

## Hefazat to hold rally in capital Dec 29 unless its leaders freed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hefazat-e-Islam has said it will hold a “grand rally” in Dhaka on December 29, if jailed leaders and activists, including Mamunul Haque, are not released by this time.

Hefazat Secretary General Shayekh Sajidur Rahman made the announcement during a demonstration yesterday held at the north gate of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque in Dhaka.

He also demanded the withdrawal of all cases against leaders and activists, said a press release.

“Our leaders and activists have been behind bars, despite not being involved in any offence. They are deprived of their legal rights. Their human and constitutional rights have been curbed. Such mistreatment against them must be ended,” Sajidur Rahman demanded.

Previously, Hefazat leaders expressed their desire for the unconditional release of leaders and activists and held meetings with Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal on several occasions.

## CASH-FOR-QUERY CHARGES TMC MP Moitra expelled from India’s Lok Sabha

NDTV Online

Trinamool Congress leader Mahua Moitra has been expelled from Lok Sabha following an Ethics Committee report into the ‘cash for query’ charges against her.

Moitra, 49, was accused of taking bribes, including two crore rupee in cash and “luxury gift items”, from businessman Darshan Hiranandani, in exchange for asking questions critical of the government in Parliament.

Moitra was also accused of surrendering log-in credentials to her personal and confidential account on the parliamentary website, so Hiranandani could post questions directly.

A fiery critic of the Modi government, Moitra had denied the bribery charges but admitted to sharing the log-in details.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who is also Moitra’s party boss, called the expulsion “unacceptable” and said that “vendetta politics of (the) BJP had killed democracy”.



Labourers work in a high rise without any safety gear, putting their lives at risk. The photo was taken in Chattogram city’s Agrabad area on Wednesday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## SCRUTINY OF NOMINATION PAPERS Another 93 aspirants challenge returning officers’ decisions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another 93 aspirants yesterday appealed to the Election Commission against the returning officers’ decisions.

Ruling Awami League nominee for Kishoreganj-3 Nasirul Islam Khan, whose candidature was scrapped by the EC, filed an appeal questioning the candidacy of Jatiya Party leader Mujibul Haque Chunnur. Nasirul said Chunnur, the secretary general of the main opposition in the parliament, was a loan defaulter.

Nasirul’s candidacy was cancelled because he concealed information about a criminal case in his affidavit. He filed another appeal against the cancellation of his candidacy.

Businessman AK Azad, an independent in Faridpur-3, filed an appeal challenging the candidacy

of AL nominee Shamim Haq, stating that the latter is a dual citizen.

The EC earlier scrapped the candidacy of Barisal-4 AL nominee Shammi Ahmed because of her dual citizenship.

Former BNP lawmaker Major (retd) Akhtaruzzaman filed an appeal against the rejection of his candidacy as an independent from Kishoreganj-2. The EC cancelled his candidacy because he concealed information about cases and had defaulted on loans.

So far, 431 aspirants filed appeals to the EC. The four-day window for filing appeals closes today.

The appeal hearings will take place from December 10-15.

A total of 2,716 aspirants filed their nomination papers, and 731 of them were rejected.

## Post-Covid price inflation drives up poverty

FROM PAGE 1

This ultimately worsened undernourishment scenario in 2022 in all the 17 countries studied. Other countries that were studied include Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and Nepal.

“World price spikes are also more important for hunger than for GDP. The Covid-19 caused across-the-board income losses, whereas rising global prices directly raised food prices and reduced households’ access to food,” he said, touching on Bangladesh’s hunger scenario.

Like the poverty rate, worsening hunger situation is also more pervasive in rural areas in Bangladesh, the paper noted.

According to the key findings of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2022, Bangladesh’s poverty rate stands at 18.7 percent at national level; it is 20.5 percent in rural areas and 14.7 percent in urban areas.

The overall extreme poverty rate is 5.6 percent – 6.5 percent in rural areas and 3.8 percent in urban areas, according to the HIES data.

Only a year ago in 2021, a study by Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) found 2.45 crore people, or 14.75 percent of the population, were pushed into poverty in a single year.

The findings were based on a Rapid Response Research (RRR), which was conducted in March 2021 on more than 6,000 people living in rural and urban slums.

Earlier in late 2020, South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem) found that 42 percent of 5,577 households covered in a nationwide survey fell below the poverty line on Covid impacts.

The non-profit organisation had interviewed the same group of households in 2018, when it found 21.6 percent of them were below the poverty line.

BIGD Executive Director Imran Matin said there has been a lot of recovery in the post-Covid period, but the recovery mechanism is fragile.

“This foundation is very weak,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

As a result, the rising cost of living and inflation, along with economic mismanagement, have aggravated people’s hardship.

“If it continues, the situation may worsen, as we still could not create a sustainable social protection system,” he said.

## Who are giving us earthquake data?

FROM PAGE 1

Only two officials monitor seismic activities in Bangladesh and they cannot monitor 24/7.

In any developed country and even in neighbouring India, automated machines and messaging services are used, experts said.

On December 2, a 5.6-magnitude tremor jolted parts of Bangladesh, triggering panic among the people. At least 76 garment workers and a Dhaka University student were injured while fleeing buildings that day.

Almost 100 quakes, mostly 3.0-4.5 magnitude minor jolts, have hit Bangladesh this year. Five of those were of magnitude 5 and above, according to data from the US Geological Survey (USGS) and India Meteorological Department.

According to BMD officials, they usually lose about 20 minutes in making information about quakes public as they have to rely on a manual system of data collection, processing, and interpretation.

They said after a jolt, they receive data which have to be manually fed into a computer so that the location and the magnitude of the earthquake can be learnt.

Rubayet Kabir, in charge of the Seismic Observatory and Research Centre of the BMD, said, “We would be able to give the information immediately if we have the software that generates automated results.”

He said they cannot provide information regarding the depth of an earthquake, which is important.

BMD officials said some data collection sites have serious noise issues, a huge barrier to getting accurate information about the depth of an earthquake. Hence, the BMD lacks the confidence to provide the depth data.

Experts said officials trained on detecting seismic activities should not be given other jobs at the BMD.

They also said officials with no geological background are bound to make errors in interpreting data churned out by the machines.

Dr Syed Humayun Akhter, former chairman of the geology department at Dhaka University, told The Daily Star that countries across the world have separate departments for collecting seismic data, interpreting the data, and disseminating the information.

India has the National Centre for Seismology in New Delhi, he said, adding that in Bangladesh the job should be given to the Geological Survey of Bangladesh where there are geologists.

He said the BMD could also appoint geologists and seismologists.

Mehedi Ahmed Ansary, a

professor at the department of civil engineering at Buet, said, “There must be seismologists or engineering-seismologists at the BMD to interpret data accurately.”

He said the BMD could immediately liaise with Dhaka University or Buet for data interpretation.

Apart from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan also have separate seismic centres.

Dr ASM Maksud Kamal, vice-chancellor of Dhaka University, said equipment can only measure the magnitude of an earthquake but information about its intensity is more important.

“Every area has a specific intensity. This data helps public and private organisations with information on how to construct an establishment in any area,” he said.

Mohan Kumar Das, executive director at the National Oceanographic and Maritime Institute (NOAMI), said the manual system depends on human observation, which can introduce delays in detecting seismic activity. An automated system can provide near-instantaneous alerts, allowing for quicker response times.

He said human operators can make errors in interpreting seismic signals or may not be able to recognise subtle signs of an impending earthquake. Automation reduces the risk of human errors and ensures a more accurate and reliable detection.

“Manual systems may not offer continuous, round-the-clock monitoring, leaving periods when seismic activity could go undetected,” he added.

The manual system relies on humans to relay information to emergency services, which can introduce delays in emergency response, especially after a disaster when communication infrastructure is compromised and everyone is trying to contact their loved ones.

“In Bangladesh, there is a significant coordination gap and a shortage of capable expert manpower. It is crucial to inspire real scientists, researchers, and geohazards specialists to address the upcoming earthquake risks.”

MANPOWER SHORTAGE

Only two officials man the Seismic Observatory and Research Centre of BMD.

Round-the-clock monitoring is not possible. In case of an earthquake during their off hours, one has to go to their office to update the nation, officials said, adding that they need at least six officials to have 24/7 monitoring.

The research centre has not conducted any research since it started operations in 2007.

“When will we conduct research? We are only two people. Should we work for the office or do research? Is it possible?” Rubayet said.

At least six officials, including Rubayet, had training on seismology in Japan but now only Rubayet is working at the centre.

Bangladesh has 13 seismometers across the country for data collection on seismic activities.

## 3 new parties

FROM PAGE 1

bill was not paid on time.

The BNM was able to field only five aspirants in Dhaka. But only two of them submitted nomination papers to the EC. One of them, Hossain Ahmed Ashik of Dhaka-II, is a former JP leader.

Besides, the Trinamool BNP aspirant of Dhaka-4, Rafiqul Islam, was an organising secretary of Jatiya Party. He is still in JP’s executive committee. Contacted, he said, “I don’t belong to the party [JP] because the party does not allow new leaders to come forward.”

Among the 10 aspirants contacted by these correspondents, five were members of Bangladesh Chhatra League, one was a member of JSD Chhatra League, and the rest were not involved in politics before.

Shamsuzzaman, an aspirant of Dhaka-I from the BSP, said he is participating in the election mainly because Saifuddin Maizbhandari had asked him to. An assistant general secretary of Ashiqin Auliya Oikko Parishad, Shamsuzzaman has been a devotee at Maizbhandar Darbar Sharif for 17 years.

Saifuddin Maizbhandari is vying for Dhaka-14. The party has 14 aspirants in Dhaka. One of them, Farahnaz Haque Chowdhury of Dhaka-II, is the chairperson of Krishok Sramik Party (KSP). She submitted her nomination paper from the BSP as her party is yet to get EC’s recognition.

The Trinamool BNP primarily fielded two aspirants for Dhaka-18. Both of their candidacy was cancelled.

Dhaka-14 Trinamool BNP candidate Nazmul Islam lost his candidacy for submitting unsigned papers. He was involved with the Chhatra League in the late 80s.

“But I was loyal to the party [AL]. I have friends in the Trinamool who said to me that if I joined this party, I might be able to support the government and there would be a chance [to get elected] if some negotiations happened,” he told The Daily Star recently.

Dhaka-19 Trinamool BNP candidate Mahabubul Hasan was a member of Chhatra League. “I love the Awami League. But competition is tough and the number of nomination seekers is large [in the AL].”

### TEACHER RECRUITMENT TEST

## 37 detained over fraud in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Rab yesterday detained 37 people for their involvement in fraud relating to assistant primary teachers’ recruitment tests in Gaibandha.

The detainees include five members of a fraud gang and 32 examinees, including 23 female and nine male, Mostafizur Rahman, company commander of Rapid Action Battalion-13, told our correspondent.

Acting on a tip-off, a Rab team detained them during drives conducted at different exam centres in town between 10:00am and 11:00am, said a press release issued by Rab-13.

The elite force members also seized 24 master cards, 20 Bluetooth devices, 17 mobile phones, bank checks, and stamps from the detainees, the release read.

The five fraud gang members are Maruf, Munna, Sohel, Nazrul, and Sohag.

During primary interrogation, the members confessed to Rab that they scammed the examinees out of Tk 14-18 lakh each, promising them job lobbies and answers to test questions through electronic devices.

“We are going to file a fraudulgence case against them and then hand them over to police,” added Mostafizur Rahman.

## 2 men found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole, Faridpur

A man was found dead near Satnal Bridge in Manirampur upazila of Jashore this morning, hours after he left Dhaka for his village home early yesterday.

Police recovered the body of Jahangir Alam, 45, of Paiyali village in Manirampur upazila, around 10:00am and sent it to Jashore General Hospital morgue for autopsy, said Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Manirampur Police Station.

“Without an autopsy report, it is not possible to say how Jahangir was killed,” said the OC.

The deceased’s father Nurul said Jahangir worked for a private company in Dhaka. Thursday night, he left the capital for home.

In Faridpur, police recovered the body of a college student from beneath a bridge over the Kumar river near Bhanga Bazar in Bhanga upazila around 7:00am.

The deceased is Sourav Malo, a 20-year-old first-year student of Government Rajendra College in Faridpur.

Bhanga Police OC Pradyut Sarkar said his belongings, including his phone, cash, and a gold ring, were found with the body.

There were deep wounds on his head, said the OC.



People hold Palestinian flags during a rally in solidarity with the Palestinian people under the slogan “Stop the massacre in Gaza” in the Spanish Basque city of Gernika, Spain yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## ‘They are plotting famine in the country’

FROM PAGE 1

“They kept saying that they would not let the election take place. They also said the polls schedule cannot be announced. But the schedule has been announced. Now they are making attempts so that the voters cannot go to the polling centres on the polling day.

“Who are they to snatch voters’ rights? They don’t have the power to do so. They can carry out arson attacks.”

Hasina called upon her party leaders and activists to stay alert to such attempts.

The PM further said: “They now have realised that the election will be held. But they won’t participate. If they don’t want to run, let it be. But the election will be held. We have all the candidates.”

Hasina went to Gopalganj on Thursday afternoon on a two-day personal trip. She returned to Dhaka yesterday.

## Putin decides to run for presidency

FROM PAGE 1

military honour, the hero of Russia gold star, Putin was asked by a lieutenant colonel if he would run again, Russian news agencies said.

The Kremlin chief said that he would. Reuters reported last month that Putin had made the decision to run.

The election will be held over a three-day period from March 15-17, a move that Kremlin critics have argued makes guaranteeing transparency more difficult.

For Putin, the election is a formality: with the support of the

state, state media and almost no mainstream public dissent, he is certain to win. Putin turned 71 on October 7.

Opposition politicians cast the election as a fig leaf of democracy that adorns what they see as the corrupt dictatorship of Putin’s Russia.

Supporters of Putin dismiss that analysis, pointing to independent polling which shows he enjoys approval ratings of above 80 percent. They say that Putin has restored order and some of the clout Russia lost during the chaos of the Soviet collapse.