

PM announces 5pc increment for teachers under MPO

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday announced “Baishakhi Festival” allowance and five percent increment for teachers and employees of non-government educational institutions under monthly pay order (MPO).

She made the announcement while distributing cheques of seed money among nine organisations and trust funds at a ceremony at the Gono Bhaban in the evening.

Nearly five lakh teachers and employees of non-government educational institutions, including schools, colleges and madrasas under the MPO, will get the increment and allowance.

An additional amount of Tk 532 crore would be spent annually on meeting the expenses of the increment, while Tk 177 crore would be required annually to provide the special allowance.

The prime minister handed over the cheques of Tk 100 crore to the trust funds and organisations.

She donated Tk 10 crore as seed money to Non-government Educational Institution Teachers-Employees Welfare Trust and Non-government Educational Institution Teachers-Employees Retirement Benefit Board.

Besides, Tk 20 crore was given each to Fire Service and Civil Defence

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina hoisting flags of newly set up BGB Ramu Region Headquarters and two new BGB battalions at Narayanganj and Gazipur. The photo was taken at the BGB Pilkhana headquarters yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

'Drug trader' killed in 'gunfight' with police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A suspected drug trader was killed in a “gunfight” with police in Chuadanga’s Uzalpur village early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Abul Bashar alias Pappu, 45, son of Bazlur Rahman of Akandbaria in Chuadanga sadar upazila.

According to Officer-in-Charge of Chuadanga Sadar Police Station Delwar Hossain, the law enforcers had information that a group of drug traders carrying contraband phensidyl was entering Bangladesh territory from India through Uzalpur border.

A police team was sent to the area. When they located a group of people at Uzalpur field, police asked them to stop.

“But the group responded by opening fire on police prompting them to retaliate. The gun-battle lasted an hour,” the OC said.

Police recovered Pappu’s body after the “gunfight”, he claimed.

The law enforcers also claimed to have recovered a shutter gun, four crude bombs and 170 bottles of phensidyl from the spot.

The OC said Pappu was an accused in six cases -- one for murder, four for drugs-related offences and one for explosions -- filed with Chuadanga Sadar Police.

His family members admitted that Pappu was once involved in drug trade.

They claimed that plainclothes men

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Oikyafront goes to Rajshahi today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Jatiya Oikyafront leaders have taken preparations to bring people from neighbouring districts today to their rally in Rajshahi, amid widespread arrests and the ongoing transport strike in Natore.

Police had twice denied permission for the rally before finally announcing on Wednesday night that the event could be held at Madrasa Maidan in the city on 12 conditions.

The Oikyafront could have taken better preparation for the rally if police had not delayed the permission until the last moment, its Rajshahi coordinator Mizanur Rahman Minu told a press conference yesterday.

Several BNP leaders in the region told The Daily Star that they had to stay away from home fearing arrests.

Police raided houses of many BNP leaders and threatened their family members of arrests if they joined the rally, Minu added.

Zahidul Islam Jewel, joint convenor of Bagha upazila Jubo Dal, said, “My home was raided on Thursday night. I can’t go home even at night.”

Police yesterday arrested 14 BNP-Jamaat men in Rajshahi and Natore, and raided many more houses of BNP leaders and activists in Naogaon and Chapainawabganj.

The rally would be addressed by Dr Kamal Hossain, Andalib Partha, Retd Col Oli Ahmed among others.

The 12 conditions slapped include not using multimedia projectors at all and not putting loudspeakers anywhere but the venue although the devices are widely used during ruling party rallies.

The participants are also not allowed to carry banners and festoons that are glued to sticks. The organisers were asked to hold the event between 2:00pm and 5:00pm. The activists cannot gather in or around the city before or after the rally.

They are also asked not to deliver any speech that is “anti-state”, in favour of war criminals, hurt religious sentiments and can deteriorate the law and order.

Activists began preparing the stage at Madrasa Maidan around 5:00pm yesterday.

“Let us see, how far we can prepare in a night. We are not allowed to go to the venue until 2:00pm on Friday,” Minu said yesterday.

He also alleged that some members of the law enforcement agencies were tearing down the banners and posters for the rally in Kasiadanga area of the city.

He also alleged that the sudden transport strike in Natore was called for not letting people from other districts attend the rally.

He blamed the law enforcement agencies for the strike saying, “If they are not responsible, why are the law-enforcement agencies silent about the transport workers who have no specific reason for calling a strike?”

He said he expected a crowd of one lakh at the rally.

Minu also said people had no confidence on the Election Commission.

“The commission is made up of some jokers, people do not believe them.”

Election on Dec 23

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meetings with the EC on Wednesday supported its plan to announce the schedule on November 8. Yesterday, both parties welcomed the EC announcement.

Analysts fear the political situation may get complicated further following the announcement of the schedule as major issues remain unsettled with the Oikyafront threatening to intensify agitation in the coming days if the schedule was announced without resolving the crisis.

The Oikyafront may march towards the EC tomorrow in protest at the announcement of the schedule. Top leaders of the opposition combine may announce the programme at its rally in Rajshahi city today, said alliance sources.

The opposition leaders are also protesting the ongoing police drive, arrest of opposition men and the filing of “ghost cases” against their grassroots across the country.

Oikyafront top leader Dr Kamal Hossain wrote to the EC on Saturday, requesting it not to announce the schedule until the crisis over the polls is resolved.

A team of the combine also met the CEC on Tuesday with the same plea.

The Left Democratic Alliance, a combine of eight leftist parties, also sent a letter to the CEC with the same request.

“We requested the EC not to announce the election schedule until the political parties reach a consensus on resolving the current political crisis. But the EC didn’t keep our request, which squandered the opportunity to resolve the crisis,” said Mujahidul Islam Selim, president of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, a component of the LDA.

“Such a move by the Election Commission is not only harmful, but also dangerous,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Talking to this newspaper, Ali Riaz, a professor of the politics and government department at the Illinois State University in the US, said the announcement of the election schedule not only makes the situation complex but also pushes it to an unwanted direction.

“I hope the Election Commission members will understand that they will need to shoulder the responsibility for creating such a situation,” he added.

Announcing the polls schedule, CEC Huda hoped that a competitive election would be held with the participation of all political parties.

“On behalf of the people, I urge all political parties to help continue the democratic process and the pace of development by participating in the polls.”

He requested all political parties to resolve their differences politically if there was any, and said they should remain careful so that the polls atmosphere does not turn violent.

According to the schedule, the last date for filing nomination papers for candidacy is November 19. The returning officers will scrutinise the nomination papers on November 22 while the last date for withdrawing candidacy is November 29.

This time, the EC unveiled the election schedule in an unusual



“We welcomed the polls schedule and hope that all political parties would join the election in a festive mood. There was a smokescreen created over the national election, but it has cleared today [yesterday] with the announcement of the polls schedule. The next general election will be held according to the schedule and there is no confusion in this regard.”

MAHBUBUL ALAM HANIF
JOINT GENERAL SECRETARY OF AWAMI LEAGUE



“It is so painful that the EC made the announcement of the polls schedule despite our request to defer it. We are not pleased with the schedule. We want to participate in the election but we can’t tell now whether we will as per the announced schedule. We will take the final decision in this regard later.”

MAHMUDUR RAHMAN MANNA
LEADER OF JATIYA OIKYAFRONT



“We strongly condemn the Election Commission for hurriedly announcing the polls schedule as it was all set-up to hold an uneven election. The government’s desire has been reflected through the announcement of the schedule. The countrymen would never accept any election that goes against their hopes and aspirations. Jatiya Oikyafront met the EC and requested them to defer the polls schedule but they did not pay any heed.”

MIRZA FAKHRUL ISLAM ALAMGIR
SECRETARY GENERAL OF BNP



“We had requested the Election Commission not to announce the election schedule until all political parties came to a consensus over the political crisis over holding of the polls. But the EC didn’t keep our request and kept the opportunity to resolve the crisis at bay. This move by the EC is not only harmful, but also dangerous. There is still an opportunity to come to a consensus over ending the stalemate through dialogues. In that case, the EC can reschedule the polls.”

MUJAHIDUL ISLAM SELIM
PRESIDENT OF CPB



“We demand that the EC defers the election date, filing of nomination, and scrutiny of nomination papers by one week as the time given for completing the process seems short. Every step of the election procedure should be taken with the people’s interest in consideration.”

PROF AQM BADRUDDOZA CHOWDHURY
LEADER OF JUKTOFRONT



“I don’t know why the EC so hastily announced the election schedule. They [the EC] had enough time in their hands as the polls will have to be held within January 28. I don’t know the mystery behind their hurriedness. The ongoing political crisis could have been resolved had the dialogues continued. But the EC announced the polls schedule without resolving the ongoing political stalemate.”

M HAFIZUDDIN KHAN
FORMER ADVISER TO A CARETAKER GOVERNMENT



“We welcome the announcement of the election schedule. The EC made the announcement following discussions with different political parties and other stakeholders. The CEC’s speech gave us the indication that the election would be free and fair. We hope all political parties will participate in the polls. Oikyafront’s demand to defer the polls schedule will delay the election, which is not in line with the constitution.”

RUHUL AMIN HAWLADER
SECRETARY GENERAL OF JATIYA PARTY



“The EC has announced the election schedule as per their consideration. But it is the moral responsibility of the Election Commission to make ways for major political parties to participate in the polls. They should also accommodate political parties’ demands if it is in their capacity.”

BRIG GEN (RETD) M SAKHAWAT HUSSAIN
FORMER ELECTION COMMISSIONER

hurry.

Since the June 1996 polls, none of the four previous ECs came up with polls schedules in such haste.

Following the start of the 90-day countdown to polls, each of the ECs took one month on average to announce the schedule.

But Huda announced the schedule only a week after the 90-day countdown began on October 31.

According to the timeframe, the election must be held on or by January 28.

The EC finalised the schedule at a meeting yesterday morning and announced it in the evening.

In his 13-minute address, the CEC

sought assistance and cooperation from all for holding the polls in a free and fair manner.

“We hope we will be able to hold a free, fair and acceptable election.”

He said political parties have started preparations for contesting the polls.

“A congenial atmosphere for the Jatiya Sangsad polls is present across the country,” he added.

However, in reality, the situation is not the same for all.

The ruling party men are carrying out campaigns in full swing to drum up public support and are using posters, banners and placards to project the government successes.

On the other hand, the presence of the opposition men on the streets is very thin as they are facing difficulties in conducting campaigns due to police harassment and cases filed against them in the past few years, according to reports from our correspondents in different districts.

The CEC, however, pledged that a level playing field will be ensured for the election.

Political parties and candidates would get equal opportunity for electioneering, he said.

More than six lakh law enforcers will be deployed across the country to maintain law and order. Their performance and neutrality will be kept

under watch.

“Legal action will be taken against law enforcers for failing to perform duty.”

He assured that the voters will be able to cast ballots freely for their preferred candidates.

On the much-talked-about issue of army deployment, the CEC said army personnel would be deployed for aiding the civil administration.

The Oikyafront and several other parties have been demanding deployment of army members with magisterial power.

The CEC also addressed the concern of opposition parties with regard to arrest and harassment of their grassroots leaders.

He said the law enforcers will be given strict orders to ensure that no harassment and filing of cases take place against any voters, political leaders and activists, candidates or polling agents.

“I will request and hope that all candidates and their supporters will follow the electoral code of conduct.”

Polling agents should stay at the stations until the results are announced, he added.

Huda also mentioned that the nomination aspirants can file relevant papers online alongside the existing system of submitting those to the returning officers and assistant returning officers.

The CEC said electronic voting machines (EVMs) would be used at several polling stations in constituencies in city areas. “Through exhibitions, voters were informed about the merits of using EVM in elections.”

The EC yesterday appointed the deputy commissioners of 64 districts as returning officers (ROs) and upazila nirbahi officers as assistant returning officers (AROs) for the constituencies in district areas.

Divisional commissioners and additional deputy commissioners were appointed as ROs and AROs for the constituencies in metropolitan areas.

Empowered by the electoral laws, the ROs with the assistance of the AROs will do all necessary work to conduct the election. They will enjoy immense legal powers to ensure the holding of a free and fair election.

CODE OF CONDUCT TAKES EFFECT

With the announcement of the polls schedule, the electoral code of conduct took effect yesterday.

The EC is likely to issue directives today, asking all aspiring candidates to remove their posters, placards, banners and billboards from public places. The commission may give a timeframe to complete the task.

If the aspirants fail to do so, the law enforcement agencies would do the task, said EC secretariat officials.

No one can start electioneering until the last date for withdrawal of candidacy.

Ministers and lawmakers cannot use government vehicles or enjoy facilities for carrying out election-related work. They are also not allowed to make any donations to any institution from public fund.

Besides, the government cannot approve or inaugurate any development project to woo voters.