

Staff Reporter

The Election Commission (EC) is preparing to fill the reserved women seats in the upazila parishads for the first time since the local government institution was introduced about three decades ago.

The latest 4th Upazila Parishad elections were held early this year since the first polls were held in 1985. The EC failed to hold the election to fill the reserved seats for women because of delays in preparing the voter list and other bureaucratic complexities.

A UZ Parishad comprises one chairman, two vice-chairmen (one of the posts reserved for woman), chairmen of all union parishads and mayors of municipalities under the upazila and women members elected in the quota of seats reserved for them.

The chairmen and vice-chairmen are elected in direct vote, but not the women members in the reserved seats.

The women members of a upazila parishad are elected in an indirect vote by the women members of the reserved seats of Union Parishad/Municipality. The women members at union parishads/municipal councils form the electoral college for choosing the reserved-seat women members for upazila parishads

Each union parishad/municipality has a one-third quota from the total number of women up/municipal councilors. For example, if a upazila has 12 unions under it, its quota for reserved women seats will be four.

The number of women representatives in the reserved seats in upazila parishad depends on the number of unions/municipalities under it.

If the EC decides to fill the reserved women seats in all 487 upazilas of the country, it will have to arrange for indirect election of some 1600 seats, said EC senior assistant secretary Farhad Hossain.

There are some 4500 union parishads and more than 300 municipalities across the country. So, the number of the reserved seats will be some 16,00.

Early this year the EC completed elections to 471 upazilas, but the reserved seats for women remain vacant.

As part of its move to fill the reserved seats the EC has recently requested the Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Ministry to complete delimitation of the Upazilas so it can make the voter list.

The ministry has so far sent demarcation gazettes of the upazilas in 33 districts out of 64 in the country.

The 33 districts are Panchagar, Thakurgaon, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Nilphamari, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Chapainawabganj, Gaibandha, Joypurhat, Bogra, Naogaon, Natore, Sirajganj, Tangail, Kushtia, Chuadanga, Jhenaidah, Faridpur, Magura, Khulna, Bagerhat, Shariatpur, Barguna, Jhalokathi, Pirojpur, Manikganj, Narayanganj, Narsingdi, Habiganj, Comilla (Adarsha Sadar and Comilla Sadar Dakkhin), Khagrachhari, and Rangamati,

The commission is now preparing voter lists in the upazilas under the 33 districts.

“The Local Government Ministry has sent demarcation of the reserved seats of upazila parishads under 33 districts to the Election Commission. We’ve already asked the ministry to sent gazette on demarcation of the reserved seats in the remaining districts soon,” Election Commissioner Abu Hafiz told.

He said the election dates will be decided in the commission's meeting which will be held soon.

The polls are likely to be held in phases.