

Presidential election on February 19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The next presidential election will be held on February 19.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal announced the schedule after holding a meeting with election commissioners at the Nirbachan Bhaban in the capital's Agargaon yesterday.

The nominations will be submitted on February 12. The nomination papers will be scrutinised on February 13. The deadline for withdrawal of candidature will be February 14, he said.

The election will take place from 2:00pm to 5:00pm on February 19 at the parliament house if there is more than one candidate, Awal added.

Three hundred and forty-three members of parliament have been enlisted in the voters' list this year to elect the head of the state. Seven posts of MPs were vacant.

According to the Presidential Election Act, 1991, the president shall be elected by the members of parliament by open ballot.

An MP shall sign the nomination paper for the presidential election as the proposer and another MP shall sign as the seconder. No MP shall sign more than one nomination paper as a proposer or seconder.

On April 24, 2018, President Abdul Hamid took oath as the head of the state for the second consecutive term, which will expire on April 24 this year.

Hamid's first five-year tenure expired on the same date in 2018, after he took office in 2013.

According to Article 123 of the constitution, the presidential election must be held 60 to 90 days before the expiry of each five-year term.

As per the constitution, Hamid cannot become president for another term, as he was elected for two terms.



A Ukrainian service member fires a RPG-7 anti-tank grenade launcher during offensive and assault drills, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Zaporizhzhia Region, Ukraine. The photo was taken on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

DOMINANCE OF ONLINE AD MARKET US sues Google

AFP, Washington

The US Justice Department has sued Google for its dominance of the online advertising market, launching a fresh legal battle against the California-based tech giant.

The case was the second federal lawsuit against Google over alleged antitrust violations and the first since US President Joe Biden took office two years ago.

The earlier case targeted Google's world-dominating search engine and is expected to go to trial later this year.

In this latest suit filed on Tuesday, prosecutors took aim at Google's extremely profitable advertising business, asking that it be broken up to level the playing field for other companies.

Google's ad dealings generated more than \$200 billion in sales in 2021 and is parent company Alphabet's biggest moneymaker by a wide margin.

The US said the revenue was unlawfully

maintained by a monopoly that had "corrupted legitimate competition in the ad tech industry."

"Google has used anticompetitive, exclusionary, and unlawful means to eliminate or severely diminish any threat to its dominance over digital advertising technologies," the suit added.

The case was launched by the Department of Justice (DOJ) in conjunction with eight US states: California, Colorado, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Virginia.

Central to the case is Google's dominance of the ad tech business, the technology that companies rely on for their online advertising needs.

The prosecutors said Google "now controls" both the buy and the sell side of the crucial sector, meaning website creators earn less and advertisers pay more, all while innovation is choked by the lack of rivals.

Dhaka, Delhi seek stronger energy ties

Says Indian envoy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and India are working together to build stronger energy connectivity, said Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Pranay Verma yesterday.

Mentioning the example of Rampal Power Plant, he said both units of the coal-fired plant were expected to be in operation this year.

Once the units start operating, it will ensure much-needed energy security in Bangladesh, he added.

He made the comments while talking at an event organised by the Bangladesh India Friendship Society (BIFS) at the Samson H Choudhury Centre of Dhaka Club.

More power plants are being constructed to supply power to Bangladesh, he said.

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Stay alert to curb market

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In the afternoon session, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi told the DCs to ensure no one takes advantage by manipulating prices during Ramadan.

"You are the hands of the government. You must take strict measures so that no one can take advantage."

He also asked the DCs to help make consumers aware of their rights.

The minister then asked them to make an effort to ensure fair prices for traders of animal rawhide during Eid-ul-Azha.

Road, Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader directed the DCs to monitor whether motorcycle riders wear helmets in the sub-urban areas.

"Though motorcycle riders in Dhaka wear helmets, the practice is not seen in sub-urban areas."

The fatality rate in road accidents has increased due to the plying of motorcycle, easy-bikes, Nasiman and Kariman on the highways, he

said, adding that the government is working to form a policy to bring discipline to this sector.

"Ensuring discipline in the transport sector is my top most priority. Lots of roads are being constructed ... But if discipline cannot be ensured, all these constructions will be of no use."

About any directives given regarding the upcoming national polls, he said, "I am talking about discipline. And discipline is applicable everywhere."

Earlier, Jute and Textile Minister Golam Dastagir Gazi instructed the deputy commissioners to operate mobile courts against the use of plastic bag in rice packaging.

"Imported rice is packaged in plastic bags. Some businesses are taking advantage of that and selling local rice in plastic bags."

The DC conference was inaugurated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Tuesday and is expected to end today after eight sessions on separate issues.

AL yet to swing into action

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yesterday to press home its 10-point demand, including resignation of the AL government and national election under a non-party caretaker government. The BNP's like-minded opposition parties also staged rallies across the country simultaneously.

Blasting BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir for his recent remarks on Baksal, Quader said, "Please explain what does Baksal stand for. It is Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League. Baksal is not a single party, rather a national party comprised of all parties, all opinions."

"Ziaur Rahman applied to Bangabandhu in writing to become a member of Baksal. There is evidence. The founder of your [Fakhrul] party joined Baksal through applying, and you call Baksal a one-party government."

Speaking at the rally, AL Presidium Member Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya said, "The Awami League has not taken the field yet. We are only rehearsing, and the BNP is nowhere to be found. What will happen to BNP if Awami League takes the field? People's involvement is needed to stage a mass uprising. But the BNP has no involvement with the people."

AL Joint General Secretary Mahbub Ul Alam Hanif said the party leaders and activists would be in the field with the law enforcement agencies if any attempt was made to foil the next general election.

He alleged that the BNP was

hatching conspiracy ahead of the election as they knew that they would lose it.

The ruling party and its associate bodies and pro-AL organisations held four other rallies at different venues in the capital yesterday marking the Mass Uprising Day.

Speaking at another event at the Banani Model School ground, Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, reiterated that the caretaker government system would not be restored and the next parliamentary polls would be held in due time following the constitutional provisions.

The Dhaka city north AL hosted the programme marking distribution of warm clothes among low-income people.

Jubo League's two city units staged two rallies at the capital's Jatrabari intersection and Mohakhali Kancha Bazzar area while the Chhatra League's Dhaka University unit staged another rally at Shahbagh.

AL insiders said the party leadership do not want to see the BNP's programmes getting exclusive media coverage, and that's why the ruling party has adopted the strategy of holding counter-programmes.

AL leaders also think that holding such programmes on the day of the BNP's events help develop a positive feeling among the party leaders and activists. The ruling party is not likely to reverse this strategy anytime soon, they added.

Rising input cost

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Even though Aman production was good last year, the price of rice has not fallen, and it indicates that hoarders are waiting for the price of rice to increase further in the coming days, he said.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), last year's average Boro paddy production cost in Rangpur and Dinaipur regions was Tk 14,900 per bigha of land and in Rajshahi and Bogura regions Tk 17,450. Each region consists of four districts.

The DAE estimates that Boro will be cultivated on 13.25 lakh hectares of land in the 16 northern districts this year. It is 26.5 percent of the total Boro cultivable land in the country, officials said.

Kanchi Karmaker, a farmer in Birol upazila of Dinaipur, said ever since the government raised the prices of diesel and fertiliser, everything related to farming has become more expensive.

Last year, the price of diesel rose by 42.5 percent while the price of each kg of urea fertiliser leaped to Tk 22 from Tk 16 in 2021.

BNP goes for fresh agitation

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reforms in which we have mentioned about bringing a balance of power to the prime minister and the president."

Coming down hard on the government for errors in new school textbooks, Fakhrul demanded corrections as some contents which were not in keeping with the country's history and culture were included in those.

Painting a gloomy picture of the country's economy, he said the situation has become so grave that the economy is "on the verge of collapse".

"The main problem is that Awami League considers the country to be its parental property, and that no one has any say about the country. That's why the ruling party men have indulged in massive corruption."

The BNP secretary general said time is running out for the government and it has to step down now.

Party leaders Khairul Kabir Khokon, Fazlul Huq Milon and Sheikh Rabiul Islam joined the rally hours after walking out of jail on bail. The programme was chaired by Dhaka South city BNP Convener Abdus Salam.

Breaking down the expenses, Shamsul Haq of Takeyarpur area of Rangpur said the average cost for preparing a bigha of land has gone from Tk 900 to Tk 1,300, sowing from Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,500, irrigation from Tk 1,200 from Tk 1,600, different fertilisers from Tk 2,000 to Tk 3,500, pesticide and other expenses from Tk 800 last year to around Tk 1,200 this year.

Making a profit of Tk 6,000 per bigha of land would be a challenge this year, said a farmer in Naogaon, adding that making that much profit would depend on a lot of things including the weather.

Prof Nazrul Islam Hakkani, president of Jatiya Krishak Samiti in Rangpur, said, "The vast majority of underprivileged farmers do not have enough money. Most of them can't get a low-interest bank loan and have to turn to loan sharks just to be able to farm. The government should provide them with cash support right now."

Mohammad Shah Alam, additional director of the DAE in Rangpur, said mechanisation in farming can be a way to cut down the costs.

Secretariat, jail on shortlist

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Khandaker Al Moin, director (legal and media) of Rab, said the video found on Mashukur's smartphone shows how trained and disciplined they are.

A Rab team arrested Mashukur and another suspect named Abul Bashar after a gunfight near Kutupalong Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar on Monday.

Bashar has the expertise in using explosives, Moin said.

The militant outfit members worked on the video until September last year, but they could not complete it as law enforcers started a crackdown on the hills.

Key leaders of the outfit, including its ameer Anisur Rahman, are seen in the video. The members, many in brown and grey camouflage, are seen with assault rifles and sharp weapons.

Militant leaders from Ansar Al Islam, Harkatul Jihad Al Islami and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh

made plans of forming Jama'atul Ansar while they were in prison years ago.

However, it finally came into being in 2019. One of the key planners, Shamin Mahfuz, a former JMB leader, has been its adviser from the beginning.

Shamin, a former student of Dhaka University, has been a friend of KNF chief Nathan Bawm, who also studied in DU.

Top Jama'atul Ansar leaders and KNF chief Nathan made a three-year deal at the beginning of 2021 at a hotel in Cox's Bazar. The latter agreed to provide shelter, training on firearms and explosives and other support to the militants in exchange for Tk 3 lakh a month.

Rab also had information that the militants gave Tk 17 lakh to KNF to buy weapons. It came to know that the militants purchased an AK-22 and an AK-32 rifle to train the young recruits.

Please point out my failures

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By changing two clauses of the constitution, Zia allowed them to do politics.

"Many war criminals, including Ghulam Azam, were brought back from Pakistan and given citizenship. Zia made war criminals advisors and ministers."

She said Khaleda Zia also gave war criminals places in her cabinet.

"Patronising war criminals like this is disgraceful for a nation. Genuine freedom fighters who did not agree to join hands with Zia were dropped from the list of freedom fighters ... and non-freedom fighters were included in the list. They did not want to honour the real freedom fighters."

In response to a query from ruling

party MP Benazir Ahmed, Hasina said the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war have affected the economy.

"Bangladesh is no exception. This has affected the prices of essentials alongside other economic and social impacts."

In reply to the supplementary question from AL MP Mozaffar Hossain, the leader of the House said Bangladesh's garment industry has expanded widely, but there are difficulties finding technical persons there.

"Many people are brought from abroad and given jobs."

In this connection, she said, the government has established textiles universities and colleges to create a skilled workforce.

Israel forces kill Palestinian in alleged knife attack

AFP, Nablus

Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian in the occupied West Bank yesterday, the Palestinian health ministry said, in what the army described as a "stabbing attack".

The ministry said that Arref Abdel Nasser Arref Lahlouh, 22, was killed "by Israeli gunfire," near the Palestinian city of Qalqilya.

The Israeli army said that Lahlouh "attempted to carry out a stabbing

attack" near the Jewish settlement of Kdumim.

"The assailant, armed with a knife, arrived at an IDF military post and attempted to stab an IDF soldier at the scene."

Lahlouh was "neutralised by the soldiers in the area," the army added.

Lahlouh is the 19th Palestinian killed in the West Bank this year, the majority of whom were shot dead by Israeli forces.