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Upazila polls next target

After JS polls, AL eyes crucial local govt bodies to have stronger base at grassroots

SHAKHAWAT LITON and HASAN JAHID TUSHER

The ruling Awami League now focuses on the upcoming upazila elections to consolidate its grip on local politics, through winning these key local bodies.

Party insiders say the newly formed government has some shortcomings and it needs full support of the upazila parishads to overcome some of those.

According to them, the government will

strengthen the upazila parishads "in real sense" in light of its electoral pledges. And to implement its political and development agendas at the local levels, the government needs its own people at the helm of the upazila parishads.

The Election Commission plans to hold polls to more than 480 upazilas in phases from next month. It may announce the schedule on Sunday or anytime this week

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Delink with Jamaat

European Parliament urges BNP, says parties that turned to terrorist act should be banned

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The European Parliament has urged the BNP to cut ties with Jamaat and Hefajat and firmly said the political parties associated with "terrorist acts" in Bangladesh should be banned.

"[The European Parliament] urges the BNP to unequivocally distance itself from Jamaat-e-Islami and Hefajat-e-Islam", according to a resolution adopted at its debate chamber in Strasbourg, France, on Thursday.

Pointing finger at Jamaat, the EP stressed "parties which turn to terrorist acts should be banned".

It acknowledged that the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has played an important role in providing redress and closure for victims of and those affected by the Bangladeshi war of independence.

The resolution, which was put forward by six political groups on recent elections in Bangladesh, observed that "The opposition

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Not illegal, but lacks legitimacy

Sir Abed on new govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sir Fazle Hasan Abed yesterday said the country's new government is not illegal, but not legitimate either.

The founding chairman of the Brac said when everybody takes part in the polls then the government is legitimate.

"The major two alliances should arrange an election through dialogue as soon as possible," Abed told journalists after inaugurating a conference organised

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WAR CRIMES WITNESSES

Law under scrutiny for lifelong security

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Against the backdrop of recurring attacks on witnesses and others involved in the war crimes trials, the investigation agency has proposed amending the relevant law to provide them with lifelong security.

On December 30 last year, the investigation agency that has been tasked with witnesses' security asked the home ministry to incorporate two provisions into the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973.

It proposed that witnesses, victims, judges and officials of the tribunals, members of the prosecution and investigation agency and their families be entitled to physical protection for rest of their lives.

To ensure the wellbeing of the witnesses, it proposed that the witnesses, victims and their families be entitled to and eligible for the benefits as provided by the state for freedom fighters.

Shawkat Mostafa, additional secretary of the home ministry, told The Daily Star on Thursday that his ministry had recently forwarded the investigation agency's proposals to the law ministry.

"The law ministry will take necessary measures upon analysing [the proposals] and holding meeting(s) with the stakeholders," he added.

Sanaul Huq, a senior member of the agency, on Thursday told The Daily Star that they had held a meeting with home ministry officials about a week ago where the officials agreed to bring changes to the war crimes act.

Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star yesterday that he was yet to get the proposals. "This [the issue of security of witnesses and others involved in the trial] is very important. After receiving [the proposals] I will talk to those who submitted the proposals and also the officials at the home ministry," he said.

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Three Inqilab journalists sent to jail

Khaleda demands release, asks govt to free all media

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court sent three journalists of Bangla daily Inqilab to jail yesterday, a day after they were arrested at the daily's office in connection with running a "baseless" report.

The three are News Editor Rabiullah Rabi, Deputy Chief Reporter Rafiq Mohammad and Diplomatic Correspondent Ahmed Atique.

Producing the arrestees before the court, police prayed for five-day remand of Ahmed Atique, said court sources.

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MRP FOR 50 LAKH WORKERS

Govt foot-dragging keeps expats waiting

M ABUL KALAM AZAD

If the government continues its snail's pace in issuing machine readable passports, around 50 lakh expatriate workers with regular passports could be in trouble from November 24, 2015, when no country would accept their travel documents.

It took the government almost four years to issue 60 lakh MRPs to people at home and issuing another 50 lakh for expats alongside meeting local demands in less than two years is quite a challenge.

If things stay as they are, it would take more than three years to do the job, way past the deadline set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

So far, the government has made little progress in speeding up the issuance of MRPs and will miss the deadline unless it increases the capacity to deliver MRPs faster,

sources in the home ministry and the passport office said.

According to the government's estimate, there are 30-35 lakh expatriates in Saudi Arabia, 11-12 lakh in United Arab Emirates, and 5-7 lakh in Malaysia.

In addition, 10-15 lakh others stay in Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, South Africa, Mauritius, Lebanon, Libya and Italy. About 90 percent of them have the old passports.

Expressing concern over the slow progress, labour secretaries of Bangladesh missions in 21 countries urged the government to expedite the issuance of MRPs.

The government has been rather slow in responding. It started discussing the matter in 2011 but it was not until last year when it decided to outsource the issuance job for MRPs for expats in Saudi Arabia, UAE and Malaysia.

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Seven houses of Hindus torched

STAR REPORT

The post-electoral violence against the Hindus shows no sign of abating as seven homes of the community in Chittagong were torched and four idols of a temple were desecrated in Netrokona yesterday.

The barbaric arson attack on the Hindu properties at Muhuripara village in Satkania of Chittagong was carried out by miscreants after it came to light that a Hindu day labourer had voted on January 5.

"We saw a cautionary message written on the wall of a local shop that reads if any Hindu member goes for voting, all the houses of the community will be torched," voter Haradhan told our district correspondent.

He added: "I was the lone member in the community who had gone only to see the polling centre. Then the local union parishad member persuaded me to cast my vote and I did."

The attack started by setting fire to the house of Haradhan around 2:50am. It soon spread to six other houses of Haradhan's neighbours before locals doused the flames.

Pinkie Das, a housewife of the village, said, "We were asleep when criminals set Haradhan's house on fire. All of a sudden, my husband's cell phone started ringing."

"After receiving the call, I found no one was responding from the other end. At that time, I also heard a lot of noise coming from outside."

Sensing that something went wrong, she came out of her house and found that her neighbours' homes were burning by the raging blaze.

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The home of a Hindu family at Muhuripara of Satkania in Chittagong yesterday after criminals burnt it down to the ground.

PHOTO: STAR