

Ershad pulls off

FROM PAGE 1

at the Jatiya Press Club, Ershad said their goal is to contest the next parliamentary elections and form a government together.

According to the EC rules, no political party will be able to participate in elections if not registered with the EC.

The 56 other components in the new coalition include 34 Islamist parties of National Islamic Grand Alliance, which was formed at the Jatiya Press Club on April 1 with Abu Naser Wahed Faruk as its chief.

The UNA also took 22 parties of Bangladesh National Alliance. Former BNP leader Nazmul Huda was the chairman of BNA but he was removed on April 5 for "inactiveness". Its current chief is Sikandar Ali Moni.

In terms of number of components, the UNA is the country's largest political alliance. The ruling Awami League-led alliance comprises 14 parties while the BNP-led alliance 20.

The JP is the main opposition in parliament, and three of its lawmakers are members of the cabinet of the AL-led government. JP Chairman Ershad himself is the special adviser to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

In reply to a question, Ershad yesterday said the JP is no longer with the AL-led alliance.

Asked whether the three JP leaders will quit the cabinet, he said the party forum will take the final decision in this regard.

"Nothing is final in politics," Ershad, however, said.

There is speculation in political

arena that Ershad's latest move could be part of a government plan to see JP as the main opposition if the BNP boycotts the 11th general election.

Before the 2001 national election, Ershad formed Islami Oikya Front and took part in the polls. His party contested the 2008 election as a component of the AL-led grand alliance.

In 2014, the JP independently participated in the national polls for 80 seats.

At the press briefing yesterday, Ershad was named the UNA chairman while JP Secretary General Ruhul Amin Hawlader its chief spokesperson.

According to the declaration of the UNA, no component in the alliance will be able to take decisions independently. Instead, a liaison committee will make and implement decisions.

The secretaries general of the components will be the members of the liaison committee while Ershad's political and press secretary Shunil Shuvo Roy will be its coordinator.

At the briefing, Ershad said no anti-liberation force will be allowed to join the alliance. Islamic values, respect for all religions, the spirit of Liberation War and Bangladeshi nationalism are the basic principles of the UNA.

He claimed that two more parties registered with the Election Commission decided to join the UNA. But he refused to disclose their names.

RESPONDING 'IN STYLE'



Surrounded by bodyguards in black suits and dark shades, controversial businessman Moosa Bin Shamsher, wearing a red tie, leaves the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (CID) office in the capital's Kakrail yesterday. The CID summoned him in connection with allegations of money laundering and tax dodging. The CID seized Moosa's Range Rover from Dhanmondi on March 21. The DG of CID Moinul Khan told The Daily Star yesterday that three cases would be filed against Moosa in connection with money laundering, tax dodging and corruption.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

2 'militants' killed in Jhenidah den

FROM PAGE 1

with all his might. The suspect aged around 25 fell on the ground and the bomb exploded, leaving him dead on the spot.

"Moments before the bomb went off, I managed to get out of the room," the OC added.

The identity of the dead militant could not be known immediately.

The two injured policemen are SM Nazmul Haque, additional deputy commissioner of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of the DMP, and Sub-Inspector Mohsin Ali.

Nazmul broke one of his hands during the operation, as he fell on the ground while getting out of the den. The SI sustained a splinter injury in the head, as he couldn't get out of the place when the militant detonated the suicide belt, said a CTTC official seeking anonymity.

The SI was admitted to Kotchandpur Health Complex and later shifted to Jessore Sadar Hospital.

Acting on information from arrested

"Neo JMB" leader Shamim, members of CTTC unit and local police led by Nazmul conducted the raid on the one-storey house with three rooms in Maheshpur upazila's Bazarapur village around 4:00am yesterday.

"As law enforcers launched the operation, house owner Jahurul Islam, a suspected militant, and his son Jasim Uddin came out of the hideout with their hands up," said another CTTC official on condition of anonymity.

"Later, another militant named Tuhin -- aged around 25 -- also came out. Seeing that he [Tuhin] was wearing a suicide belt, police fired several shots at him. The bullets hit him and also the suicide belt, which exploded within moments," added the official.

At a briefing at the DMP Media Centre yesterday afternoon, CTTC Unit Chief Monirul Islam said, "The militant was killed either in the suicide blast or in police firing."

Thinking that there was nobody inside the hideout, several police personnel, including OC Ahmed, entered

the house around 5:30am. With a bomb attached to his body, one of the militant suspects grabbed Ahmed.

Locals said they heard four huge explosions during the raid.

After the incident, police cordoned off the house and called in members of bomb disposal unit of the CTTC.

On May 5, CTTC officials arrested Shamim, regional coordinator of "Neo JMB" from Jhenidah.

On his information that a huge cache of explosives was kept at his Lebutola house, law enforcers raided the place in Jhenidah Sadar on Saturday night and early yesterday.

"Shamim, who was a member of the mainstream JMB, later joined "Neo JMB". He arranged shelter for Nibras Islam and a few other militants involved in the Gulshan Holey Artisan Bakery attack on July 1 last year," said CTTC Unit Chief Monirul.

Briefing reporters in Jhenidah around 9:00pm, Didar Ahmed, deputy inspector general of police (Khulna range), said they had completed the

operation codenamed "Subtle Split-2" at the Bazarapur den in Maheshpur.

Police detained house owner Jahurul, 45, a sweetmeat seller at Maheshpur Bazar, and his son Jasim, 25.

One of the two dead militants was identified as Tuhin from Jhenidah, while the identity of the other was yet to be known, the DIG said.

He further said the operation codenamed "Subtle Split-1" at Lebutola would start again today.

Police has recovered two pistols from the Bazarapur den and diffused three bombs, while six grenades, a pistol and eight bullets were found at the Lebutola hideout, he added.

In the last two months, police busted seven "Neo JMB" hideouts -- two in Chittagong, one in Sylhet, two in Moulvibazar, one in Jhenidah and one in Chapainawabganj. At least 23 people, including suspected militants, women and children, were killed in raids on the hideouts.

According to police, 18 of them were killed in suicide attacks.

Once solvent, now broke

FROM PAGE 16

"Last year, flashfloods damaged most of my crops. As a son of a freedom fighter, I managed to get a loan of Tk 2 lakh from the liberation war affairs ministry and farmed paddy again this year. But I have lost everything this year too and I don't know what to do now," he lamented.

According to the district administration, there are 2,77,188 farmers in Sunamganj. But as per the district agricultural extension department, the number is 3,31,316.

In Sunamganj, 1,50,000 families have been given VGF cards, meaning that nearly half or less than half of the affected farmers are out of VGF programme.

Jahid Uddin of Bordhol, a remote village in Tanguar Haor area of Tahirpur, was an affluent farmer who cultivated paddy on five acres of land in the haor area, but lost everything.

He said the paddy harvested every year met his family's need and all other expenses.

Leaders of haor development-related organisations said the solvent farmers' food stock had exhausted and the list of VGF programme had already been prepared without them. The farmers would have to suffer more as they had no alternative income source.

Kamruzzaman Kamrul, upazila chairman of Tahirpur, said, "The landless farmers are standing in line for OMS rice, and their names are on the VGF list. Some of them are going outside their villages in search of work. But the solvent farmers are in extreme distress and they need more support than the others."

Sheikh Rafiqul Islam, deputy commissioner of Sunamganj, said the government had a plan to support all farmers in distress, and the administration would seek more help if necessary.

Macron makes French history



A supporter of French presidential election candidate for the En Marche! movement Emmanuel Macron celebrates in front of the Pyramid at the Louvre Museum in Paris yesterday, following the announcement of the results of the second round of the French presidential election.

PHOTO: AFP

FROM PAGE 1

in Paris, waving French flags.

"He's a symbol of hope," said Jean-Luc Songtia, 36. "It's like Obama eight years ago. It's youth, it's hope."

Unknown three years ago, Macron is now poised to become one of Europe's most powerful leaders, bringing with him a hugely ambitious agenda of political and economic reform for France and the European Union.

The result will resonate worldwide and particularly in Brussels and Berlin where leaders will breathe a sigh of relief that Le Pen's anti-EU, anti-globalisation programme has been defeated.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman said it was a "victory for a strong and united Europe", while EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said French voters had chosen a "European future."

The euro rose against the dollar in Asian trade and other financial markets are expected to react positively to the news.

After Britain's vote last year to leave the EU and Donald Trump's victory in the US, the French election had been widely watched as a test of how high a tide of right-wing nationalism would rise.

Trump, whose beliefs and temperament are seen as radically different

to Macron's, congratulated the future French president on his "big win" and said he looked forward to working with him.

Le Pen, 48, had portrayed the ballot as a contest between Macron and the "globalists" -- those in favour of open trade, immigration and shared sovereignty -- and her "patriotic" vision of strong borders and national identities.

In a short statement, Le Pen, who is called Madame Frexit by many, claimed a "historic, massive result" and said she had called Macron to wish him "success" in tackling the challenges of the country.

She said her National Front (FN) party needed to undergo a "pro-

found transformation" ahead of parliamentary elections in June, which is set to include a name change, according to one of her aides.

"The prime minister warmly congratulates President-elect Macron on his election success. France is one of our closest allies and we look forward to working with the new president on a wide range of shared priorities," said a Downing Street spokesman.

"Happy that the French chose a European future," European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker wrote on Twitter.

MAJOR OBSTACLES AHEAD Macron will face huge challenges as he attempts to enact his domestic agenda of cutting state spending, easing labour laws, boosting education in deprived areas and extending new protections to the self-employed.

The philosophy and literature lover is inexperienced, has no political party and must try to fashion a working parliamentary majority after legislative elections next month.

His En Marche movement -- "neither of the left, nor right" -- has vowed to field candidates in all 577 constituencies, with half of them women and half of them newcomers to politics.

"In order for us to act, we will need a majority in the National Assembly," the secretary general of En Marche, Richard Ferrand, told the TF1 channel, adding that only "half of the journey" had been completed.

Many analysts are sceptical about Macron's ability to win a majority with En Marche candidates alone, meaning he might have to form a coalition of lawmakers committed to his agenda.

Furthermore, his economic agenda, particularly plans to weaken labour regulations to fight stubbornly high unemployment, are likely to face fierce resistance from trade unions and his leftist opponents.

He also inherits a country which

is still in a state of emergency following a string of Islamist-inspired attacks since 2015 that have killed more than 230 people.

Macron and outgoing Socialist President Francois Hollande will appear side-by-side on the Champs Elysees avenue in Paris on Monday for a ceremony to commemorate the Nazi capitulation on May 8, 1945.

ROLLERCOASTER ELECTION The vote yesterday followed one of the most unpredictable election campaigns in modern history marked by scandal, repeated surprises and a last-minute hacking attack on Macron.

Hundreds of thousands of emails and documents stolen from his campaign were dumped online on Friday and then spread by anti-secrecy group WikiLeaks, leading the candidate to call it an attempt at "democratic destabilisation."

France's election authority said publishing the documents could be a criminal offence, a warning flouted by Macron's opponents and far-right activists online.

The election saw voters eject establishment figures, including one-time favourite Francois Fillon, a rightwing ex-prime minister.

Unpopular Hollande was the first to bow to the rebellious mood in December as he declared he would be the first sitting president not to seek re-election in the French republic, founded in 1958.

In the first round of the presidential election on April 23, Macron topped the vote with 24.01 percent, followed by Le Pen on 21.30 percent, in a crowded field of 11 candidates.

The results revealed Macron was favoured among wealthier, better educated citizens in cities, while Le Pen drew support in the countryside as well as poverty-hit areas in the south and rustbelt northeast.

"France is sending... an incredible message of hope to the world," veteran centrist Francois Bayrou, an ally of Macron, told France 2 television. "Anyone who bet on this has probably made a fortune."

Culprits

FROM PAGE 1

who headed a five member medical board that examined the girls, however, said it would be difficult to find evidence of rape if the incidents took place over a month ago.

He added that formal report of the tests would be prepared in about 25 days.

Rafiqul Islam, assistant commissioner (Gulshan) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said teams of police were conducting drives to catch the alleged rapists and their aides.

Two young men allegedly raped the girls more than a month ago in a hotel while three others assisted them. One of the victims filed a case with Banani Police Station on Saturday night.

Two young men Ahmed Shafat and Nayem Ashraf were accused of raping while Shafat's driver Billal, an unnamed bodyguard, and another young man Sadman Shafiq were accused of assisting Shafat and Nayem.

A state minister in his Facebook page on Saturday night urged people, who knew the alleged perpetrators, to publish their pictures.

The plaintiff told The Daily Star that Billal filmed as she was being raped while the body guard was present there. The perpetrators had been threatening to upload the clip on the internet in the past few weeks.

The victims had been kept at the Victim Support Centre of DMP since Saturday night. Police took them to DMCH in the afternoon and brought them back after they were examined.

The victim, who lodged the case, alleged that Banani police dilly-dallied while filing the case because the accused were from rich families and that there could be an underhand dealing. The allegation was denied by police.

In the case, the plaintiff alleged she and the other girl got acquainted with the two culprits through one of their friends Sadman Shafiq early March.

Invited to a birthday party, she along with her friend went to the hotel around 8:30pm on March 28. "They confined us to two rooms at gunpoint after the rooftop party ended around midnight," she said, adding that one of them raped her twice.