

Polling begins in Bangladesh for 13th Jatiya Sansad election



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Nava Thakuria 12 February 2026 Updated 9 Apr 36715 views

Amid high security arrangements across the country, polling begins this morning at 7:30 am for the highly projected 13th Jatiya Sansad election in Bangladesh, where over 2000 candidates representing 50 political parties along with many independent contestants are in the fray. The Muslim majority nation has over 12.77 crore registered voters including 6.27 crore women and 1,232 third-genders, who are voting for electing 299 representatives (out of 300 seats in the national assembly). Over 42,000 polling centres will facilitate the electorates to exercise their franchise (through ballots in person) till 4:30 pm (on 12 February 2026). The election will be conducted alongside the referendum on the July National Charter, a provision for constitutional reforms, in the south Asian country.

The interim government chief Professor Muhammad Yunus urged all participating candidates to rise above personal and party interests to prioritize greater interest of the Muslim majority nation regardless of the poll-outcomes. Addressing the nation of over 170 million people ahead of electoral exercises, Nobel peace laureate Dr Yunus commented that victory as well as defeat is an integral part of democracy and hence after the election, they should dedicate themselves to build a new, just, democratic, and inclusive Bangladesh together. Chief adviser of the caretaker government also asked all voters to participate in the process enthusiastically in a festive spirit. Prof Yunus made a special appeal to the women and young voters, many of whom were deprived of the opportunity to exercise their franchise in earlier occasions, to come forward showing their commitment for a new beginning.

Nearly 400 foreign election observers including around 200 journalists representing 45 global media outlets arrived in the south Asian nation. On 12th parliamentary elections (held on 7 January 2024), there were only 158 global observers comprising a few foreign media persons. Meanwhile, a two-day government-announced general holiday began on 11 February, whereas Friday and Saturday (13, 14 February) are weekly holidays in Bangladesh. Notably, ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's party Awami League is barred from participation in the electoral process leaving a fair space to the arch rival Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in the election. The country had the last general election in January 2024, but the overthrowing of Hasina's government following a student-led mass uprising just after six months necessitated the polls.

Meanwhile, the New York-based press watchdog Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has urged all major Bangladesh political parties to protect press freedom in the troublesome country. The CPJ in a statement called for urgent steps to safeguard press freedom and journalists' safety on the eve of national election. Sending separate letters to the office bearers of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, student-led National Citizen Party and Jatiya Party, the global body urged them 'to make public commitments to protect journalists during the election period' by rejecting violence, intimidation and also misuse of criminal or national-security laws. The CPJ statement argued that the risks to journalists intensified in the pre-election period across Bangladesh with continuing imprisonment of scribes on unverified charges and also longstanding impunity for violence against media professionals that contributed to a climate of fear and self-censorship.

Earlier, the Geneva-based media safety & rights body Press Emblem Campaign (PEC) condemned the murder of Bengali Hindu journalist Rana Pratap Bairagi (45) in Jessore locality on 5 January and demanded a thorough probe to book the culprits and punish them under the law. Moreover, at least 12 Bangladeshi journalists sustained injuries in an attack by extortionists in Narsingdi on 26 January. Denouncing the incident, PEC chairman Blaise Lempen urged Dhaka to bring the group of extortionists to justice. Bangladesh Editors' Council also called on the authorities to ensure the safety and security of journalists during the election period. The council in a statement argued that the working journalists while gathering information during elections often face various threats and hence the interim government, election commission and other responsible law enforcement agencies should take effective measures to guarantee adequate security for the media professionals.

Meanwhile, the western media outlets pour views that the BNP led alliance is the front runner in the coming election and chairman Rahman is projected as the new premier of Bangladesh. When Rahman returned to his home country on 25 December ending a self-imposed exile in the United Kingdom for 17 years, he was greeted by millions of people. The son of former Bangladesh President Ziaur Rahman and former premier Khaleda Zia responded to the public with a visionary line 'I have a plan' imitating the historic speech (I Have a Dream) of Martin Luther King Jr in 1963. Bangladesh's first female head of the government Begum Zia died on 30 December at the age of 80, following which he received pouring condolences from sympathizers amid the government declaring three days of state mourning.

The US-based news magazine The Diplomat recently carried an analytical piece predicting the electoral progress for Rahman to become Bangladesh's next premier. Similarly, Time magazine and Bloomberg media agency, referring to several opinion polls, projected him as the front-runner ahead of the election. Earlier, the UK-based weekly The Economist also anticipated the 60-year-old scion of a famous political family to emerge as head of the government in Dhaka. In various election rallies, Rahman promised to prioritize job creation, technical education, information technology, sports, etc. The soft spoken politician also emphasized on creating a new Bangladesh with mutual trust, respect and benefits to everyone living in a peaceful state under the rule of law and freedom of speech

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