

BANGLADESH

Date of Elections: 18 February 1979*

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of Parliament in the first such poll since nationwide martial law was imposed and the Parliament elected in March 1973 was dissolved in November 1975**.

Characteristics of Parliament

The unicameral Parliament of Bangladesh, the House of the Nation, consists of 300 members elected for 5 years. Until that dissolution of Parliament occurring next after the expiration of a period of 10 years subsequent to the effective date of the Constitution (December 16, 1972), 30 seats are in addition reserved exclusively for women, who are to be elected by Parliament itself.

Electoral System

Any citizen of Bangladesh—regardless of race, caste or sex—not less than 18 years of age, who has neither been declared insane nor convicted under the Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunals) Order 1972, may be enrolled on the electoral roll of a constituency delimited for the purpose of election to Parliament if he is a resident of that same constituency.

One electoral roll is established for each constituency. Voting is not compulsory.

All citizens of Bangladesh having attained the age of 25 qualify to be elected to Parliament. Disqualified, nevertheless, are the insane; undischarged bankrupts; persons who, on conviction for a criminal offence involving moral turpitude, have been sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years, unless five years have elapsed since their release; persons owing allegiance to a foreign State; certain Government contractors; persons convicted under the Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunals) Order 1972; and persons holding certain offices of profit in the service of the Republic or of a statutory public authority***.

Nomination papers of candidates must be accompanied by a deposit of 2,000 *lakas*. Any person may simultaneously be a candidate in several constituencies.

The 300 members of Parliament chosen by popular vote are elected from as many constituencies on the basis of simple majority. Each elector expresses his vote by placing a

* The 30 female members of Parliament were declared elected unopposed on 31 March 1979.

** See *Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections* (1975-1976), p. 13.

*** See section *Parliamentary Developments*, p. 7.

mark with a rubber stamp within the space on the ballot containing the name and symbol of the candidates of his choice.

By-elections are held within 90 days to fill any seat falling vacant in Parliament.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

The unicameral Parliament elected on 7 March 1973 was dissolved on 6 November 1975, following a military takeover of the country and the imposition of martial law.

New parliamentary elections had initially been scheduled for February 1977. On 30 November 1978, President of the Republic Ziaur Rahman announced that elections would be held on 27 January 1979, and that martial law would be lifted shortly afterwards. The poll was subsequently postponed until February, after a threat of boycott of elections by 12 political groups.

A 1976 regulation requiring all political parties to be approved by the authorities was repealed on 19 November 1978. Primary contenders for the legislative seats were the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), formed in September 1978 by supporters of the President; the Awami League, which held the overwhelming majority in the previous Parliament but which had been split in August 1978; the right-wing Bangladesh Moslem League, leader of a two-party Moslem coalition; and the *Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal*. Altogether more than 20 parties, as well as a number of independent candidates, were in the field.

Polling day was marked by a low turnout. The BNP captured more than two-thirds of the 300 popularly-chosen seats, as the opposition vote was divided among a large number of candidates. Unopposed BNP candidates for a further 30 seats reserved for women were for their part declared elected on 31 March.

The first session of the newly-elected Parliament was held on 2 April, and martial law was lifted on 6 April. Prime Minister Azizur Rahman formed a Cabinet on 15 April.

Statistics

1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in Parliament

Number of registered electors.	38,000,000 (approx.)
Voters.	40% (approx.)

Political Group	Number of Seats
Bangladesh Nationalist Party.	237*
Awami League (Malek Ukil faction).	40
Bangladesh Moslem League.	20
<i>Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal</i>	9
Awami League (Mizan faction).	2
Other parties.	6
Independents.	16
	<hr/> 330

* Including the 30 seats reserved for women.