

Nisith faces heat in old murder-bid case

Minister's bail plea shot down

OUR BUREAU

Jalpaiguri/Cooch Behar: Nisith Pramanik, the Union minister of state for home affairs and the BJP MP of Cooch Behar, faced a setback on Thursday as a division bench of Calcutta High Court refused to grant him anticipatory bail.



Nisith Pramanik. File picture

Pramanik filed an anticipatory bail petition as he was named in connection with an attempt-to-murder case registered with the BIP MP of Cooch Behar. After being arrested on Thursday as a division bench of Calcutta High Court refused to grant him anticipatory bail.

Pranank had rejected the charges. Pramanik joined the BJP in February 2019 and contested the Lok Sabha polls the same year and won the Cooch Behar seat. He later became a junior Union minister.

Sayak Chakraborty, his lawyer, said the division bench had asked for an affidavit from the state in connection with the case. "The police recovered the bullet. That is why sections of the Arms Act were also included in the case. An arrest warrant is pending in Nisith Pramanik's name and police can execute the warrant till May this year," said Aditi Shankar Chakraborty, the government lawyer.

The division bench comprising Justice Surya Prakash Kesarvani and Justice Raj Chatterjee by a 2-1 majority refused to grant him anticipatory bail. The case will be heard again on January 22," Chakraborty added.

In 2018, ahead of the rural polls, when Pramanik was in Trinamul, differences had cropped up over the selection of candidates. Pramanik had defected the district leadership and fielded several dissidents. Many of them emerged winners. This triggered political violence between Trinamul factions before and after the polls. Several Trinamul leaders had accused Pramanik of orchestrating the violence.

MLA office attacked, glare on TMC feud

SNEHAMOY CHAKRABORTY

Calcutta: The infighting in the Trinamul Congress in Hooghly district reached a new low after the polls. Several Trinamul leaders had accused Pramanik of orchestrating the violence.

While Byapari blamed his rival in the party, Hooghly zilla parishad member Runa Khatun, and her husband Arijit Das for the violence, the couple lodged a police complaint against the MLA for allegedly tarnishing their image.

"Finally, my apprehension has come true. Runa Khatun and her husband Arijit Das attacked my office in Hooghly's Irit. They broke the windows panes and the door of the office. They also threw away party flags and photographs of Didi (Mamata Banerjee)," Byapari wrote on social media. Byapari had on Wednesday gone public apprehending an attack on his life and accused Khatun and her group of conspiring against him. "I was in Calcutta last night. I was being killed if they had spotted me in Balagarh last night," he said.

Rejecting Byapari's allegations, Khatun said, "It is the MLA who started throwing muck at me. He has been making false allegations against me and my husband."

Byapari hasn't filed a police complaint with the attack on his office. The police said "unknown" people had attacked the office.

Hasina strains to feed credibility to polls

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Osman is said to have coined the "Khela hobe (The game is on)" slogan around 2013-14 in the context of a local election, before the chief minister appointed Mamata Banerjee and her party used it to spectacular effect in the run-up to the 2021 Bengal assembly election.

With campaigning set to end almost on Friday, and the threat looming of the BNP scaling up its protests over the next 60 hours, there was considerable interest in Hasina's address at Narayanang. It was the last of the nine rallies the Prime Minister addressed during the 16-day campaign window.

"There were a lot of conspiracies to derail the election. Attempts to derail the poll process are still going on," Hasina said. "Since they (the BNP) cannot win the election, they are trying to deny the people the right to vote," she added, alluding probably to the strike called by the BNP, which is carrying out an extensive poll boycott programme across the country.

The Islamic Action Bangladesh, a fringe political force that pursues an Islamist agenda, too held a news conference on Thursday, which was the first of a series of such events by the BNP. Amid the boycott calls and the allegations from a section of civil society that the election is "a sham" and a "friendly match between the Awami League and its allies", the biggest question ahead of the election relates to the final voter turnout.

In the 2014 elections, which too the BNP boycotted, the turnout was a little over 30 per cent. Five years later, the turnout witnessed a spike to a little over 90 per cent. However, there were allegations of large-scale rigging by the Awami League that prompted the BNP to pull out of the race from most constituencies on polling day.

With the controversies around the last two elections having led to increased interest in the polls this time, the



Sheikh Hasina addresses an election rally on Thursday. Picture courtesy: Awami League

Awami League leadership is trying its best to ensure a turnout of around 40 to 50 per cent, a ruling party source said. "The poll outcome is known: Hasina will win... The only surprise element about the election is the voter turnout," a veteran journalist said.

"The BNP is trying its best to ensure the lowest possible turnout so that it can demand that the election be set aside," he added. "With the controversies around the last two elections having led to increased interest in the polls this time, the

Hasina devoted a substantial part of her Narayanang address to explaining the Awami League's commitment to democracy. She recounted the 32-year-old country's chequered history of political assassinations, three coups and some 19 to 21 failed coups.

She alluded to the country's experience with army dictators Ziaur Rahman (who later gave up his uniform to join the BNP) and H.M. Ershad (the man behind the Jatya Party).

"In the past, there were attempts to subvert the democratic process, with military dictators stripping people of their voting rights and confining the process to the cantonment. It was the Awami League that restored the people's right to vote," Hasina said.

"The democratic tradition is continuing from 2009 to 2023... Now we are in 2024. As this democratic tradition is thriving, the country has progressed to a new stage."

The Prime Minister then reeled off statistics on the country's transition from power

to power-surplus, and from famines to self-sufficiency in food. Her stress on the Awami League's history of commitment towards democratic values made it clear she was addressing the international community, especially the US-led Western bloc that has raised questions about the poll process in Bangladesh.

Somehow in the ruling party said that instructions had been sent out from the highest echelons to party functionaries that there should not be any violation of the poll process on January 7.

"Some Awami League candidates, including ministers, are facing tough fights from dissidents contesting as Independents... The message from the top is that the polls have to be free and fair, even if it results in the loss of the party's official momentum," an Awami League source said.

This promise of free and fair polls is meaningless, a civil society member said. "Whoever wins, he or she will be part of the Awami League family... So, this charade of competitive elections is going to be the same, asking not to be identified."

There are allegations that the ruling party plans to use the government machinery to force voters to go to the booths. This came up during a meeting that chief election commissioner Kazi Habibur Awal held with foreign diplomats based in Dhaka. Awal dismissed the allegations.

The Prime Minister has done extensive campaigning for the polls, covering 163 constituencies out of the 300, either virtually or through public meetings. This is going to be a democratic and free and fair election," said Bipbar Barua, office secretary with the Awami League and special secretary to the Prime Minister.

Hike in Bengal's jute wages after pact

SUBHASISH CHAUDHURI

Calcutta: The Bengal government on Wednesday raised the minimum daily wage of jute labourers at the entry level to Rs 485 from the existing Rs 370 and offered multiple financial benefits by signing a tripartite agreement with the jute industry representatives and labour unions.

The tripartite agreement, to improve the wages and other financial benefits of some three lakh jute workers in Bengal, would come into effect from February 4, 2024, state labour welfare minister Mjoy Ghatak said on Thursday. The pact will be effective for the next three years.

The last such pact was signed in 2019. The revision in the jute industry wages comes ahead of a scheduled visit by Union textile minister Piyush Goyal to Calcutta later this week. Industry sources said the Union minister was expected to take stock of the developments in the jute sector, including concerns such as falling raw jute prices.

Both labour unions and jute mill owners have welcomed the new agreement, but at the same time expressed concern over the promotion of

synthetics by the Centre, the main consumer of jute products. According to the agreement expired in early 2023, labour unions sought from the state government a wage hike and other financial benefits.

According to the pact, a worker would draw a gross monthly wage of Rs 14,066 at the entry level, which is a hike of about Rs 3,562 a month. A senior labourer would draw a gross monthly wage of Rs 17,271. Rs 553 more than his previous wage. Employees hired in 2002 will draw a monthly wage of Rs 15,837, a hike of Rs 627.

Moreover, all existing labourers will get a one-time ad hoc amount of Rs 130 per month, which will be added to the basic wages, apart from DA.

The industry representatives unanimously agreed to hike house rent allowance by 7.5 per cent from 5 per cent.

Among the other major benefits, a new worker will be paid an attendance incentive of Rs 20 daily for at least 12 out of 15 days of uninterrupted attendance. Also, labourers working for 20 or more years will be made "permanent", which stands to benefit around one lakh workers.

In a bid to resolve the PF grievances of labourers, the government and jute mill owners agreed to dissolve the Provident Fund Trustee Boards and PF accounts of all jute mills and brought them under the control of the Centre's EFPO.

Representatives of the Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA), 113 individual jute mill owners not associated with the IJMA, and 29 labour unions, along with INTTUC, signed the pact in Ghatak's presence.

The IJMA welcomed the pact but also pointed out the added expense with the wage hike. "The new wage agreement comes into effect from February 4. We anticipate a 5 per cent rise in wage bills because of it. It will raise operating costs and we have to see how best to manage at a time when there are demand constraints," Raghavendra Gupta, the IJMA chairman, told The Telegraph. "But we are committed to worker welfare."

Labour department officials said jute mill owners agreed to fund the hike in unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled and highly skilled categories.

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GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL: West Bengal Police Recruitment Board: Araksha Bhawan (5th Floor), Cross Road, Block-DI, Sector-II, Salt Lake City, Kolkata-700 091.

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Any person having found the same and in possession thereof is requested to return the same to the undersigned within 14 days from the date of publication of this notice.

The West Bengal Police Recruitment Board has published the details of Final Written Examination for recruitment to the post of Constables/Lady Constables in Kolkata Police - 2022 and uploaded the same in the websites of West Bengal Police Recruitment Board.

आवृत्त सस्कार: ग्रामीण कार्य विभाग, कार्यपालक अभियंता का कार्यालय कमांडिंग बिल्डिंग, ओल्ड नगर कोर्ट परिसर, कोलकाता।

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