GOVT SCHOOLS

Class one admission age raised to six

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The education ministry has revised its admission policy for government secondary schools, raising the minimum age for admission to class one from five to six years for the 2027 academic year.

The move brings government schools in line with private schools, for which the ministry issued a separate admission policy on November 10.

Under the revised policy, children seeking admission to class one must be at least six years old but younger than seven on January 1, 2027.

The previous policy allowed children aged five and above to apply for admission to class one, although the National Education Policy 2010 stipulates six years as the standard admission age.

After the ministry fixed the minimum admission age at six in the policy for private schools, a discrepancy emerged between government and private institutions. The revised policy removes that difference.



Commuters ride atop a moving train while pedestrians walk dangerously close to it, navigating past vendors occupying the narrow walkway alongside the railway tracks in Dhaka's Tejgaon area yesterday. Such risky practices are common as commuters and pedestrians flout safety regulations to take shortcuts, putting their lives at risk.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

IN FOCUS

Govt plans education criteria for journalists

Says info minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Information Minister Andaleeve Rahman yesterday told parliament that the government has prepared a proposal to amend the Press Council Act 1974, seeking to set minimum educational qualifications for journalists and allow punitive action against those found disseminating false or misleading information.

Replying to a query from independent MP Sultana Jesmen, Andaleeve said the proposed amendments aim to make the Press Council a more powerful, effective and media-friendly institution.

The proposal would empower the council, like the Bar Council, to register journalists and maintain an online database of recognised professionals. It also seeks to set minimum educational qualifications for journalists.

The amendments would introduce penalties such as financial fines for editors, publishers and journalists found violating the code of conduct by publishing false, harassing or unethical reports that go against public interest.

The council would also be empowered to initiate investigations and take action against newspapers, news organisations, editors, publishers and journalists for violating journalistic ethics, harming public interest or spreading rumours, fake news and hate speech.

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Malaysia migration cost capped at Tk 1.54 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has capped migration costs for Malaysia-bound workers at Tk 1.54 lakh, warning private recruiting agencies against excessive charges that previously reached Tk 7-8 lakh.

Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Ariful Haque Chowdhury issued the warning yesterday as state-run Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited (BOESL) began selecting 112 workers for jobs in Malaysia at zero migration cost.

The recruitment is the first phase of a government initiative to send 10,000 Bangladeshis to Malaysia without migration expenses through BOESL.

Speaking to journalists at Probashi Kalyan Bhaban in Dhaka, Ariful warned that agencies found exploiting jobseekers could face legal action, including measures against their licences.



BOESL begins selecting 112 workers for zero-cost recruitment; minister warns agencies against overcharging.

While Malaysian employers will bear all expenses for workers recruited through BOESL, private agencies have suggested they could send workers for Tk 2-2.5 lakh. The minister stressed that the government had not fixed that amount.

He said agencies must provide individual employment details, including the employer, job, contract duration and recruitment arrangements, for government scrutiny to ensure workers have genuine jobs and are not forced to return home after reaching Malaysia.

On medical examinations, Ariful said Bangladesh had objected to some names on a list of 51 medical centres.

Bangladesh had submitted names of medical centres to Malaysian authorities, but additional facilities appeared on the list, prompting objections.

A Malaysian team is reviewing the facilities before finalising the list, which the minister expects by Sunday or Monday.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

REVISED CYBER LAW

Lighter penalties, but little relief for free speech

TASNEEM TAYEB

The government's revised cyber protection law draft proposes lower penalties for some speech offences but retains non-bailable provisions for spreading rumours and online belittling. It also retains the proposal to remove mandatory tribunal approval for blocking content and grants immunity to officials.

The ICT Division published the draft of the Cyber Security (Amendment) Act, 2026 on November 10, seeking comments by November 25.

Under proposed Section 26A, spreading rumours or disinformation would carry up to five years' imprisonment, a Tk 10 lakh fine, or both, down from 10 years and Tk 40 lakh in September's draft.

The proposed definition covers false or distorted information deliberately created, published or circulated to cause public panic, agitation or social unrest.

However, the draft does not specify how intent would be established.

Talking to The Daily Star, Supreme Court lawyer Priya Ahsan Chowdhury said this is a limited improvement, while terms such as "public panic" and "social instability" remain subjective.

She warned of risks to criticism, satire, and public-interest reporting.

The offence would remain cognisable and non-bailable. Belittling or bullying would carry up to three years' imprisonment, a Tk 5 lakh fine, or both, and remain cognisable and non-bailable. Defamation would be non-cognisable and bailable, punishable by up to two years or Tk 5 lakh, or both.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Prothom Alo Executive Editor Sajjad Sharif questioned the limits of "constructive criticism", saying citizens posting opinions, cartoons, or memes lack comparable safeguards.

Human Rights Support Society, in a statement signed by Executive Director Ejazul Islam, sought clearer definitions, bailable offences, and civil remedies for defamation.



The draft CPA was conceptually faulty to begin with, and now this new draft is even constitutionally flawed.

IFTEKHARUZZAMAN
TIB Executive Director

Section 8(4) of the Cyber Protection Act, 2026 requires tribunal approval within three days of blocking content. If approval is refused or not obtained, the content must be restored.

The previous draft proposed removing this requirement. The latest draft instead allows affected parties to seek agency review, with decisions due within 15 days. Authorities must also inform them of the reasons for blocking within three days.

The latest draft also retains the proposal to end public disclosure of blocked content.

HRSS sought judicial approval and an effective appeals process, saying agency review cannot replace judicial oversight.

Section 46A requires tribunal approval before arrests over news, opinions, images or cartoons published or broadcast by registered media.

Under Section 29, these outlets and their operators would receive at least 15 days' written notice and an opportunity to defend themselves before proceedings.

However, a court could still suspend or cancel a company's registration or licence or prohibit its activities, following conviction.

Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said media-only safeguards raise constitutional concerns over equality before the law.

He also criticised proposed immunity from civil or criminal cases for the Cyber Protection Council chairperson, members and authorised officials over good-faith acts.

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Info Commission to resume appeal hearings on Nov 16

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Information Commission will resume hearing appeals on November 16 after remaining largely inactive for over two years following the July uprising, Chief Information Commissioner Professor Nahreen Islam Khan said yesterday.

The commission received 917 complaints during that period, she said while unveiling its 100-day work plan at a press conference at its office in Dhaka.

Nahreen, professor of geography and environment at Jahangirnagar University, was appointed chief information commissioner on October 17.

Information Commissioners SAM Mahfuzur Rahman and Khan Mohammad Abul Hossain were appointed alongside her. They assumed office the following day.

According to the commission's 100-day plan, it aims to open district-level offices next year. It will also organise Right to Information fairs at universities and schools later this month and train journalists and content creators.

Nahreen said initiatives are being taken to monitor government expenditure and the use of foreign donations to ensure transparency.

She also highlighted a manpower shortage, saying only 22 officers and employees are working at the commission against its sanctioned strength of 76.

She said steps will be taken to ensure institutions publish detailed information on their websites to uphold citizens' right to information.

Information Commissioner SAM Mahfuzur Rahman urged journalists facing obstacles in obtaining information for investigative reporting to seek the commission's assistance.

He also called for expanding the Right to Information Act to cover the private sector.

Commissioner Khan Mohammad Abul Hossain also spoke.

Five DU assistant proctors resign

Proctor denies asking them to quit

DU CORRESPONDENT

Five teachers have resigned from their positions as assistant proctors at the University of Dhaka (DU), after allegedly being indirectly asked by the university's proctor to step down.

The teachers, all appointed during the interim government following the July uprising, submitted their resignation letters over the past two days, university sources said.

The teachers are Dr Rafiqul Islam, associate professor of Arabic; Atia Sanjida Shormi, lecturer of Zoology; Muhammad Mahbub Kaisar, associate professor of Sociology; Sharmin Kabir, associate professor at Institute of Education and Research; and Jahangir Alam, assistant professor of Management Information Systems.

A resigning assistant proctor, seeking anonymity, told The Daily Star that Proctor Israfil Ratan had indirectly asked them to resign. "Although he had a good relationship with us, he might have made the request due to pressure from elsewhere," the teacher said.

The teacher suspected that political considerations might have played a role.

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PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

A farmer carries freshly harvested cauliflower to a local market at Chunia Para Eidgah ground in Rajshahi's Durgapur upazila yesterday. While some farmers tend their crops, others harvest the popular winter vegetable and sell it directly to wholesalers at the market.

Govt to import 2,95,000 tonnes of fertiliser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will import 2,95,000 tonnes of fertiliser to prevent shortages during the upcoming Boro season. The proposals were approved at yesterday's meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase.

Of the total, 1,55,000 tonnes of urea fertiliser will be procured from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and KAFCO.

This includes 80,000 tonnes from Saudi Arabia at US $432 per tonne, 45,000 tonnes of bulk granular urea from Fertiglobe-UAE at US $519.17 per tonne and 30,000 tonnes of bagged granular urea from KAFCO in Bangladesh at US $411 per tonne.

The government will also import 1,40,000 tonnes of TSP and DAP fertiliser from Morocco. This includes 60,000 tonnes of TSP at $656 per tonne and 80,000 tonnes of DAP at US $851.67 per tonne.

The committee also approved the purchase of 10,000 tonnes of sugar from Meghna Sugar Refinery Ltd at Tk 104 per kg, costing Tk 104 crore.

Another 10,000 tonnes of red lentils will be purchased from Shabnam Vegetable Oil Industries Ltd at Tk 76.77 per kg, for a total of Tk 76.77 crore. Both sugar and lentils will be supplied in 50kg bags.