

ROKEYA PADAK
Ruvana, Kalpana, Nabila, Ritu Porna to get it this year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to award four women the Rokeya Padak in recognition of their significant contributions in their respective fields.

Ruvana Rakib has been selected in the category of women's education (research), Kalpana Akter in women's rights (labour rights), Nabila Idris in human rights, and Ritu Porna Chakma in women's awakening (sports), the Cabinet Division confirmed yesterday.

The award giving ceremony will be held at the capital's Osmani Memorial Auditorium tomorrow. The laureates will be honoured at the event, which will be chaired by Sharmin Murshid, the women and children affairs adviser.

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus will attend as the chief guest.

The Rokeya Padak is named after Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, a pioneer of Bengali women's education and a social reformer for ensuring equal rights for women and men.



Election commissioners, led by their chief AMM Nasir Uddin, meet Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at Jamuna yesterday to brief him about preparations for the upcoming election and referendum.

PHOTO: PID



Abu Sufian

DIG faces inquiry over obscene messages to junior colleague

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The home ministry has launched a departmental inquiry against Deputy Inspector General Mohammad Abu Sufian over allegations of sending an obscene video clip and disturbing messages to a junior female colleague through his Facebook Messenger.

Signed by the ministry's senior secretary, a show-cause notice was issued to the DIG on November 24, asking him to submit a written explanation in 10 working days as to why he should not be dismissed from service and handed down a penalty for the alleged misconduct. It added that he could provide his answer within the stipulated time or opt for a personal hearing for self-defence.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday, Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam confirmed that the allegations were currently being investigated by the home ministry.

Following the initiation of the inquiry, Sufian was transferred from his post as commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police to the Police Headquarters.

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'People saw what they did in 1971'

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were respected political figures, and we should not speak ill of those who are no longer alive.

"What we can say is that they stayed in the BNP government until the very last day, showing their full confidence in Begum Khaleda Zia's fight against corruption."

He said the allegations of corruption during the BNP rule were raised, but now, with a more independent judiciary, no charges against them have been proven.

"All those were only propaganda. So, the conclusion remains -- only BNP has been able to pull Bangladesh away from corruption in the past, and only BNP will be able to do it again."

Tarique pointed out that he has been saying since August 5 last year that the days ahead would not be easy.

"More difficult times are awaiting us. Different conspiracies are being hatched from different directions. Only the people can stop these plots, and BNP, together with the people, can resist them."

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir inaugurated

the programme in the morning with BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi in the chair.

FOCUS ON 8 SECTORS

BNP yesterday outlined an eight-sector plan it says it will implement if voted to power, covering family welfare, agriculture, health, education, sports, environment, religious affairs, and employment.

The pledges were highlighted at a six-hour training session where more than 1,000 Chhatra Dal leaders and activists were briefed on how to present the commitments to voters.

Under its Family Card, BNP plans to provide Tk 2,000-2,500 monthly assistance or essential food items to 50 lakh women.

For farmers, the proposed Farmer Card would ensure fair prices for fertiliser, seeds, and pesticides, along with incentives, easy-term loans, and insurance.

BNP's health sector plan promises one lakh new health workers -- 80 percent of them women -- for door-to-door screening of common diseases.

It pledges round-the-clock free medicine through primary health centres, affordable treatment for

major illnesses, expanded maternal care at upazila hospitals, and year-round mosquito-control initiatives.

In education, the party plans to provide tablet computers to teachers, set up multimedia classrooms, introduce a "Learning with Happiness" curriculum at Class Six, and make technical education compulsory.

Arabic, Japanese, and Korean would be offered as third languages, alongside mid-day meals and improved toilet facilities.

The party also pledges compulsory technical education from Class Four and sports villages in all 64 districts.

Its environment plan includes excavating 20,000km of canals and rivers and planting 25 crore trees.

BNP also promises monthly honorariums and festival allowances for imams, khatibs, and muezzins, along with support for other religious institutions.

On employment, the party plans to provide free internet at educational institutions and short-term training for foreign languages and skills development.

Nazrul was captured and then released on November 19, the eve of Eid.

One of the force's most striking operations was the Bharaterkandi Bridge battle. The Pakistanis had dug bunkers on both sides of the vital bridge.

One mid-November day, 12 fighters under Majnu Mridha split into two units and struck from both flanks.

Freedom fighter Nurul Alam Molla, 78, recalled, "Four Pakistani soldiers fell instantly. As the Pakistanis retaliated, a fierce battle ensued for the bridge.

The EC has finalised plans for 42,761 polling centres and 2,44,739 booths. Each centre will serve about 3,000 voters, with one booth for every 600 male or 500 female voters.

With eight hours of polling, each voter will have 48-58 seconds inside the booth.

BALLOT PAPERS

The EC decided that all election materials, including ballot papers, will reach polling stations the day before voting.

Asked whether this could revive

EC all set for polls, referendum in Feb

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the nation with the finest election in its history."

SCHEDULE THIS WEEK

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) Abul Fazal Md Sanaullah told reporters after the meeting at the EC, "We will announce the schedule [for national polls and referendum] this week."

Asked whether BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's illness could delay the announcement, he said, "Political parties have expressed both support and opposition to such views. These are political statements. The EC is proceeding according to its own judgment, in line with its earlier commitment and the government's plan."

EC officials noted that election day is typically before or after a weekend, either Sunday or Thursday.

February 13 and 14 are weekends, and the last three national elections were all held on Sundays.

EXTENDED VOTING HOURS

With two ballots to be cast, time management has become a key concern. Voting will now run from 7:30am to 4:30pm, extending polling by an hour, with half an hour added to morning and afternoon sessions.

Election day will be a public holiday.

Where space allows, additional booths will be set up.

A mock vote on November 29 showed that casting two ballots took a voter 3 minutes 52 seconds on average, about two minutes for those who did not read the ballot, and 7-8 minutes for those who did.

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allegations of overnight ballot-stuffing, Sanaullah said, "The EC is confident that such events will not occur this time. The commission aims to restore public confidence and will remain vigilant to ensure the process is free from disruption."

During the January 7, 2024 polls, ballots were delivered to 93 percent of centres on election morning, except remote areas. Traditionally, ballots were dispatched the previous day, a practice questioned after 2018 when opposition parties alleged ballot box stuffing before dawn.

Ballot printing for expatriate voters begins today, with dispatch starting tomorrow. These overseas ballots will not feature candidate names, only party and independent symbols, allowing voters to select their choice once nominations are finalised.

For the referendum campaign, the EC will support the government's programmes. To make the referendum question easily visible, a large-size sample ballot will be displayed before the voter queue at every polling centre, Sanaullah added.

PRESIDING, RETURNING OFFICERS

The EC has prepared lists of presiding, assistant presiding, and polling officers, drawing from government, semi-government, autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies, and state-owned banks.

"Private bank officials will remain on reserve and engaged only if necessary," Sanaullah said.

On returning officers, he said the meeting did not finalise appointments.

Traditionally, deputy commissioners serve as returning officers. The EC is reviewing these, and a decision will be announced in due course," Sanaullah said.

Asked about demands to bar the Jatiya Party and 14-party alliance partners from contesting, he replied, "The commission's stance is that those permitted by law will be able to take part in the polls. The law specifies who can and cannot contest."

On whether an adviser in the interim government may run, he said, "You will see in due time. It is probably not possible."

The commission has already published the final voter list, completed delimitation of the 300 constituencies, approved registration for two new political parties with two more pending, and launched a mobile app for expatriate voter registration.

Meanwhile, the government has amended the Representation of the People Order, updated the electoral code of conduct, and nearly completed major reshuffles in field administration and the police.

NCP, AB Party

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He added, "However, the legal process regarding the issue of contesting the election under a single symbol will be further reviewed, and more details will be provided after that analysis."

According to a recent amendment to the Representation of the People Order 1972, candidates in an alliance must use their own electoral symbols instead of the coalition leader's symbol.

Nahid also said that the three parties should have come together earlier but could not due to unfortunate circumstances, adding that they tried to reach an understanding with older parties for reforms, "but it was a mistake".

AB Party Chairman Monju said the alliance aims to serve as a platform for political reforms, while Bangladesh Rastro Songskar Andolan President Hasnat Kayum said that Bangladesh "will no longer return to its old ways".

"We came together today [yesterday] to work towards a reformed and new Bangladesh," he said.

Shibpur: A leftist fortress

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Shibpur Pilot High School. After the horror of the night that followed, central Chhatra Union leaders fled Dhaka for Shibpur, with Kazi Jafar, Menon, Rono among them.

Filmmaker Zahir Raihan also took shelter in Shibpur on his way to India. His car was used by the freedom fighters before he crossed the border through Joshor Bazar.

On March 27, on Mannan Bhuiyan's orders and under the leadership of Mannan Khan, students and youth began weapons training on the high school grounds with rifles.

"The training was led by Majnu Mridha and Haris Molla of the Bengal Regiment," Mannan Khan, now 81, told this newspaper. "Towards the end of April, I went to India with 30-35 freedom fighters to collect weapons and for higher training."

In the first week of May, Pakistani forces struck Shibpur, raiding the homes of farmer leaders Rob Khan and Rafiq Dakat in Chakradha. Freedom fighters led by Majnu Mridha ambushed them near Bandhaidhya Bridge.

Freedom fighter Abdul Latif, 78, remembered, "As soon as the military reached the bridge, we attacked together. Some soldiers were injured. Even after we pulled back, they kept firing until morning."

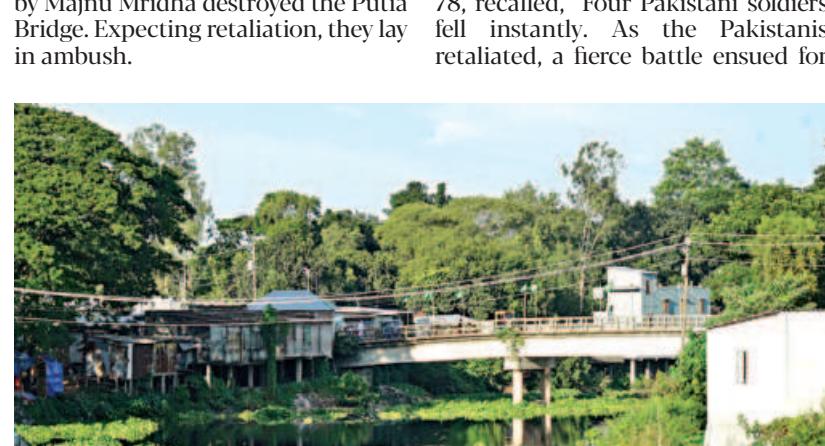
After the clash, the force set up headquarters at Abdul Khalek's house in Bilsharan and opened a training camp at Ashrafpur School. Weapons came in through many channels. After the Demra Panchdona battle, Bangladeshi soldiers retreated, leaving a cache behind.

Freedom fighter Tofazzal Hossain, 75, recalled, "Naval Siraj collected the weapons, which reached us through Majnu Mridha and Mannan Khan." New camps sprang up across Shibpur.

Shibpur's name travelled far. Students from across the country arrived for training while Joshor Bazar and the nearby Arial Khan river became a lifeline for refugees and freedom fighters heading to India, hence it earned the name "Second Agartala".

"We set up a camp at Damodar Doctor's house near Joshor Bazar to ease their journey," said freedom fighter Chan Mia, 72.

In late May, early June, and mid-June, three groups of fighters went to India for training. Leftist leaders from both sides of the border formed a committee in Kolkata. Through close contact with the Communist Party of India, the Shibpur fighters gathered



Putia Bridge

Freedom fighter Nurul Alam Molla said, "Around 11:00am, six trucks approached. From the riverbank, the guerrillas opened fire. Thirty Pakistani soldiers, including a captain, were killed; young freedom fighter Fazlu embraced martyrdom."

The Pakistanis then erected a permanent camp at Putia, aided by some local peace committee members.

In September, the guerrillas executed some local robbers for collaboration. "Later that month, several Pakistani soldiers died in a mine explosion at Ghasirdia," Mannan Khan said.

As Pakistani numbers swelled, the force prepared a two-pronged ambush. One group led by Mannan Khan took position at Shaspur intersection. Another under Majnu Mridha near Chardanda bridge. But information given by Razakars to the Pakistani forces turned the tide.

Pakistanis attacked Majnu's group from behind. A firefight followed. "A Pakistani truck overturned after its driver was shot, killing four soldiers."

"We fired two rounds of blank shots at 9:00pm and again at dawn," said Mannan Khan. "It terrified them through the night."

At month's end, fighters led by Majnu Mridha and Mannan Khan liberated Shibpur.

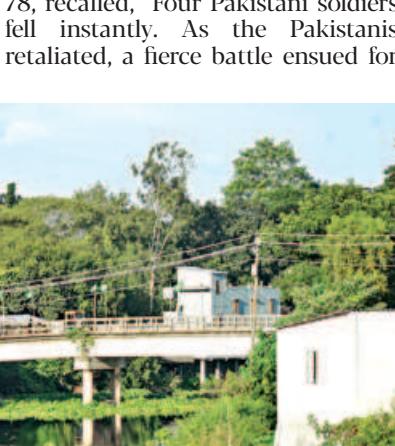
On December 6, they marched to reclaim Narsingdi. The final battle unfolded at the T&T camp on December 11.

After one and a half days of combat, the Pakistanis fled toward Dhaka before dawn on December 13.

Narsingdi was free!

Mannan Bhuiyan died on July 28, 2010 at the age of 67.

When ammunition dwindled, the fighters retreated. Freedom fighter



Mannan Bhuiyan Mannan Khan

half an hour. The Pakistanis finally couldn't keep up the resistance. They fled, leaving six dead. Then we blew up the bridge."

By late November, the Pakistanis began thinning out of Shibpur. Sensing the shift, the guerrillas adopted a psychological tactic.

"We fired two rounds of blank shots at 9:00pm and again at dawn," said Mannan Khan. "It terrified them through the night."