

Nation goes to 12th JS polls tomorrow

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Online Desk: The Election Commission (EC) has completed all preparations to hold the 12th Jatiya Sangsad (JS) elections in a free, fair and peaceful manner in all but one constituency simultaneously across the country tomorrow.

EC officials said 11,96,89,289 voters, including 6,76,09,741 males, 5,89,18,699 females and 849 transgender, will vote to elect 299 members of parliament out of 300 as the EC earlier postponed the elections to Naogaon-2 due to independent candidate Aminul Islam's death.

The balloting will begin at 8am and continue till 4pm without any break at 261,912 polling booths in 42,024 voting centres across the country.

The ballot papers and other polling materials, including stamp pads, official seals, marking seals, are being sent to returning officers (ROs) offices.

However, the EC, for the first time in the election history of the country, decided to send ballot papers to polling stations in the morning of voting day except 2,964 centres in the country's remote areas as ballots to these centres will be sent by today.

A total of 1,970 candidates, including 1,534 from 28 political parties and 436 independents, are vying in the polls.

Of the candidates, 266 from the ruling Awami League (AL), 265 from Jatiya Party (JaPa), 135 from Trinomul BNP, 66 from Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JASAD), 122 from National People's Party (NPP), 13 from Jatiya Party (JP) and 10 from Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh are contesting in the polls.

A total of 90 female candidates, including from political parties and independents, and 79 from ethnic minority and other groups are vying in the polls.

A required number of members of law enforcement agencies have been deployed across the country to ensure the security of the voters so that they can go to polling centres, exercise franchise and return home safely.

About 8 lakh members of law enforcement agencies, including 182,091 from police and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), 1,155 platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) members, 505,788 Ansar and VDP members and Coast Guard personnel, have been tasked with ensuring overall security during the elections across the country.

Members of the armed forces were deployed from Wednesday across the country to assist the local civil administration in holding the general election in a free, fair, and peaceful manner.

Army personnel are performing their duties in 62 districts while Navy personnel have been deployed in two coastal districts- Bhola and Barguna- and 19 upazilas "In Aid to the Civil Power".

Besides, members of Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) are providing assistance to the voting centres in remote hilly areas in the country with helicopters.

Members of law enforcement agencies and armed forces will remain deployed till January 10 to ensure peace, and control law and order before, after, and during voting day.

In addition, BGB Dog Squads specially trained on explosive materials are working in different areas across the country to deal with any violent activities.

Besides, the Fire Service and Civil Defence has formed a central monitoring and coordination cell to deal with any kind of incident including fire and violent activities during the JS elections across the country.

A total of 8 lakh polling officials will remain engaged in polling activities while more 1 lakh will remain standby, he said, adding, in addition to that 3,000 executive and judicial magistrates will perform their duties in the fields across the country during the elections.

A total of 66 returning officers (ROs), including two divisional commissioners and 64 deputy commissioners (DCs), are performing their responsibilities to conduct the polls.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kazi Habibul Awal will address the nation this evening over tomorrow's polls. His address to the nation will be aired on state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Betar at 7pm.

The EC, however, ordered the authorities concerned to enhance security and surveillance at all polling stations across the country in a bid to hold the election in a free and fair manner.

In an order, the commission said it has established a total of 42,024 vote centres at government and non-government educational institutes across the country.

The order instructs the relevant authorities to enhance security and vigilance at polling centers by consulting with the presidents and secretaries of the managing committees of the educational institutes.

Additional Secretary of the EC Ashok Kumar Debnath said a total of 20,773 observers, including 2,000 from different countries across the globe, are monitoring the elections. The election observers also included media personnel.

The EC has introduced an app named 'Smart Election Management BD' to provide latest updates related to polls every two hours.

The voters will be able to track centre-based vote count every two hours after polling and find their polling centres during voting through the app, which is available on the google play store, from anywhere in the country.

The government has imposed a 24-hour ban on the plying of taxicabs, pickup vans, minibuses and trucks starting from midnight on Saturday in preparation for tomorrow's polls.

Besides, a 72-hour ban on motorcycle movement has also been imposed from midnight on Friday till midnight on Monday. But the motorcycles having EC pass will remain out of the purview of this restriction.

These restrictions will be relaxed for law enforcement agencies, armed forces, administration personnel and observers on permission, vehicles on emergency services, drug, medical equipment and things used for identical works, vehicles to be used for going to and return from airport with passengers and all types of vehicles carrying newspapers, long-route vehicles, contesting candidates and their agents.

As per the instructions, jeep, car, minibus and other small size vehicles of the contesting candidate, vehicle for the election agent will be allowed to ply the roads. However, they will have to obtain an approval from the returning officer and display a sticker on the vehicle.

In the case of motorcycles, journalists, observers or any other person engaged in emergency work will have to obtain an approval of the returning officer.

Officers-employees or any other person engaged in election work will have to take an approval of the Election Commission beforehand for motorcycles.

As per the instruction, necessary effective measures may be taken for relaxation of the restrictions on national highways, inter-district or metropolitan highways, connecting roads of highways and main roads.

In addition, district magistrates may take necessary measures to impose or relax restrictions on certain vehicles in view of local requirements and realities.