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Electoral Democracy of Bangladesh

Electoral Democracy of Bangladesh was successfully and graciously restored on February 12, 2026 elections, held in the aftermath of student-led protests of 2024 culminating into ouster of the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Awami League party. Subsequent to the elections, 18 months of ad-hoc interim government under Mohd Yunus came to an end. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) under the leadership of Tariq Rehman, son of deceased leader of Bangladesh, Khaleda Zia won with massive majority (more than two-thirds) in the *Jatiya Sangsad* (JS). Voters also endorsed sweeping constitutional reforms in a referendum held alongside the parliamentary elections entrusting the task of implementing 'July National Charter' containing nearly 80-plus prospective reforms of Bangladesh's governance system.

BNP won 212 seats with Islamist-led Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) bagging 77 seats in 13th *Jatiya Sangsad*. Newly constituted National Citizen Party (NCP) of 2024 protestors won six seats as alliance partner of Jamaat. NCP thus failed to get any noticeable traction in politics of the country. Nearly 60% of the electorates voted in the 2026 elections. 300 members are directly elected in *Jatiya Sangsad* whereas 50 seats are reserved for women and are filled on the basis of proportional representation by a vote of the 300 members.

Bangladesh experienced real revolution when Tarique Rahman was sworn-in as the new Prime Minister of Bangladesh on February 17, 2026. Rahman took oath of office with 25-member Cabinet in which he appointed two Hindus as Ministers: Dipen Diwan (a Chakma Buddhist Leader) and Nitai Roy Chowdhury; bringing the strong anti-Hindu feelings brewing-up within Bangladesh's polity. Rahman, thus on his part revealed strong willingness to engage constructively with India as he signaled that bilateral ties would not be hostage to the issue of Sheikh Hasina's extradition.

New bonhomie is gradually building-up to strengthen bilateralism between India and Bangladesh. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar visited to condole during Rahman Mother's last rites. PM Modi congratulated Rahman for massive and unprecedented victory and invited to visit India. Lok Sabha Speaker participated in the swearing-in ceremony and paid courtesy meeting to JeI leader along with Foreign Secretary of India Vikram Misri. On each occasion India sent strong fillers to engage positively with Bangladesh. India is strongly recalibrating its ties with Bangladesh, reiterating its 'Neighbourhood First' foreign policy choice.

Bangladesh is of great strategic significance for India. India shares longest common border with Bangladesh; has shared civilizational heritage; Bangladesh is India's gateway to South East Asia; Bangladesh with Myanmar are vital for India's connectivity projects towards east. The country may also provide transit route to India for its northeastern regions reducing pressure on Chicken Neck corridor.

Founded in 1978 by Bangladesh's former president Ziaur Rahman, father of Tarique Rahman, BNP ruled many times with his wife Khaleda Zia becoming first female Prime Minister, an office that she assumed thrice. The party has a mixed bag with both criticism and appreciation. BNP boycotted past elections including 2024 accusing them of being neither free nor fair. The party has been accused for corruption and poor governance. Her son Tarique Rahman spent 17 years in self-imposed exile in London. Student-led protest thus has proved to a boon to the BNP.

2026 Elections to *Jatiya Sangsad* remained mired in controversy with ban on Awami League (AL) from contesting the election. AL leader Sheikh Hasina has been convicted in absentia with sentence to be hanged. JeI is often accused of being pro-Pakistan Islamist organization, infamous for its historical role in opposing the creation of Bangladesh and collaborating with the Pakistan Army during the 1971 war of liberation. Fact remains JeI emerged as the second largest winner in 2026 elections, and its strong presence would be determining.

Mohd. Yunus, leader of the interim government, left a contested legacy as he joined hands with the JeI and some student leaders who were the cause of his elevation to the post after the 2024 protests. His tenure was marked by mob violence, brutal persecution of opponents; countrywide destruction of landmark monuments of the Liberation War, including museum and house of Sheik Mujibur Rahman; large-scale release of captivated criminals and extremists; economic decline and attacks on minorities.

Rahman has some immediate mega-challenges to face before he consolidates electoral democracy of Bangladesh: (i) to implement the July National Charter; (ii) to unite the country where banned Awami League supporters feel disenfranchised; (iii) to make Bangladesh \$1 trillion economy by 2034 and live up to BNP pledge; (iv) to stable and strengthen garment industry, main driver of economy as it accounts for 10% of GDP, employing four million people, largely women; (v) to contain the issue of rising living cost and persistent inflation; (vi) to restore the shaken confidence of investors owing to political uncertainty and win them over.

—BK