



## DIRECTOR'S DESK



The recent 12th Parliamentary election in Bangladesh marked by a boycott from certain political factions, notably the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), unfolded relatively peacefully and garnered recognition both domestically and internationally as a free and fair electoral process. However, despite this acknowledgment, the voter turnout remained notably low, with only 41.99 percent of registered voters participated.

The outcome of this election underscores the evolving landscape of Bangladeshi politics. The victory of the Awami League raises questions about the future of opposition politics, as no other party, including the Jatiya Party, secured the requisite number of seats to be recognized as the opposition in parliament. Many parties failed to secure any representation in the new parliament, with only a handful, including the Jatiya Party, Workers Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, and Bangladesh Kalyan Party, gaining seats alongside the Awami League. Notably, the election also witnessed a surge in independent candidates, predominantly dissidents of the Awami League, potentially reshaping the dynamics of opposition within the parliament.

The outcome highlights the uncertainty surrounding parties that opposed the 12th parliamentary election, as their boycott failed to garner significant support domestically or internationally. The post-election scenario will be crucial in determining whether

these opposition parties can sustain their anti-government momentum.

Prior to the election, the Awami League government faced pressure from Western powers to ensure a free and fair electoral process, with fears of potential sanctions from the United Nations. However, following the election, most of the Western powers acknowledged the results and expressed willingness to engage with the new government, signaling a shift in perception and enhancing Bangladesh's global standing.

The significant participation of minority communities in the election is noteworthy, with several minority candidates securing victory, albeit amidst concerns of post-election violence, echoing past experiences in 2001.

Moreover, the 12th parliamentary election witnessed increased participation of women candidates, marking a milestone in Bangladesh's electoral history. However, despite this progress, the number of successful women candidates remained comparatively low.

In this edition of News Reel, the Institute for Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) delves into the implications of the 12th parliamentary election's outcome, analyzing its impact on Bangladesh's political landscape.

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# FUTURE OF THE OPPOSITION MOVEMENT IN BANGLADESH IN THE POST POLL SCENARIO

— Dr. Abdul Jabbar Khan★

The 12th National Parliament Elections of Bangladesh was held on 7 January, 2024. In this election, Bangladesh Awami League won 223 seats confirming more than two-third majority in the parliament. Jatiya Party won 11 seats behind the independent candidates who won 62 seats. Total voter turnout in this election was 41.8%, i.e. about 50 million out of about 120 million legitimate voters. Some political parties, including Bangladesh National Party (BNP), boycotted the election demanding an interim caretaker government for conducting free and fair election. However, they failed to create any mass movement that could create a situation to convince other political parties to consider necessity of adopting any extra-constitutional means for the election. In fact, most of the political parties believe that the constitutional provisions of Articles 118 through 126 adequately empower the Election Commission of Bangladesh to act as an interim government for conducting elections. Although under a different scenario in the year 1996, caretaker government system was introduced for three next national elections, the handing over of charge to the caretaker government by BNP in 2006 was full of

crafty and ill motivations. Instead of holding the elections within a 90-day timeframe as per constitution, the unelected caretaker regime postponed elections for two years. This had seriously dented the political legitimacy of the caretaker system, especially in the eyes of the Awami League. Human rights abuses during the caretaker regime were suffered by all political groups and contributed to a loss of legitimacy. So much so devious it was that it was removed by 15th amendment of the constitution followed by a verdict from the court in the year 2011. Keeping all those backlashes and turmoil of 2006 caretaker government in mind, people of Bangladesh this time decided not to respond to the single point demand of BNP to oust the incumbent government and restore the caretaker government system once again. People rather chose to move ahead by upholding the constitutional provisions for holding the 12th National Parliamentary Elections.

The election was observed by 20,773 Local Observers, 127 Foreign Observers, 59 Foreign Journalists, 63 Officials of Foreign Missions and 84 Local Observer Organizations. It is said that observers are



‘eyes and ears’ of a fair election. None of the reports obtained so far from these observers is found to have made any negative remark regarding the fairness of the election. All the observers during the series of press conferences termed the election free, fair and safe. Of course, they made no mistake to mention that participation of all the political parties would definitely make it more festive. However, they also made the point very clear that political parties have every right to participate in elections and also not to participate in an election but they have no right to inhibit the voters from casting votes. The decision of not participating in an election is driven by a party’s strategy. That being kept aside, there was no single reported case in any form of media that a voter who turned out to the polling station could not cast his/her vote. In order to avoid any controversy, Election Commission sent the ballot papers to the centres only on the day of election. They never looked hesitant to show cause the candidates for violating electoral norms or to even scratch off the candidature of candidates of the ruling party. The results of all the seats and all the polling stations have been published in the official website of election for public consumption after the elections. Such initiative from Election Commission is the first of its kind and is highly applaudable. Overall, the 12th National Parliamentary Elections may be termed as the fairest election in the history of Bangladesh. Unfortunately though, this was not fully participatory.

While Bangladesh Awami League has formed government for the fourth successive term, they will have a lot of challenges to face ahead. Due to the Russia-Ukraine war, Israel’s genocide in Gaza and Indo-Pacific Strategy, loads of geo-political issues will show up almost every morning in the next five years. Pending the

China-Taiwan tension and recent Iran-USA strain, a lot will have to be handled by Bangladesh. The modern world is now moved by seamless supply chain management, fuel diplomacy, transparent financial management and export-import mutual dependency. All these are now controlled a great deal by smart governance that is already taken over and will soon be further taken over by technologies of 4IR. Governments of all over the world are now picking up the legislatures who are tech-enabled. Bangladesh is now the 35th largest economy in the world with almost 500 bUSD Gross Domestic Product and therefore cannot stay away from following others. The country’s infrastructural development in the last fifteen years has been remarkable. Now it is time for Bangladesh to complete all its ongoing mega projects and focus on developing a tech-based society and administrative system. All the educational institutions should be its top priority now. While the world is moving towards knowledge economy, Bangladesh cannot fall behind despite having such a wonderful strength of demographic dividend. For dealing with all these challenges, the political parties should create inviting environment for the fresh bloods with tech ability. Not only they should bring in the new bloods, they should groom them up sector wise so that when 4IR technologies will run the show, our political masters do not find themselves flabbergasted. The so called politics of arson and vandalism have become almost obsolete and unacceptable now. All the political parties of Bangladesh must learn to appreciate the value of intellectual might. They all must get prepared for combating the future challenges of tech-based world. Only badmouthing and criticizing the opponent with false logic and tricky language will create no room for them in the minds of people of Bangladesh anymore.



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# WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN THE POLITICS OF BANGLADESH: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

— Dr. Farzana Mahmood★

Functional and substantive democracy can be attained when effective participation of women in all domains of national life is ensured. Good governance also requires inclusion of women at all levels of the political realm. On the other hand, political participation is a rudimentary platform for gender equality. Research shows that status and influence of women multiply when they actively get engaged in politics and decision-making process. Findings of different studies indicate that when more women are involved in the decision-making process, the public demands are better addressed by the government. Women become independent and confident, societal stigma and cultural norms that works against women are challenged and changed. Women participation in politics helps to reduce domestic and other forms of violence against

women, child marriage, dowry and repression on women. When more and more women obtain leadership position, they encourage to break the glass ceiling that other women face in attaining leadership.

Article 27, 28 and 65(3) of the Constitution of Bangladesh stipulates women's equal rights in the public spheres. Since inception in 1972, the Constitution provides reserved parliamentary seats for women. Introduction of reserved seats by the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the first step towards including women in the parliament and thereby promoting gender equity. Over the years the number of reserved seats has been increased from 15 out of a total of 300 seats to 50 out of a total of 350 seats. Through the 17th amendment



to the Constitution in 2018 the reserved seats for women have been secured for another 25 years with the aim to prepare those women to contest in direct polls.

To promote women in politics regulation for reserved seats (one-third) in the local government elections such as Union Parishad, Municipality, City Corporation and Upazila Parishad have been ensured in Bangladesh. In 2016, elections were held at 4,087 Union Parishads in six phases; of those Union Parishad polls only 26 women candidates won in chairman posts. In the next Union Parishad polls, held between June 2021 to February 2022, out of a total of 4,058 polls 45 women candidates won in chairman posts. This data indicates that the number of women candidates contesting the Union Parishad elections has increased over the time.

In the 10th parliamentary elections of 2014 as many as 29 female candidates contested the elections. In the 2018 general elections 69 female candidates out of 1733 candidates contested, which amounts to 3.98 percent of the candidates. During the 12th general elections of 2024, 92 contestants out of 1,891 candidates for 300 parliamentary seats were women, which amount to 4.86 percent of the candidates. In the 2024 elections as many

as 26 independent women candidates from small parties contested. In comparison to the previous general elections participation of female candidates has increased by 38 percent, but the figure is only nearly 5 percent of the total contestants competing for 300 seats. Election results indicate that though the number of women candidates contesting the general elections has increased, they were not game changers in polling. In the 10th parliamentary elections 18 female candidates came out victorious and became members of parliament. In the 11th and 12th general elections 23 and 19 women respectively became parliamentarians through direct polls.

The Representation of the People Order (RPO), 1972 articulates that political parties will set aside minimum 33 percent of all their committee posts for women. The Awami League (AL) central executive committee has a total of 81 members and 18 of them are women. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), has a central executive committee consisting of 502 members and only 69 of them are women. In the Jatiya Party (JP), only 45 out of 365 members of the central executive committee are women. Therefore, women hold 23 percent positions in the central committee of AL, 13.7 percent in the central committee of BNP and 12.32 percent in the central committee of JP.



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The major political parties of Bangladesh are yet to fulfil the obligation laid down in the RPO. Hence, in 2021 the Election Commission of Bangladesh extended the time till 2030 to fulfil the obligation of having at least 33 percent women in the committees of the political parties.

The discrepancy in the number of male and female politicians contesting the general elections, Union Parishad elections and representing in the central committee of the major political parties and in the legislature demonstrate that women are not definitely at the same level with men in the political institutions and power structures. Politics in Bangladesh is still male-dominated. Therefore, in the political parties, parliament, cabinet and local governing bodies participation and influence of female leadership is inadequate.

Compared to other South Asian countries, the number of women political activists and workers in Bangladesh are increasing. To reduce gender disparity in politics, in the last 15 years numerous reforms have been adopted by the Bangladesh Government at the institutional and legislative levels. Nonetheless, social, cultural and organizational notions continue to bring about barriers for females who

want to participate in politics. Since financial strength is essential to participate in electoral politics, women's limited access and control over financial resources is a major factor that contributes to the underrepresentation of women in politics. Other barriers include the masculine nature of politics, limited access to political networks, lack of family and community support, lack of adequate institutional knowledge and direct experience in politics. Often female politicians are designated to work in the women wings which undermine women's ability to participate in the bigger platform and influence important decisions.

Types of political violence that women in Bangladesh face more than their male counterparts include verbal abuse, hate speech, sexual harassment, threats of violence and cyber-bullying. Political violence targeting women seeks to entirely ward off participation of women in politics. Participation of women in politics is also hampered by sexism at all levels of the system, including the workplace, education, transportation, and civic engagement .

Several other factors leading to underrepresentation of women in politics include lack of education, social stereotypes, patriarchy, religious norms, ideology of



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political parties etc. The patrilineal society of Bangladesh demands women to live with their in-laws after marriage. In this process women lose their own community networks. Moreover, as a result of socio-cultural practices women do not have mobility like men. Because of all these factors, political parties too lack the assertiveness to nominate their female candidates for direct election.

In normative democracy theory political equality has pivotal value; though in the global context this objective has not yet been established. As a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Bangladesh has a commitment to the global community for empowerment of women. In the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (2019) Bangladesh committed to improve women's equal participation in public life. Since 2009 Bangladesh has also been implementing gender-sensitive budgeting to ensure the participation of women in all spheres of life. Moreover, agenda for empowerment of women are reiterated in each of Bangladesh's five-year plans.

In spite of socio-cultural and other hindrances certain affirmative policies coupled with political commitment have led to increased women participation in the politics of Bangladesh over the years. Improvement of relevant legal and policy support in the last 15 years generated significant improvement in women's empowerment.

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap 2020 Report, in terms of political empowerment Bangladesh is ranked seventh in the world. With regard to parliamentary participation Bangladesh has also been ranked 86th and 124th on cabinet portfolios. As per the Inter Parliamentary Report, 2022 Bangladesh has been ranked second in South Asia with 21 percent women representatives in the parliament.

Undoubtedly, in Bangladesh political participation and empowerment of women has improved over time, but more is required, specially in politics. In this regard political parties should meet their legal obligation of 33% women representation at all levels of committees. Moreover, favourable environment should be created to increase participation of women in direct polls. For this purpose, the capacity of female political activists from local to national government levels needs to be reinforced. Women need to be equipped with relevant knowledge and resources to be able to break gender barriers within the socio-political system. Civil society members, politicians and media should take initiatives to bring about socio-cultural and political change that swings the attitudes of voters regarding female politicians. It is crucial to enhance women's skill, awareness and participation in politics, because political engagement and acceptance is a rudimentary footpace for gender equality.



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# 12TH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AND BANGLADESH'S RISING GLOBAL INFLUENCE

— Nurul Islam Hasib\*

Bangladesh, a relatively young country at 53 years old, gained independence in 1971 after a nine-month-long bloody war. However, its early years were marked by political upheaval, with the assassination of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in 1975. Following that, the political party BNP came into existence.

The political landscape in Bangladesh remains polarized between two major camps: the Awami League and the anti-Awami League, led by the BNP. Additionally, the continued political presence of Jamaat-e-Islami, which sided with Pakistan during the Liberation War in 1971, further contributes to the divided nature of politics in the country.

In the history of Bangladesh's elections, the 12th parliamentary elections held on January 7, 2024, stands out

as the first election to openly attract massive foreign interest. Countries, notably the US, Russia and China, openly issued statements in the lead-up to the elections.

Western nations, especially the US and the UK, advocated for free and fair elections through public statements. Meanwhile, Russia and China countered these statements, characterizing them as interference in a country's internal affairs.

The prospect of imposing sanctions on Bangladesh or individuals closely associated with the government had been a topic of discussion long before the elections, with various countries expressing concerns and considerations in this regard. The geo-political dynamics surrounding Bangladesh's elections underscore the global interest in the country's political developments.



Following the imposition of sanctions by the US Treasury Department on Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and seven of its officers for serious human rights violations on December 10, 2021, opposition campaigners have been circulating lists of individuals anticipating potential US sanctions. The move sparked reactions in Bangladesh, with the opposition, led by the BNP, applauding the action, while the government criticized the US's stance.

This development, often linked to the 12th parliamentary elections, stems from heightened US interest in the region, especially in Bangladesh, given its geo-political significance in South Asia and China's involvement in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Notably, Bangladesh was the first country in South Asia to join the BRI following President Xi Jinping's proposal in 2013.

The process and reasons behind potential Western sanctions on Bangladesh post-election remained unclear. However, on September 22, 2023, Washington announced a visa restriction policy, indicating the Department of State's intention to impose restrictions on Bangladeshi individuals involved in undermining the democratic election process.

This would encompass members of law enforcement, the ruling party, and the political opposition. The United States emphasized its commitment to supporting free and fair elections in Bangladesh conducted peacefully, with affected individuals and their immediate family members facing potential ineligibility for entry into the United States.

Despite using the US sanctions as a tool to exert pressure on the government, government maintained its engagement with the US. This was evident in the statement following the meeting between Ambassador Peter Haas and the new foreign minister, Dr. Hasan Mahmud, on January 17. Ambassador Haas outlined future collaborations with Bangladesh, expressing eagerness to work closely in the coming months based on mutual interests. Areas of cooperation mentioned included addressing climate change, exploring business opportunities, and addressing the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh.

Simultaneously, it is evident that Western countries plan to exert continued pressure on the new government, as stated by the British High Commissioner in Dhaka, Sarah Cooke. After her meeting with the new foreign minister, she emphasized the UK's commitment to engaging constructively with the administration and political parties, citing a statement issued by the UK government on January 8 outlining its stance on the election, democracy, and human rights.

Following the election, the UK government condemned instances of intimidation and violence that occurred before and during the campaign period, asserting that such conduct had no place in political life. It noted that not all political parties participated in the election, limiting the Bangladeshi people's voting options, especially with the BNP boycotting the election.

Leading up to the elections, the BNP had been critical of India, China, and Russia, as these countries maintained that the elections were internal affairs of Bangladesh, in contrast to the Western position. Russia even accused Washington of direct interference to overthrow Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Despite these geopolitical tensions, Bangladesh successfully maintained a delicate balance, particularly in the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine war, where Western countries pressured the government to take sides.

Post-election, the new government is gradually enhancing its engagement with various countries. Numerous nations have extended congratulations to the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, expressing their intent to collaborate. Foreign Minister Dr. Hasan Mahmud led the Bangladesh delegation at the 19th NAM summit in Kampala, Uganda.

Further diplomatic activities include Dr. Hasan Mahmud's upcoming visit to New Delhi on February 7, at the invitation of Indian External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar. This marks his first bilateral visit to any country. Additionally, a delegation from the Chinese Communist Party visited Bangladesh, signifying ongoing diplomatic interactions.

In mid-February, the Prime Minister is scheduled to attend the Munich Security Conference in Germany, highlighting Bangladesh's active participation in global discussions on security and international relations.

Leading up to the elections, various countries clarified their stances, revealing a spectrum of positions. A comprehensive examination of their speeches and statements indicates that nations such as India, Russia, China, and several Middle Eastern countries adopted a flexible approach.

In contrast, the UK, US, and Canada took a firm stance against the government, while certain affluent countries, including the European Union and Japan, maintained a relatively neutral position.

The depth of relationships between nations is shaped by mutual interests. The government, naturally, seeks to



enhance contact with those expressing solidarity, while simultaneously working to improve relations with countries that held reservations about the elections.

The newly appointed foreign minister, on his inaugural day, emphasized readiness to collaborate with both the East and the West, echoing the government's foreign policy of - friendship to all, malice towards none - fostering friendship universally and harbouring no ill will.

Bangladesh currently stands as a politically and economically robust nation, achieving unprecedented capability. Its significance in South Asia has reached new heights. Given

this importance, Bangladesh aims to swiftly expand the scope and depth of its international relations.

The US State Department has unequivocally stated its commitment to recognizing Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government for a fourth consecutive term.

However, there remains a belief that Western countries, particularly the US, will persist in applying pressure on the government while pursuing their geo-political interests in the South Asian region. The delicate interplay between recognition and pressure reflects the complex dynamics at play in Bangladesh's international relations.



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# ELECTION AND PLIGHT OF THE HINDUS IN BANGLADESH

— Mohshin Habib★

It has been a long-running trend in Bangladesh to exert pressure on Hindu minorities both before and after all national and local elections in the country. One might argue that this trend has evolved into a cultural phenomenon. The rise of hate speech before any election and subsequent attacks on vulnerable minority Hindus after the election results, regardless of the outcome, has become a common occurrence. The national election on January 7, 2024 was no exception; it was particularly complicated one. Bangladesh general elections on January 7, 2024 have highlighted again the condition of Hindu minorities in terms of their political affiliation.

The largest opposition force, the Bangladesh National Party, along with their main ally Jamaat-e-Islam, chose

not to participate in the election. The ruling party, Awami League, received support from the much weaker Jatiya Party (National Party) to complete the electoral process. Foreign countries and international organizations urged the government to ensure a free and fair election, emphasizing that voter turnout should be a key criterion. The USA specifically emphasized the importance of a participatory election, meaning that the BNP-Jamaat alliance should have participated. It is worth mentioning that the BNP-Jamaat alliance and some like-minded parties demanded a caretaker government to oversee the election procedure. However, the Awami League rejected this demand, citing the removal of the caretaker system by the 10th National Parliament. Hence, the Awami League wanted to ensure that a substantial number of voters were present, regardless of



how they cast their votes. Awami League leader and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said in a meeting, “I want all the candidates to be in the field. This will increase voter turnout and voting will also be festive and competitive.” To do so, her party has taken a new strategy. PM unleashed the supporters and the members of the party to compete against their own officially nominated candidates without any obligation. As a result we have seen some of the candidates were stronger than the nominated one. This has made the situation more confusing, embarrassing for the minority Hindus. This time it was more difficult for the less than 10 percent minority Hindus of the country. Normally the Hindus of Bangladesh have been considered as vote bank for boat, the electoral symbol for Awami League. Now, they had two or three candidates in front of them in a constituency from the same party fighting each other with their local influence. Each and every candidate tried to catch minority votes either by convincing or intimidating.

Envisaging the situation, on 11 October, the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council has submitted a memorandum to the Election Commission, declaring the areas predominantly inhabited by minorities as 'vulnerable' in the context of the twelfth national parliamentary elections. They suggested that while the aspiration is for a participatory, fair, and impartial environment for election proceedings, in the past, it has not been entirely satisfactory for the approximately twenty-two million religious and ethnic minority populations. On one hand, there is a lack of proportional representation in parliament in relation to the demographic ratio, and on the other hand, religious and ethnic minority men and women cannot spontaneously participate in elections. Election Commission, however, did not take any initiative as the government did not deem there was any threat. But it was not so easeful. On 13th January, Freedom fighter Keshab Lal Mandal, elected Member of Parliament from Bagherhat-3 (Rampal-Mongla) constituency, has urged the Prime Minister to intervene and put an end to post-election violence and oppression against minorities. In a written statement during a press conference, he stated that since the 12th parliamentary elections on January 7, armed supporters of the elected parliamentarian Habibur Nahar in Mongla, Bagherhat-3, have established a reign of terror.

“From the beginning of the election, supporters of the independent candidate Idris Ali, belonging to the minority community, have been subjected to various threats and intimidations by armed miscreants. Since the announcement of the election results, armed miscreants, supporters of the independent candidate Idris Ali, have been launching attacks

on homes and businesses of the Hindu community. They have been involved in looting and vandalizing residential areas, businesses, and shops. The encroachment and plundering of fish ponds has also taken place. Even women and children in these homes are not spared from their attacks. Two freedom fighters have also been seriously injured in their attacks,” he said in the statement.

On January 13, the leading Bengali newspaper Prothom Alo reported that several Hindu families in a village in Kumarakhali Upazila of Kushtia are living in extreme fear. Their fate has become alarming as local residents, intimidated by a free candidate's supporters, have attacked at least seven houses after the evening of the Election Day. Already, three members from two families have left their homes and moved elsewhere. A Hindu veteran Jiban Ranjan Biswas expressed to the newspaper that there were at least 70 Hindu families in the vicinity. Among them, 60 families participated in the boat election. On the evening of the Election Day, supporters of the independent candidate attacked at least seven houses of different families. Among those affected, the families of Ujjwal Kumar Singh, Adhir Kumar Singh, Ravi Das, Binay Kumar Mandal, Samendra Nath Mandal, and Surya Kumar Mandal were in extreme distress. Among them, Ravi Das and his wife, Suniti Das, left their home on next Monday morning. There are other such reports not necessary to mention.

Bangladesh's Hindus have endured violent attacks even during non-election time, obviously. Targeting Hindus began especially after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of the nation, who declared Bangladesh a secular state. But why the Hindus are being targeted and became vulnerable; why Hindus are being treated as gatecrashers while their roots are much older in the land than the 90 percent Bangladeshi Muslims? Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, the main force behind the creation of a "secular" Bangladesh, is the father of Sheikh Hasina, who has been the standard bearer of the Awami League for the last three decades. Bangladeshi Hindus traditionally support the Awami League, which has a secular platform.

It has a deep background too. A huge part of Muslim population in Bangladesh, even before 1947 partition, used to believe their religious identity first than nationality. One can assume that the gap between Islam and non-Islam in sixteenth-century Bengal was the same as that of the late twentieth century. There is no denying that twentieth century Bengali Muslims became increasingly aware of the beliefs and practices and that they attempted to integrate those beliefs and practices into their identity as Muslims. This



existing sentiment was behind the creation of Pakistan, and later created pro-Pakistani collaborators inside Bangladesh during 9-month-long liberation struggle.

When the Pakistani military initiated a crackdown on East Pakistan's soil on March 25, 1971, one of their initial tasks was searching for Hindus door-to-door, believing that they were the main conspirators working on behalf of India to separate the two wings of Pakistan. Although the Pakistani army surrendered to the Indian army and the freedom fighters of Bangladesh, they left a large number of local supporters who had collaborated with Pakistanis to kill and rape, especially Bengali Hindus. These Pakistani supporters were in a dormant state during the tenure of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. After the assassination of Sheikh Mujib, this formidable force emerged again with the approval and support of two military rulers who exploited anti-Indian and anti-Hindu sentiments in power politics. General Ziaur

Rahman, the founder of the BNP, played a significant role in this resurgence. Throughout his life, Maj Gen Ziaur Rahman was a diehard opponent of India. With such notorious hatred towards India and also towards Hindus, General Zia founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) with the goal of nurturing anti-India and anti-Hindu sentiment in Bangladesh. His aim was to gradually advance towards serving as a pseudo part of Pakistan. On the other hand, Jamaat-e-Islami, a Wahabi political organization founded by Abu Ala Maududi, regains popularity in Bangladesh society and has been collecting supporters at compound rate (Ziaur Rahman played a vital role to promote this group). They firmly spread the rumour that India has exploited the Hindus of Bangladesh and the Bangladeshi Hindus consider India as their love land. Alongside Jamaat-e-Islam, Islamist extremism is also on the rise. These are the main reasons for which the Hindus of Bangladesh are being trapped in their motherland.



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# AN ANALYSIS OF THE ELECTORAL OUTCOME OF THE 12TH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN BANGLADESH

— Snehangshu Bhattacharjee★

Amid the boycott of the elections by the opposition parties of Bangladesh, the 12th Parliamentary elections were held in the country on 7th January, 2024. The election saw a participation of 28 registered political parties and 1970 candidates. Among the 1970 candidates, 1534 candidates belonged to the 28 registered political parties and 436 were contesting the election as independent candidates.

The voter turnout, however, in this 12th national election of Bangladesh was low, with just 41.8 per cent of the electorate casting their vote. A further analysis of the voting pattern in the current election had revealed that although the overall voter turnout was 41.99 percent, nonetheless, only 21 constituencies had reported a voting percentage of above 60 percent, revealing that in these 21 places more than sixty percent of the registered voters cast their votes. Contrary to

this, not less than 52 constituencies had reported that less than 30 percent of the registered voters cast their votes in these places. The highest, i.e., 87.24 percent of votes were cast in Gopalganj-3 and the Awami League President and Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina was elected from that constituency. The lowest voter turnout of 13.04 per cent was reported from Dhaka-15 where the State Minister for Industries Kamal Ahmed Majumdar won the seat as an Awami League candidate. The voting pattern showed that the capital city of Dhaka had witnessed an extremely low voter turnout.

The result of the 12th Parliamentary elections unfolded some interesting trends. According to the results declared by the election commission, out of the 298 of the country's 300 parliamentary seats that went to the polls, Awami League won 222 seats, Jatiya Party won 11, Bangladesh Workers

Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Bangladesh Kalyan Party won one each, and independent candidates won 61 seats.

More than ninety women candidates participated in the 12th national election which was an all-time high in the electoral history of Bangladesh. However, only 19 women could secure victory in the elections. It is important to mention here that there were four independent candidates who emerged victorious in this election. They were Amatul Kibria Keya in Habiganj-1, Joya Sengupta in Sunamganj-2, Tahmina Begum in Madaripur-3 and Abdullah Nahid Nigar in Gaibandha-1.

Beside women, participation of celebrity candidates was another striking feature of the current Parliamentary elections in deliberation. In this election while few had registered victory, others had to concede defeat. Eminent candidates like Asaduzzaman Noor, Ferdous Ahmed, Barrister Sayedul Haque Sumon and Mahboob Rahman Ruhel emerged victorious in the elections. However, Momotaz Begom, Mahiya Mahi, Doli Sayontoni, Nakul Kumar Biswas and Ashraful Hossen Alom, better known as Hero Alom, failed to win the elections in their constituencies.

The election results revealed that people from various sectors got elected in the 12th parliamentary election of Bangladesh which included BFF Senior Vice-Presidents Abdus Salam Murshedy from Khulna-4, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza from Narail-2 and Shakib Al Hasan from Magura-1 constituency. Beside this, a total of 12 doctors were elected as members of Parliament in the 12th National Parliament elections. Eleven of them won the nomination of Bangladesh Awami League and remaining one won as independent candidate.

Increasing presence of the Business community of Bangladesh in the Legislative politics has been noticed since 1991. Accordingly, even in the recently concluded parliamentary elections around 199 members of parliament came from different business backgrounds. Garment industry, which is one of the principle industries of Bangladesh and which had been an epicenter of controversy due to the labour agitation, also saw representation in the 12th parliamentary elections with 18 candidates hailing from the textile and ready-made garment industry, consolidating their positions as successful entrepreneurs turned lawmakers.

The election result was assumed to have a significant impact over the nature of the new parliament of Bangladesh as 100 new faces from the Awami League and many independents candidates were set to take their seats in it. The election also brought an end of an era of Bangladesh with heavyweight

candidates like Jatiya Party (Manju) Chairman Anwar Hossain Manju, Workers' Party's Fazle Hossain Badsha, Jatiya Party's Sharifa Quader, Krishak Sramik Janata League's Quader Siddiqi, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal's Hasanul Haque Inu getting defeated by the independent candidates .

The election also brought some surprising result for the Awami League. Three state ministers and eleven other Awami League MPs were defeated by independent candidates. The three ministers were state minister for civil aviation and tourism, Md Mahbub Ali, the state minister for the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, Swapan Bhattacharjee and the state minister for relief and disaster management, Enamur Rahman.

### **The electoral outcome of the smaller parties in Bangladesh**

Beside Awami League and Jatiya Party, 26 other smaller parties participated in the elections. However the electoral result showed that their performance was dismal. 23 parties out of 28 participating in the elections could not win a single seat in the twelfth parliamentary elections. As a result, there would be representation of just five parties in the twelfth parliament. Out of the 26 smaller parties of Bangladesh, candidates of 17 parties secured second place in 38 seats. Workers Party of Bangladesh won second place in four seats. Bangladesh Nationalist Movement secured second position in four seats, Zaker's party said its candidates got the second highest number of votes in three constituencies. The newly registered Trinamool BNP secured the second position in only two seats. Similarly, National Socialist Party candidates had also claimed the second position in two constituencies. The National People's Party finished second in just one seat. It should also be mentioned here that the chiefs or chairpersons of a total of 11 political parties, who contested in the 12th national polls, had lost their security deposits, as they failed to secure 12.5 percent of the total votes polled in their respective constituencies. Together, the 11 candidates bagged a miniscule 44,905 votes.

### **The electoral outcome of the Islamic parties of Bangladesh that participated in the election**

Though the major Islamic parties had not participated in the 12th parliamentary elections, it was seen that several smaller Islamic political parties plunged into the electoral race. A total of 276 candidates from 7 Islamic parties participated in the 12th National Assembly elections. However, not a single



candidate won the election and they could not even secure the second or third place in the competition. The election results raised questions about their credibility among the Bangladeshi electorate.

### **The electoral outcome of the minority candidates in Bangladesh**

In this election, a total of 14 candidates from the minority community won the election. Among them, 12 were from the ruling Awami League and 2 won as independent candidates. The electoral result showed that in the 12th parliament of Bangladesh there would be less minority representation. Several minority leaders of the Awami League that included state minister Swapan Bhattacharjee, Dhirendranath Sambhu, Jewel Areng, Ashim Kumar Ukil, Mrinal Kanti Das and Manoranjan Shil Gopal lost to the independent candidates. However the victory of independent Hindu candidates like Pankaj Nath and Jaya Sengupta who were denied tickets by the Awami leadership and were able to win the election show that candidates with ability could resist the tide of Awami League success.

The result of the 12th Parliamentary elections in Bangladesh showed certain interesting trends regarding the electoral outcomes of the minority candidates. It was seen that 15 candidates belonging to the minority community stood as the closest competitor to the winning candidates in their parliamentary constituencies. Out of the 15 candidates, 7 candidates contested the election as independents, 6 candidates contested the election from Awami League and 2 contested from other smaller parties. Out of the 15 candidates who secured the second position only one candidate lost his electoral deposit. However 7 Minority candidates who won the election lost their electoral deposit.

### **Rise of independent MPs in Bangladesh**

One of the most striking outcomes of the recently held parliamentary elections in Bangladesh was the electoral success of the independent candidates. Majority shares of these independent candidates were dissidents of Awami League who contested the elections as independent candidates. A total of sixty-two independent candidates emerged victorious in the January 7th election. Another important statistics of the recently concluded election of Bangladesh revealed that the independent candidates got the highest number of votes after the winning candidates in 154 seats.

Soon after the elections, the question arose: Who would play the role of the opposition parties in the new parliament of Bangladesh. Though the constitution of Bangladesh remains silent over the issue of what should be the number to get the recognition of the opposition leader of parliament.

Opposition-less parliament is not new in Bangladesh. After the elections of 1973 the parliament of Bangladesh did not see any opposition party. The Awami League then won 293 of the 300 seats, while the opposition and independents won seven seats. At that time, seven members of parliament demanded to form an opposition party, but Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman rejected it, although there was no opposition party in the first Parliament.

There was speculation in Bangladesh whether these independent candidates would come together to form an opposition in the 12th Parliament of Bangladesh. The statement of the law minister of Bangladesh Anisur Rahman mentioned that in order to get the status of the opposition party the elected independent MPs had to form a coalition.

Independent MPs coming together to form a political party is not new in Bangladesh. Earlier, 16 independent candidates who won the 2014 parliamentary elections were seen forming a coalition led by Haji Selim. Three and a half years later, however, most of the independent candidates, including the leader of that alliance, Haji Salim, returned to the Awami League. In the 4th national election 1988, it was seen that the General Ershad led Jatiya Party won 251 seats, the combined opposition party led by JASAD won 19 seats, Freedom party won 2 seats and the independent won 25 seats. Later on ASM Abdur Rab was elected as the opposition party leader with the help of the independent MPs and Freedom party leadership.

### **The uncertain political future of the Jatiya Party**

The electoral result of Bangladesh saw the relegation of Jatiya Party as the main opposition party in the parliament of Bangladesh. In the 12th Parliamentary elections it could only win 11 seats throughout the country. It was the poorest result of the Jatiya party in decades. It is to be mentioned here that Jatiya party could only register victory in eleven out of 26 seats where it had electoral adjustment with the Awami League. Jatiya Party was severely defeated in the 12th parliamentary elections even from their stronghold in Rangpur. Jatiya Party chairman GM Quader's wife Sherifa Quader had stumbled in the race of 12th parliamentary election losing to the independent candidate Md. Khasru Chowdhury in the Dhaka-18 constituency.



Though Jatiya Party was dissatisfied with the electoral outcome of the recently held parliamentary elections as reflected in the statement of the Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader who said the election would not be acceptable as it was held under the control of the government. GM Quader brushed aside the possibility of rejecting the results but said the election would not get wider acceptance.

The poor electoral result of the Jatiya Party has raised questions whether it would get the recognition of the opposition party in the new parliament, though Awami League leader and State Minister for Energy and Power, Nasrul Hamid said that according to the constitution the opposition party of Bangladesh would be the Jatiya Party. However people casted doubt whether this time Jatiya Party would be able to get the status of the opposition party in Bangladesh.

## Conclusion

The trends of the electoral outcome of the 12th Parliamentary elections in Bangladesh indicates that the Awami League would dominate the legislative politics of Bangladesh in the future as there would be no visible opposition in Bangladesh legislative politics. The declining strength of the Jatiya Party indicated that it might face the same fortune as JASOD had faced in 1970's. The electoral result also proved that the smaller parties which participated in the election lacked organizational strength and political credibility in the country as most of their candidates lost the election miserably. The liberal Islamic parties which participated in the elections stating that they represent the confidence of the Muslim community also came under question as they failed miserably in the elections. The rising number of businessmen in the legislative arena also indicated that in the near future the policy formulation of Bangladesh might be tilting towards the interest of the industrialists.



Dreamstime

★ Senior Researcher, ISCS





Dreamstime



Dreamstime

## Foreign Minister of Bangladesh undertakes maiden visit to India

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr Hasan Mahmud visited India on his first official trip from February 7-9 and held a meeting with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and discussed steps to “forge ahead” in their “vibrant and people-centric partnership”. They also exchanged views on regional and international developments. The two Ministers also reviewed the progress in wide-ranging areas of bilateral relations, including cross-border connectivity, economic and development partnership, cooperation in defence and security, power, energy, water resources and people-to-people exchanges. He also held a meeting with the National Security Advisor Ajit Doval. During the visit, Foreign Minister Mahmud called on the President of India and held a meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister, Piyush Goyal. He travelled to Kolkata on February 09 before concluding his visit.





## Biman Bangladesh Airlines Connects Dhaka to Chennai

Biman Bangladesh Airlines has launched direct passenger flights from Dhaka to Chennai, India, inaugurated on December 16, 2023, coinciding with Victory Day. Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Pranay Verma, praised the new link, emphasizing India's commitment to enhancing bilateral communication for tourism, business, and medical travel. Shafiul Azim, CEO of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, highlighted the significance of this route, connecting Dhaka with southwestern India. Flights will operate on Saturdays, Mondays, and Thursdays. Air travel is crucial due to difficulties and time constraints on roads and railways for the 12 to 13 lakh people traveling annually from Bangladesh to states like Kolkata and Chennai for various purposes.

## Bangladesh and Myanmar Foreign Ministers discuss Rohingya Crisis at NAM Summit

The Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr. Hasan Mahmud met his Burmese counterpart Than Swe in Uganda during the sidelines of the NAM summit on January 20, addressing Rohingya repatriation and bilateral concerns. It marked their first meeting since Mahmud assumed office. The Rohingya crisis remains a major challenge, with over 1.1 million refugees in Bangladesh following ethnic persecution in Myanmar's Rakhine state. Despite agreements, repatriation hasn't progressed, with China participating in discussions. Mahmud emphasized peaceful conflict resolution and urged intensified efforts for a sustainable Rohingya solution at the NAM summit, highlighting the need for a culture of peace.



## Bangladesh imports potatoes and onions from India

As part of the government's decision to import potatoes to keep its price stable, an Indian truck loaded with 25 tons of potatoes arrived in Bangladesh on February 03 through the Hili Land Port in Dinajpur. Overall, the Bangladesh government has approved the import of 34,000 tons of potatoes through the Hili Land Port. The price of potato skyrocketed due to shortage of the supply in Bangladesh's market last year. On October 30, 2023, the Bangladesh government allowed import of potatoes from India to maintain supply and to keep the situation normal. Nevertheless, following market stability, Bangladesh again stopped importing potatoes through Hili land port from December 15. Meanwhile, the Indian government has also permitted the export of 50,000 tons of onions to Bangladesh through the National Cooperative Exports Ltd. in March 2024.





## Collaborative Talk on **How Important is Indonesia in India's economic development in the coming decade**

2nd February, 2024, ICCR, Kolkata

The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) in collaboration with The Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS) organized a Talk on “How Important is Indonesia in India's economic development in the coming decade” by Dr. Satish Chandra Mishra, eminent economist and entrepreneur from Indonesia who had been the Managing Director of Strategic Asia & Director of Strategic Asia Global. The event was organized at The Indian Council for Cultural Relations, ICCR, Ministry of External Affairs, GOI.

The event initiated with a Welcome Address by Shri Arindam Mukherjee, Director, ISCS India, followed to which the Distinguished Chairperson of the event, Shri Ambarish Dasgupta- Senior Partner, Intueri Consulting LLP initiated his deliberation by mentioning the significance of understanding the geo-political risk that would emerge in 2024. He said, beside the research scholars, the corporate sector is playing an important role in the analysis of the geo-political risk. Initiating his discussion on Indonesia, the speaker spoke about the cultural linkage between New Delhi and Jakarta by mentioning the poem Sagarika and the letters of Bali Yatra written by Rabindranath Tagore while he was in Indonesia.

His deliberation was followed by the presentation of Dr. Satish Chandra Mishra who started his discourse by mentioning the cultural similarity between India and Indonesia. He commented that India was central to the cultural imagination of Indonesia. He thereafter presented the systematic transition of Indonesia after 1999. He mentioned how decentralization of power, reform in the military had transformed Indonesia into a stable democracy. He thereafter discussed the economic success story of Indonesia. He said that Indonesia achieved highest economic growth rate despite facing challenges like economic crisis in mid-nineties, 2008 and the devastating Tsunami. He spoke about the Bank restructuring programme of Indonesia, Universal national health insurance scheme of the country and how constitutional provision was made to spend 20

percent of the country's budget in the education sector of the country.

In the last part of his deliberation he spoke on the sectors where both India and Indonesia could cooperate with each other and mentioned about sectors like maritime security, defence and infrastructure which included health, education, information technology related infrastructure along with traditional infrastructure.

The seminar ended with the thanks giving speech of Dr. Sarup Prasad Ghose who offered his sincere regards to the chair of the seminar, Shri Ambarish Dasgupta and the speaker Dr. Satish Chandra Mishra. He also thanked the Director of Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, Shri Arindam Mukherjee for organizing such meaningful dialogue and also the participants who attended and raised important questions and suggestions over this topic.

The invitation card features a blue background with white and yellow text. At the top, logos for the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, India, and the Indian Ocean Resource Centre are displayed. The central text reads: "You are cordially invited to the talk on **How Important is Indonesia in India's economic development in the coming decade** 2nd February, 2024 , 4.30 pm Venue: The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) 9A, Ho Chi Minh Sarani, Kolkata- 700071". Below this, the Speaker is listed as Dr. Satish Chandra Mishra, Managing Director of Strategic Asia & Director of Strategic Asia Global, Indonesia. The Chairperson is Shri Ambarish Dasgupta, Senior Partner, Intueri Consulting LLP. At the bottom, the names of the hosts are listed: Arindam Mukherjee, Director, ISCS, and Dr. Sarup Prasad Ghosh, Director, MAKAIAS. The card also includes the text "By Invitations Only".

**Speaker**  
Dr. Satish Chandra Mishra  
Managing Director of Strategic  
Asia & Director of Strategic  
Asia Global, Indonesia

**Chairperson**  
Shri Ambarish Dasgupta  
Senior Partner,  
Intueri Consulting LLP

**Arindam Mukherjee**  
Director, ISCS

**Dr. Sarup Prasad Ghosh**  
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By Invitations Only



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