Netherlands at Lord's in 2009, followed by another loss to the Dutch in 2014, a defeat to Ireland in 2022, and most recently to Scotland in 2024. Their 2010 match against Ireland was washed out.

That frustrating sequence finally came to an end thanks largely to a composed knock from Tom Banton, who guided England home with an unbeaten 63 off 41 while chasing 153.

Captain Harry Brook was full of praise for the right-hander, who had been dismissed for two in both of England's earlier Group C games.

"He was awesome. It was a brilliant innings," Brook said. "He's obviously matured as a player... the way he's chased that down there single-handedly, with a couple of cameos from [Jacob] Bethell and Sam [Curran]. He played it beautifully."

England had slumped to 13-2 early in the chase and were still crawling at 54-2 after eight overs before Banton shifted gears, launching spinner Mark Watt for three towering sixes in a ninth over that cost 22 runs and effectively released the pressure.

Brook highlighted Banton's growing adaptability as a key trait. "Everyone in the world knows he's got a very good reverse sweep, so he's had to adapt his game a little... because they try to stop him from hitting that shot," he said.

"He's a powerful player. He's got long levers. He can hit the ball out of any ground, and he's shown that tonight."

Brook also felt Banton is settling into the number four role, calling it "the ideal position for him going forward".

The win was vital after England's earlier loss to the West Indies, and now victory over debutants Italy on Monday at Eden Gardens will secure their place in the Super Eight -- with a long-standing European curse finally lifted.

South Africa captain Aiden Markram (R) fist-bumps with Dewald Brevis during their Group D fixture of the T20 World Cup against New Zealand at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad yesterday. Markram blasted an unbeaten 44-ball 86 to guide Proteas to victory in 17.1 overs with seven wickets remaining after Marco Jansen's 4-40 had restricted the Kiwis to 175-9.

PHOTO: CRICKET SOUTH AFRICA

Tarique to call on Shafiqur, Nahid today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman is scheduled to call on Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman and National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam at their homes today.

BNP Media Cell sources said that Tarique will first visit the Jamaat ameer's residence, followed by Nahid's home.

Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman resides in the capital's Bashundhara Residential Area, while Nahid Islam lives on Bailey Road.

The time for the visit was fixed following discussions with Jamaat and NCP, sources at the BNP Media Cell said.

According to the source, Tarique will visit them to exchange post-election courtesies.

Earlier yesterday, the BNP chief

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

COLOURS OF FALGUN …. People from all walks of life welcomed spring with colours and flowers during the Bashanta Utshob at Aambagan Shaheed Wasim Park in Chattogram city yesterday. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Yunus thanks top leaders for ensuring peaceful polls

Urges all to work together to meet people's expectations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus yesterday called the heads of BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, and National Citizen Party -- Tarique Rahman, Shafiqur Rahman and Nahid Islam -- to thank them for their significant roles and responsible conduct in ensuring a festive and peaceful election

He conveyed his thanks through separate telephone conversations with the leaders.

Congratulating them, Yunus said the restraint, moderation and responsible behaviour shown by political parties had made it possible to maintain a joyous and

SEE PAGE 9 COL 5

Cabinet secy resigns

Siraz Uddin takes charge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Abdur Rashid

Cabinet secretary Sheikh Abdur Rashid, who was serving on a contractual basis, has resigned.

Speaking to The Daily Star last night, he said, "I had informed the government of my wish to resign before the elections, and it has been implemented today."

However, he declined to comment on the specific reason for his resignation.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Public

SEE PAGE 9 COL 5

US readies for weeks-long Iran ops

Say officials; Trump says regime change could be 'best thing' as second carrier heads to Middle East

AGENCIES

The US military is preparing for the possibility of sustained, weeks-long operations against Iran if President Donald Trump orders an attack, two US officials told Reuters, in what could become a far more serious conflict than previously seen between the countries.

The disclosure by the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitive nature of the planning, raises the stakes for the diplomacy underway between the United States and Iran.

US and Iranian diplomats held talks in Oman last week in an effort to revive diplomacy over Tehran's

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

POST-POLLS VIOLENCE

1 killed, 5 hurt in 5 districts

STAR REPORT

One person was killed and five others injured in separate incidents of post-election violence from Friday evening to last night in five districts.

The deceased, Osman Sardar, 29, was a supporter of an independent (BNP's rebel) candidate for Bagerhat-2 and a resident of Paronowapara village in Bagerhat Sadar upazila.

The victim's elder brother Enamul Kabir Sardar said a clash broke out between the supporters of the BNP-nominated candidate Barrister Sheikh Mohammad

SEE PAGE 9 COL 2

People issued direct mandate for reforms

Says Ali Riaz

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Political considerations are more important than legal ones when it comes to implementing the July Charter, said Ali Riaz, special assistant to the chief adviser.

In politics, the first and most important consideration has to be political, even more than legal, he said at a press briefing yesterday.

"We are reminding everyone that the people have given their verdict and support for political parties has also been seen. So, there must be coordination

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1