

Polls to take place in December

Says Mahfuj Alam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Information and Broadcasting Adviser Mahfuj Alam yesterday called upon all to prepare for the next general election, saying that the polls would be held within the December timeline.

"Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus said that the election would be held on time. It is scheduled for the end of this year, in December," he said at a prayer and iftar event organised for the injured in the July uprising.

"A timeline has already been set, and the election will take place within that timeframe. Everyone should start preparing for it."

Mahfuj hoped that the political parties would act responsibly, and the state organs would stop sabotage and cooperate properly so that the election could be held at the right time.

"No matter what organisation you belong to, your responsibility as part of the uprising is to stay united -- against the Awami League, in demanding reforms, and in seeking justice," he added.

Eid joy eludes jobless workers

FROM PAGE 1

Alif Hossain used to earn around Tk 25,000 per month, including overtime, as a senior washing operator until the Beximco factory, where he worked, was shut down last year.

Struggling to support his parents, wife, and son, he remains in Dhaka, paying Tk 4,000 monthly rent in hopes of finding work after Eid. "I've been going through a tough time," said Alif.

However, Sohan Mia, who drew Tk 29,000 per month, returned to his village to Bogura after receiving his arrears and service benefits following the shutdown.

Sohan was able to pay his outstanding rent before leaving Dhaka, but he remains unemployed and deeply stressed about the future of his seven-year old son, wife, and sister.

"How can my family feel the joy of Eid when I don't have a job?" he asked.

Milon Mia from Kurigram, who previously earned Tk 35,000 a month as a senior supervisor, is now struggling with temporary daily-wage work in a subcontracting factory. "Supporting five family members, including parents and siblings, has become nearly impossible this Eid," he said.

A former senior store in-charge at a garment factory in Savar, where he worked for 32 years, could not join any factory after losing his job. "My two children have stopped going to school," he said.

The factory management promised to pay nearly Tk 15 lakh in service benefits and arrears a lot earlier, but the payment is uncertain as the management does not respond to his phone calls anymore, he said.

Requesting not to mention the factory name, he alleged that the government gave it interest-free loans to pay the workers, but the factory management did not disburse the money.

The factories owned by people linked to the ousted Awami League government were particularly hit by the political changeover. Beximco Group shut down 14 textile and garment units after its vice chairman, Salman F

Drying up alarmingly

FROM PAGE 1

The existing water services heavily rely on groundwater, with about 70 percent of the water supply provided by Dhaka WASA being sourced from aquifers, according to WASA documents.

The rest is refined from the Shitalakhiya, Buriganga and Padma by the five water treatment plants dotted around Dhaka.

Dhaka WASA produced about 2,680 million litres of water (mld) per day for 20 million residents of the capital and its suburban areas, according to its annual report of fiscal 2022-23.

As per Dhaka WASA's projection, the demand for water this year would be 3,598 mld per day, meaning more water has to be extracted from the aquifer -- an unsustainable practice, as per the water supply master plan of Dhaka WASA published in 2014.

Despite annual recharge every year, there is an overall declining trend in groundwater level due to over-extraction, according to the master plan.

Subsequently, it advocated shifting the bulk source of water from groundwater to surface water to limit the supply from deep tube wells to 1,260 mld per day.

A large scale extraction from such aquifers may cause a permanent depletion of water level, said Anwar Zahid, a senior groundwater researcher.

In the 1970s, the groundwater level was less than one metre below the surface. Now, it has dropped to 70 metres, according to his research.

In 2022, the groundwater levels in



An aerial photograph taken yesterday shows smoke billowing from a substation supplying power to Heathrow Airport amid efforts to douse the remainder of the flames after a fire broke out in Hayes, west London. Britain's Heathrow airport, Europe's busiest, was shut down early yesterday after a major fire at an electricity substation cut power to the sprawling facility west of London, officials said.

PHOTO: AFP

Zones.

He also said that apart from Beximco, the government financially supported six garment factories facing payment difficulties.

Md Towhidur Rahman, president of the Bangladesh Apparel Workers Federation, highlighted the severe difficulties workers face this Eid.

"Although terminated workers from Beximco received government-assisted service benefits, many remain unemployed," he said.

BACK PAY

Initially, the Industrial Police listed 203 factories at risk of failing to pay workers before this Eid, with additional verification by the BGMEA and BKMEA.

However, the number would be significantly lower after further assessment due to the government's disbursement of nearly Tk 2,325 crore from unpaid cash incentives for garment exporters, Secretary Shafiquzzaman said.

He also said the government had been coordinating with the BGMEA, BKMEA, and other agencies to manage payment issues effectively.

BGMEA administrator Anwar Hossain said 98 member factories were initially identified as vulnerable, but after reassessment, only five to 10 factories may be critically affected. Additionally, to tackle liquidity shortages, BGMEA managed funds from unpaid cash incentives.

"Last week, the government disbursed Tk 2,000 crore, and another Tk 325 crore is underway for small and medium enterprises. However, around seven factories may only pay bonuses before Eid, deferring salary payments until after the holiday," Anwar said.

Employment Secretary AHM Shafiquzzaman acknowledged that the ministry did not have exact data on how many factories were closed since the political changeover.

Regarding the re-employment of the workers, Shafiquzzaman said a committee was working on the issue so that the workers can find jobs in the member factories of the BGMEA and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), and units inside the Export Processing

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