

Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections and Referendum

12 February 2026



The Commonwealth

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Map of Bangladesh



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADD	Action on Disability and Development
AI	artificial intelligence
AL	Awami League
ASK	Ain o Salish Kendra
BAKSAL	Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League
BALLOT	Bangladesh Advancement for Credible, Inclusive and Transparent Elections
BEC	Bangladesh Election Commission
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BTV	Bangladesh Television
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
COG	Commonwealth Observer Group
CSO	civil society organisation
DUCSU	Dhaka University Central Students' Union
EEC	Election Enquiry Committee
HRSS	Human Rights Support Society
IAB	Islami Andolan Bangladesh
ICT	information and communication technology
ICT	International Crimes Tribunal
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
IGB	interim Government of Bangladesh
IGP	Inspector-General of Police
MP	member of parliament
NCC	National Consensus Commission
NCP	National Citizen Party
PEAM	Pre-Election Assessment Mission

PWDs	persons with disabilities
RPO	Representation of the People Order
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VDP	Village Defence Party

Letter of Transmittal

Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections and Referendum

Commonwealth Observer Group

12 February 2026

17 February 2026

Dear Secretary-General,

As Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group (the Group) to the 13th parliamentary elections and the referendum on the July Charter held on 12 February 2026 in the People's Republic of Bangladesh, I am pleased to submit to you our Final Report. We are honoured to have been invited to be present here, at this watershed moment in Bangladesh's history.

I wish to commend the people of Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Election Commission including all election officials, law enforcement agencies, and the interim Government, for the orderly, peaceful, and transparent manner in which the parliamentary elections and the referendum were conducted. The decision to extend the postal ballot mechanism to out of country voters and inmates in these elections represents a laudable development, enfranchising a greater number of citizens.

We also note that the Bangladesh Election Commission introduced a Code of Conduct with clear guidelines on campaigning, social media use, political parties and candidates' campaign materials, which were designed to ensure that the elections were conducted in a neutral, orderly, and peaceful political environment. The Group lauds the professionalism of polling officials, noting that prescribed procedures were followed throughout the voting, counting and tabulation processes.

We note that there is room for improvement to enhance inclusion and accessibility in future elections. Regarding women's participation and representation, our Group was encouraged by the number of women who turned out to vote. However, these elections also showed that more needs to be done to encourage the inclusion of women, given the low percentage (4%) of women

candidates and that only seven women were elected in these elections. Accordingly, we have proposed recommendations to garner support for women's increased participation in future elections in Bangladesh. The Group observed that, while election and security officials assisted persons with disabilities (PWD) and the elderly to vote, some polling stations were inaccessible to persons with physical challenges.

The Group's overall assessment is that the electoral process was orderly, peaceful, and transparent. Looking ahead to the next elections, we encourage the Bangladesh Election Commission to conduct a post-election review, including of all observer recommendations, as is consistent with good practice. We also call on the Commonwealth Secretariat and other international partners to remain ready to support Bangladesh in this regard.

In accordance with our mandate, we submit our detailed findings and recommendations in the attached report to help further strengthen the electoral process in Bangladesh.

The people of Bangladesh have elected their representatives, to step forward from this historic moment of the country's democratic journey and continue the work of building the democratic trust and engagement of all its citizens, across generations, genders, and abilities.

On behalf of the members of the Commonwealth Observer Group, and in my own name, I would like to express our gratitude for the opportunity to observe the elections and referendum and, in that way, contribute to the consolidation of democracy in Bangladesh.



HE Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo

Former President of the Republic of Ghana

**Chairperson of the Commonwealth
Observer Group**

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Executive Summary

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Hon. Shirley Botchwey, established a Commonwealth Observer Group ('COG' or 'the Group') to visit Bangladesh to observe the 13th parliamentary elections and the referendum on the July Charter, held on 12 February 2026. The COG was constituted at the invitation of the Chief Election Commissioner of the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC).

The COG comprised eminent persons drawn from across the Commonwealth, including politicians, diplomats and experts in election management, law, media and civil society, with expertise spanning issues including gender, youth and persons with disabilities (PWDs).

The Group was present in Bangladesh from 4 to 18 February 2026. In fulfilling its Terms of Reference, it engaged with a wide range of stakeholders. These included Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and other members of the interim Government of Bangladesh, the Chief Justice, the Chief Election Commissioner and other BEC officials, the Chief of Army Staff and the Inspector-General of Police.

The Group also met representatives of political parties; media agencies; online monitoring and fact-checking groups; civil society organisations including women's and youth groups; PWDs; Commonwealth High Commissions; international organisations; other international observer missions; and citizen observer groups.

The 13th parliamentary elections and the referendum on the July Charter were held within the context of the July 2024 uprising, which represented a significant event in Bangladesh's political history, marking a transition from Awami League-led governance to a renewed democratic trajectory. Stewardship of this transition fell to the interim administration led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus. Although Yunus was unelected, the period of transition underpinned his fourfold mandate: to restore law and order, rebuild state institutions through reform commissions, ensure accountability, and deliver credible elections alongside a constitutional referendum on the July Charter.

The 13th parliamentary elections were conducted for the 350-member unicameral parliament (Jatiya Sangsad), comprising 300 directly elected constituency seats and 50 seats reserved for women allocated based on proportional representation. A total of 51 political parties were registered, with 2,034 candidates contesting the elections. The elections were held in only 299 constituencies because of the sudden passing of a candidate in one constituency.

With a total of 127,711,793 registered voters, the Bangladesh elections marked the largest democratic undertaking in the Commonwealth in 2026. For the first time, postal voting was extended at scale to diaspora voters and individuals in lawful custody. This is a commendable innovation, enfranchising a greater number of citizens, including approximately 772,000 overseas voters across 122 countries.

While scepticism about the BEC's independence and capacity persisted, rooted partly in controversies surrounding the January 2024 elections, and the barring of the Awami League, the Group's overall assessment is that the elections were peaceful, orderly and transparent. The voting, counting and results management processes were conducted in a professional manner. The Group commends the BEC and polling staff for conducting their duties with professionalism and diligence.

Security arrangements were unprecedented in scale, with nearly 1 million personnel deployed through a joint security framework. Technological innovations, including drones, body-worn cameras, CCTV monitoring and a dedicated cybersecurity cell, supported real-time oversight without compromising ballot secrecy. Notwithstanding isolated incidents, these arrangements contributed to a peaceful environment for the elections. The Group lauds the professionalism within which the security agencies conducted themselves. The Group also applauds the people of Bangladesh for exercising their franchise in an orderly and peaceful manner.

The Group noted limited public awareness of the referendum's substance and concerns about the secondary role of political parties in shaping the July Charter. However, the COG observed that the referendum passed with 47,225,980 votes.

The elections also highlighted important dimensions of inclusion. Women constitute roughly half the population and benefit from 50 constitutionally reserved parliamentary seats, with an additional 50 proposed under the July Charter. However, only about 4 per cent of candidates for constituency seats were women, and just seven women were directly elected in 2026, underscoring the need to promote women's participation and representation. Nevertheless, the Group noted that civil society organisations continued to play a constructive role in promoting gender equity and broader democratic reforms.

Youth representation and participation remain a concern. Although citizens under 35 comprise approximately 44 per cent of the Bangladeshi electorate and were instrumental in the 2024 protests, their representation in party leadership and participation as candidates remained low. The Group proposes more meaningful youth engagement in Bangladesh's political and governance processes.

By contrast, there appeared to be tangible progress on matters relating to the inclusion of PWDs, including the introduction of the first-ever braille ballots and structured assistance programmes. These innovations marked a significant administrative advance in ensuring electoral inclusion. More still needs to be done to ensure greater inclusion of PWDs, including providing accessible polling stations.

The Group noted that the media was vibrant and active. The media environment during the campaign was notably more open than in previous cycles. Some newspapers and television channels provided broad and balanced coverage. Nonetheless, attacks on media offices in December 2025 underscored persistent risks to press freedom.

The restrictive legal environment created by the Communication and Technology Act and the Cyber Security Act contributed to a 'media chill,' resulting in Bangladesh ranking 149th out of 180 countries in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index.

Digital platforms – primarily Facebook but also YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp and X (formerly Twitter) – served as primary arenas of political contestation, amplifying both civic engagement and misinformation. In response, the BEC established a media monitoring and cybersecurity unit and launched youth-oriented digital outreach initiatives.

Ultimately, the February 2026 parliamentary elections and referendum represented a historic juncture, being administratively innovative and largely peaceful and transparent. However, there is room for further improvement. As Bangladesh moves forward, consolidating institutional trust, addressing political divisions, broadening women's and youth representation and strengthening safeguards for media freedom and digital integrity will be central to deepening the democratic gains of this pivotal transition.

This report presents a set of recommendations for consideration by key stakeholders in Bangladesh. They are offered in a constructive spirit, with the aim of deepening democracy and further strengthening the country's institutions and electoral processes.

Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Targeted stakeholder(s)	Type of recommendation
Chapter 3: Legal Framework and Electoral Administration			
1	Ensure the relevant Ordinances during the period of the Interim Government are tabled within 30 days of the first sitting of parliament.	Government	Legal/Regulatory
2	Strengthen constitutional and legal institutions to secure the rule of law, including the timely publication of judicial decisions relevant to elections.	Government, Judiciary	Legal/Regulatory Policy
3	Strengthen the independence of the BEC through institutional reform and capacity-building.	BEC, Government, Parliament	Legal/Regulatory
4	In future, the BEC should ensure it provides adequate and tailored voter education programmes to enable the voters to understand the process of voting and related issues in the case of a referendum, and their role as voters to enable meaningful participation in the elections.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical Policy
5	While these elections were conducted under special circumstances, it is important that the BEC exercises its mandate in a manner that ensures sufficient time is provided for due process, taking into account the electoral cycle.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
6	The BEC should facilitate further dialogue with political parties and other interested organisations on the subject of political participation with a view to achieving a level playing field in future elections. Given that the July National Charter has been accepted by the people of Bangladesh, the BEC ought to partake in the process of amendments to the RPO as it relates to the registration of political parties.	BEC, Political parties, and other relevant stakeholders	Policy Administrative/ Technical
7	The BEC should also strengthen transparency and predictability in party registration by publishing clear and consolidated guidelines detailing requirements for party symbol reservation, registration criteria and grounds for rejection or deregistration.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
8	The BEC should consider recruiting eligible women for senior positions including as presiding officers where possible.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical Policy
9	The Group recommends assessment of the effectiveness of Vigilance and Observation Teams, the functioning of EECs and the timeliness of post-election expense audits.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical Policy

(Continued)

No.	Recommendation	Targeted stakeholder(s)	Type of recommendation
10	In order to strengthen the dispute resolution mechanisms, the Group recommends a review of the RPO and the introduction of mandatory time-lines for resolving electoral disputes and ensuring timely resolution.	BEC	Legal/Regulatory
11	The Group further proposes the creation of an independent Electoral Dispute Tribunal to complement and enhance the capacity of existing judicial structures.	BEC, Judiciary	Legal/Regulatory Policy
Chapter 4: Participation and Inclusion			
12	Advance women's pathways to elected office through phased transition of reserved seats to direct election and a mandatory 40 per cent women candidate quota across political parties. Accelerate expansion to 150 reserved seats with clear timelines aligned with CEDAW General Recommendation 40 obligations.	Political parties, Parliament	Political Policy Legal/Regulatory
13	Mandate gender parity in electoral politics by requiring that political parties field a minimum of 50 per cent women candidates as a condition of eligibility to participate in general elections, with transitional provisions allowing two election cycles to achieve full compliance. This should be supported by BEC matching grants and technical assistance that enable women candidates, including independents and those from smaller parties, to compete on equitable financial terms.	Political parties, BEC	Political Policy Legal/Regulatory
14	Create a safe electoral environment by operationalising the Sexual Harassment Prevention and Protection Law 2025 by establishing a BEC rapid response unit to monitor and address online harassment, misogynist campaigning and violence against women in politics.	Political parties, BEC	Policy Legal/Regulatory Administrative/Technical
15	Encourage the institutionalisation of gender parity in electoral governance to achieve a progressive gender balance by setting a 50 per cent target for women presiding officers and senior electoral officials by 2031. Mandate BEC publication of comprehensive sex-disaggregated data across all electoral processes to enable evidence-based policymaking.	BEC	Policy Administrative/Technical
16	Leverage Bangladesh's regional gender equality leadership to progressively withdraw CEDAW reservations on Articles 2 and 16(1) to signal comprehensive commitment to eliminating discrimination.	Government	Policy Legal/Regulatory

(Continued)

No.	Recommendation	Targeted stakeholder(s)	Type of recommendation
17	Require registered political parties to uphold constitutional gender equality guarantees by formally and publicly rejecting assertions, whether based on religious interpretation, cultural tradition or other grounds, that women are ineligible for political leadership (in reference to CEDAW Article 7). Party commitments should be verified through BEC monitoring, documented in public registries and enforced through party registration requirements, with non-compliance resulting in suspension of ballot access pending remedial action.	Political parties, BEC	Policy Legal/Regulatory
18	Set up public recognition programmes for women panchayat/council members to normalise female political authority.	Government, Political parties	Political Policy
19	Institutionalise civil society partnerships through formal advisory mechanisms by establishing a standing Civil Society Electoral Advisory Council that convenes regularly with the BEC and holds decision-making authority on inclusivity standards, observer protocols and voter education strategies.	BEC, CSOs	Policy Administrative/Technical
20	Resource CSOs as primary implementers of targeted voter education, digital platform regulation and post-election reconciliation.	BEC, CSOs	Administrative/Technical Policy
21	Create a co-ordinated civil society network providing year-round, comprehensive support to aspiring and active women candidates across all political parties to include mentorship programmes, transformational leadership training for politicians and peer learning platforms.	CSOs, Political parties	Political Policy
22	Promote meaningful inclusion within political parties: Encourage political parties to adopt internal reforms that ensure genuine youth representation in party structures, including executive committees and candidate selection processes. This could involve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory youth quotas: Implement internal party quotas for youth representation in leadership positions and as electoral candidates, similar to provisions for women, to ensure a minimum level of inclusion. • Youth wings with decision-making power: Empower youth wings of political parties with actual decision-making authority and resources, moving beyond their traditional roles as mere campaign vehicles. • Capacity-building and mentorship: Establish programmes within political parties to provide political education, leadership training and mentorship opportunities for young aspiring leaders. 	Political parties	Political Policy

(Continued)

No.	Recommendation	Targeted stakeholder(s)	Type of recommendation
23	<p>Support young candidates: Develop mechanisms to support young candidates, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds or independent platforms, in overcoming financial and structural barriers to contesting elections. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial assistance: Explore the possibility of election commission matching grants or dedicated funds for young candidates. • Lowering candidacy age: Review and potentially lower the minimum age for contesting elections to align with the energy and aspirations of the youth demographic. 	Political parties, BEC CSOs	Political Legal/ Regulatory
24	<p>Combat online harassment and misinformation: Strengthen regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to address online misinformation, cyber harassment and hate speech, creating a safer digital environment for political discourse and youth engagement. This should include public awareness campaigns and digital literacy initiatives targeting young people.</p>	Political parties, Media, CSOs, Government	Political Policy
25	<p>Institutionalise youth engagement platforms: Establish formal platforms for dialogue between youth organisations, political parties and electoral bodies to ensure youth perspectives are systematically considered in policy-making and electoral reforms.</p>	Political parties, BEC, CSOs	Policy Political
26	<p>Data collection and analysis: Encourage the BEC to collect and publish disaggregated data on youth voter turnout, candidate participation and other relevant metrics to enable evidence-based policy-making and track progress on youth inclusion.</p>	BEC	Policy
27	<p>Braille ballot national standardisation: The DUCSU model should be adopted for all national elections, with mandatory availability upon request at every polling station.</p>	BEC	Administrative/ Technical Policy
28	<p>Braille-literate counting staff: The BEC should recruit and train braille-literate temporary staff in every district, not rely on external contractors.</p>	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
29	<p>Accessible voter education: All BEC materials should be produced in audio, large-print and easy-read formats.</p>	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
30	<p>Disability-disaggregated data: Turnout and satisfaction surveys should include disability status to measure effective access.</p>	BEC	Administrative/ Technical

(Continued)

No.	Recommendation	Targeted stakeholder(s)	Type of recommendation
31	Sign language interpreters should be made available at each polling station, or the ability to carry out video or WhatsApp video calls to enable the deaf to communicate with a sign language interpreter if he or she is unable to comprehend the instructions.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
32	A calm room should be introduced for voters who are on the autism spectrum in case they become overwhelmed or need support.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
33	Training should be given to volunteers on how to assist PWDs, especially the physically challenged and wheelchair users.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
34	Geriatric accessibility standards: Introduce ramps, seating, priority queues and large-print materials at all polling stations.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
35	State-provided transport: Consider institutionalising dedicated vehicles for voters unable to walk independently, modelled on the palanquin precedent.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
36	Homebound voting pilot: Consider supervised mobile ballot units for voters certified as unable to travel (requires constitutional amendment).	BEC, Parliament	Administrative/ Technical Legal/ Regulatory
37	Post-2026 evaluation: Carry out a comprehensive assessment of postal voting accessibility, non-literate voter participation and mail delivery reliability.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
38	Include a braille jacket for visually impaired voters.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
Chapter 5: Campaign and Media			
39	To improve the campaign environment in future elections, Bangladesh may wish to consider various mechanisms to develop a more inclusive political culture, including measures to address truth-seeking and national healing.	Government, Political parties	Political
40	Build the capacity of institutions such as the National Institute of Mass Communication to conduct media literacy campaigns and the Press Institute of Bangladesh to train journalists in objective news reporting. The International Fund for Public Interest Media is one possible source of support.	National Institute of Mass Communication, Press Institute of Bangladesh	Policy
41	The new government of Bangladesh should consider passing legislation to transition state-owned media in Bangladesh to public service broadcasting.	Government, Parliament	Legal/Regulatory Policy

(Continued)

No.	Recommendation	Targeted stakeholder(s)	Type of recommendation
42	Build the capacity of the Bangladesh Community Radio Association and its member stations to broadcast election news and opinions relevant to remote and marginalised communities more effectively. (Organisations such as the Association Mondiale des Radios Communautaires, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) community radio programming may be able to assist.)	Bangladesh Community Radio Association	Administrative/ Technical
43	Build the capacity of the Bangladesh Press Council to facilitate a media code of conduct for reporting on elections, created and enforced by media organisations and journalists themselves.	Bangladesh Press Council	Policy Administrative/ Technical
44	The Group encourages the BEC to retain its election media monitoring unit and gradually build it into a simple, year-round risk monitoring function. This would involve continuing to track online trends in-between elections, identifying early warning signs of emerging issues and tactics, and providing short, clear public updates even outside campaign periods.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
45	The Group encourages the BEC to expand its focus beyond false and misleading information to also address gendered abuse, impersonation of candidates, co-ordinated harassment, religious and ethnic hate, and AI-generated harms that may impact elections and civic participation. This could include setting up clear internal referral pathways for serious cases and identifying how female candidates can report serious attacks quickly and safely.	BEC	Policy Administrative/ Technical
46	The Group encourages the BEC to strengthen transparency by publishing brief updates on how violations of the Code of Conduct are handled, including where issues are escalated to social media companies.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
47	The Group acknowledges the positive steps already taken to promote responsible digital campaigning and encourages the consistent, rights-respecting application of the Code of Conduct, particularly in relation to official accounts and paid digital content. Maintaining a clear, publicly accessible record of verified official accounts can assist citizens in identifying authentic sources and reducing impersonation risks. Any review of party accounts is encouraged to remain clearly anchored in Code compliance, with safeguards that protect lawful political expression and reinforce public trust in the Commission's neutrality.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical

(Continued)

No.	Recommendation	Targeted stakeholder(s)	Type of recommendation
48	The Group encourages the government to ensure the BEC has the staff, training and budget required to sustain this work throughout the year.	Government, BEC	Policy Administrative/ Technical
49	The Group encourages the BEC to invest in understanding social media companies' safety policies and existing enforcement tools. By aligning relevant parts of the Code of Conduct with platform rules where appropriate, the Commission may be better positioned to request timely action when violations occur.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
50	The Group encourages the new administration to sustain investment in youth civic education, digital literacy and responsible AI awareness programmes throughout the electoral cycle and beyond the major urban centres. Consistent engagement can strengthen long-term democratic resilience and support informed participation.	BEC	Policy Administrative/ Technical
51	The Group encourages civil society groups, media and fact-checking practitioners, digital investigators and other key stakeholders to consider establishing a coalition to reduce duplication of effort, pool resources, consolidate expertise, strengthen engagement with technology companies and present a unified voice on enforcement, transparency and safeguards.	CSOs, Media Fact-checking practitioners, Digital investigators Other stakeholders	Policy Administrative/ Technical
52	The Group encourages CSOs and partners to maintain year-round monitoring of digital risks and not limiting this to during election periods. Developing shared early-warning indicators for co-ordinated attacks and gendered harassment can make it possible to identify issues earlier and address them long before the electoral period.	CSOs, Other stakeholders	Administrative/ Technical Policy
53	The Group encourages the international community to build on existing local expertise through long-term investment in established organisations and initiatives. This can strengthen national capacity and ensure knowledge remains embedded locally.	International community	Developmental
54	The Group encourages the international community to provide multi-year support for digital risk monitoring, women's online safety initiatives and safeguarding efforts. Treating this work as ongoing democratic infrastructure, rather than a short-term project, can improve preparedness and over time.	International community	Developmental

(Continued)

No.	Recommendation	Targeted stakeholder(s)	Type of recommendation
55	The Group encourages social media companies to approach Bangladesh as a sustained governance context rather than a short-term election market. This includes maintaining strong Bangla-language moderation capacity throughout the year, investing early in election preparedness and sustaining partnerships with the BEC beyond election day.	Social media companies	Developmental
56	The Group encourages Meta to expand and strengthen its Trusted Partner and Third-Party Fact-Checking Programmes in Bangladesh.	Meta	Developmental
57	The Group encourages greater transparency regarding Bangla-language moderation capacity, including clearer information on staffing levels, escalation processes and enforcement timelines, particularly during election periods. Bangladesh-specific transparency updates, published before, during and after elections, can enhance trust and allow for informed public assessment.	Social media companies	Developmental
58	The Group encourages social media companies to commission, and publish, independent Human Rights Impact Assessments on Bangladesh.	Social media companies	Developmental
59	The Group encourages platforms to strengthen safeguarding for women and vulnerable groups by establishing clear, fast-track escalation mechanisms for co-ordinated harassment, threats and impersonation. Dedicated escalation pathways for the BEC during high-risk periods may also support timely resolution of serious violations.	Social media companies	Developmental
60	The Group encourages platforms to invest in features and interventions that promote responsible use of social media by both citizens and political actors. This may include civic prompts, educational partnerships, transparency tools for paid political content and clearer labelling systems. Preventative interventions can reduce harmful amplification before enforcement becomes necessary.	Social media companies	Developmental
61	The Group encourages structured and ongoing engagement with the BEC and civil society through regular preparedness dialogues long before election cycles and structured reviews afterwards. Institutionalised engagement strengthens mutual understanding, reduces friction during high-pressure periods and supports collaborative governance over time.	BEC, CSOs, Social media companies	Policy Developmental

(Continued)

No.	Recommendation	Targeted stakeholder(s)	Type of recommendation
Chapter 6: Voting, Counting and Results Management			
62	The voter list should be organised in such a manner as to facilitate the quick identification of voters, without the need for the use of political party 'information slips.' The list should be ordered according to ID card number, alphabetical order or some such appropriate manner.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical
63	Adhere to international good practice, aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which emphasises the right to inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory electoral processes that uphold the dignity and independence of PWDs.	BEC	Policy Administrative/ Technical
64	The BEC should revisit the current arrangements to continue to improve the facilities for voting booths in future elections.	BEC	Administrative/ Technical

1. Introduction

This introductory chapter begins with a summary of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) methodology. It provides essential background on the context in which COGs operate and concludes with an overview of how this methodology was applied to the 2026 13th parliamentary elections and referendum on the July Charter in Bangladesh.

1.1 International election observation methodology

Since 1980, the Commonwealth has observed more than 200 elections in 41 countries. International election observation serves several purposes, including:

- promoting the openness and transparency of the electoral process;
- deterring improper practices and attempts at fraud;
- enhancing public confidence in the process, thereby contributing to acceptance of election results;
- diffusing political tensions through diplomacy and mediation; and
- strengthening international standards on electoral good practice.

1.2 The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines: key provisions

The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines for the Conduct of Election Observation in Member Countries ('the Revised Guidelines') were agreed by Heads of Government at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London, United Kingdom. The key provisions include the following:

1. *COGs are independent, including of the Secretariat*
'Members of a COG are invited by the Secretary-General in their personal capacity as an eminent Commonwealth citizen, not as a representative of any member country, government or political group.'
2. *Observers, not monitors*
Unlike some citizen observer groups (monitors), which are permitted to intervene or offer assistance to electoral officials in a limited manner, Commonwealth observers – as with all international observers – cannot and do not interfere in any way with any aspect of the electoral process.
3. *Taking forward COG recommendations*
The Revised Guidelines encourage member countries to establish 'domestic mechanisms,' such as multi-stakeholder meetings or committees, to review and take forward recommendations made by a COG.
4. *Whole-of-election-cycle approach*
Election observation is ideally not a stand-alone activity. Where possible, the Secretariat seeks to support stakeholders in the implementation of these recommendations through a range of methods, including the production of expert publications, the training of election management body staff and the facilitation of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, and, crucially, through bespoke technical assistance to national stakeholders upon the submission of a formal request.

1.3 The strength of Commonwealth Observer Groups

While all international election observer missions adhere to the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, each organisation's methodology has slight variances that

reflect its unique strengths. The strength and value of Commonwealth observer missions lie in three key characteristics:

1. *Eminent observers*
While COGs are smaller in size than some other international observer missions, they comprise eminent persons from across the Commonwealth in their respective fields of expertise, such as senior politicians; electoral commissioners; election experts; diplomats; and human rights, legal and media experts. The biographies of all observers can be found in Annex I.
2. *Diversity and peer-to-peer learning*
COGs reflect the geographical diversity of the Commonwealth itself, with observers selected from each of the world's continents. This inculcates a genuine spirit of peer-to-peer learning on election administration and democratic reform.
3. *Political mediation through the Chair's Good Offices*
COGs are normally chaired by a former Head of State or senior diplomat, invited based on careful consideration of a number of factors that ensure they are a 'good fit' for the election in hand. The respect afforded to such high-profile leaders allows COG chairs to enter into a 'Good Offices' role in instances of post-election political disputes and non-acceptance of election results. Such Good Offices roles have played a vital part in ensuring peaceful transitions between governments on many occasions.

More information on the role and mandate of observers can be found in the 2019 Commonwealth Handbook on Election Observation. For more information on the Commonwealth's efforts to promote democracy, please visit the Commonwealth Secretariat website.¹

1.4 Deployment of a Commonwealth Observer Group to the 13th parliamentary elections and referendum on the July Charter in Bangladesh

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Hon. Shirley Botchwey, constituted a COG (or 'the Group') for the 13th parliamentary elections and referendum on the July Charter, held on 12 February 2026, following an invitation from the Chief Election Commissioner of the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC).

The Secretary-General's decision was informed by a customary Pre-Election Assessment Mission (PEAM) undertaken by the Secretariat staff team from 26 to 30 October 2025. The PEAM met with a broad range of national and international stakeholders, including the Attorney General, the Inspector-General of Police (IGP), the Law Adviser to the interim Government of Bangladesh (IGB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative, and representatives of the BEC; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; political parties and political coalitions; civil society organisations (CSOs) and women's, youth and persons with disabilities (PWDs)' groups; resident Commonwealth High Commissions; and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) Country Office.

1.5 Commonwealth Observer Group composition

The COG was led by His Excellency Nana Akufo-Addo, former President of the Republic of Ghana. The Group comprised 13 eminent persons drawn from across the Commonwealth. Experts brought together a diversity of experience in the fields of election management, politics, civil society, law, diplomacy, media and human rights, among others. An eight-person staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat supported the COG. A full list of members can be found at Annex I.

¹ <https://thecommonwealth.org/>

1.6 Terms of Reference

The mandate and agreed Terms of Reference for the Group were as follows:

The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the invitation of the Bangladesh Election Commission.

The Group is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole.

The Group will determine in its own judgement whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which the country has committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.

The Group is to act impartially and independently. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly. It is also free to propose to the authorities concerned such action on institutional, procedural and other matters as may assist the holding of such elections.

The Group is to submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of Bangladesh, the Chief Election Commissioner of the Bangladesh Election Commission and leaders of political parties, and thereafter to all Commonwealth governments.

Figure 1.1 Members of the Commonwealth Observer Group with Commonwealth Secretariat staff.



1.7 Activities

The Group was in Bangladesh from 4 to 18 February 2026. The announcement of the COG was made prior to the Group's arrival on 21 January 2026² (Annex II). Its arrival statement was issued on 8 February 2026³ (Annex III).

² The Commonwealth (2026) 'Former Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo to lead Commonwealth Observer Group for Bangladesh Elections and Referendum'. 21 January. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/former-ghanaian-president-lead-commonwealth-observer-group-bangladesh>

³ The Commonwealth (2026) "'We are here to affirm the Commonwealth's solidarity with the people of Bangladesh" – Chair of the Commonwealth Observer Group'. 8 February. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/we-affirm-commonwealths-solidarity-people-bangladesh-chair>

The Group met with a range of stakeholders, including the Chief Adviser and other members of the IGB, the Chief Justice, the Chief Election Commissioner and other members of the BEC, the Chief of Army Staff and the IGP, and representatives of political parties, the media, online monitoring and fact-checking groups, CSOs (including women's and youth groups and representatives of PWDs), Commonwealth High Commissions and international organisations, as well as other international observer missions and local citizen observer groups. Members of the Group also observed campaign rallies in the lead-up to the elections.

Figure 1.2 Members of the Commonwealth Observer Group paid a courtesy call on the Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.



The members of the Group were deployed to the eight divisions of Bangladesh on 10 February: Barisal, Chattogram, Dhaka, Khulna, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Sylhet. On deployment, members received further briefings from local officials, including BEC officials and the police. They also observed voting, counting and transmission of results from polling stations in these areas to the returning officers.

The COG Chair delivered an Interim Statement (Annex IV) on 14 February, presenting the Group's preliminary findings and observations. In the Statement, the Group commended the people of Bangladesh, the BEC, law enforcement agencies and the IGB for the peaceful and orderly manner in which the parliamentary elections and the referendum had been conducted.

The Group proposed recommendations, which included increased women's participation in future electoral processes and continued efforts towards greater youth participation and empowerment in governance, as well as highlighting the importance of creating a level playing field for all political parties to enshrine democratic culture and support long-term political stability.

The Group completed its report in Dhaka before the members' departure on 18 February 2026, for transmission to the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

2. Political Background

2.1 Historical overview

The partition of British India in August 1947 created the state of Pakistan, comprising two distinct wings separated by over 1,000 miles. East Bengal, renamed East Pakistan in 1955, was united with the western wing based primarily on shared religion. After its Liberation War of 1971, which was marked by extensive violence and loss of life, East Pakistan separated from Pakistan to become the independent state of Bangladesh in December 1971. The Constitution of the new country was promulgated in 1972.

Bangladesh's history has witnessed various government systems, from a Westminster-style parliament to military and one-party presidential rule, to a multi-party presidential system and back to a parliamentary system in 1991. Today, Bangladesh is a unitary republic with a parliamentary democracy and includes eight administrative divisions. It has an estimated population of approximately 176 million,⁴ 91 per cent of whom are Muslim and 8 per cent of whom are Hindu, with smaller Buddhist and Christian communities. Bangla (Bengali) is the sole official language and is spoken by almost all of the population as a first or second language.

2.2 Post-independence history

The first parliamentary era of Bangladesh, spanning from 1972 to 1975, represents the foundational yet complex chapter in the nation's political development. Held on 7 March 1973, the first general elections of independent Bangladesh were a landmark exercise in self-governance. With a voter turnout of 54.9 per cent, the Bangladesh Awami League (AL), led by Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won 293 out of 300 parliamentary seats on a platform centred on post-war reconstruction and nation-building.

The new government faced formidable challenges rebuilding a war-ravaged economy and administration, compounded by a famine and governance concerns, which gradually eroded public confidence. In January 1975, the Constitution was amended to introduce a presidential system and a one-party framework known as BAKSAL (Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League). A coup d'état and the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 15 August 1975 closed this inaugural chapter of Bangladesh's post-independence history and ushered in a long period of military-dominated rule (1975–1990), during which General Ziaur Rahman emerged as a central figure.

After a referendum in 1977, Ziaur Rahman was elected President of Bangladesh in June 1978. He founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) that year. After President Rahman's assassination in 1981 and the brief presidency of Justice Abdus Sattar, General Hussain Muhammad Ershad seized power in 1982, inaugurating a second phase of military rule that ended with the mass uprising of 1990 led jointly by the AL and the BNP. The uprising compelled General Ershad (then President Ershad) to resign. An interim administration led by Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed was appointed to transition to democratic elections.

The restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991 and the election of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, the widow of the late General Ziaur Rahman, marked the beginning of the representative-democratic era in Bangladesh. In the 1996 elections, the BNP lost to the AL, led by Sheikh Hasina Wajed, daughter of the late Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Sheikh Hasina lost power to Begum Khaleda Zia in the 2001 elections but won again in 2008 and remained in power through subsequent, albeit widely criticised, elections in 2014, 2018 and 2024.

2.3 Post-independence political challenges

Profound political divisions have been a recurring theme in Bangladesh's political history. In 1996, in response to distrust between the AL and the BNP, Bangladesh developed a non-party caretaker government system, a constitutional innovation that enabled credible elections in 1996, 2001 and 2008. Though later abolished

⁴ <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/BD>

in 2011, the caretaker system enabled neutral interim governance to bolster electoral legitimacy in a deeply polarised context.⁵ Before and after the caretaker system, the postponements and rescheduling of elections reflect how electoral timetables in Bangladesh can often be shaped by political crisis and negotiation rather than routine democratic calendaring. As discussed later in this report, per a judicial decision in late 2024, the caretaker government system has been restored with prospective effect.

Post-independence challenges have also included the management of long-running conflict and autonomy demands in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). A peace accord signed in 1997 between the Government of Bangladesh and indigenous representatives marked an important step. Nevertheless, contested implementation of some of its provisions has contributed to periodic tensions and concerns among local communities.

Since 2017, Bangladesh has also been compelled to manage the presence of over 1 million forcibly displaced Rohingya from Myanmar, who are concentrated largely in the Cox's Bazar area. Their displacement has placed sustained pressure on host communities, public services and security management, posing a continuing humanitarian and foreign policy challenge.

2.4 The July Uprising of 2024

The events of July and August 2024 mark one of the most consequential turning points in Bangladesh's political history. What began as student protests over a single issue surged into a nationwide uprising that, within weeks, had brought an end to the uninterrupted 15-year period of incumbency of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The uprising ignited over a quota system that reserved a significant portion of government jobs for specific categories of people, including the children of freedom fighters from the 1971 Liberation War. However, the quota issue symbolised deeper frustration with a political order that was widely perceived as entrenched and authoritarian. On 5 August 2024, as large crowds converged on Dhaka, the military refused orders to fire on civilians. Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled to neighbouring India. On 8 August 2024, an interim government was sworn in, led by Muhammad Yunus as Chief Adviser to the new interim government.

Timeline of 2024's July Uprising

Date	Event
June 2024	Student protests begin, initially over the quota system
July 2024	Protests escalate; hundreds are fired on and killed
5 August 2024	Sheikh Hasina flees to India
8 August 2024	Interim government sworn in under Muhammad Yunus

2.5 The Interim Government of Bangladesh

The transition from authoritarian governance to the promise of a democratic order fell to an interim government led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus, who carried no electoral mandate but significant moral authority.

Tasked with restoring order, rebuilding institutions, pursuing accountability through trials and conducting elections,⁶ the IGB faced immense domestic challenges in translating the democratic hopes of the

⁵ The restoration of the caretaker system is detailed in Chapter 3 of this report, on Legal Framework and Electoral Administration.

⁶ Chowdhury, K. R. and Salam, S. (2024) 'Yunus-Led Interim Bangladesh Govt Sworn in; Diverse Members Include 2 Student Leaders'. RFA, 8 August. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/bangladesh-yunus-cabinet-08082024194039.html> ('Restoring the law and order situation is our first job. We cannot take further steps until the law and order situation returns to normalcy'); The Daily Star (2025) 'Reforms First Priority, Then Trials, Polls'. 29 May. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/reforms-first-priority-then-trials-polls-3906996>

'Monsoon Revolution.' The uprising had left as many as 1,400 dead, with a United Nations fact-finding mission later describing the response of the previous government as brutal and systematic, citing credible evidence of excessive force and coordination by senior officials.⁷

While international recognition of the transition was overwhelmingly positive, with countries and key partners recognising the IGB,⁸ the political transition also affected Bangladesh's external relations in various ways. Relations with India became more sensitive following Sheikh Hasina's departure from Bangladesh to India, while the IGB sought to enhance ties with other international partners.

As noted above, the IGB's mandate encompassed four interrelated tasks. First was restoring law and order. Second was rebuilding institutions through reform commissions. Third was accountability through trials, including the reconstitution of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), amendments to its powers and prosecutions of senior figures from the previous regime. Fourth was the conduct of free and fair elections, which the IGB pursued alongside a constitutional referendum on the July Charter. These four aspects are further detailed below.

Law and order

The July Uprising left a weakened security apparatus, which frayed law and order in the aftermath. However, the military, which had refused to fire on protesters, became a crucial partner in stabilisation, while remaining subordinate to the civilian interim government.

In a report by Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a well-known CSO, 102 people were killed in political violence in 2025. The figure was 100 in 2024, 45 in 2023 and 70 in 2022. Separately, the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) reported 133 deaths from political violence in 2025, down from 145 in 2024, though up from 96 in 2023. The figures for 2024 exclude the up to 1,400 estimated to have been killed during the uprising against the Sheikh Hasina government.

The day after the election schedule was announced on 11 December, Sharif Osman Bin Hadi, a well-known political activist and an independent member of parliament (MP) aspirant, was shot in what appeared to be a targeted political attack. His resulting death on 18 December triggered public outrage and violence across the country. Also on 18 December, a Hindu garment worker was killed in Mymensingh following mob violence over unproven allegations of blasphemy, which the IGB acknowledged was a hate crime. On 19 January 2026, the IGB identified 645 incidents involving members of minority communities that had occurred in 2025, explaining that 71 of these had been communal in nature.

Reforms

Multiple high-level reform commissions were established after the 2024 uprising to address systemic issues, including with regard to the electoral system, constitutional law, anti-corruption measures, policing, the judiciary and public administration. The first six commissions submitted their reports in early 2025, and included recommendations such as for the establishment of a national constitutional council to strengthen institutional checks and balances. The overarching goals included dismantling authoritarian structures; restoring credible elections; promoting welfare; fostering an inclusive, fear-free society; and diversifying an oligarchical economy.

The IGB also established a National Consensus Commission (NCC) in early 2025, which convened parties to discuss the reform commission reports. However, these parties did not include the AL and others regarded as allied to it, such as the Jatiya Party (sometimes referred to as the 'Jatiyo Party'). The outcome document of the NCC, the July Charter, was eventually signed on 17 October by representatives from 24 political parties, including the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat).

⁷ OHCHR (2025) 'OHCHR Fact-Finding Report: Human Rights Violations and Abuses Related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh'. 12 February. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ohchr-fact-finding-report-human-rights-violations-and-abuses-related>

⁸ See, for example, the Samoa Communiqué of the 2024 CHOGM, adopted on 26 October 2024, para 43: 'Heads reaffirmed their support for the interim Government and the people of Bangladesh ...'

The July Charter outlines wide-ranging political, judicial, electoral and administrative reforms. Of the 84 pledges for reform that are reflected in the Charter, about one-third were unanimously agreed, while nearly two-thirds were incorporated into the Charter with notes of dissent by parties or lacking full consent.

On 13 November 2025, Chief Adviser Yunus announced that the 13th parliamentary elections and a referendum on the July Charter proposals would be held on 12 February 2026. The specific question to be presented on the referendum ballot would ask whether the voter approved the implementation of the July Charter (Yes/No), and specifically in four respects (summarised below):

- Public institutions shall be established according to procedures stated in the July Charter.
- The next parliament shall be bicameral, with a 100-member upper house formed in proportion to votes obtained by political parties in the national election, and any constitutional amendment shall require majority approval of the upper house.
- Victorious parties in the upcoming election must implement reforms that reached consensus in the July Charter, including on women's political representation; public offices to be filled by the opposition; limits on the Prime Minister's tenure; and greater presidential powers, fundamental rights and judicial independence.
- Other reforms described in the July Charter will be implemented in line with the commitments made by political parties.

Accountability

In October 2024, the IGB reconstituted the ICT in Bangladesh, which was established under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act 1973 and first became operational in March 2010, to try those alleged to have committed atrocities during the 1971 Liberation War. Shortly after being reconstituted, the ICT issued arrest warrants against Sheikh Hasina and several others on charges of crimes against humanity.

On 10 May 2025, reportedly under pressure from students and other groups, the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act 1973 was amended, giving the ICT authority to punish political parties and related groups.

Later, on 11 May 2025:

1. The IGB promulgated the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Ordinance 2025, with provisions to ban individuals or entities involved in terrorist acts and their activities.
2. The Home Ministry issued a gazette notification, with immediate effect, that, pursuant to the 2009 Anti-Terrorism Act and the above-mentioned 2025 Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Ordinance, activities of the AL were banned until the ongoing ICT cases were completed.

The next day, the BEC suspended the AL's party registration, pursuant to the above gazette notification. The AL therefore could not contest the elections.

In July 2025, the ICT submitted charges of crimes against humanity against Sheikh Hasina, the former Home Minister and the former IGP. The ICT later submitted similar charges against others. On 17 November 2025, the ICT delivered its verdicts, convicting the former Prime Minister and Home Minister of crimes against humanity, and sentencing them to death.

Elections

The political landscape evolved rapidly ahead of the February 2026 elections.

Student leaders and Jamaat, the country's largest Islamic party, emerged as significant contenders, reconfiguring Bangladesh's hitherto two-party system. In late December 2025, Jamaat entered into an alliance with the National Citizen Party (NCP), which was formed by student leaders of the July Uprising. Also in December 2025, the BNP was reinvigorated by the return to Bangladesh of its new Chair, Tarique Rahman, from the United Kingdom, where he had been in exile since 2008. The former BNP Chair, and the mother of Tarique Rahman, Begum Khaleda Zia, died on 30 December 2025; her funeral drew hundreds of thousands of attendees.

In the lead-up to the February 2026 elections, the BEC oversaw preparations for polls to vote in the country's 350-member unicameral parliament (Jatiya Sangsad), which comprises 300 constituency seats and 50 reserved for women allocated proportionally to parties that win a seat.

Beginning in late September 2025, the BEC held public dialogues with CSOs, political parties, women's representatives and election experts, and processed applications from new political parties, ultimately registering a small number, including the NCP. The campaign period was marred by significant political violence in December 2025, including the assassination of Osman Hadi. This demonstrates the fragile security environment in which the elections and simultaneous referendum were conducted, although the elections were ultimately peaceful overall.

Summary

The culmination of the IGB's work took place on 12 February 2026, with the conduct of the 13th parliamentary elections and referendum on the July Charter. Muhammad Yunus' promise to the nation was that this would be 'the most free, fair and peaceful vote in the country's history.' The following chapters in this report present further context and the observations of the COG on these historic elections.

Figure 2.1 Quick reference key dates.

Event	Date
Independence	16 December 1971
First election	7 March 1973
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman assassination	15 August 1975
President Ziaur Rahman assassination	30 May 1981
President Hussain Muhammad Ershad ousted	6 December 1990
Caretaker system established	March 1996
Caretaker system abolished	June 2011
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ousted	5 August 2024
Court restores caretaker system prospectively	December 2024
Tarique Rahman returns to Bangladesh	25 December 2025
Begum Khaleda Zia dies	30 December 2025
13th parliamentary elections	12 February 2026
Results declared	13 February 2026

3. Legal Framework and Electoral Administration

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh 1971 as amended and as interpreted by the Supreme Court provides the constitutional basis, and the legal framework, for the conduct of elections in Bangladesh (Art. 124).

3.1 Domestic legal framework

The Constitution

The Constitution has been amended 17 times. These amendments have to be read in light of the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court which has declared some aspects of these constitutional amendments to be invalid.⁹ The Constitution establishes a parliamentary system under a unitary state (Art. 1). The President is the head of state and the Prime Minister the head of the government (Arts 48(2) and 55). While the Constitution does not explicitly provide for the right to vote, Part VII provides the constitutional basis for holding elections. In addition, the Constitution guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and expression as well as freedom of the press (Art. 39).

Constitutional amendment requires a two-thirds majority of parliament and the assent of the President (Art. 142). In *Badiul Alam Majumdar v Abdul Mannan Khan* (2024), the Court declared the 2011 amendments seeking to remove the requirement to hold a referendum null and void.¹⁰ Consequently, the provisions applicable under the 12th Amendment to the Constitution now apply. Therefore, any amendment to Articles 8,¹¹ 48 (on the Office of the President) or 56 (on the Prime Minister and the Cabinet of Ministers) of the Constitution requires approval by a majority of the people through a referendum.

The Constitution vests in the President the power to make Ordinances as may be required, subject to the limitations stipulated, and these Ordinances have the force of law.¹² This power is available to the President if the parliament is dissolved or not in session (Art. 93(1)). These Ordinances must be placed before parliament at its first meeting. Unless approved, such Ordinances will expire within 30 days or when parliament disapproves them by resolution, whichever is sooner (Art. 93(2)). A different procedure applies to Ordinances related to expenditure under the Consolidated Fund (Art. 93(3)).

Part VII of the Constitution provides for the establishment of the Election Commission. The Bangladesh election system is based on the first-past-the-post system of representation. The National Assembly comprises 300 directly elected members from single-member constituencies spread across the entire country, with 50 seats reserved for women and drawn on a proportional basis from all the parties represented in parliament (Art. 65(3)).

The Election Commissioner and Other Election Officers Appointment Act 2022

The appointment of members of the BEC is provided for in the Election Commissioner and Other Election Officers Appointment Act 2022. The Act provides for the procedure of appointing Election Commissioners, including the establishment of a Search Committee, the qualifications of the Chief Election Officer and Other Election Commissioners and the mandate of the Election Commission.

⁹ The Bangladeshi Supreme Court has identified a basic structure to the Bangladeshi Constitution on the basis of which it has engaged in judicial review of aspects of constitutional amendments including the 7th, 13th, 15th and 16th Amendments.

¹⁰ Writ Petition 9935 of 2024 with Writ Petition 12431 of 2024, judgement issued on 17 December 2024, as cited in Hoque, R. (2026) 'Bangladesh: A Year of Unprecedented Constitutional Upheaval'. SCO Observer, 12 February. <https://www.scoobserver.in/journal/bangladesh-a-year-of-unprecedented-constitutional-upheaval/>

¹¹ This includes fundamental principles such as secularism.

¹² Art. 93(1). The limitations are that Ordinances cannot be ones that 'could not lawfully be made' under the Constitution and cannot alter or repeal any provision of the Constitution or continue provisions of an Ordinance previously made.

Election Commission Secretariat Act No. 5 of 2009

This law was enacted to enable the establishment of a Secretariat for the Election Commission so as to enable it to exercise its functions independently. The Act provides for the establishment of the Election Commission Secretariat, the functions of the Secretariat, financial independence, and the appointment of officers and employees, among others. This law was amended by Election Secretariat (Amendment) Ordinance No. 50 of 2025 as follows:

- Section 3(4) – to provide for the establishment of the Elections Commissions Service responsible for the recruitment of officers and staff of the Election Secretariat Commission;
- Section 4(2)(a) – to provide for specific duties of the Election Commission.

Delimitation of Constituencies Act 2021

This law was passed in 2021 and replaced Delimitation of Constituencies Ordinance No. XV of 1976. Section 3 of the Act permits the Election Commission to determine its own procedures. Section 6 gives it powers to divide the country into constituencies for the purpose of electing MPs as specified in Art. 65(2) of the Constitution – that is, 300 MPs directly elected from the constituencies. There are other laws in place governing the delimitation of constituencies, such as the Jatiya Sangsad Constituencies Delimitation Act 2021 (amended by Delimitation of Constituencies of the Jatiya Sangsad (Amendment) Ordinance No. 23 of 2025).

Other laws, guidelines and rules governing elections

- Electoral Roll Act No. 6 of 2009 as amended by Electoral Roll (Amendment) Ordinance No. 39 of 2025;
- Representation of the People Order (RPO) No. 175 of 1972 (amended by the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act of 2023, Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance No. 56 of 2025 and Representation of the People (Second Amendment) Ordinance No. 75 of 2025);
- Political Parties Ordinance No. XLV of 1978 – this law provides for the formation of political parties, the management of their finances, and permitted and prohibited activities;
- Election Officers (Special Provisions) Act No. 13 of 1991;
- Guidelines and rules governing the conduct of elections.

3.2 International conventions

- Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol;
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its First and Second Optional Protocols;
- Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance including the interstate communication procedure;
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families;
- Convention on the Rights of the Child including the Optional Protocols;
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

3.3 The referendum

The President issued the July National Charter (Constitutional Reform) Implementation Order 2025 for the purpose of seeking approval from the People for the July National Charter and thereby establish a Constitutional Reform Assembly that would reform the Constitution (Preamble of the Order). This Order includes the questions that were presented at the referendum (Section 4) and stipulated the manner in which the referendum would be conducted.

The Order stipulates the steps that should follow a successful referendum. These include establishing a Constitutional Reform Council comprising all elected representatives. The Council is mandated to 'complete the constitutional reform, in accordance with the July National Charter' within 180 working days from its first session (Section 7). The Order sets the Council's quorum at 60 members in attendance. However, constitutional amendments must pass with a simple majority of the entire Council (Section 10(3)). This means that, while the Council may discuss and deliberate on issues with just 60 members present, constitutional amendments will require 151 votes in favour. The Order specifically provides that 'measures shall be taken to incorporate the July National Charter into the Constitution' (Section 12). It further provides for the elections to the upper chamber of parliament (Section 13). The Order declares that the 'constitutional reforms adopted by the Council shall be deemed final, and no further approval or consent shall be required in respect thereof' (Section 14).

3.4 Legal issues

The legal issues associated with parliamentary elections in Bangladesh need to be considered in the broader context of the circumstances outlined in Chapter 2 of this report.

Interim Government of Bangladesh

The President appointed the interim Government on 8 August 2024. It was reported that this appointment was made on the basis of a reference sought by the President from the Supreme Court.¹³ Subsequently, this reference was challenged and it was rejected by the High Court and dismissed by a seven-member bench of the Appellate Division in *Muhammad Mohsen Rashi v Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs* (CPLA 781/2025).¹⁴ During this interim period, the High Court Division of the Supreme Court also restored the caretaker government system in the case of *Badiul Alam Majumdar v Abdul Mannan Khan*.¹⁵ In this case, the Court struck down a 2011 decision, thereby clearing the path for the 13th parliamentary elections under the IGB.¹⁶ The restored provisions on the caretaker government were to apply prospectively to the next parliamentary elections. Some stakeholders raised concerns relating to the constitutionality of the IGB.

Some stakeholders further pointed out that the Ordinances by which most of these decisions and reforms had been made would expire unless approved by the new parliament. Past practice suggests such approval cannot be assumed.¹⁷ Since August 2024, inclusive of the Ordinances discussed above, 116 ordinances have been enacted for the advancement of the rule of law including for institutional reform and to

¹³ Prothom Alo (2025) 'HC Full Verdict: Interim Govt Supported by Legal Documents, People's Will'. 12 February. <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/do9pn1fzk2>. This Group could not access a copy of this reference.

¹⁴ As cited in Hoque, R. (2026) 'Bangladesh: A Year of Unprecedented Constitutional Upheaval'. See also Prothom Alo (2025) 'Interim Govt Formation Held Valid, Leave to Appeal Dismissed with Observations'. 4 December. <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/r139fm0abe>. This Group could not access these judgements on the website of the Supreme Court and relied on news reports about them.

¹⁵ Writ Petition 9935 of 2024 with Writ Petition 12431 of 2024, judgement issued on 17 December 2024, as cited in Hoque, R. (2026) 'Bangladesh: A Year of Unprecedented Constitutional Upheaval'.

¹⁶ Civil Appeal 112 of 2025 and Civil Appeal 113 of 2025 with Civil Review Petitions 282/2024, 313/2024 and 248/2025 order issued 20 November 2025. See Hoque, R. (2026) 'Bangladesh: A Year of Unprecedented Constitutional Upheaval'.

¹⁷ Liton, S. and Hasan, R. (2009) 'Fate of 38 out of 54 Ordinances Uncertain'. The Daily Star, 23 February. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-77282>

strengthen anti-corruption efforts.¹⁸ Examples include the Appointment of Judges to the Supreme Court Ordinance 2025, the Ordinance establishing a Supreme Court Secretariat¹⁹ and that on the Human Rights Commission.²⁰

Banning of the Awami League

Currently, there are 60 registered political parties in Bangladesh.²¹ Political parties in Bangladesh are governed by Political Parties Ordinance No. of 1978. This Ordinance provides for the formation of political parties. Section 3(1) of the Ordinance prohibits political parties from acting in a manner prejudicial to the sovereignty, integrity or security of Bangladesh. The Ministry of Home Affairs issued a 'notification' banning the AL under the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Ordinance 2025; the same day, the BEC suspended the party's registration.²²

Each democracy needs to make informed decisions on the extent to which it regulates political parties. At the same, it is essential to recognise that, as far as political contestation is concerned, inclusion, tolerance and engagement are to be encouraged. The law, including electoral laws, in this context, ought to be used to incentivise all political parties to contest.

Women's inclusion and participation

The Constitution further provides for equality before the law (Art. 27), non-discrimination and the right to participate in public life (Art. 28). Despite these constitutional guarantees and a history of female leadership at the highest level in Bangladesh, political participation by women is severely constrained, as evidenced by the low numbers of female candidates for the 300 constituency seats. We note that 50 parliamentary seats have been reserved for women in addition to the 300 and that a further 50 seats have been proposed to be allocated under the July Charter.

Implementation of the referendum outcome

Inasmuch as the referendum result has been positive (68.25% yes vote), the nature of the questions posed in the referendum and the reliance on the new parliament to enact legislation to give effect to the July Charter Ordinance may give rise to uncertainty in the implementation of the referendum outcome. These constitutional uncertainties are compounded by the secondary role played by political parties in the process and the lack of awareness among the people about the reforms as reported to, and observed by, the Group, as well as the manner in which the July Charter was created.

Recommendations	Ensure the relevant Ordinances during the period of the Interim Government are tabled within 30 days of the first sitting of parliament.
	Strengthen constitutional and legal institutions to secure the rule of law, including the timely publication of judicial decisions relevant to elections.
	Strengthen the independence of the BEC through institutional reform and capacity-building.

¹⁸ BSS (2026) 'Interim Govt Takes 526 Decisions, Records 83.46 pc Implementation Rate'. 5 February. <https://www.bssnews.net/news-flash/358051>

¹⁹ Hoque, R. (2026) 'Bangladesh: A Year of Unprecedented Constitutional Upheaval'.

²⁰ Bdnews24.com (2025) 'Government Approves new Human Rights Commission Ordinance, Expands Jurisdiction and Powers'. 30 October. <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/8cd106ab9699>

²¹ <https://ecs.gov.bd/en/political-parties> and Alamgir, M. and Deepto, A. (2025) '51 of 59 Parties Turn in Nominations'. The Daily Star, 31 December. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/elections/news/51-59-parties-turn-nominations-4070441>

²² The Daily Star (2025) 'Activities of AL, Affiliates Banned'. 12 May. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/activities-al-affiliates-banned-3892976>. Gazette Notification in Bengali available at https://www.dpp.gov.bd/upload_file/gazettes/57494_98364.pdf

3.5 Election administration

Bangladesh Election Commission and its organisational structure

The BEC is a constitutional body established under Part VII of the Constitution. The members of the Commission are appointed by the President and are mandated to 'be independent' and 'subject only' to the Constitution and 'any other law' (Art. 118). The Constitution declares that it is the 'duty' of 'all executive authorities' to 'assist' the Election Commission (Art. 126).

Figure 3.1 The Commonwealth Observer Group received a briefing from the Bangladesh Election Commission.



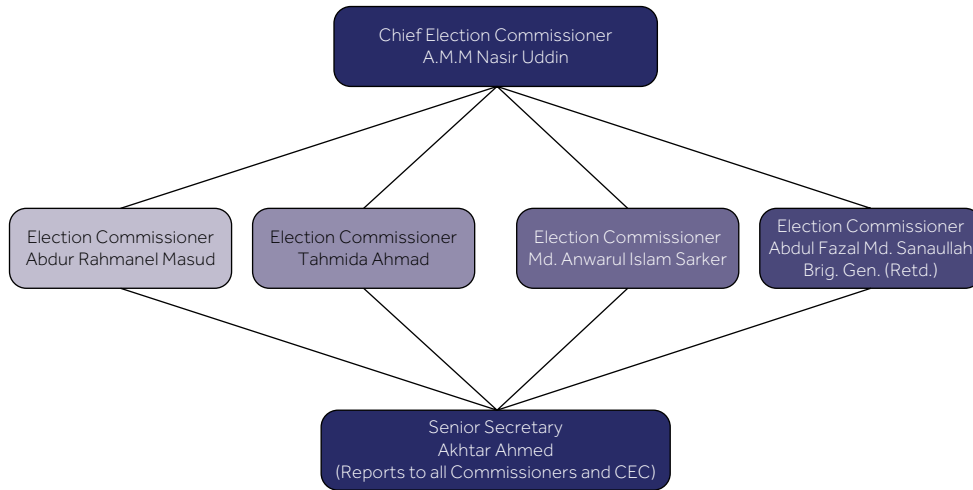
The Chief Election Commissioner is the Chair and head of the BEC. He is supported by four other commissioners, whose primary responsibilities are policy-making and the provision of strategic direction. The executive arm of the BEC is composed of an independent Secretariat led by the Secretary, who is assisted by assistant/joint secretaries who manage corporate functions such as human resources, finance, legal affairs, and who in addition direct the operations that are devolved to regional offices headed by regional election officers. Under district election officers sit over 500 sub-district level offices (upazila/thana election officers), who are based in the various localities countrywide. During the elections, the BEC delegates its election delivery operational functions to deputy commissioners, who work with the district electoral officers as returning officers, and who manage local government-level operations, including the functions of polling officials. The BEC employs 3,983 permanent staff plus 2,261 project-specific staff members countrywide. For these elections, 800,000 temporary staff members were deployed at voting centres.

The Election Commission for the 13th parliamentary elections and referendum

The term of office of the BEC appointed in February 2022, which was scheduled to terminate on 26 February 2027, ended abruptly on 5 September 2024, a month after the fall of the AL government, when the Chief Election Commissioner, Kazi Habibur Awal, together with the four other commissioners, resigned. It is reported that these former commissioners are facing treason and other charges and are on remand.

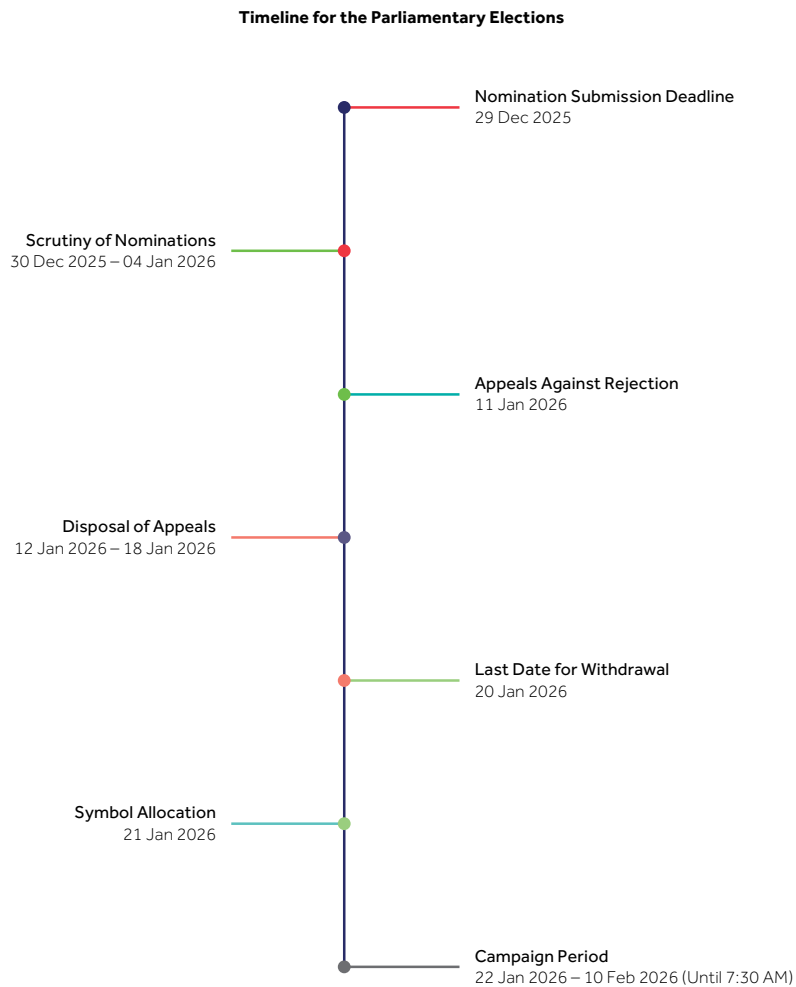
The mass resignations of the commissioners created a constitutional void. In October 2024, the IGB appointed a six-member Search Committee chaired by the Chief Justice in line with the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Commissioners Act 2022 and Article 118 of the 1972 Constitution (as amended). The Search Committee invited names of candidates from political parties, professional bodies and civil society. After reviewing the submitted names, the Search Committee forwarded its recommended candidates to the President for appointment. On 21 November 2024, President Mohamed Shahabuddin

signed the order for the five-year term appointment of Chief Election Commissioner A.M.M. Nasir Uddin (former Secretary), together with commissioners Abdul Rahmani Masud (retired District and Sessions Judge), Tahmina Ahmed (Retired Joint Secretary), Md Anwarul Islam Sarker (Retired Additional Secretary) and Abdul Fazal Md Sanullah (Retired Brigadier General).



Timeline for the 13th parliamentary elections

On 11 December 2025, the BEC announced the following timeline for the February 2026 election:



Public trust

The appointment of the new BEC seemingly did not cause any backlash or public outcry. Public trust in the new commissioners has been uncertain and unclear, however. Some interlocutors expressed misgivings about the BEC's independence and capacity to conduct credible elections. There was general concern about the extension of postal voting to diaspora voters based in 122 countries abroad, noting the logistical implications and lack of a trial run. Concerns about the transparency of the process, including the chain of custody and guarantees for the security of ballots, were also raised. Other interlocutors were dissatisfied with the BEC's early closure of the accreditation process for local observers, and how the BEC had managed the registration of independent candidates. The COG was not informed of any other public concerns about the BEC's partiality or ineptitude. When asked about public trust, the BEC conceded to the COG that, given the historical events of 2024, including the management of the January 2024 elections by the erstwhile BEC, lack of public trust of the incumbent commissioners ought to be reasonably expected. The Group was further informed that the BEC's voter education campaign had fallen short of explaining the content and meaning of the referendum issues. Nonetheless, the successful manner in which the 2026 13th parliamentary elections were managed promises to have earned the BEC the respect and trust of the Bangladesh public and a wide range of local stakeholders, as well as the international community.

Recommendations	In future, the BEC should ensure it provides adequate and tailored voter education programmes to enable the voters to understand the process of voting and related issues in the case of a referendum, and their role as voters to enable meaningful participation in the elections.
	While these elections were conducted under special circumstances, it is important that the BEC exercises its mandate in a manner that ensures sufficient time is provided for due process, taking into account the electoral cycle.

Funding

The BEC is funded through annual parliamentary budget allocations from the Consolidated Government Fund. The BEC informed the Group that, under the Electoral Services Commission Act, additional funds are expected to be appropriated to support their staffing requirements. Although the Act is intended to strengthen the BEC's financial capacity, it is not yet operational, pending finalisation of the necessary rules and regulations.

For the 2025/26 financial year, the IGB allocated US\$250 million to the BEC. Owing to the inclusion of the referendum and the extension of the postal vote to diaspora voters, the BEC's budget was further augmented by an additional US\$148.48 million. This supplementary funding enabled the BEC to successfully conduct the parliamentary elections and the referendum, and to introduce innovative mechanisms such as the CCTV cameras in selected voting centres, which undoubtedly enhanced the integrity of the voting process.

The BEC's budget also included expenditure by the state on the deployment of its security agencies to safeguard the election process and maintain the peace. In-kind funding also came from multilateral institutions such as UNDP and IFES, which provided technical assistance such as for the deployment of voter registration digital solutions, voter education messaging and dissemination, and technical training of BEC staff.

Registration of political parties and nomination of candidates

Political parties wishing to contest the elections had to reserve a symbol with the BEC and register to contest the elections. Only registered parties could field candidates. Fifty-one parties were registered for the 13th parliamentary elections, with 2,034 candidates contesting the elections. Only Bangladeshi citizens of 25 years or older could register as candidates. Candidates had to submit an income, assets and liabilities statement. Independent candidates had to submit signatures of 1 per cent of the voters from the constituency that the candidate would contest.

The amendments of the RPO are directed towards countering frivolous election contestants, and partly to respond to past unacceptable conduct such as 'no vote victories' and the absence of women candidates. Given that the RPO represents a gate-keeping policy for political participation, further contestation could reasonably be expected in future. The BEC was satisfied that dispute management processes, which go as far as the superior courts, were adequate to handle any future disagreements regarding the registration of political parties and the nomination of candidates.

Recommendations	The BEC should facilitate further dialogue with political parties and other interested organisations on the subject of political participation with a view to achieving a level playing field in future elections. Given that the July National Charter has been accepted by the people of Bangladesh, the BEC ought to partake in the process of amendments to the RPO as it relates to the registration of political parties.
	The BEC should also strengthen transparency and predictability in party registration by publishing clear and consolidated guidelines detailing requirements for party symbol reservation, registration criteria and grounds for rejection or deregistration.

Boundary delineation

Section 8 of the Delimitation of Constituencies Act 2021 permits the BEC to delimit new constituencies following a Census or where it deems it necessary to do so. In preparation for the 13th parliamentary elections, the BEC reviewed the existing boundaries of the 300 constituencies. Using the criteria of Census data, administrative convenience and territorial integrity, as required of it, it adjusted 39 boundaries, taking into account population shifts, to arrive at an average of 420,500 voters per constituency. Where deemed necessary, the BEC may publish a preliminary list of constituencies and, after receiving objections and views, amend the list. As this activity has an impact on voter identity and participation, it has to be carried out transparently, and there has to be sufficient time for stakeholder engagements. The Group was informed that the process of redrawing constituency boundaries drew public attention. A notable issue arose over a single constituency (Bagerhat-2), which was resolved by the BEC reversing its decision.

Voter registration

Any citizen of Bangladesh above the age of 18 who is not of 'unsound mind,' is not convicted under the Bangladesh Collaborators Order 1972 and is a resident of a constituency is 'entitled' to be on the electoral roll (Art. 122 of the Constitution).

In preparation for the elections and referendum, the BEC conducted a door-to-door voter registration campaign for two months, between 1 September and 31 October 2025. This added 1,304 880 new voters to the register, including diaspora and Gen Z voters.

From 18 November 2025, the BEC opened a period of public scrutiny of the draft register for objections.

During the same month, the BEC extended the voter registration process through postal voting to diaspora voters and voters in lawful custody for the first time, through digital innovative mechanisms using a mobile phone app known as Postal Vote BD. The app has a facial recognition function and liveness detection (verification of physical presence) for voter identification and verification. Other features included distinct voter lists for diaspora registrants and QR code-based ballot tracking.

Postal voting is an administrative instrument designed to facilitate universal suffrage while preserving procedural integrity. Postal voting in Bangladesh is governed by Art. 27 of the RPO. Bangladesh has a significant expatriate population, particularly in the Middle East, Europe, North America and Southeast Asia. The legal framework provides postal voting for citizens living abroad (diaspora voters), election officials voting outside their constituency, eligible voters applying for postal ballots (security officials, civil servants, etc.) and voters in lawful custody.

Postal ballots for the 13th parliamentary elections and referendum were distributed to expatriates across 121 countries, with significant concentrations in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Qatar and Oman.

Diaspora and postal voter registration opened on 26 November and closed on 5 January 2026. It netted 772,546 out-of-country residents and 761,138 domestic voters, including polling officers and voters in lawful custody. The largest volume of postal ballots, accounting for 237,568 in total, was dispatched to expatriate voters residing in Saudi Arabia.

The BEC indicated that over 1.5 million voters had registered via the application, including approximately 772,546 diaspora voters and 761,138 in country voters.

The process of voter registration was implemented with a view to digitally harmonising the VR data with the national ID database.

The final voters' register recorded 127,711,899 voters. The timelines over which the BEC updated the voters' register, and its extension of voter registration abroad, represent a huge undertaking worthy of note and praise, considering the truncated period over which the finalisation of the voters' register was accomplished.

Prior to the elections, stakeholders raised concerns over technological safeguards, relating to cybersecurity and whether the app had observed secrecy of the vote. A review of the process indicated that the BEC had put in place sufficient measures to safeguard both secrecy of the vote and cybersecurity. Specifically, the vote declaration form was placed separately from the National Assembly and referendum ballot. Only postal ballots with separate duly signed declaration forms were considered valid. The BEC also informed the Group that it had mitigated the risk of chain-of-custody vulnerabilities in international mail systems by signing direct contracts with respective country postal services and also ensuring all mail was pre-paid. It was further observed that prescribed procedures had been followed, including digital tracking of the postal vote and count in a transparent and accountable manner.

Pre-election preparations: deployment, recruitment and training of election workers

The BEC undertook comprehensive measures to recruit, train and deploy a large number of election personnel to ensure the smooth conduct of the polls.

Recruitment of election personnel

The BEC informed the Group that more than 700,000 polling officials had been recruited to manage the election across the 42,779 polling centres and 247,482 polling booths nationwide. Each polling centre required one presiding officer, one assistant presiding officer per booth and two polling officers per booth, totalling approximately eight to 10 officials per centre. The BEC further indicated that, to cater for contingencies, it had prepared teams with 10 per cent additional personnel beyond the required number.

In addition to polling officials, the BEC deployed 69 returning officers, 499 assistant returning officers, more than 1,000 executive magistrates and over 300 judicial magistrates to oversee the electoral process.

The Group observed that, though a high number of women were recruited as polling officials, most presiding officers were men. See Chapter 6 for further analysis.

Recommendation

The BEC should consider recruiting eligible women for senior positions including as presiding officers where possible.

Training framework and implementation

BEC informed the Group that the training programme covered all critical aspects of the election, including electoral laws and rules and overall poll management, for more than 800,000 personnel. The training followed a cascading model. Master trainers were first trained centrally in Dhaka, after which field-level training for polling officials was conducted locally across the country.

Figure 3.2 Some members of the COG at the BEC briefing.



The training covered all duties and responsibilities before, during and after voting, including vote-counting, result preparation, handling of election materials and the roles of polling agents. Special attention was given to training officials on how to conduct and manage two separate ballots on the same day (for both the parliamentary election and the referendum).

Specialised training for security personnel

Recognising the crucial role of security personnel in maintaining order at polling centres, the BEC also arranged specialised training for security agencies, including for high-level officials of Bangladesh Ansar and Village Defence Party (VDP) and training for deputy directors general, directors and district commandants of Bangladesh Ansar and VDP, focusing on election processes and law enforcement at polling centres. The Group observed that the targeted trainees were inclusive of men and women.

Deployment of staff and electoral materials

The BEC demonstrated strong operational preparedness in the deployment of staff and electoral materials for the parliamentary election and referendum. Polling officials were deployed in adequate numbers, appeared well trained and carried out their duties professionally and in accordance with established procedures.

Electoral materials, including sensitive items such as ballot papers and result forms, were distributed in a timely and organised manner. In all observed polling stations, essential materials were available at opening, allowing voting to commence as scheduled.

Overall, the deployment process contributed positively to the orderly, efficient and credible conduct of the elections.

Campaign finance

Campaign finance is governed primarily by RPO No. 55 of 1972, alongside the Political Parties Registration Rules 2008. Oversight and enforcement fall under the authority of the BEC.

The regulatory framework addresses four core areas: candidate expenditure limits, political party spending limits, disclosure and reporting requirements, and monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.

According to the RPO (Art. 44B, clause 3), candidate spending is capped at BDT 10 (US\$0.08) per registered voter in a constituency, but not exceeding the overall established maximum per constituency, and party spending is scaled according to the number of candidates fielded. While political parties are restricted in how much they may contribute to individual candidates and are prohibited from receiving foreign funding, there is no explicit cap on private contributions to candidates, creating an asymmetry between income and expenditure controls.

In terms of financial disclosure, candidates must submit statements of assets, liabilities, income sources and post-election expense returns, while political parties must file election expenditure reports and annual audited financial statements (RPO Art. 44A, clause 3). If a candidate fails to submit the return, they will face two to seven years imprisonment and a fine of up to BDT 150,000 (RPO Art. 74). Monitoring is conducted through district-level Vigilance and Observation Teams and Electoral Enquiry Committees (EECs).

Figure 3.3 Commonwealth Observer Group engaging with the BEC.



The group was informed that the BEC had prescribed the permitted expenditure items for candidates, which included the use of coloured posters and black and white cloth banners and the hiring of vehicles for campaigning or transporting voters. No stakeholders raised concerns about the current legal framework on campaign financing and how it was implemented. However, the Group observed that there was no strict compliance with the guidelines on billboards, posters and banners.

Recommendation	The Group recommends assessment of the effectiveness of Vigilance and Observation Teams, the functioning of EECs and the timeliness of post-election expense audits.
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Electoral dispute resolution framework

Election disputes are governed by different institutions. Election petitions are provided for in Chapter V of RPO No. 155 of 1972, which designates the High Court as the court with jurisdiction to hear election petitions. The Constitution provides for election petitions and guarantees the right of the BEC to be heard in such petitions (Art. 125).

Other quasi-judicial or administrative dispute resolution mechanisms are provided for under the RPO, under the oversight of the BEC. This framework provides for remedies at different stages of the electoral process, including nomination, campaigning, polling and post-election adjudication.

During the pre-election period, any disputes arising from candidate nominations are first addressed by the returning officer in each constituency. Decisions of the returning officer, including acceptance or rejection of nomination papers, may be appealed to the BEC. This mechanism provides an opportunity for administrative correction prior to finalisation of the candidate list. The process serves as a critical safeguard against arbitrary exclusion or procedural irregularities at the nomination stage.

Campaign-related violations and breaches of the electoral code of conduct are addressed through the EECs, which are constituted by the BEC. These are composed of district-level judicial officers and are mandated to investigate complaints, gather evidence and report findings to the BEC. Decisions of the EECs may also be appealed to the BEC. The use of judicial officers provides for an independent mechanism for addressing campaign violations and breaches of the code of conduct while also providing mechanisms for appeal to the BEC.

Post-election disputes are resolved through the judicial system. Election petitions may be filed before the High Court by any candidate or voter who wishes to challenge an election result. Grounds for petition include allegations of corruption or illegal practices, improper acceptance or rejection of nomination papers and material irregularities that may have affected the result of the elections. Petitioners are required to file within 45 days of the official gazette publication of results. This provides for a clear statutory limitation period for the initiation of election-related proceedings.

The Group observed that, while the filing deadline is defined for post-election disputes, there is no corresponding statutory timeframe for the adjudication and disposal of election petitions. This absence of mandatory resolution timelines may undermine the integrity of an election outcome through delayed electoral justice. Prolonged legal disputes can weaken the law's ability to deter wrongdoing and erode public trust in the justice system's capacity to provide timely resolutions.

The Group observed that the overall dispute resolution framework currently provides multiple entry points for pursuing legal and administrative redress.

Recommendations	In order to strengthen the dispute resolution mechanisms, the Group recommends a review of the RPO and the introduction of mandatory timelines for resolving electoral disputes and ensuring timely resolution.
	The Group proposes the creation of an independent Electoral Dispute Tribunal to complement and enhance the capacity of existing judicial structures.

Security

The BEC, working with the Joint Security Team, implemented a comprehensive, multi-agency security framework to ensure the elections were conducted in a peaceful manner. The Group was informed that the security plan represented the largest-ever deployment in the country's electoral history, with nearly 1 million personnel mobilised from various law enforcement and defence agencies.

A three-tier security deployment plan was put in place that served as the core structure for all law enforcement operations. This included static forces deployed at polling centres and designated checkpoints to provide fixed-point security, mobile units tasked with patrolling multiple locations to ensure widespread coverage and a central reserve force maintained on standby for rapid response to any emergency situations.

The Group observed an average of 16 security officials at each polling centre. The Group was informed that the Ministry of Home Affairs served as the central co-ordinating authority for all security agencies, while the BEC oversaw overall monitoring through a dedicated Co-ordination Cell stationed at the BEC headquarters to ensure seamless co-ordination between the centre and field operations.

The deployment composition drew personnel from multiple agencies, with specific responsibilities assigned to each. The agencies deployed included the Army, the police, Bangladesh Ansar and VDP, and the Border Guard. Additional forces from the Rapid Action Battalion, the Navy and the Coast Guard were mobilised for specialised operations and coastal security.

It was also observed that, for the first time in Bangladesh's electoral history, the BEC introduced advanced technological measures to enhance security operations. Drones were deployed for aerial surveillance, while body-worn cameras for field personnel provided live feeds displayed at the BEC's Co-ordination Cell for real-time monitoring. CCTV coverage was also implemented at polling centres where feasible. Further, a dedicated cybersecurity cell monitored social media to counter misinformation, co-ordinated with the UNDP platform and fact-checking units.

The Group observed that the comprehensive security arrangements contributed to a largely peaceful election day. According to the BEC, voting proceeded smoothly in all centres despite isolated incidents. The Group further noted that the security measures implemented did not compromise the secrecy of the vote or the integrity of the electoral process and commends the BEC and all security agencies for this.

Institutional issues

Technical support

In preparation for the 13th parliamentary elections, the BEC received several technical assistance packages from development partners, most notably from IFES and the United Nations. In discussions with the IFES team, it emerged that the BEC was supported in the following work areas:

- capacity-building;
- staff training;
- logistics systems management;
- studio/situation room management;
- social media publicity and campaigns.

Voter education content creation and dissemination

Having worked closely with the BEC, the IFES team advised the Group that, henceforth, the BEC needed to bolster its institutional capacity through ongoing technical support in the following areas:

- modernisation and digital transformation;
- upgrading of its information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure;
- Institution of cybersecurity safeguards.

Through the BALLOT (Bangladesh Advancement for Credible, Inclusive and Transparent Elections) programme, UNDP Bangladesh offered a varied set of assistance packages, including election materials procurement for items such as indelible ink, transparent ballot boxes and seals; social media monitoring capacity to counter misinformation and disinformation; and voter education and inclusion. BALLOT was funded by Australia, Canada, Japan, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway and the United Kingdom.

Post-election institutional support

The Group was informed by the BEC's management that the BEC would prioritise the following institutional development areas for future elections, which to a large measure echo what the IFES technical support team shared with the Group:

- strategic advice on the refinement of the postal voting systems, especially for diaspora voters;
- institutional ICT capacity;

- a results management system;
- social media management, including artificial intelligence (AI) solutions;
- inclusion programmes;
- constituting and conducting a national education campaign for democracy development;
- support for the BEC's Election Training Institute.

Considering the sheer size of operations carried out within a compressed timeframe, as well as the political and constitutional significance of the 13th parliamentary elections, it would be remiss of the Group not to highlight the areas that were particularly impressive.

While there were reported doubts about the wisdom of extending the postal voting processes to diaspora voters without any trial run, the BEC performed admirably in registering expatriates and giving them an opportunity to vote. The Group believes that the postal voting system, which is a hybrid of manual and digital systems, represented a pioneering effort in the world of elections, and was a huge success. For this feat, the Group commends the BEC for its work.

Procuring, storing and distributing election materials to over 40,000 voting sites is a huge and complex exercise. By ensuring that all voting sites were adequately provisioned, the BEC demonstrated efficiency and commitment. The Group was further impressed by the BEC's sober attitude towards the restoration of public trust in its workings, given the political events of 2024 and thereafter. The Group believes the BEC has laid a good foundation for public trust. It must not be complacent and should continue to build on its public reputation because public trust is earned over a period of time. Since public opinion is often based on perceptions, it will be of paramount importance for the BEC to work towards securing and maintaining structural, financial and functional independence.

4. Participation and Inclusion

The February 2026 elections represented a historic watershed moment in Bangladesh and followed the significant events of July and August 2024, which were predominantly championed by youth. Young people demonstrated remarkable civic courage and commitment to democratic transformation. The generational shift was particularly significant, as young women and men stood at the forefront of the protests, signalling a renewed civic engagement that offers tremendous promise for Bangladesh's democratic future.

Consultations with a diverse range of stakeholders, including CSOs, youth groups and community leaders, in the lead-up to the 2026 elections highlighted areas where continued, collective efforts could further strengthen the democratic process. These include fostering a more supportive environment by addressing challenges related to online harassment and bullying and enhancing institutional support structures. While the electoral environment has in the past faced strains as a result of electoral violence and intimidation targeting women, minorities and disadvantaged groups, these experiences provide valuable opportunities for strengthening the democratic participation ecosystem. The goal remains to ensure all citizens can participate fully and safely in democratic processes.

Bangladesh has put in place a comprehensive and forward-looking legal and policy framework that reflects its commitment to gender equality, youth development and social inclusion. This architecture provides a strong foundation for ongoing progress and includes:

Constitutional and national policy foundations:

- Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh 1972;
- National Women's Development Policy and Action Plan 2011;
- National Social Security Support Policy 2018;
- National Policy on Disability 1995, National Action Plan 2006;
- Women's Affairs Reform Commission Report 2025;
- National Youth Policy 2017.

International commitments and regional co-operation:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979 (ratified 6 November 1984);²³
- Optional Protocol to CEDAW 2000 (ratified 6 September 2000);
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 (ratified 30 November 2007);
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 (ratified 12 May 2008);
- Convention on the Political Rights of Women 1953 (ratified 5 October 1998);
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995;
- Sustainable Development Goals 2015;
- South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Social Charter 2004;
- South Asia Regional Gender Action Plan II 2023–2028.

²³ CEDAW ratification includes reservations on Articles 2 (principle of non-discrimination and elimination of discrimination against women) and 16(1)(c) (elimination of discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations, in particular the same rights and responsibilities; and a declaration on Article 10(1) regarding obligations under Articles 8 and 9 of the Optional Protocol (inquiry procedure).

Legislative implementation:

- Evidence Act 1872, amended 2022;
- Prevention of Suppression Against Women and Children Act 2000;
- Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013;
- Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000;
- Anti-Discrimination Bill 2022;
- Sexual Harassment Prevention and Protection Law 2025;
- Dowry Prohibition Act 2018.

4.1 Women

The legal architecture as highlighted above has positioned the country to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, although some stakeholders observed gaps between the law and their implementation.

Political participation

According to the 2022 Census, Bangladesh is home to a population of 165,158,616 people, comprising 81,712,824 males, 83,347,206 females, and 12,629 Hijra/intersex persons. In the realm of gender equality, the country has made notable strides. In 2025, Bangladesh was ranked 125 out of 172 countries on the Gender Inequality Index, with a value of 0.487. At the same time, it achieved its ninth consecutive year as the top performer in South Asia on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, securing a 77.5 per cent gender parity score and an impressive global ranking of third for political empowerment.

This commitment to women's participation is also reflected in the constitutional provision reserving 50 seats exclusively for women in the 350-member parliament, which are filled through proportional representation by the directly elected members.

Figure 4.1 The COG received a briefing from some women groups.



The February 2026 parliamentary elections, widely regarded as the most competitive and credible electoral exercise in nearly two decades, underscored Bangladesh's democratic progress while also highlighting important opportunities to further strengthen women's political representation. In the aftermath of the transformative July and August 2024 protests, the IGB established six national commissions to advance institutional reforms. These commissions comprised 50 men and five women, reflecting both progress and the continued need for inclusive representation. Initially, a seven-member National Consensus Commission, composed entirely of men, was tasked with negotiating the July Charter with political parties. In response to constructive advocacy by women activists, the IGB demonstrated its responsiveness by establishing a dedicated Women's Affairs Commission, ensuring that gender perspectives would be integrated into the reform process.

The resulting July Charter reflects meaningful progress. Despite limited recommendations from the Women's Affairs Commission, provision for a gradual increase of reserved seats to 100 and partial consensus on a 5 per cent nomination floor for women candidates was made. These steps offer a solid foundation upon which Bangladesh can continue building momentum towards the fuller realisation of its gender equality commitments. Further opportunities for strengthening the framework include exploring the direct election of reserved seats and developing robust enforcement mechanisms for nomination quotas.

Electoral participation and representation

The 2026 voter registration process yielded encouraging trends, with 64,825,361 men and 62,885,200 women registered, alongside 1,232 third-gender voters. The BEC, comprising five commissioners (four men and one woman), observed that female voter registration had grown by 4.16 per cent compared with 2.29 per cent growth among male voters – a positive indicator of increasing civic engagement among women.

Of the 2024 candidates nationwide, only 87 women²⁴ contested the 2026 elections, representing just 4.30 per cent of the candidate pool. Among the 51 registered political parties, 30 fielded female candidates while 21 did not nominate women. Major parties' nominations included the BNP (10 women), Jatiya Party (six), NCP (three) and Ganosamhati Andolon (five).

These figures point to an important opportunity for Bangladesh to build upon its legal framework and impressive gender parity rankings, by further enhancing women's representation in competitive electoral politics. The strong foundation established through constitutional provisions and policy commitments now invites continued progress towards translating national gender equality achievements into expanded political participation at the candidate level.

Stakeholders observed that women's pathways to parliamentary representation have often been facilitated through established political networks and family connections rather than through transparent, merit-based party career advancement structures accessible to women from all backgrounds. While the reserved seat system was designed to establish a foothold for women in national politics, stakeholders noted that promising women leaders frequently encountered significant challenges in sustaining long-term political careers without robust, systematic party support and development mechanisms.

Some political organisations expressed concerns regarding societal readiness and security conditions for women's political participation, while certain faith-based parties acknowledged that doctrinal interpretations currently informed their institutional approaches to women's leadership roles. Young women activists, including those who played prominent roles in the anti-discrimination uprising, reported limited inclusion in strategic party decision-making and described experiencing stigmatisation and heightened scrutiny for their political engagement. These observations highlight cultural and institutional barriers that merit collective attention and constructive action.

²⁴ This data is based on the 'United Nations Bangladesh Fact Sheet on Women Participation – 13th National Parliamentary Election and Referendum', as the Group was unable to source directly from the BEC.

The structural gap between women's strong presence in governance, service delivery and electoral administration, and their underrepresentation as competitive candidates, suggests an opportunity for strengthening internal party nomination processes and candidate support mechanisms. Addressing this disconnect could help translate women's civic engagement and administrative competence into enhanced electoral representation.

Several political parties, including the Amar Bangladesh Party, the BNP, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Jamaat, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and the NCP, commendably included gender equality and women's empowerment commitments in their election manifestos. This reflects growing recognition of gender equality as a national priority and provides a constructive platform for concrete action in the years ahead.

The 2026 parliamentary elections present one of the more striking paradoxes in contemporary political discourse: a country governed by two women prime ministers – Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina – for 33 continuous years (1991–2024) yet where women's descriptive representation in parliament has remained modest. In the 2018 parliament, women's directly elected representation did not exceed 22 members. The 2026 elections resulted in seven women directly elected as MPs (six BNP candidates and one independent), alongside the 50 reserved seats. While this represents the most competitive electoral environment in recent memory, it is worth noting that the 2008 elections (the 9th parliament) saw the highest number of directly elected women (19)²⁵ in recent decades. This historical perspective offers an opportunity for reflection and renewed commitment to enhancing women's direct electoral representation.

Historical context (2001–2026)

Parliament	Year	Women directly elected	Reserved seats	Notes
9th	2008	19	45	Last 'free and fair' vote
10th	2014	18	50	Opposition boycott
11th	2018	22	50	Opposition boycott
12th	2024	19–20	50	Opposition boycott; low turnout
13th	2026	7	50	First competitive elections since 2008

Sources: Social News XYZ and Prothom Alo (14 February 2026), citing the Election Commission and Khan Foundation research report.

The 2026 elections saw seven women directly elected, representing a 25-year low in direct electoral representation for women. This contrast offers an opportunity for reflection on the conditions that enabled higher representation in 2008 and how those lessons might inform efforts to strengthen women's direct electoral participation in future contests.

Stakeholders shared thoughtful observations regarding the reserved seats mechanism, noting that, while originally conceived as temporary affirmative action to support women's entry into national politics, its implementation may have produced unintended constraints on women's political advancement. Some political leaders observed that indirect election processes, combined with current party-based allocation practices, could limit opportunities for women to develop independent political constituencies and competitive campaign skills. These reflections point to valuable opportunities for reviewing the reserved seats framework to ensure it continues to evolve in ways that advance, rather than inadvertently constrain, women's substantive political participation and leadership pathways.

At the same time, stakeholders offered constructive observations regarding how the current framework might be refined to better serve its intended purpose. Some political leaders noted that the indirect election process for reserved seats, combined with existing party-based allocation practices, may inadvertently limit opportunities for women to develop the skills and constituencies necessary for competitive electoral

²⁵ IPU (nd) 'Elections in 2008'. http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2023_08.htm

politics. Unlike their male counterparts, who must campaign, build public support and defend their records before constituents, women elected through the reserved system may not have the same opportunities to cultivate these essential political capabilities.

Several stakeholders suggested that these structural features could be examined with a view to strengthening the pathway from reserved representation to direct election. The goal, as many participants emphasised, is not to diminish the importance of reserved seats, but to ensure they function as a genuine stepping-stone rather than a separate and parallel track. There was broad consensus that any review of the framework should be guided by the principle of enhancing women's substantive political participation and ensuring talented women leaders had every opportunity to build sustainable, impactful political careers.

These observations point to valuable opportunities for dialogue among political parties, the BEC, women's organisations and other stakeholders about how Bangladesh's affirmative action mechanisms could continue to evolve in support of the nation's enduring commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Encouraging developments

Observers noted several encouraging developments during the electoral process, including substantial voter turnout among women, thoughtful provisions accommodating elderly and pregnant voters, the significant participation of women as polling officials and security personnel and impressive numbers of women exercising their franchise across the country. These positive indicators reflect Bangladesh's demonstrated commitment to inclusive electoral processes and the active civic engagement of its female citizens.

The observation that presiding officers were predominantly men points to a constructive opportunity for further progress. Building on women's already strong representation in other electoral functions, there is scope to advance greater numbers of women into senior electoral leadership roles. Such a progression would represent a natural and welcome evolution, fully aligned with Bangladesh's impressive global ranking on political empowerment and its longstanding tradition of women's leadership at the highest levels of governance.

Pathways forward

Stakeholder feedback consistently highlighted several areas where continued collaborative efforts could further strengthen women's participation in the democratic process. These include addressing challenges related to online harassment, navigating cultural considerations and enhancing institutional support mechanisms within political parties. These observations offer valuable opportunities for constructive engagement among political parties, civil society, electoral authorities and international partners. Working together, stakeholders can build upon Bangladesh's aspirational legal framework and gender parity achievements to develop enhanced mechanisms that support women's full and meaningful participation at every stage of the democratic journey.

While the Constitution recognises Hijra/intersex persons and the 2026 voter registration included 1,232 third-gender voters, stakeholders reported that some Hijra and LGBTQ+ individuals encountered challenges during the electoral process. These included instances where requirements related to dress and identification documents did not fully align with principles of inclusive participation. Such feedback offers constructive input for continued dialogue on how electoral procedures could be further refined to ensure all citizens are able to participate in a manner consistent with their dignity and identity.

Recommendations

Advance women's pathways to elected office through phased transition of reserved seats to direct election and a mandatory 40 per cent women candidate quota across political parties. Accelerate expansion to 150 reserved seats with clear timelines aligned with CEDAW General Recommendation 40 obligations.

(Continued)

	Mandate gender parity in electoral politics by requiring that political parties field a minimum of 50 per cent women candidates as a condition of eligibility to participate in general elections, with transitional provisions allowing two election cycles to achieve full compliance, supported by BEC matching grants and technical assistance that enable women candidates, including independents and those from smaller parties, to compete on equitable financial terms.
	Create a safe electoral environment by operationalising the Sexual Harassment Prevention and Protection Law 2025 by establishing a BEC rapid response unit to monitor and address online harassment, misogynist campaigning and violence against women in politics.
	Encourage the institutionalisation of gender parity in electoral governance to achieve a progressive gender balance by setting a 50 per cent target for women presiding officers and senior electoral officials by 2031. Mandate BEC publication of comprehensive sex-disaggregated data across all electoral processes to enable evidence-based policymaking.
	Leverage Bangladesh's regional gender equality leadership to progressively withdraw CEDAW reservations on Articles 2 and 16(1) to signal comprehensive commitment to eliminating discrimination.
	Require registered political parties to uphold constitutional gender equality guarantees by formally and publicly rejecting assertions, whether based on religious interpretation, cultural tradition or other grounds, that women are ineligible for political leadership (in reference to CEDAW Article 7). Party commitments should be verified through BEC monitoring, documented in public registries and enforced through party registration requirements, with non-compliance resulting in suspension of ballot access pending remedial action.
	Set up public recognition programmes for women panchayat/council members to normalise female political authority.

4.2 Civil society

CSOs played an indispensable role in Bangladesh's 2026 electoral process, serving as advocates, monitors and facilitators of constructive dialogue between citizens and electoral institutions. Organisations such as Naripokkho and various women's advocacy groups engaged proactively with the BEC on critical governance issues, including efforts to address the underrepresentation of women candidates who comprised approximately 3.6 to 4 per cent of the candidate pool despite women representing 43 to 50 per cent of the population. Their advocacy contributed to important discussions regarding the establishment of a women's commission to advance gender equity in the political process.

These groups also documented challenges faced by women candidates, including instances of cyberbullying, online harassment and physical violence, and presented evidence-based recommendations to the BEC regarding platform accountability and code of conduct enforcement. This constructive engagement reflects the vital role civil society plays in strengthening democratic processes and supporting the BEC's efforts to ensure a safe and inclusive electoral environment for all participants.

CSOs deployed local observers across polling stations, providing crucial oversight despite inconsistent treatment by some newly appointed presiding officers, who lacked systematic training on accreditation protocols. Beyond election day monitoring, civil society groups conducted voter education campaigns targeting vulnerable populations (including women, youth, PWDs and indigenous communities), addressing the widespread confusion surrounding the referendum's 30 conditions. They focused on issues such as campaign finance transparency, tracking misinformation, and hate speech across digital platforms, where 60 million social media users could determine electoral outcomes.

The consultations revealed civil society's multilayered contributions: minority rights organisations (the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council) articulated security demands following incidents of idol vandalism and violence; youth movements advocated for reconciliation commissions to deal with the lives lost in the July revolution; disability rights groups submitted accessibility recommendations that resulted in the BEC's commitment to flexible polling station protocols; and media houses navigated newfound press freedom to cover diverse political views after years of suppression.

The July 2024 protests, in which women and youth played transformative leadership roles, generated expectations for enhanced women's political representation. However, translating civic participation into electoral candidacy proved challenging, owing to several factors: limited integration of the Women's Affairs Commission's recommendations into transition frameworks, renewed assertions of conservative cultural positions regarding women's public roles, persistent structural barriers within party nomination systems despite symbolic women's leadership and difficulties newer political formations faced in operationalising gender-equitable practices. These observations highlight that transforming civic participation into institutional representation requires sustained structural interventions and enabling mechanisms beyond the immediate post-transition period.

The July Charter and proposed constitutional reforms appropriately identify women's political representation as a priority objective. Stakeholders observed, however, that achieving this goal would require specific implementation mechanisms beyond aspirational language, including clear quotas, electoral system provisions and party nomination requirements with accountability frameworks. The constitutional reform process presents an important opportunity to translate normative commitments into concrete structural mechanisms and institutional change that deliver measurable progress on women's representation and honour the spirit of the July Uprising and women's demonstrated civic leadership.

Despite Bangladesh's vibrant civil society sector and impressive track record in women's empowerment programming across economic and social sectors, this expertise has not yet been systematically channelled towards electoral candidate support. The transition from advocating for women's political participation to providing practical tools for candidacy represents a natural evolution that several CSOs expressed an interest in pursuing with appropriate capacity and resources.

Recommendations	Institutionalise civil society partnerships through formal advisory mechanisms by establishing a standing Civil Society Electoral Advisory Council that convenes regularly with the BEC and holds decision-making authority on inclusivity standards, observer protocols and voter education strategies.
	Resource CSOs as primary implementers of targeted voter education, digital platform regulation and post-election reconciliation.
	Create a co-ordinated civil society network providing year-round, comprehensive support to aspiring and active women candidates across all political parties to include mentorship programmes, transformational leadership training for politicians and peer learning platforms.

4.3 Youth

The 2026 Bangladesh parliamentary elections marked a pivotal moment for the nation, particularly concerning the role and engagement of its youth. Following the transformative July and August 2024 protests, largely spearheaded by young people, the elections were widely anticipated as an opportunity for a new generation to shape the country's democratic trajectory. Therefore, this section examines the extent of youth participation and inclusion in the 2026 elections, drawing on COG's observations, electoral data and the perspectives of young voters and activists. It also identifies key challenges and proposes recommendations for fostering more meaningful youth engagement in Bangladesh's political landscape.

Historical context: The July Uprising and its electoral aftermath

The period leading up to the 2026 elections was profoundly influenced by the youth-led uprising of July and August 2024, which ultimately led to the ousting of the previous government. This movement, often

characterised as a 'Gen Z' uprising, highlighted a profound shift in civic engagement, with young women and men at the forefront of anti-discrimination protests.²⁶ This unprecedented enthusiasm and generational shift signalled a renewed civic commitment, offering immense promise for Bangladesh's democratic future.²⁷

For many young Bangladeshis, the 2026 elections were their first experience with a truly competitive electoral process, following years of one-party dominance.²⁸ The transition from street-based activism to formal electoral politics presented both opportunities and challenges for youth. While the uprising demonstrated the immense power of organised youth, translating this energy into sustained political influence within established structures proved to be a complex endeavour.²⁹

Youth demographics and electoral participation

Bangladesh possesses one of the largest youth populations in the Commonwealth, with individuals under 35 years constituting approximately 44 per cent of the total voter base.³⁰ This demographic reality meant that young voters, including over 4.5 million first-time electors, were poised to play a decisive role in shaping the outcome of the 13th parliamentary elections.³¹

The voter registration process for the 2026 elections demonstrated encouraging trends in youth engagement.

While specific disaggregated data for youth voter turnout is not yet fully available, anecdotal evidence and observations from COG indicated enthusiastic participation from young people. The overall referendum turnout was reported at 60.26 per cent, suggesting a significant level of civic engagement across the electorate, including its younger segments.

Despite their numerical strength and visible activism, the meaningful inclusion of youth within formal political party structures remained a concern. The COG noted that, while young people were visibly active throughout the electoral process, this did not consistently translate into substantial representation or decision-making power within political parties.

Youth in the political landscape³²

The 2026 elections saw the emergence of new political forces, including the NCP, largely driven by the youth who were central to the 2024 uprising. The NCP, campaigning under the water-lily symbol, secured six seats in the 300-member parliament. A notable victory was that of Md Nahid Islam in the Dhaka-11 constituency, a prominent student leader from the July Uprising, who successfully transitioned from activist to elected representative. Other youth leaders, such as Hasnat Abdullah (Cumilla-4), also emerged victorious, signalling a nascent shift in political representation.

However, the overall success of youth-driven parties was limited, with the established BNP securing a landslide victory with 209 seats.³³ This outcome underscored the enduring dominance of traditional political structures and the challenges faced by newer, youth-centric movements in gaining widespread electoral traction.

²⁶ Chowdhury, Z., Paul, R. and Das, K. N. (2026) 'After Gen Z Uprising, Bangladesh Vote Shows Limits of Youth Power'. Reuters, 13 February. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/after-gen-z-uprising-bangladesh-vote-shows-limits-youth-power-2026-02-13/>

²⁷ Marof, M. H. (2026) 'Bangladeshi Gen Z Toppled Hasina. Now They Could Decide Next Prime Minister'. Al Jazeera, 20 January. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2026/1/20/bangladeshi-youth-toppled-hasina-now-they-could-decide-next-prime-minister>

²⁸ The Economic Times (2026) 'Younger Bangladesh Voters Primed for First Post-Hasina Election'. 8 February. <https://m.economictimes.com/news/international/world-news/younger-bangladesh-voters-primed-for-first-post-hasina-election/articleshow/128185578.cms>

²⁹ Chowdhury, Z., Paul, R. and Das, K. N. (2026) 'After Gen Z Uprising'.

³⁰ UNB (2026) 'Youth Participation Vital to Bangladesh's Democratic Future: Commonwealth Observer Group Chief'. 9 February. <https://www.msn.com/en-xl/asia/bangladesh/youth-participation-vital-to-bangladeshs-democratic-future-commonwealth-observer-group-chief/ar-AA1VW05j>

³¹ Shawon, A. A., Nabab, S. and Munshi, S. (2026) 'Youth Vote Set to Reshape Democracy's Course in Bangladesh'. Dhaka Tribune, 6 February. <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/402633/youth-vote-set-to-reshape-democracy%E2%80%99s-course-in>

³² Dhaka Tribune (2026) '13th National Election Results: Full Division-Wise List Of Winners'. 13 February. <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/403313/13th-national-election-results-full-division-wise>

³³ BBC News. (2026) 'BNP Sweeps to Victory in First Vote Since Gen Z Uprising'. 13 February. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgrzwn4yg7jo>

Youth perspectives leading up to, during and after the elections were widely reported in the media, reflecting a mix of hope, enthusiasm and frustration. First-time voters expressed a sense of optimism. One first-time voter articulated a common sentiment, stating his belief that the election could bring 'real change'.³⁴ Many described the election day with festive enthusiasm, comparing it to an 'Eid day'.³⁵

Youth activists and leaders, while celebrating the opportunity for democratic renewal, also voiced concerns about their limited influence within established political parties. An NCP member highlighted the internal party challenges, noting that 'the biggest and most important decisions are not taken in our presence'.³⁶ Another leader from the July Uprising spoke to the COG of the societal pressures faced by young women in politics, observing that they are often 'censored, vilified...judged for simply being part of a political party.'

Challenges to youth participation and inclusion

Despite the significant role played by youth in the 2024 uprising and their enthusiastic participation in the 2026 elections, several challenges hindered their meaningful inclusion in the political process:

- Limited representation in political parties: While youth were instrumental in campaigns and as actors of change, their presence in leadership roles or as nominated candidates within established political parties remained disproportionately low. The structure of many parties often relegates youth to supportive roles rather than empowering them in decision-making.
- Dominance of traditional politics: The overwhelming victory of established parties like the BNP demonstrates the persistent influence of traditional political machines, making it difficult for newer, youth-led movements to gain significant ground.
- Online harassment and misinformation: The digital sphere, while a powerful tool for youth mobilisation, also presented significant challenges. The COG highlighted concerns about online misinformation, cyber harassment and hate speech, which negatively impacted public discourse and could deter youth, particularly young women, from political engagement.
- Lack of institutional support: There is a perceived lack of dedicated institutional mechanisms within political parties to nurture young talent, provide political education and facilitate their progression into leadership positions.

To build upon the momentum generated by the youth-led uprising and the increased civic engagement observed in the 2026 elections, the Group recommends the following:

Recommendations	<p>Promote meaningful inclusion within political parties: Encourage political parties to adopt internal reforms that ensure genuine youth representation in party structures, including executive committees and candidate selection processes. This could involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory youth quotas: Implement internal party quotas for youth representation in leadership positions and as electoral candidates, similar to provisions for women, to ensure a minimum level of inclusion. • Youth wings with decision-making Power: Empower youth wings of political parties with actual decision-making authority and resources, moving beyond their traditional roles as mere campaign vehicles. • Capacity-building and mentorship: Establish programmes within political parties to provide political education, leadership training and mentorship opportunities for young aspiring leaders.
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³⁴ Sumon, S. (2026) 'Youth Voters Take Centre Stage in Bangladesh Election after Protests'. Arab News, 6 February. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2632362/world>

³⁵ Billah, M. and Sujon, M. A. (2026) "'Like Eid': Bangladeshis Hail Landmark Election: Many Vote after 17 Years'. Al Jazeera, 12 February. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/2/12/like-eid-bangladeshis-hail-landmark-election-many-vote-after-17-years>

³⁶ Marof, M. H. (2026) 'Bangladeshi Gen Z Toppled Hasina.

	<p>Support young candidates: Develop mechanisms to support young candidates, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds or independent platforms, in overcoming financial and structural barriers to contesting elections. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial assistance: Explore the possibility of election commission matching grants or dedicated funds for young candidates. • Lowering candidacy age: Review and potentially lower the minimum age for contesting elections to align with the energy and aspirations of the youth demographic.
	<p>Combat online harassment and misinformation: Strengthen regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to address online misinformation, cyber harassment and hate speech, creating a safer digital environment for political discourse and youth engagement.³⁷ This should include public awareness campaigns and digital literacy initiatives targeting young people.</p>
	<p>Institutionalise youth engagement platforms: Establish formal platforms for dialogue between youth organisations, political parties and electoral bodies to ensure youth perspectives are systematically considered in policy-making and electoral reforms.</p>
	<p>Data collection and analysis: Encourage the BEC to collect and publish disaggregated data on youth voter turnout, candidate participation and other relevant metrics to enable evidence-based policy-making and track progress on youth inclusion.</p>

By implementing these recommendations, Bangladesh can leverage the vibrant energy and democratic aspirations of its youth to strengthen its democratic institutions and ensure a more inclusive and representative political future.

4.4 Persons with disabilities

For PWDs, Bangladesh demonstrates genuine, measurable progress – from near-total exclusion in the 1990s to pioneering administrative innovations in 2025–2026, including first-ever braille ballots and structured volunteer assistance programmes. This is the clearest success story in the inclusion portfolio.

The February 2026 elections thus presented a study in stark contrasts: administrative inclusion improving for some groups, political inclusion collapsing for others.

Historical context

The organised political participation of PWDs in Bangladesh elections dates definitively to 2001. Prior to this, PWDs were almost entirely absent from the electoral process except as passive recipients of assistance from able-bodied companions, with no privacy or independent agency.

In the 2001 elections, Action on Disability and Development (ADD) successfully deployed 365 observers with mobility, visual and hearing impairments across 13 districts. This was the first time Bangladeshi PWDs had participated as electoral actors rather than merely as voters. A woman with a mobility impairment described her experience to the COG as 'not like the other bad days. Rather, I could take it as an Eid day.'

³⁷ The Commonwealth (2026) 'Commonwealth Observers Praise Peaceful Bangladesh Polls. Call for Greater Inclusion'. 14 February. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news-press-release/commonwealth-observers-praise-peaceful-bangladesh-polls-call-greater-inclusion>

Figure 4.2 A voter with mobility challenges making her way to the polling station.



Critically, the 2001 observer programme was preceded by a foundational advocacy victory: in 1995, five activists with mobility impairment undertook a seven-day wheelchair journey from Kushtia to Dhaka to submit a memorandum to the Prime Minister's Office and Parliament Speaker. This directly contributed to the passage of the Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare Act 2001.

By December 2006, ADD had trained 6,050 PWD observers for the scheduled 2007 parliamentary elections – a 16-fold increase from 2001.

Our search results produced no information on PWD electoral inclusion during the 2009–2024 period. This evidentiary gap is itself significant. It suggests that, while voter registration may have included disability data, no major procedural innovations – comparable to the 2001 observer programme – were introduced at the national level during this period. The BEC's attention to disability access appears to have remained at the level of aspirational statements, rather than systemic reform.

A decisive breakthrough occurred in September 2025, not in a national election but in the Dhaka University Central Students' Union (DUCSU) election – an event that carries immense symbolic weight in Bangladesh's political history. Dhaka University authorities, responding to the candidacy of three visually impaired students, and the presence of 30 visually impaired voters, introduced braille ballot papers for the first time in Bangladesh's history.

National rollout: Commission planning for 2026

Simultaneous to the DUCSU innovation, the BEC signalled its intention to scale disability inclusion nationally. In August 2025, Election Commissioner Abul Fazal Md Sanaullah announced at the National Consultation on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Electoral Process that the BEC was considering deploying volunteers from Bangladesh National Cadet Corps and Bangladesh Scouts to assist PWDs, elderly voters and those with mobility limitations.

In December 2025, the BEC formalised these commitments, announcing:

- extended voting hours (7:30am–4:30pm, adding one hour total);
- multiple voting booths at each centre to reduce congestion and improve accessibility;

- special assistance protocols for PWDs, elderly citizens and pregnant women;
- 300 Electoral Inquiry Committees with judicial powers to address complaints;
- Two magistrates per upazila (for each sub-district) for enhanced election day oversight.

During the February 2026 elections, these measures were operationalised. While systematic post-election assessment data is not yet available, the BEC's pre-election planning represents the most comprehensive national framework for PWD electoral access in Bangladesh's history.

Figure 4.3 Commonwealth observer Senator (Ret.) Datuk Dr Ras Adiba Radzi being assisted to a polling station.



Recommendations	Braille ballot national standardisation: The DUCSU model should be adopted for all national elections, with mandatory availability upon request at every polling station.
	Braille-literate counting staff: The BEC should recruit and train braille-literate temporary staff in every district, not rely on external contractors.
	Accessible voter education: All BEC materials should be produced in audio, large-print and easy-read formats.
	Disability-disaggregated data: Turnout and satisfaction surveys should include disability status to measure effective access.
	Sign language interpreters should be made available at each polling station, or the ability to carry out video or WhatsApp video calls to enable the deaf to communicate with a sign language interpreter if he or she is unable to comprehend the instructions.
	A calm room should be introduced for voters who are on the autism spectrum in case they become overwhelmed or need support.
	Training should be given to volunteers on how to assist PWDs, especially the physically challenged and wheelchair users.

4.5 Elderly voters

The 13th parliamentary election produced powerful visual documentation of elderly participation that captured national attention. Some testimonies to the COG include the following:

- A 103-year-old woman, unable to walk independently, was carried to the polling station in a palanquin arranged by her family. Her son had previously served as a local union parishad member. Her arrival 'drew wide attention from other voters and local residents, who gathered to witness the rare scene.'
- A 105-year-old man arrived holding his son's hand at dawn, before any other voter, in thick fog. He became the first voter at his centre. He stated he 'could not vote in the last three elections but found the environment better this time.'
- An 84-year-old woman, supported by her daughter, voted for the first time in 12 years. A widow, she said she did not know any of the eight candidates but 'still wanted to exercise her right to vote,' hoping for 'better law and order and improved living conditions.'

Recommendations	Geriatric accessibility standards: Introduce ramps, seating, priority queues and large-print materials at all polling stations.
	State-provided transport: Consider institutionalising dedicated vehicles for voters unable to walk independently, modelled on the palanquin precedent.
	Homebound voting pilot: Consider supervised mobile ballot units for voters certified as unable to travel (requires constitutional amendment).

Inclusion of the 2026 referendum in the election

The simultaneous constitutional referendum presented an accessibility challenge, and the Group could not establish through its own online research whether efforts to address this were undertaken. Voters were asked to decide on multiple complex institutional reforms (bicameral legislature, term limits, judicial appointments) through a binary Yes/No ballot.

No information is provided on:

- accessible voter education explaining the 80+ proposals in plain language;
- braille or audio referendum materials for PWDs;
- assisted voting protocols for elderly voters confronting complex constitutional questions.

There is a risk that procedural complexity creates de facto exclusion for voters with limited literacy, visual impairments or cognitive disabilities – even as administrative access improves.

The 2026 elections were therefore a test not merely of who wins but of whether Bangladesh's democracy could recognise and rectify its most profound and persistent exclusion. While the evidence to date has not been encouraging, optimism should nevertheless be encouraged and nurtured as future remedies are considered.

Recommendations	Post-2026 evaluation: Carry out a comprehensive assessment of postal voting accessibility, non-literate voter participation and mail delivery reliability.
	Include a braille jacket for visually impaired voters.

5. Campaign and Media

5.1 The campaign

The twin elections, combining the parliamentary election and the referendum, have been regarded as historic and the most consequential in the history of Bangladesh.

According to Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, 'We expect this election to be better than any other election the country has witnessed in the past. Campaigning is taking place peacefully across the country. Political parties are playing a responsible role, and the large public gatherings are being held without violence and disorder.'

Sixty political parties registered with the BEC. The AL was banned in May 2025 from participation in the elections because of its alleged role in the violent crackdown on the July Uprising and because of allegations of crimes against humanity. Five main parties thus contested the elections and referendum: the BNP, Jamaat, the NCP, Jatiya Party, with two factions, and Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB). A total of 2,029 candidates contested for the main political parties along with 275 independent candidates, all contesting for the 300 parliamentary seats, with 50 seats reserved for women participation.

At campaign rallies, the main political parties launched their manifestos, encouraging voters to vote for credible parties that promoted the vision of change, peace, stability, prosperity and transformation of the country.

The main concerns of the electorate, as addressed at campaign events and public meetings by political parties and independent candidates, included the following:

- economic security and inclusive development;
- the fight against corruption and bad governance;
- restoration of democratic governance and political empowerment through voting rights for all;
- education empowerment;
- women's empowerment and political participation of minority communities;
- youth empowerment and job creation;
- responding to historic atrocities and gross human rights violations, in particular justice for the victims of the July Uprising;
- an inclusive Bangladesh owned by all citizens of the state.

Election Commission preparation for and management of campaigning

Noting the electoral management of the historic elections and to ensure orderly, free and fair elections, the BEC issued clear guidelines and a Code of Conduct, announcing the start of campaigning on 22 January and its conclusion on 10 February 2026 (48 hours prior to the opening of polls on 12 February).

As part of the BEC's elections schedule and security measures, all campaigns, political rallies, public processions and meetings were banned for a total of 96 hours, both before and after polling day.

This included restrictions on the movement of people outside of their respective electoral areas. Notwithstanding, political parties and candidates were expected to continue with their activities through social media.

The BEC's Code of Conduct stipulated clear guidelines on campaigning, social media use, political parties and candidates' election promotional materials. The Code of Conduct was published as the '13th National Election: What Candidates Can and Cannot Do.'

The Code of Conduct and campaign restrictions were designed to ensure the elections were conducted in a neutral, orderly and peaceful political environment. In addition, the Code stressed the requirement to use biodegradable and environmentally safe materials on campaign posters, banners, leaflets and billboards.

Figure 5.1 Posters and banners of some political parties.



The Code allowed the publication of portrait or party symbols on campaign materials only in black and white, except for on billboards. The size of billboards was specified as 16 feet by 9 feet, to ensure they did not obstruct traffic. All campaign materials were to be removed within 48 hours after voting. In the post-election period, campaign materials were still littered across the country, in violation of the BEC Code of Conduct.

On donations and government resources, the Code specified that it was imperative for candidates to refuse to agree to any reception from organisations or associations during campaigning as well as to avoid the use of government vehicles and premises for campaign events and rallies.

On polling day conduct, the Code stressed the need to refrain from bringing campaign materials, symbols or attire inside the polling area. In addition, it included guidelines on campaigning time and the use of sound systems. Campaigns were to begin no earlier than three weeks before polling day and that all campaign activities were to end 48 hours before polling day. Only three microphones or loudspeakers could be used at one event, with limits on sound systems between 2:00pm and 8:00pm to a threshold of 60 decibels.

Furthermore, restrictions were placed on public meetings and campaign rallies, requiring all political parties and independent candidates to submit campaign schedules to relevant authorities in advance; to obtain written permission on the date, time and location of campaign rallies; to notify the police at least 24 hours before rallies for traffic and security arrangements; and to hold campaign rallies and public meetings or processions in locations that did not obstruct public movement.

On social media, the Code specified the need to register all social media accounts, IDs and email addresses with the returning officer before posting any content, and to ensure all online campaigning respected voters, women, minorities and candidates.

In terms of enforcement of the Code of Conduct, all political parties and independent candidates pledged to co-operate with the election authorities in the case of any breach or any investigation into campaign violations. Penalties included a fine of up to BDT 1,00,000, or six months in prison, for violations and, in the case of serious violations, disqualification from participation, punishable under the RPO. The BEC also deployed executive magistrates to conduct mobile courts for violations of the Code. All these measures would contribute to the peaceful and orderly nature of most of the campaign as well as increasing the credibility of the electoral environment as impartial.

Actual campaign

Despite these measures, we observed that enforcement of campaign restrictions, and the Code of Conduct, by the BEC was a challenge. On polling day, we observed political party campaign materials at some polling stations as well as some voters entering the polling stations premises with political party symbols and artefacts, irrespective of the presence of polling officers. At some polling stations, we observed some level of campaigning, with some rickshaws carrying political party symbols within the vicinity of polling stations, in breach of the campaign Code of Conduct.

Bangladesh's historic legacy and the national desire for change in the aftermath of the July Uprising pushed all political parties and independent candidates to promote peaceful and positive campaign messages. Nevertheless, social media was replete with negative campaign messages, in particular cyberbullying of women, disabled groups and ethnic minorities.

On the whole, campaign rallies, public processions and political meetings were orderly and peaceful, as well as vibrant, demonstrating youthful exuberance. However, women were often on the periphery of these campaign events. Festive campaign scenes and the newfound national mood for change across the country in the run-up to the elections conveyed a picture of widespread voter satisfaction, with the absence of large-scale violence and generally peaceful campaign events.

Overall, social media's dominance of the campaign, and the emergence of a new genre of election songs, had a significant impact on the 13th parliamentary elections, largely because of the influence of youth and Gen Z.

The estimated 970,000 security personnel and law enforcement agencies deployed nationwide contributed to the peaceful and orderly nature of the campaign rallies and public processions. At some of the public meetings and political rallies observed, there were no security or law enforcement officers present.

The referendum campaign

The referendum campaign message focused only on the key elements of the July Charter. It was largely promoted by the IGB, which campaigned for a 'Yes' vote. The referendum simplified the choice for voters in the form of a 'Yes' and 'No' vote. A 'Yes' vote translated into formation of a Constitutional Reform Council, comprising elected parliamentary representatives that would simultaneously serve as members of the national parliament. A 'No' vote meant a rejection of the July Charter and its associated reform agenda.

The referendum process generated considerable debate among citizens, in that it was perceived that the IGB's message was rather contradictory. There were concerns that the IGB had campaigned for the 'Yes' vote and even instructed government institutions to promote the 'Yes' vote campaign, while simultaneously

directing government officials not to campaign for the referendum. It is claimed that the IGB spent an estimated BDT 140 crore on the referendum campaign, taking the 'Yes' vote campaign to mosques and schoolteachers.

Political parties were divided on the referendum: some campaigned for their supporters to vote 'Yes' whereas others actively campaigned for a 'No' vote. The proscribed AL urged its supporters to vote 'No' in the referendum.

Those political parties that were not in favour of the referendum also used social media to aggressively campaign for a 'No' vote. Indeed, the referendum campaign was fraught with misinformation and falsehood, which contributed to suspicion and a lack of trust and to undermining the credibility of the 'Yes' vote campaign.³⁸

A major concern was the perceived lack of education and voter awareness about the referendum, especially among the poor and illiterate in rural areas and urban centres. It was reported that such groups generally felt the referendum was a 'government affair.'

The division is reflected in the outcome of the referendum vote, with the 'Yes' vote winning by 68.59 per cent and the 'No' vote garnering 31.41 per cent of the 59.44 per cent of registered voter turnout.

To put this into context, the campaign and the elections themselves were influenced by three inter-related underlying factors: a historic legacy of decades of violent and repressive authoritarian rule; newfound hope for and aspirations of change and transformation inspired by the July Uprising; and the continued dominance of the traditional political parties, including the BNP, which has governed the country four times, the banned AL (six times), Jatiya Party (twice) and Jamaat. These status quo political parties strategically positioned themselves post-July 2024 to continue to leverage and dominate the political landscape.

Issues and concerns regarding the campaign period

Some international election observers and field monitoring agencies highlighted concerns that some rallies and public processions were marred by election violence that was systematic, with intimidation used against political opponents, women, ethnic minorities and indigenous communities.

In 50 constituencies monitored by the European Partnership for Democracy and Odhikar consortium, instances of electoral violence were observed at a number of campaign events, rallies and public processions. According to the Human Rights Support Society, at least 10 people were killed and 2,503 injured in elections-related violence in the run-up to the elections, specifically between October 2025 and 14 February 2026.³⁹ The objective was to discourage and prevent participation in the electoral process. Electoral violence mainly included threats, individual and communal harassment, physical clashes, property damage, fatal violence and electoral process obstruction.

On 7 February 2026, the Group bore witness to political demonstrators clashing violently with security forces and law enforcement agencies in front of the InterContinental Hotel in Dhaka, resulting in a three-hour skirmish and the firing of smoke and stun grenades.

Nevertheless, these incidents of political violence were not generally large-scale and widespread, but isolated in nature, reflecting historic patterns and incidents of violence associated with elections and campaign events.

Only one isolated incident of violence happened on polling day, with a cocktail explosion at a polling station in Gopalganj, as reported by Al Jazeera TV and Jamuna TV. In the immediate post-election period, there were reports of five people being injured and one person being killed across five districts in what seemed to be cases of intra-party post-election violence.⁴⁰

³⁸ Hossain, M. and Sumi, A. (2026) 'What Grassroots Bangladesh Thinks about the Referendum'. BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, 8 February.

³⁹ The Daily Star (2026) '10 Killed, 2,503 Hurt Since Oct Last Year'. 16 February. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/10-killed-2503-hurt-oct-last-year-4106906>

⁴⁰ The Daily Star (2026) 'Post-Polls Violence: 1 Killed, 5 Hurt in 5 districts'. 14 February 2026. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/national-election-2026/news/post-polls-violence-1-killed-5-hurt-5-districts-4106041>

Many citizens expressed the perspective that these elections were the most peaceful in the history of the country.

The more than 540 international election observers and foreign journalists observing and reporting on the campaign rallies, political processions and public meetings across the country also presented the view that the elections were conducted in a neutral, orderly and peaceful political environment.

It is important to note that, in the pre-election period, there were concerns about the role and political influence of external actors on the campaign and elections. For example, there were reports of difficult bilateral and political relations between India and the IGM. At some political rallies, we observed banners with anti-India slogans. Also, Bangladesh is at a geopolitical crossroads in South Asia, so the election was keenly followed by world powers such as China and the United States.⁴¹

With the victory of the BNP, Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi was one of the first world leaders to congratulate Bangladesh and the BNP Prime Minister-elect Tarique Rahman, stating that, 'India will continue to stand in support of a democratic, progressive and inclusive Bangladesh shows trust of the people in your leadership. As two neighbours with deep-rooted historical and cultural ties, I reaffirm India's continued commitment to the peace, progress and prosperity of both our peoples.'⁴²

Recommendation	To improve the campaign environment in future elections, Bangladesh may wish to consider various mechanisms to develop a more inclusive political culture, including measures to address truth-seeking and national healing.
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5.2 Media

Overview and context

The Bangladeshi media is vibrant and active, and the Group commends it for the depth and breadth of its coverage of these elections.

The mainstream media in Bangladesh is a mix of government-owned and private media.

Newspapers are privately owned. There are hundreds of Bangla-language periodicals covering a wide range of political issues and perspectives. The largest, Prothom Alo, has a circulation of more than 500,000. There are nine English-language newspapers serving an urban, educated readership. The largest, The Daily Star, has a circulation of 45,000.

Television is the biggest news provider in Bangladesh, with more than a dozen stations on the air. The state-owned broadcaster, Bangladesh Television (BTV) promotes the government's agenda in its news programmes and does not have editorial independence. Private television stations include Jamuna TV, Somoy TV and Ekattor TV. They previously supported the government of Sheikh Hasina, then refrained from criticising the IGB when it was formed in 2024.

Radio includes 19 community radio stations broadcasting in rural and remote areas of the country. Like its television counterpart, the state-owned Bangladesh Betar radio station promotes the government's perspective in its news broadcasts. There is also a wide range of private AM and FM radio stations.

During the government of Sheikh Hasina, media freedom was severely curtailed. Reporters Without Borders noted a range of obstacles to objective journalism, including censorship, cyber-harassment, pressure from military intelligence, judicial harassment, draconian laws, police violence and assaults by the ruling party's militias.

Legal framework for the media

Bangladesh's Constitution guarantees press freedom and freedom of expression. During the government of Sheikh Hasina, however, media freedoms were severely curtailed. Her government amended the ICT Act

⁴¹ Balachandran, K. (2026) 'Foreign Powers' Stakes in the Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections – Analysis'. Eurasia Review, 26 January.

⁴² Hussain, A. (2026) 'Could BNP's Landslide Win Open a New Geopolitical Chapter for Bangladesh'. Al Jazeera, 14 February.

in 2013 to curb freedom of expression. Section 57 of the amended act, for example, makes digital offences non-bailable, with prison sentences ranging between seven and 14 years for publishing 'false,' 'obscene' or 'defamatory' information in electronic form.

The Communication and Technology Act (later the Cyber Security Act) was also used to restrict freedom of expression, curb free and objective journalism and endanger the safety of journalists. Together, these laws allowed searches and arrests without warrant and the seizure of electronic equipment. They also forced journalists to reveal confidential sources on arbitrary grounds. The legal environment before the July Uprising created a 'media chill' in which reporters routinely censored themselves. As a consequence, Bangladesh's ranking in the 2024 World Press Freedom Index was 165 out of 180 countries.

After the July Uprising, the IGB initiated reforms to the Constitution and the legal framework. Six commissions were established to define policy recommendations, one of which was the Media Reform Commission, headed by Kamal Ahmed, Consulting Editor of The Daily Star. The Media Reform Commission delivered a report that included a situation assessment of the media sector to orient future change proposals. Although media freedom has yet to be protected in Bangladesh's Constitution or laws, these developments have ended the 'media chill' of the previous administration.

In 2025, therefore, the legal environment with respect to media was fluid, creating space for media outlets to hold governments to account and investigate corruption. Journalists gradually produced more balanced reporting as a result. Bangladesh's rank on the World Press Freedom Index jumped 16 places in 2025, to 149 out of 180 countries.

When the election campaign started, this fluid legal environment permitted reporting on a wide range of campaign topics and party platforms, a notable improvement from the campaigns that preceded it.

Election reporting by newspapers and television

Campaign coverage by newspapers and television stations was enthusiastic and comprehensive. For the first time in nearly 20 years, journalists were able to cover the full range of political viewpoints. Editors often placed news from different parties on their front page or in the same broadcast.

Figure 5.2 Front page of The Daily Sun, covering stories from both Jamaat and BNP.



There was a price to pay for this new independence, however. On 19 December 2025, arsonists attacked the offices of both The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, setting them ablaze and trapping journalists in smoke. Although no one was hurt, a mob vandalised both newspapers offices before being dispersed by security services. The flames were subsequently brought under control by fire fighters.

Figure 5.3 Arsonists attacked and vandalised offices of some of the newspapers.



The reporters at these newspapers continued to publish despite the attacks, not missing an issue. Their online editions were down for just a few hours before resuming service. The Daily Star called this 'one of the darkest days for independent journalism in Bangladesh' but stated: 'We shall continue with unabashed conviction in democracy and freedom of speech. We shall continue with unflinching commitment to hold power to account. We shall continue with unrelenting dedication to independent and objective journalism.'⁴³

Figure 5.4 Election coverage by some media houses.



This kind of energy and optimism was evident throughout the campaign. However, it was not uniformly adopted by all newspapers and television stations. Many reports remained weighted in favour of special interests or political groups. Often, reporters neglected to report the perspective of marginalised groups, women and minorities.

⁴³ The Daily Star (2025) 'A Dark Day for Independent Journalism'. 19 December. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/dark-day-independent-journalism-4061941>

After nearly two decades of media control, there is a need to strengthen the capacity of journalists to report objectively and also for readers and viewers to critically evaluate news reports.

Recommendation	Build the capacity of institutions such as the National Institute of Mass Communication to conduct media literacy campaigns and the Press Institute of Bangladesh to train journalists in objective news reporting. The International Fund for Public Interest Media is one possible source of support.
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Election reporting by state-owned media

The state-owned radio and television stations (along with the national news agency, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha) continued to promote government viewpoints in their news and election coverage, neglecting other viewpoints and perspectives. Their coverage of the referendum on the July Charter, for example, was one-sidedly in favour of the initiative.

State-owned media could make a bigger contribution to credible elections in Bangladesh if they were transformed to become public service broadcasters. This development would be especially appropriate for Bangladesh as it is due to graduate from the United Nations least developed country category to developing country status later in 2026.

Although funded by governments, public service broadcasters operate as non-partisan, non-profit entities, guided by a public interest mandate. They are safeguarded from political interference in matters related to editorial decision-making and governance. Their news reports can therefore be critical of government programmes and policies, resulting in more objective reporting.

Transitioning BTV and Bangladesh Betar from state-owned media to public service broadcasters would require changes to their legal, financial and editorial structures in order to guarantee them independence from government interference. The Commonwealth may be able to co-ordinate assistance in this transition, since several examples of good practice in public service broadcasting exist in its member countries, including the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Recommendation	The new government of Bangladesh should consider passing legislation to transition state-owned media in Bangladesh to public service broadcasting. (The Commonwealth Broadcasting Association could perhaps assist in implementing the legislation.)
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Election reporting by community radio

Bangladesh's 19 community radio stations were ideally placed to report on election issues affecting poor and marginalised groups, including indigenous groups. Television stations and newspapers often under-report the issues that are important to these groups. However, community radio stations found it difficult to fill the gap. Such stations are chronically underfunded both in their equipment and in their capacity to report from remote communities. If sustainable support could be organised, they would be well positioned to contribute to better election reporting and the democratic development of Bangladesh.

Recommendation	Build the capacity of the Bangladesh Community Radio Association and its member stations to broadcast election news and opinions relevant to remote and marginalised communities more effectively. (Organisations such as the Association Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communitaires, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) community radio programming may be able to assist.)
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Regulatory environment for the media in election campaigns

In July 2025, the BEC issued media guidelines for journalists and media representatives covering the elections. These guided reporters on behaviour around polling stations, prohibited 'hateful propaganda' and required journalists to adhere to electoral laws and regulations.

A participatory approach to creating a positive media environment during election campaigns might be more effective. The Bangladesh Press Council could be empowered to facilitate a media code of conduct for elections that is created by news organisations and self-regulated by journalists themselves. This approach would shift the responsibility for objective coverage of Bangladesh's elections from the BEC to media outlets. Empowering journalists to regulate themselves would encourage professional standards in which objective reporting could flourish.

Recommendation	Build the capacity of the Bangladesh Press Council to facilitate a media code of conduct for reporting on elections, created and enforced by media organisations and journalists themselves.
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Social media

This section focuses specifically on the role of social media during the electoral period. To develop a better understanding of the digital political landscape in Bangladesh, the Group held separate consultations with a range of stakeholders, including civil society organisations, digital rights actors, media and fact-checking professionals, government stakeholders and international partners. The Group did not conduct forensic digital investigations, and did not have access to proprietary platform data. Neither did the Group consult with any social media company.

1. The digital environment

The 2026 election and referendum in Bangladesh took place at a time when important political conversations and activities were taking place in the digital sphere globally. In Bangladesh, this shift appeared to have been accelerated by two key factors:

- 1.1 The BEC revised Code of Conduct placed restrictions on campaign materials and certain traditional political activities.⁴⁴
- 1.2 The environment was characterised by widespread mobile phone ownership and low-cost data access, particularly among 18–34 year olds in the aftermath of the 2024 youth uprisings.⁴⁵ Bangladesh's digital landscape is large and expanding. Over the past decade, the country has undergone rapid digital transformation, with mobile broadband serving as the primary access point. Smartphone ownership is widespread in urban areas and increasing steadily in rural areas. Stakeholders informed the Group that affordable data packages had expanded access among younger demographics.

Stakeholders informed the Group that social media platforms, particularly Facebook, YouTube and TikTok, and to a lesser degree X (formerly Twitter), were central to political communication during this election cycle. Several stakeholders indicated that, unlike previous electoral cycles, digital platforms served as primary arenas of political engagement.⁴⁶ Stakeholders consistently expressed to the Group the following sentiments: 'The campaigns are not on the streets, they are virtual.'

⁴⁴ Abbas, M. (2026) 'National Election: What Candidates Can and Cannot Do'. The Daily Star, 20 January. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/elections/news/national-election-what-candidates-can-and-cannot-do-4085866>

⁴⁵ Alamgir, M. and Deepto, A. (2026) 'Young Voters Poised to Shape Next Election'. The Daily Star, 10 January. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/young-voters-poised-shape-next-election-4077266>

⁴⁶ Sujan, M. A. (2026) 'Bangladesh's Latest Election Battlegrounds: TikTok, Facebook, YouTube'. Al Jazeera, 22 January. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2026/1/22/tiktok-facebook-youtube-bangladeshs-latest-election-battlegrounds>; Hasan, M. T. (2026) 'The Social Media Battlefield: Political Campaigns in Bangladesh's National Elections'. Global Voices, 10 February. <https://globalvoices.org/2026/02/10/the-social-media-battlefield-political-campaigns-in-bangladeshs-national-elections/>

Various forms of content flowed fluidly between online platforms and traditional media. Viral narratives and video clips from social media frequently shaped television and newspaper commentary, amplifying digital discourse into mainstream political discussions.

According to available digital landscape studies, Bangladesh has 186 million active mobile connections (approximately 105% of the population) 82.8 million internet users (47% of the population) 64 million social media users, primarily on Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok and to a lesser extent, X (formerly Twitter).

2. The ban on the Awami League: Digital implications

As outlined in earlier chapters, a significant development in the pre-election period was the government's decision to ban all activities of the AL under the Anti-Terrorism Act.⁴⁷

Stakeholders informed the Group that this decision had materially altered the political communication environment. With traditional political activities restricted and the prohibition extending explicitly to cyberspace, social media platforms became a focal point of both enforcement and circumvention dynamics.

Despite the formal ban on the activities of the AL, social media platforms continued to host content generated by official party accounts and individuals identifying as party leaders or supporters. Facebook, YouTube and X (formerly Twitter) were reportedly used to express political views, challenge official government narratives, pre-emptively delegitimise the electoral process and encourage loyalists to boycott the election. Diaspora networks and anonymised accounts further amplified AL content.

The Group notes that, in this context, social media platforms served as contested arenas. While the government's stated position was that the ban applied across all domains, including online spaces, the transnational and decentralised nature of social media complicated enforcement.

3. Social media as a tool for participation, and a vector of digital threats

Across consultations, stakeholders consistently described social media as both empowering and destabilising. The ways social media functioned during this electoral period included the following:

- A campaign tool

Digital platforms lowered barriers to entry, allowing smaller parties and independent candidates to reach audiences without relying on traditional media gatekeepers. Social media was used to communicate directly with voters, particularly youth and out-of-country⁴⁸ voters. Stakeholders informed the Group about various approaches used, including influencer partnerships, livestreaming of rallies and speeches, short-form campaign messaging and rapid response rebuttals.

At the same time, stakeholders noted that influencer-led campaigning was not always clearly disclosed, raising questions about funding transparency and accountability.

- A forum for debate

Social media served as a space for discussing referendum positions and national issues through various methods, including influencer-led political commentary, live discussions, meme accounts, reaction videos and hashtag-driven discussions. Some commonly used hashtags include #নর্বিচান, #BangladeshElection2026, #BangladeshElectionSecurity, #BDElection, #DhakaElectionCampaign, #BangladeshElectionViolence and #BanglaPolitics.

Stakeholders informed the Group that algorithm-driven amplification sometimes prioritised provocative or sensational content over substantive discussion, contributing to polarisation.

- A public information channel

⁴⁷ The Daily Star (2025) 'Activities of AL, Affiliates Banned'. 12 May. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/activities-al-affiliates-banned-3892976>

⁴⁸ The Commonwealth (2026) 'Historic Poll Sees Millions Vote at Home in Bangladesh and 122 Countries as Commonwealth Team Observes Process'. 12 February. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/historic-poll-sees-millions-vote-home-bangladesh-and-122-countries-commonwealth-team-observes>

Political and public institutions used social media to issue public statements, counter rumours, clarify voting procedures and provide logistical updates.

- A mobilisation mechanism

Stakeholders informed the Group that social media played a role in mobilising both physical and digital participation. Platforms were used to organise activities, encourage voter turnout, co-ordinate volunteer networks and amplify referendum messaging.

Digital mobilisation reduced logistical costs but also increased the speed at which harmful messaging escalated.

- A documentation, archiving and accountability tool

Social media functioned not only as a communication platform but also as a form of informal digital archiving. Citizens documented events, shared concerns and circulated images and videos in real time, collectively creating a distributed public record of the election. This digital archiving can strengthen transparency and public accountability by preserving evidence and enabling scrutiny.

At the same time, stakeholders shared that rapid circulation before verification amplified unconfirmed claims and contributed to fear, confusion or reputational harm.

- A vector of digital threats

Stakeholders expressed concern to the Group that the same features that make social media useful for democratic participation also make it vulnerable to misuse. Stakeholders based this argument on several factors, including speed and scale, algorithmic amplification, anonymity and pseudonymity, low cost of online co-ordination, transnational reach, private and encrypted channels, inadequate content moderation by social media platforms and poor enforcement of the BEC's Code of Conduct.

The Group notes that social media activity does not create political tensions in isolation. However, stakeholders consistently indicated that digital platforms accelerated, amplified and entrenched tensions owing to insufficient safeguards.

4. Digital threats to civic participation and elections

The Group notes with great concern a broad range of digital threats described by various stakeholders. These include but are not limited to:

- false and misleading information. False narratives often pre-emptively questioned electoral legitimacy and procedures. Stakeholders informed the Group that certain viral claims appeared to have been amplified through cross-border networks, including within diaspora networks operating from India, the United Kingdom and the United States;⁴⁹
- co-ordinated inauthentic activity including the use of bots and propaganda cells;⁵⁰
- religious and ethnic hate;⁵¹
- technology-facilitated gender-based violence.⁵² Female candidates and women participating in political discourse experienced targeted abuse and sexualised claims. Some female stakeholders described harassment intensifying after public appearances or media interviews resulting in withdrawal from online engagement;

⁴⁹ Digitally Right (2026) 'New Research on Tackling Election Disinformation in Bangladesh Ahead of 2026 Polls'. 9 February. <https://digitallyright.org/tackling-election-disinformation/>; Sajid, E. and Dubey, S. (2026) "'Flood" of Disinformation ahead of Bangladesh Election'. 10 February. <https://factcheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.96N66KE>

⁵⁰ The Daily Star (2026). 'Fake "Haha" Reactions Attack Political Opponents ahead of Elections'. 3 February. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/investigative-stories/news/fake-haha-reactions-attack-political-opponents-ahead-elections-4097146>

⁵¹ Aman, M. (2026) 'Faith, Fear, and Falsehoods: Mapping Communal Misinformation and Hate in Bangladesh's 2026 Election'. Activate Rights, February. <https://activaterights.org/key-insights-from-the-activate-rights-election-monitoring-situation-room/>

⁵² Eron, S. M. (2026) 'When Visibility Becomes Vulnerability: TFGBV in Post-Uprising Bangladesh'. Activate Rights, 4 February. <https://activaterights.org/when-visibility-becomes-vulnerability-tfgbv-in-post-uprising-bangladesh/>

- cyberbullying and harassment. For example, individuals promoting the 'no vote' in the referendum faced hostility and were often socially shamed and labelled as fascists, leading to self-silencing, in some cases;
 - manipulated visuals and AI-generated deepfakes;
 - incitement or inflammatory rhetoric.
5. Institutional responses
- Bangladesh Election Commission

The Group acknowledges several proactive steps taken by the BEC:⁵³

- establishment of an in-house media monitoring unit;
- rapid response fact-checking;
- issuance of guidelines for online conduct;
- requirement for parties to submit the URLs to official social media accounts;
- youth-focused digital outreach initiatives.

The Group acknowledges that the absence of internet shutdowns and platform disruptions during the election period contributed positively to perceptions of openness.

Recommendations	The Group encourages the BEC to retain its election media monitoring unit and gradually build it into a simple, year-round risk monitoring function. This would involve continuing to track online trends in between elections, identifying early warning signs of emerging issues and tactics, and providing short, clear public updates even outside campaign periods.
	The Group encourages the BEC to expand its focus beyond false and misleading information to also address gendered abuse, impersonation of candidates, co-ordinated harassment, religious and ethnic hate, and AI-generated harms that may impact elections and civic participation. This could include setting up clear internal referral pathways for serious cases and identifying how female candidates can report serious attacks quickly and safely.
	The Group encourages the BEC to strengthen transparency by publishing brief updates on how violations of the Code of Conduct are handled, including where issues are escalated to social media companies.
	The Group acknowledges the positive steps already taken to promote responsible digital campaigning and encourages the consistent, rights-respecting application of the Code of Conduct, particularly in relation to official accounts and paid digital content. Maintaining a clear, publicly accessible record of verified official accounts can assist citizens in identifying authentic sources and reducing impersonation risks. Any review of party accounts is encouraged to remain clearly anchored in Code compliance, with safeguards that protect lawful political expression and reinforce public trust in the Commission's neutrality.
	The Group encourages the government to ensure the BEC has the staff, training and budget required to sustain this work throughout the year.

⁵³ The BEC received financial and technical support from international organisations, including but not limited to IFES and UNDP.

	The Group encourages the BEC to invest in understanding social media companies' safety policies and existing enforcement tools. By aligning relevant parts of the Code of Conduct with platform rules where appropriate, the Commission may be better positioned to request timely action when violations occur.
	The Group encourages the new administration to sustain investment in youth civic education, digital literacy and responsible AI awareness programmes throughout the electoral cycle and beyond the major urban centres. Consistent engagement can strengthen long-term democratic resilience and support informed participation.

- Bangladeshi civil society and the international community

The Group acknowledges the efforts of civil society involved in identifying, preventing and reducing digital threats to civic participation and the elections as a whole. Bangladeshi organisations, including but not limited to Digitally Right, Activate Rights, The Dissent, FactWatch, the Media Resources Development Initiative and Boom Bangladesh were involved in a variety of efforts such as fact-checking, social media monitoring and digital investigations, media literacy programmes and digital safety training of journalists.

IFES, the European Partnership for Democracy and other members of the international community also provided on-the-ground support. For example, UNDP deployed eMonitor+, a tool that leverages AI to identify harmful social media content such as hate speech and gender-based violence.

Recommendations	The Group encourages civil society groups, media and fact-checking practitioners, digital investigators and other key stakeholders to consider establishing a coalition to reduce duplication of effort, pool resources, consolidate expertise, strengthen engagement with technology companies and present a unified voice on enforcement, transparency and safeguards.
	The Group encourages CSOs and partners to maintain year-round monitoring of digital risks and not limiting this to during election periods. Developing shared early-warning indicators for co-ordinated attacks and gendered harassment can make it possible to identify issues earlier and address them long before the electoral period.
	The Group encourages the international community to build on existing local expertise through long-term investment in established organisations and initiatives. This can strengthen national capacity and ensure knowledge remains embedded locally.
	The Group encourages the international community to provide multi-year support for digital risk monitoring, women's online safety initiatives and safeguarding efforts. Treating this work as ongoing democratic infrastructure, rather than a short-term project, can improve preparedness and over time.

- Social media companies

Key stakeholders expressed concern that social media companies were failing to invest sufficient human, technical and financial resources in ensuring their platforms were not deployed to undermine the electoral process. Some stakeholders told the Group that they expected the government to do more to hold the companies accountable.

In December 2025, two government parastatals⁵⁴ sent separate letters to Meta expressing concern over the possible use of Facebook to disrupt the upcoming elections by using the platform to incite violence following arson attacks on the premises of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo.⁵⁵

Although social media companies did not deploy special election missions to Bangladesh, as is the practice for some countries,⁵⁶ stakeholders informed the Group that Meta had engagements with the BEC, and hosted separate virtual meetings with female politicians, civil society and members of the company's Trusted Partners Programme⁵⁷ to deepen its understanding of the digital threats landscape. At the time of the elections, only three organisations operating in Bangladesh were enrolled in Meta's Third-Party Fact-checking Programme⁵⁸ – namely, Boom Bangladesh, FactWatch and the international news organisation Agence France-Presse. To be considered for this programme, organisations must first be certified by the International Fact-Checking Network.⁵⁹ This strict verification process serves to ensure partners are non-partisan and have a transparent source of funding, but it has also meant that, over the years, fewer organisations from Global Majority countries have been signed up as Meta's fact-checking partners than in the Global North.

In addition, TikTok launched an in-app election information hub in collaboration with the BEC in January 2026. The company also participated virtually in a one-day workshop organised by UNESCO and Digitally Right under the United Nations BALLOT project.⁶⁰

Stakeholders shared with the Group speculatively that the country's 2025 legislation, which stipulated jail terms for technology companies,⁶¹ may have had an impact on firms' willingness to invest in election efforts earlier on.

Recommendations	The Group encourages social media companies to approach Bangladesh as a sustained governance context rather than a short-term election market. This includes maintaining strong Bangla-language moderation capacity throughout the year, investing early in election preparedness and sustaining partnerships with the BEC beyond election day.
	The Group encourages Meta to expand and strengthen its Trusted Partner and Third-Party Fact-Checking Programmes in Bangladesh.
	The Group encourages greater transparency regarding Bangla-language moderation capacity, including clearer information on staffing levels, escalation processes and enforcement timelines, particularly during election periods. Bangladesh-specific transparency updates, published before, during and after elections, can enhance trust and allow for informed public assessment.
	The Group encourages social media companies to commission, and publish, independent Human Rights Impact Assessments on Bangladesh.

⁵⁴ Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission and the National Cyber Security Agency.

⁵⁵ Prothom Alo (2025). 'Interim Government Writes to Meta Seeking Action against Inciting Content'. 20 December. <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/vazqj4qr7n>

⁵⁶ Meta (2019). 'Preparing for Upcoming Indian Elections'. 8 April. <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/04/preparing-for-indian-elections/>; Meta (2021). 'Our Steps to Protect State Elections in India'. 30 March. <https://about.fb.com/news/2021/03/steps-to-protect-elections-india/>; Meta (2024). 'How Meta Is Preparing For Indian General Elections 2024'. 19 March. <https://about.fb.com/news/2024/03/how-meta-is-preparing-for-indian-general-elections-2024/>

⁵⁷ According to the Financial Times, there were 465 global human rights and civil society groups enrolled in Meta's Trusted Partner Programme as at August 2023. It is not known how many Bangladeshi organisations are involved. Financial Times (2023) 'Correction: Meta's Trusted Partner Program'. 23 August. <https://www.ft.com/content/9abb074a-86e8-4125-bed6-be0dfcfb7848>

⁵⁸ Meta (2025). 'How Fact-Checking Works'. 7 April. <https://transparency.meta.com/features/how-fact-checking-works/>

⁵⁹ <https://ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/>

⁶⁰ UNESCO (2026) 'UNESCO Dhaka Brings Together Digital Platforms, Civil Society to Strengthen Electoral Information Integrity'. 22 January. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-dhaka-brings-together-digital-platforms-civil-society-strengthen-electoral-information>

⁶¹ The Daily Star (2026). 'Govt Eases Data Localisation Rules, Drops Jail Terms for Tech Firms'. 8 January. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/govt-eases-data-localisation-rules-drops-jail-terms-tech-firms-4076391>

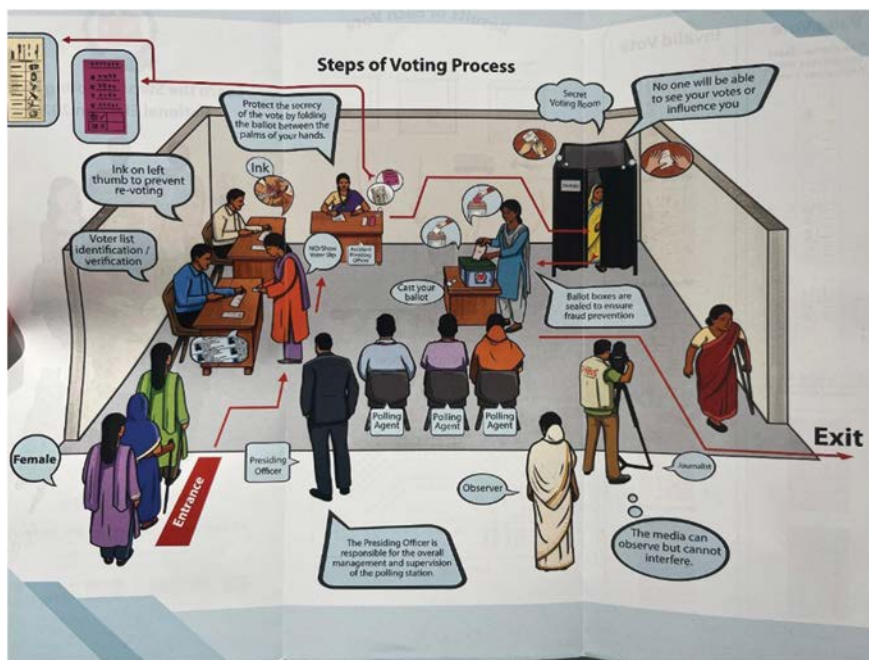
	The Group encourages platforms to strengthen safeguarding for women and vulnerable groups by establishing clear, fast-track escalation mechanisms for co-ordinated harassment, threats and impersonation. Dedicated escalation pathways for the BEC during high-risk periods may also support timely resolution of serious violations.
	The Group encourages platforms to invest in features and interventions that promote responsible use of social media by both citizens and political actors. This may include civic prompts, educational partnerships, transparency tools for paid political content and clearer labelling systems. Preventative interventions can reduce harmful amplification before enforcement becomes necessary.
	The Group encourages structured and ongoing engagement with the BEC and civil society through regular preparedness dialogues long before election cycles and structured reviews afterwards. Institutionalised engagement strengthens mutual understanding, reduces friction during high-pressure periods and supports collaborative governance over time.

In conclusion, the 2026 election and referendum demonstrated that social media is now fully embedded in Bangladesh's democratic processes.

6. Voting, Counting and Results Management

The procedures for voting, closing of the polls and tabulation of election results are provided for in the RPO and are detailed in manuals prepared by the BEC. The manuals include the Counting and Results Guide (published February 2026), the Manual for Presiding Officers and Assistant Presiding Officers, and the Election Agents and Polling Agents Guidelines (published February 2026).

Figure 6.1 BEC leaflet explaining the voting process.



Source: p10, Counting and Results Guide, Bangladesh Election Commission

6.1 Pre-poll arrangements and procedures

Voting was originally planned to be conducted in 300 constituencies; however, elections were ultimately held in 299. On 4 February 2026, the BEC suspended the election in the Sherpur-3 constituency owing to the death of the candidate of Jamaat-e-Islami, Nuruzzaman Badal, in accordance with relevant provisions in the RPO.⁶²

Polling stations were primarily established in schools and colleges.

A total of 127,711,899 registered voters were eligible to vote, comprising:⁶³

- 64,825,154 men;
- 62,885,525 women;
- 1,220 third-gender voters.

⁶² Jugantar Report (2026) 'Elections for Sherpur-3 Constituency Postponed'. 4 February. <https://www.jugantor.com/national/1061247>. Prior to this Report's publication, the rescheduled Sherpur-3 parliamentary election was held on 9 April 2026. In addition, Tarique Rahman stood for two seats in the general election, and won two of them: Bogura-6 and Dhaka-17. He chose to represent Dhaka-17 and quit Bogura-6, thus triggering a by-election, which was also held on 9 April. BNP candidates won both the seats.

⁶³ <https://ecs.gov.bd/en/constituency>

The total electorate included 1,533,684 registered postal voters, of whom:

- 761,138 were registered for in-country postal voting.
- 772,546 were registered for out-of-country postal voting.

There were 42,779 polling stations, divided into 247,499 polling booths.

On average:

- Approximately 600 male voters were assigned to each booth.
- Approximately 500 female voters were assigned to each booth.

In all instances observed by our Group, ballot materials were distributed to polling centres in advance of the opening of polls.

Ballot boxes were received at polling stations from the night before the elections to early in the morning before the opening of polls. Ballot boxes were only sealed just before polling opened at 7:30am, and the presiding officer or assistant presiding officer ensured the number of the ballot box matched those on the seals before they proceeded to seal each box with four seals. The ballot box was placed on a desk in the middle of the room, with a slot at the top for the insertion of the voter's completed white ballot paper and the pink referendum paper. Both ballots were to be cast together in the same box.

Each polling station was managed by one presiding officer, assisted by one assistant presiding officer and two polling officers per booth.

We observed that polling staff had completed the set-up of polling booths prior to the official opening of the poll at 7:30am in accordance with the prescribed guidelines.

Access to polling stations

The following persons were permitted to enter polling stations:

- registered voters assigned to that polling station;
- polling officials;
- candidates and their agents;
- domestic and international observers;
- accredited media representatives;
- officers accredited by the BEC or the returning officer;
- members of law enforcement agencies.

Voter information and signage

Polling stations were primarily set up in schools and colleges. Inside the compound, there were clear signs and streams set up to manage the queues of voters. The Group observed that lines were physically set up before opening time at 7:30am and were often demarcated using large wooden sticks and string running across them, with the allocated numbers in the front of each stream.

6.2 Key procedures for opening of the polls and voting

The Manual for Presiding Officers and Assistant Presiding Officers outlines the procedures governing the conduct of the poll.

Opening of the poll

Before the commencement of voting, empty ballot boxes were displayed to candidates, election agents, polling agents and citizen (domestic) and international observers present. Serially numbered plastic seals

were affixed to the ballot boxes. The seal numbers were recorded by the assistant presiding officer and noted by polling agents.

Voting procedures

Only voters whose name appeared on the voters' roll were permitted to vote, after identity verification.

The assistant presiding officer verified the voter's identity by:

- matching the voter's photograph on the roll;
- confirming the voter's name;
- confirming the father's or husband's name.

The polling officer then:

- checked the voter's finger for indelible ink;
- applied indelible ink where no prior mark was detected;
- announced the voter's name and serial number aloud;
- put a tick against the name of the voter on the voters' roll.

Figure 6.2 Indelible ink is applied is applied to a voter.



Polling agents similarly marked the voter's name on their copies of the roll.

The assistant presiding officer recorded the voter's serial number and polling area on the ballot paper counterfoil, affixed the official seal to both the counterfoil and the back of the ballot paper, and signed over the seal.

The ballot paper was then issued to the voter, who proceeded to the voting compartment to mark the ballot using the official marking seal.

The voter was to fold the ballot paper within the compartment, and then insert it into the ballot box positioned in front of the assistant presiding officer.

Figure 6.3 Voters being verified by polling officials.



Figure 6.4 COG Chair observes as a voter casts her vote.



After casting the vote, the voter exited the polling station.

Recommendation

The voter list should be organised in such a manner as to facilitate the quick identification of voters, without the need for the use of political party 'information slips.' The list should be ordered according to ID card number, alphabetical order or some such appropriate manner.

6.3 Observations on opening of the polls and voting

There were clear signs and streams set up to manage the queues of voters. The Group observed that lines were physically set up before opening time at 7:30am. There was a clear distinction between voting streams for men and women; within each of these sections, there were further signs for voting register numbers leading to different rooms, thereby ensuring the queues and lines were broken into smaller numbers to aid in queue management. Polling agents and other personnel were helpful in directing voters to the right streams and rooms. While the voting booths and rooms were well arranged, further improvements could be made to ensure adequate spacing throughout the room if available.

Most voters presented voter slips obtained from party kiosks located outside polling stations. In the polling stations visited, only two kiosks were observed – those of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami. A cordial atmosphere prevailed among party activists. It was also observed that, in violation of the Code of Conduct, political banners were placed in some areas right outside polling centres, and some rickshaws transporting people on polling day had posters stuck on their rear. Some polling agents were also seen to be wearing their party candidates' pictures on lanyards inside the polling stations.

Persons with disabilities

Assistance was extended to PWDs; however, polling stations generally lacked adequate facilities to fully accommodate their needs.

The Group notes with concern that PWDs faced significant barriers to their participation, and many polling stations remained inaccessible, with many polling stations only accessible by stairs. We observed, however, that election and security officials assisted PWDs and the elderly to vote. The Group was also concerned that blind voters did not have the option to vote independently with tactile ballot papers, nor were there other arrangements for persons with other disabilities.

Recommendation	Adhere to international good practice, aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, that emphasise the right to inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory electoral processes that uphold the dignity and independence of PWDs.
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Secrecy of the ballot

The layout at most polling centres ensured the protection of the secrecy of the ballot. Most polling centres were in school buildings. Voting stations often comprised multiple rooms, and some larger rooms were divided in half using furniture such as benches and chairs, creating two booths. The layout of voting compartments ensured the secrecy of the ballot.

Recommendation	The BEC should revisit the current arrangements to continue to improve the facilities for voting booths in future elections.
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Security

The Group commends the co-ordination and the specific arrangements that were made to ensure the safety of the voters and all Bangladeshis. We also express our appreciation for the facilitation of the freedom of movement of citizen and international observers. Voters appeared to cast their votes freely.

Every polling station was manned by security personnel, usually in groups of three, with one armed and two unarmed. The Group also observed police officers wearing body cameras within the polling stations from the opening of the polls until all processes were completed. Generally, their presence was neither intimidating nor intrusive. CCTV was also installed in many classrooms.

Party agents

The Group observed that polling agents were present at all polling centres.

Citizen and international observers

Citizen and international observers were present at polling centres. Our observers interacted with observers from the Alliance for Fair Election and Democracy, the Asian Network for Free Elections, the European Union and others.

6.4 Key procedures for closing of the polls, counting and results

The prescribed procedures for closing, counting and results were as follows.

Closing of the polls

At 4:30pm, the official closing time, only voters already inside the polling station and standing in line were permitted to vote. Most polling centres we observed had no queue at closing time, and polls generally closed on time, with polling officials adhering to procedures. The entrance to the polling station was closed precisely at 4:30pm.

The Group followed the results process, from polling stations to returning officer locations in various constituencies. The Group also observed the counting of postal ballots.

The presiding officer is permitted to allow party agents and observers in the room for the closing of the polls, and we observed the presence of both groups of stakeholders.

Once the last voter had been processed and the polls had closed, the Group observed the polling centres closing, with only polling agents and security personnel remaining. One room in each voting centre was allocated for counting, and this room was rearranged for the purpose.

After the last vote was cast, the assistant presiding officer sealed the ballot box insertion slot with a fifth serially numbered plastic seal. Ballot boxes from each booth were transported to the counting room in the presence of candidates and/or their agents.

Counting procedures

Ballot boxes were unsealed and voting papers were placed in the middle of the room, often on a mat or a sheet.

Ballot papers were removed from the ballot boxes and placed on the floor for sorting. They were segregated into pink ballot papers (referendum) and white ballot papers (parliamentary election).

Empty ballot boxes were shown to candidates and polling agents.

All ballot papers were thoroughly mixed to preserve ballot secrecy.

These were then compiled and bundled up with string, before the first count started.

Once the first count was done, a second count was done by the presiding officer. After this, party agents were allowed to count votes for their respective party if they expressed an issue with the count. Once this was completed, if the numbers of votes counted did not tally with the total votes cast, a third count was conducted.

For the referendum:

- 'Yes' and 'No' votes were counted separately.
- Totals were recorded in the Referendum Results Sheet in the presence of polling agents.

For the parliamentary elections:

- Ballot papers were sorted by candidate according to party symbols.
- Unclear or invalid ballots were placed in a separate 'Rejected' pile.
- Valid votes for each candidate were counted.
- The total number of rejected ballots was counted and recorded.

At the completion of the count in the presence of the polling agents, results were finalised after ascertaining the number of votes received by each candidate and the number of spoiled and rejected ballot papers. The number was then reconciled with the number of ballot papers used.

The presiding officer then proceeded to complete Form 16, which includes:

- votes received by each candidate;
- number of rejected ballots;
- ballot paper account;
- seal numbers and signatures.

The presiding officer also completed Form 3 with regard to the referendum results:

- number of 'Yes' votes;
- number of 'No' votes;
- number of rejected ballots;
- ballot paper account.

Both Form 16 and Form 3 were then signed by the presiding officer and assistant presiding officers, and submitted to polling agents for their signatures.

Each respective pile of votes was then placed in special envelopes with the total number written on the front, which were then sealed before being sent to the District Commissioner's Office.

The returning officer announced the results after consolidating the votes received from the polling stations in the constituency and the postal ballots (see below). The final results are then recorded in Form 18 for the parliamentary election and in Form 7 for the referendum.

Postal vote reception

We have received reports that almost 616,185 postal votes were cast in time for these elections.⁶⁴

The returning officer sent a written request to all candidates or their election agents specifying the date and time to be present before the ballot boxes were sealed. This was done to ensure transparency of the process.

After logging into the software developed for postal voting, the returning officer could see the total number of registered postal voters and their status in the constituency.

Postal ballots started arriving at the returning officer's office after the allocation of symbols to contesting candidates. According to instructions issued by the BEC, postal ballots had to reach the office of the returning officer of each constituency by 4.30pm on polling day. Any ballots received after the prescribed time would not be scanned or counted and would be kept separately and considered as rejected ballots.

The returning officer assigned one officer to receive postal ballots from the postal department. In addition, the returning officer appointed supporting staff to assist the officer responsible with the scanning of the envelopes and other related tasks.

Upon receiving a postal ballot envelope by post, the responsible officer scanned the QR code printed on the envelope. The envelopes were then securely placed in the designated ballot box of the constituency.

Scanning the QR codes generated constituency-wise lists of received postal ballots, in Form 12. The responsible officer signed and preserved the software-generated forms daily. If, during QR code scanning, the software displayed a QR code as a duplicate, the returning officer would cancel the ballot. In such cases, the envelope was secured separately without being opened.

⁶⁴ United Nations Development Programme, Factsheet on Postal Voting System

The returning officer was to use one box for every 400 ballot envelopes received. Each ballot box had to have a sticker bearing the constituency number and name. On the scheduled date, in the presence of candidates and agents, four seals were affixed to each ballot box. Before this, the numbers of each box and each seal were read aloud, and the candidates or agents in attendance were asked to record the numbers.

Once the ballot box was filled with postal ballots contained in envelopes, the aperture of the ballot box was to be sealed with a fifth seal and stored in a secure location.

Postal vote counting

Candidates, polling agents, journalists and observers were allowed during the counting, subject to the same rules applicable to polling stations and voting booths.

The returning officer appointed one presiding officer per constituency for counting postal ballots. Additionally, one polling officer was appointed for every 100 postal ballots and one assistant officer to co-ordinate every 15 polling officers.

After completing the counting of postal ballots, the presiding officer was to record the results of the parliamentary election in Form 16A and the results of the referendum in Form 4, as in the case for polling stations. The presiding officer then was to record the results, publish them and provide copies to the candidates and/or agents in attendance.

6.5 Overall assessment of counting and results

The Group observed that the close and counting procedures at individual centre level took place efficiently and relatively quickly. Prescribed procedures for postal vote counting were also followed, including digital tracking of the postal vote and count in a transparent and accountable manner.

Polling officials conducted their duties in a professional, orderly and diligent manner. Established procedures for the opening of the poll, voting, closing, counting and the completion of statutory forms were generally adhered to in the polling centres visited. The overall management of the process reflected a structured and methodical approach by the election authorities at polling station level.

The presence of polling agents and observers throughout the polling and counting processes contributed to transparency and confidence in the integrity of the procedures. The Group noted that the 2008 COG had recommended that the transparency of the tabulation of polling centre results at the constituency level needed to be improved, ensuring that representatives of candidates could easily follow the tabulation of the result and verify the certified results they had collected from individual polling centres. The Group therefore commends efforts to improve transparency in this regard for these elections, with polling agents allowed to be present during counting, and the fact that they were also given the opportunity to count their party votes themselves in the event of a dispute.

The Group also notes the 2008 COG recommendation that the count at polling centres needed to be more consistent in order to ensure uniformity of reconciliation procedures, and that this could have been addressed through more comprehensive training. The Group notes that, for these elections, this issue was addressed through the provision of training for polling agents conducted by the BEC and international donor support from organisations such as IFES and UNDP.

The counting process, including reconciliation of ballot papers and completion of Forms 16 and 3, was undertaken in the presence of stakeholders and was conducted efficiently.

The Group further noted the significant participation of women and youth, both as election officials and as polling agents. Dedicated polling streams for women were established in several locations to facilitate their participation. In addition, many polling stations visited had women serving as presiding officers, polling officers, polling agents and members of law enforcement agencies. This visible inclusion reflects positive efforts towards gender representation and inclusivity in the electoral process.

Figure 6.5 Sorting of ballot papers.



Certain areas, particularly accessibility for PWDs, would benefit from further enhancement, aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which emphasise the right to inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory electoral processes that uphold the dignity and independence of PWDs. However, the overall environment observed on polling day was calm and orderly, with voters able to cast their ballots freely.

Annex I. Composition and Biographies of the Group

Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (Ghana), Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group

Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo is the 5th President of Ghana's 4th Republic, and was sworn into office for a second term on 7th January, 2021.

He has been a prominent champion of human rights, rule of law, justice, freedom, and democracy in Ghana. Indeed, as a lawyer, he undertook many of the most important constitutional cases of the modern era in Ghana, which, inter alia, protected the independence of the judiciary, the right of the citizen to demonstrate without police permit, and the right of equal access of all political parties to the State-owned media.

Nana Akufo-Addo has held numerous positions, and played various active roles in the public life of Ghana. He was a three term Member of Parliament from 1997 to 2008. He served as Attorney General and Minister for Justice (2001–2003), and as Minister for Foreign Affairs from April 2003 to July 2007, both under the government of the former President of the Republic of Ghana, HE John Agyekum Kufuor.

On 23rd December, 2007, he was elected as the New Patriotic Party's presidential candidate. In the 2008 presidential election, Akufo-Addo led in the first round of voting, but failed to obtain the required 50% + 1, pushing the election into a second round runoff between him and the National Democratic Congress candidate, the late John Evans Atta Mills, who eventually won with 50.23% as against Akufo-Addo's 49.77% vote.

In 2010, he was elected presidential candidate of the NPP, but, again, lost the 2012 election marginally to the incumbent, the then President John Dramani Mahama. The NPP challenged the results of the election through a petition at the Supreme Court, losing by a 5–4 verdict. Akufo-Addo immediately accepted the decision, congratulated President Mahama, and called upon all NPP supporters to accept the decision, even though he and they all disagreed with it.

This act of statesmanship culminated in the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations, the United States of America, the Christian Council of Ghana and the Chief Imam of Ghana, amongst others, applauding Akufo-Addo for preserving Ghana's peace, and maintaining Ghana's status as a beacon of democracy in Africa.

Nana Akufo-Addo was, on 18th October, 2014, re-elected to lead the NPP into the 2016 general elections. He won the presidential election, after defeating the incumbent, President John Dramani Mahama. He obtained 53.85% of the total valid votes cast, as announced by the Electoral Commission, with 44.40% for the losing incumbent.

He was re-elected as President of the Republic in the 7th December 2020 election, for a second term in office, having obtained 51.3% of the popular vote, defeating, for the second time, his challenger, John Dramani Mahama, former President of the Republic and NDC presidential candidate. He successfully completed his second term and handed over the reins of government in January, after the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), won the December 2024 elections.

Observers

Lebrechtta Nana Oye Hesse-Bayne (Antigua and Barbuda) is a visionary feminist economist and development expert dedicated to advancing women's rights, social justice, and inclusivity across the

Caribbean and globally. With a Master's degree from the University of Wales and executive education from Harvard's Kennedy School, she brings over two decades of transformative leadership to gender equality, climate justice, poverty reduction, and human rights.

As Executive Director of Shidaa Sustainable Development Solutions Ltd, Lebrechtta collaborates with governments, UN agencies, international organizations, and development institutions including UN Women, UNDP, Caribbean Development Bank, Commonwealth Secretariat, and the Inter-American Development Bank. Her groundbreaking work spans gender-based violence prevention, women's political participation, climate change adaptation, economic empowerment, and social protection across Caribbean nations.

A sought-after gender expert, researcher, and capacity-building specialist, Nana Oye has authored influential research on violence against women, gender and trade, and women's leadership. She champions marginalized communities, reshaping systems to ensure sustainable gender inclusive development that leaves no one behind. She currently also serves as President of the Regional Board of Directors for Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWiL).

Neil Ford (Canada) has 30 years of professional experience as a journalist, communication for development specialist and director of communication at international organisations. He was an award-winning broadcast journalist for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, reporting on economic development and cultural identity in Northern Canada. He then specialised in communication for development, designing partnership and governance strategies to give marginalized people a voice in their own development. After joining the UN system, Neil directed the communication teams of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). He finished his career as Director of Communication at the Commonwealth, retiring in 2020. Neil now advises on the design and delivery of communication and partnership strategies that support freedom of expression, emphasize gender equality, and enable young people to claim rights and participate effectively in decision-making.

Miliana Iga (Fiji) is a Pacific youth leader and development economist from Fiji, currently serving as the Coordinator of the Pacific Youth Council (PYC), a regional network of 13 National Youth Councils from 13 Countries across the Pacific. In this role, she leads regional coordination, institutional strengthening, and policy advocacy to advance Pacific youth priorities in regional and international decision-making spaces.

With her background as a development economist, Miliana brings expertise in policy analysis, governance reform, and development financing, with a particular focus on finance modalities at regional and global levels.

Beyond her coordination role, Miliana serves in advisory positions on regional and global boards, contributing Pacific perspectives to discussions on financing mechanisms and development governance. She remains deeply committed to people-centred development and equitable societies.

The Hon. Senator (R) Datuk (Dr) Ras Adiba Mohd Radzi (Malaysia) is a politician, community activist, a Para air rifle shooter, Poet and a veteran News anchor & sports presenter. She was appointed as a Senator on 20th May 2020 to represent Persons with disabilities (PWD). She has since contributed tremendously to the implementation of the OKU Act 2008 and continues to advocate and address issues on the inclusivity and rights of PWDs. During Ras Adiba's three years of service, she has made the most significant contribution to the disabled, the elderly and the needy in the areas of education, facilities & infrastructure, well-being & welfare as well as socio-economy & employment. In the field of education for the disabled, Ras Adiba has worked with MOSTI to increase the number of disabled students in TVET and STEM-based education. She has also advocated for an increase in the number of teachers for the disabled, reducing drop-out rates and ensuring equal opportunity at public universities.

In 2017, Ras Adiba co-founded OKU Sentral, where she began her advocacy, educating and provisioning of aid for the disabled community. She felt that with the right voice and assistance from the government, corporate and private sectors, the disabled community can live a better life, gain more independence and achieve greater success.

A firm believer in personal growth and up-skilling, Ras Adiba involves herself in both the pursuit of education and knowledge as well as shares her wealth of wisdom.

In 2019, she obtained her Master of Business Administration from the International Business School Of Scandinavia and in 2022 she earned the Honorary Doctorate of Social Sciences And Humanities from the Open University of Malaysia. She is also an Honorary Fellow at the International Islamic University and an Adjunct Professor at the National University of Malaysia (Psychological research centre & human wellbeing department).

For all her years of contribution to the disabled and less fortunate, Ras Adiba was conferred the Knight Commander of the Order of the Territorial Crown (PMW) by His Majesty the King, Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah Ibni Al Marhum Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah, which carries the title Datuk in 2021.

She then received the International Women of courage award 2023 (IWOC) for her amazing work, courage, leadership and strength from the First lady of the United States of America, Dr. Jill Biden.

M.I. Abdool Rahman (Mauritius) has been the Electoral Commissioner of Mauritius since 1998. He has been involved with electoral administration and law for over four decades.

Prior to assuming the role of Commissioner, Rahman served as a Judicial Officer. He joined the Attorney General's Office as Crown Counsel in 1986 and joined the Bench as a Senior Magistrate in 1986.

Internationally, he has been involved as Election Consultant with various regional and international organizations, including the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Francophonie, the African Union and SADC and the Indian Ocean Commission.

Mr Abdool Rahman is also a Council member of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), a Member of the 'Réseau de Compétences électorales francophones (RECEF). He is currently the President of the 'Réseau Electoral de l'Océan Indien (REOI), a regional network bringing together electoral management bodies from the Indian Ocean Region and a Board Member of the Election Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) since July this year.

Mr Abdool Rahman has been awarded the honour of Grand Officer of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean (GOSK) in 2018 for distinguished service in the field of elections and democracy, and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Centre for Parliamentary Studies in 2023.

Rosemary Ajayi (Nigeria) is the founder of Digital Africa Research and Safety Lab (DigiAfricaLab) and has over a decade of experience safeguarding African democratic processes from digital harms through research, investigations, and evidence-based advocacy.

Her election integrity work dates back to Nigeria's 2011 General Elections, where she played a key role in one of the country's earliest social media monitoring initiatives, the Social Media Tracking Centre at the Yar'Adua Foundation. Since then, she has participated in multiple election observation missions, both online and in the field, with a focus on how digital platforms shape electoral environments.

Rosemary advises election monitoring bodies, digital rights organisations, fact-checking coalitions, media organisations, policymakers, and technology companies on disinformation, coordinated influence operations, hate speech, content moderation, and election integrity. She also collaborates closely with activist-researchers from high-risk countries including Ethiopia, India, and Myanmar to press technology companies to allocate greater resources to safeguarding vulnerable regions during elections and other critical civic moments.

Prof. David J Francis (Sierra Leone) is former Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and former Chief Minister of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Professor Francis is internationally recognized academic and policy-practitioner. He held a Research Professorial Chair in African Peace & Conflict Studies, at the University of Bradford in UK where he served as Head of Department of Peace Studies and Director of the John & Elnora Ferguson Centre for African Studies (JEFICAS).

Professor Francis is extensively published with 12 books and more than 30 journal referred articles, book chapters and commissioned papers. During this period, Professor Francis successfully supervised the completion of Seven (7) Doctoral/PhD Research degrees and more than 35 Masters degrees. Professor

Francis also served as UNESCO Professorial Chair for Peace Education in 12 African Countries. He is currently a Senior Visiting Research Professor at the African Studies Institute, Zhejiang Normal University in China.

Sangeetha Yogendran (Singapore) is an international lawyer with 15 years of experience in human rights implementation, research, advocacy, and program management. She most recently led the Women Leaders in International Justice and Accountability project with the Asia Justice Coalition, developing women's representation and leadership in international law from the Asia region.

Sangeetha has worked at the regional and international level to better represent marginalised groups through international law and its institutions. She has worked across NGOs, the UN, government and civil society, and managed several multi-country programmes and projects, particularly in the Global South. She has lived and worked in Singapore, Cambodia, Malaysia, Australia, Palestine, the Netherlands, and Belgium, and has been deployed to support humanitarian responses in the Philippines, Nepal, Indonesia and Bangladesh.

Sangeetha is a qualified Advocate & Solicitor in Singapore, and holds Masters degrees in Public International Law from the University of Melbourne, and in Applied Conflict Transformation Studies from the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies in Cambodia. She is currently pursuing a Masters in Social Innovation at the University of Cambridge, and doctoral research on victims' rights and reparations at the ECCC with Mahidol University.

Prof. Mandla Mchunu (South Africa) is a former law teacher and Chief Electoral Officer of the South African Independent Electoral Commission. After holding several other senior government positions, he established a consulting outfit, AfriCore Advisory, which specialises in national IDs, Voters Rolls and related electoral democracy systems.

He has undertaken consulting assignments to strengthen electoral democracy in several African countries viz. Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Malawi etc.

As a person who contributed significantly in setting up the infrastructure and machinery for electoral democracy in South Africa, he is widely respected. He remains active and keen on matters related to constitutional democracy. He is a member of the board of trustees of Africa Check, and a member of the PwC Africa Public Interest Board.

Dr Dinesha Samararatne (Sri Lanka) is a Professor at the Department of Public & International Law at the Faculty of Law of the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka and Senior Fellow of the Melbourne Law School, Australia. She served as an independent expert to the Constitutional Council of Sri Lanka (January 2023 to January 2026). Her areas of specialization include judicial review, public participation in constitution-making, constitutional resilience, women and constitutional law, guarantor institutions, academic freedom and the relevance of the global south in comparative constitutional law. She was an honorary visiting fellow at, Pantheon-Sorbonne, Paris 1 University, France (2023), a postdoctoral fellow at the Melbourne Law School, University of Melbourne, Australia (2019 – 20), a Kathleen Fitzpatrick Visiting Fellow at the Melbourne Law School (2018) and a Junior Fulbright Scholar (2008–09). She read for her undergraduate and master's degrees at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka and Harvard Law School, USA respectively.

Winifred Tarinyeba Kiryabwire (Uganda) is an Associate Professor of Law at the School of Law at Makerere University, Uganda where she teaches postgraduate and undergraduate courses. She has also served as visiting academic, fellow and adjunct professor at other academic institutions in Africa, and the United Kingdom.

She has 25 years' work experience (2001–2026) in academia, regulation, governance and oversight responsibilities, advisory and consulting work in various sectors and jurisdictions. At the international level, she has served in various capacities with various organizations such as global standard setting bodies, professional bodies and academic and research organizations.

She holds a Doctor of Science of Law degree (JSD'09) and Master of Science of Law degree (JSM'06) from Stanford University, USA as well as a Master of Laws degree (LL.M'01) from Cambridge University, UK; a Postgraduate diploma in Legal Practice (PGDLP'00) from the Law Development Centre; and Bachelor of Laws degree (L.L.B'99) from Makerere University.

Kryticous Patrick Nshindano (Zambia) former Chief Electoral Officer of the Electoral Commission of Zambia, is a Public Policy and Electoral Management consultant. A PhD Graduate in Business and Management and holds a Master in Electoral Policy & Administration, Master in Business Administration, Bachelor in Economics and Professional certificate in Post Legislation Scrutiny. His expertise spans project management, policy analysis, and research. He has held key roles, including Senior Electoral Advisor for IFES, CEO's Chairperson for the Electoral Commission Forum of the Southern African Development Community (ECF-SADC). Kryticous has also served on boards including the Millennium Challenge Account Zambia and the IMF's external advisory panel on social safeguards. He has provided expert policy and technical support to various local and international institutions including UN, ICGLR, Commonwealth, NDI, SNP/WFD and IGAD. He has also participated in several electoral observer missions including leading the Commonwealth Expert Observation Team for the 2023 elections in the Kingdom of Eswatini.

Commonwealth Secretariat Support Staff

Mr. Linford Andrews – Adviser & Head, Electoral Support Section, Governance & Peace Directorate (GPD) (Staff team leader)

Dr Dinusha Panditaratne – Adviser & Head, Asia, Governance & Peace Directorate (GPD)

Ms Lindiwe Maleleka – Political Adviser, Electoral Support Section, Governance & Peace Directorate (GPD)

Mr Sumedha Ekanayake – Human Rights Adviser, Human Rights Unit, Governance & Peace Directorate (GPD)

Ms Temitope Kalejaiye – Public Relations and Engagement Officer, Governance & Peace Directorate (GPD)

Mr Sarthak Roy – Assistant Research Officer, Political Asia team, Governance & Peace Directorate (GPD)

Mrs Madonna Lynch – Executive Officer, Electoral Support Section, Governance & Peace Directorate (GPD)

Mr Damilare Omotosho – ICT Support Specialist, ICT Data and Analytics Section, Strategy, Portfolio, Partnerships & Digital Division (SPPD)

Annex II. Arrival Statement



The Commonwealth

2026 Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections and Referendum

**Arrival Statement by H.E. Nana Akufo-Addo
former President of the Republic of Ghana,
Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group**

08 February 2026 Dhaka

I am pleased and honoured that the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon. Shirley Botchwey, has invited me to serve as Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group to Bangladesh's forthcoming Parliamentary Elections and Referendum.

Bangladesh is known as a country with rich history and deep cultural heritage, and the deep affection her people hold for their nation. Since our group arrived, we have experienced this firsthand through the warmth, hospitality, and openness of the Bangladeshi people.

These elections come at a significant and sensitive moment in Bangladesh's democratic journey. They follow a period of political contestation, public debate around governance, institutional reform, and the continued aspirations of citizens for inclusive, transparent, and credible democratic processes.

As one of the most populous democracies in the Commonwealth, the conduct of these elections will be closely watched both domestically and internationally.

Over the past 46 years, the Commonwealth has consistently worked to strengthen electoral democracy by supporting election management bodies, democratic institutions, and electoral processes across its member countries.

Democracy remains one of the most important pillars of the Commonwealth, enshrined in its Charter, a fundamental global value rooted in the principle that people have the right to express freely their will and determine their own political, economic, social, and cultural systems.

I enjoin all stakeholders to uphold these important values for the benefit and prosperity of the people of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is home to a remarkably youthful population, with a significant proportion of citizens under the age of 35. The engagement of young people in this electoral process is vital, not only for Bangladesh's democratic future, but also as an inspiration to young citizens across the Commonwealth who stand in solidarity.

The Commonwealth has previously observed elections in Bangladesh, and we now return once again to observe the progress the country and its institutions have made, as well as the challenges.

Bangladesh is an active participant in the Commonwealth Election Professionals Programme, an initiative that promotes professional development, knowledge-sharing, and peer support among electoral administrators across the Commonwealth. Three representatives of the Bangladesh Election Commission took part in the most recent regional training event held in Colombo, Sri Lanka. We hope that the lessons and good practices from this programme are reflected in the conduct of these elections.

Our mission here is simple: we are here to affirm the Commonwealth's continuing solidarity with the people of Bangladesh.

Our Group was constituted following an invitation from the Bangladesh Election Commission, and after a pre-election assessment mission in October 2025, which advised that Bangladesh would benefit from a Commonwealth Observer Group for this electoral process.

I am joined by 12 other eminent persons from across the Commonwealth, including representatives from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and the Pacific. My colleagues come from diverse professional backgrounds, including politics, civil society, election management, diplomacy, and law.

Members of the Group arrived on 4 February, and we will remain in Bangladesh until 18 February. As independent observers, our mandate is to observe, not to interfere in the electoral process, and to provide an impartial account of our observations.

We will assess the pre-election environment, polling day, and the post-election period. We will consider the electoral process as a whole and report on whether it has been conducted in accordance with national laws, Commonwealth values, and international standards to which Bangladesh has committed herself. We shall remain objective and impartial in discharging our mandate. The Group's assessment is independent and will be its own, not that of the Commonwealth Secretariat nor any individual member country.

Since the Group's arrival, we have received briefings from a wide range of stakeholders, including election officials, political party representatives, civil society organisations, law enforcement agencies, members of the diplomatic community, and domestic and international observers.

On 10 February, members of the Group will be deployed to selected divisions to observe the pre-election environment. Subsequently, we will observe the opening of polls, voting, closing, counting, and the management of results. We will issue an Interim Statement of our preliminary findings on 14 February.

A final report will then be submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Government of Bangladesh, the Election Commission, political parties, and Commonwealth member governments, and will also be made available to the public.

We urge all stakeholders to play their part in ensuring inclusive, transparent, and credible elections and referendum.

On behalf of the Group, I would like to thank the people of Bangladesh for their warmth and hospitality, and for allowing us to be part of this important democratic process.

I thank you.

Annex III. Deployment Plan

DIVISIONS	OBSERVERS
Dhaka 1	HE Mr Nana Addo Akufo-Addo Amb. Fawaz Aliu Rashid Tamimu Linford Andrews Temitope Kalejaiye
Dhaka 2	Hon Senator (Retd) Datuk Dr Ras Adiba Mohd Radzi Lindiwe Maleleka Madonna Lynch Sarthak Roy
Chattogram	HE Mr David John Francis Rosemary Ajayi
Rajshahi	Prof. Mandlakayise Mchunu Lebrechtta Nana Bayne
Khulna	Dr Dinesha Samararatne Patrick Kryticous Nshindano
Sylhet	Abdool Rahman Miliana Iga Ramatanivai
Barisal	Neil Ford Sangeetha Yogendran
Rangpur	Prof Winifred Tarinyeba Kiryabwire Sumedha Ekanayake
Mymensingh	Dr Dinusha Panditaratne Damilare Omotosho

Annex IV. Interim Statement

Interim Statement by

HE Mr Nana Addo Akufo-Addo

Former President of Ghana

Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group

14 February 2026 | Dhaka, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

1. The people of Bangladesh, members of the media, fellow observers, members of the diplomatic corps, ladies and gentlemen; good afternoon to you all. Thank you for joining us at this Commonwealth Observer Group Press Conference.
2. I am honoured to chair the Commonwealth Observer Group for the 13th parliamentary elections and the referendum on the July Charter, at a watershed moment in Bangladesh's history. Our presence here reaffirms the Commonwealth's support to the people and Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and its democratic process.
3. Let me at the outset commend the people of Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Election Commission including the election officials, law enforcement agencies, and the interim Government, for the peaceful and orderly manner in which the parliamentary elections and the referendum were conducted.
4. This Commonwealth Observer Group is an independent body that will make recommendations to the Commonwealth Secretary-General. Our mandate is to offer an informed and impartial assessment of the entire electoral process according to standards for democratic elections, as set out in the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, and in the 2018 Revised Guidelines on Commonwealth Election Observation.
5. The Commonwealth is honoured to have been invited by the Chief Election Commissioner of the Bangladesh Election Commission. I take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the interim Government of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Election Commission for all the arrangements that have been made to facilitate the work of the Commonwealth Observer Group, which was constituted by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Honourable Shirley Botchwey. It comprises myself and twelve experts drawn from the fields of politics, law, media, gender, and election administration from several Commonwealth regions.
6. The Commonwealth Secretariat announced the deployment of the Group on 21 January 2026. We arrived in Dhaka on 4 February, having been preceded by a Commonwealth Secretariat staff team that has been in the country since 30 January.
7. The Group notes the long history of Commonwealth engagement with Bangladesh. The Commonwealth admitted Bangladesh as its 34th member on 18 April 1972, after its independence in December 1971. This is the fourth time that a Commonwealth Observer Group has been deployed.

BACKGROUND

8. I will now present the preliminary findings of the Group. The final report, setting out our full findings on the electoral process and our recommendations in greater detail, will be submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General and shared with the Government of Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Election Commission, and other key national stakeholders, and will be made publicly available to all.

9. On 10 February, we deployed in teams across the eight divisions of Bangladesh, in Barisal, Chattogram, Dhaka, Khulna, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Sylhet, to observe pre-election activities and Election Day.

THE PRE-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT

Let me begin with the pre-election environment.

Stakeholder engagement

10. Prior to our deployment, we met with a range of stakeholders in Dhaka, including Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus and other members of the interim Government of Bangladesh, the Chief Justice, the Chief Election Commissioner and other members of the Bangladesh Election Commission, the Chief of Army Staff, and Inspector-General of Police. We were also briefed by political parties, media representatives, online monitoring and fact-checking groups, civil society organisations including women and youth groups and representatives of persons with disabilities (PWDs), as well as Commonwealth High Commissioners and international organisations. In addition, we met with other international observer missions and local citizen observer groups.

Context of the elections

11. The electoral process took place against the backdrop of significant political developments following the July Uprising of 2024. Under the interim Government of Bangladesh, the political environment has been shaped by key decisions, including consultative dialogue on political reforms, which culminated in the July Charter and the associated referendum process, as well as decisions affecting the participation of some political parties, including the barring of the Awami League. It is within this transitional context that the elections and referendum were conducted.

Participation and Inclusion

12. **Women:** We were encouraged by the number of women who turned out to exercise their franchise. However, these elections also showed that more needs to be done to encourage the inclusion of women, given the low percentage (4%) of women candidates and only seven women elected in these elections.
13. Accordingly, we will make recommendations to garner support for women's increased participation in future electoral processes in Bangladesh. Our meetings with various stakeholders, including civil society and youth groups, indicated that there is room for improvement in fielding women in the election process due to the prevailing environment, including online harassment and bullying.
14. **Youth:** The Group acknowledges the increasingly visible role of youth in political mobilisation and public discourse, with many interlocutors pointing to heightened levels of political awareness and activism among younger citizens. At the same time, several stakeholders conveyed that this energy does not always translate into influence within formal party hierarchies or decision-making structures, thereby raising questions about whether youth participation is being institutionally embedded or remains largely consultative or episodic. We encourage the new Government to continue efforts towards greater youth participation and empowerment in governance.
15. **Political participation:** Stakeholders conveyed to the Group differing perspectives on the breadth of political representation in Bangladesh, not just in these elections, but during other periods of her political history. The Commonwealth will continue to highlight its shared values in all member countries, to advocate for each voter to be enfranchised and a level playing field of all political parties, to enshrine democratic culture and support long-term political stability.

Referendum on July Charter

16. The proposed referendum on the July Charter featured prominently in discussions with stakeholders. The Group recognises the Charter as a response to multiple and urgent demands for reform. At the same time, some stakeholders expressed concerns about whether the referendum process was sufficiently consultative, and clearly communicated.

Security

17. The Group received consistent assurances from law enforcement and security agencies regarding their coordination to ensure a stable and enabling environment throughout the electoral period. We commend this coordination and the specific arrangements to ensure the safety for voters and all Bangladeshis. In addition, we express our appreciation to the security forces for facilitating the freedom of movement of citizen and international observers.

Postal Ballots

18. The extension of a postal ballot mechanism to out of country voters and inmates in this electoral cycle represents a laudable development to enfranchise a greater number of citizens. We recognise this step as a bold and positive measure towards greater inclusivity, while also supporting further efforts to enhance the efficacy, transparency, and public confidence in the logistics of its implementation.

Media

19. The Bangladeshi media is vibrant and active, and the Group commends it for the depth and breadth of its coverage of these elections. Broadcast, online and print media provided extensive reporting on a range of election-related issues and broader political developments, contributing to public engagement. This enhanced media freedom strengthened the quality of political discourse.
20. Although the Constitution guarantees press freedom, some stakeholders reported harassment, threats and violence, including arson attacks on the offices of *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star*, the biggest Bangla and English language newspapers. Despite these concerns, mainstream media played a dynamic role in reporting on a wide range of issues and competing positions of parties.
21. Stakeholders conveyed that social media was a major factor in shaping these elections. Social media platforms have been used to conduct campaigns and reach voters with minimal restrictions. While this has facilitated engagement, the proliferation of false information, hate speech, misogyny, and cyberbullying is of considerable concern. The emergence of AI-generated content poses a risk of misleading voters and distorting public debate.
22. In this context, the introduction of fact-checking columns by news organisations, along with fact-checking efforts by civil society, is commendable. We welcome further efforts to address the scale of digital threats and false information circulating online. We will, therefore, be recommending more proactive measures to address such concerns.

The Campaign

23. We note that the Bangladesh Election Commission introduced a Code of Conduct with clear guidelines on campaigning, social media use, political parties and candidates' campaign materials, which were designed to ensure that the elections were conducted in a neutral, orderly and peaceful political environment. The Group notes that, aside from isolated incidents, the campaign environment was generally vibrant, festive, and well attended by party supporters. The Code of Conduct only allowed the use of portrait or party symbols on campaign materials in black and white, except for billboards, and we observed that – for the most part – this was largely respected.

ELECTION DAY

24. The Group noted a peaceful atmosphere prior to the opening of the polls.

Pre-Poll Procedures

25. In all instances observed by our Group, ballot materials were distributed to polling stations in advance of the opening of polls. Polling staff followed pre-poll procedures in accordance with prescribed guidelines.

Opening and Conduct of Poll

26. Polling stations opened on time. Opening procedures were implemented in a professional manner. Voting was conducted in a peaceful manner, with procedures largely followed. While a few isolated incidents were reported, these did not appear to affect the overall conduct of voting in a systemic manner.
27. In all polling stations visited, relevant information for voters in relation to the location of their voting stations was clearly displayed. We observed that polling stations had separate queues for men and women. Most polling stations were divided into two or more streams which aided queue management. Overall, the polling officials conducted their duties with professionalism and diligence.

Postal Ballot

28. The Group was able to observe postal ballot counting in some locations, and notes that prescribed procedures were followed.

Polling Agents

29. Polling agents were observed in all polling stations. In general, they conducted themselves professionally throughout the voting process.

Citizen and International Observers

30. Our observers interacted with the Alliance for Fair Election and Democracy (AFED), Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), European Union (EU) observers, and others.

Secrecy of the Ballot

31. The layout at polling stations ensured the secrecy of the ballot. Most polling stations were at schools.

Participation and Inclusion

32. We note the participation of women as polling officials and security personnel, and commend the large numbers of women voters. However, we noted that Presiding Officers were predominately men, suggesting room for advancing women into senior electoral roles.
33. The Group observed that election and security officials assisted PWDs and the elderly to vote. However, polling stations in general were inaccessible to persons with physical challenges, especially on the upper floors, a situation that needs to be addressed. The Group also observed that there were no accommodations for other forms of disability. We will reflect on this issue and offer recommendations in our final report.

Security

34. We observed the presence of police and other security officials in all polling stations. They were professional, and enabled an orderly and peaceful atmosphere. We observed the introduction of CCTV at polling stations, and body cameras on security personnel. These measures enhanced security, without compromising the integrity of the process.

Close of Polls and Tabulation

35. At the close of polls at 4:30 PM, most polling stations we observed had no queues. We observed that polls generally closed on time and polling officials adhered to procedures. Our observers followed the results process, from polling stations to Returning Officers' locations, in various constituencies. We observed the transparent nature of the count at polling stations, as well as the counting of postal ballots.

CONCLUSION AND POST-ELECTION PERIOD

36. While the Group has noted isolated reports of post-election tensions, we encourage all stakeholders to continue to promote calm and peaceful conduct during the post-election period, and to resolve any disputes through the relevant legal channels.

37. Looking ahead to the next election cycle, we encourage the Bangladesh Election Commission to conduct a post-election review, including of all observer recommendations, as is consistent with good practice. We urge it to consider establishing an appropriate domestic mechanism to implement recommendations of our final report. We also call on the Commonwealth Secretariat and other international partners to remain ready to support Bangladesh in this regard.
38. 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.

I thank you.

Issued on 14 February 2026

Dhaka

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