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Govt to buy
soybean oil,
sugar for TCB



Miraz's
quest for
'doosra'



A book of
longing and
belonging



Modi strikes
migration deal
with Australia

US visa curbs on those who will bar fair polls

Blinken announces new policy for Bangladesh to 'promote' free polls

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US will impose visa restrictions on individuals and their immediate family members "if they are responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh".

In a statement yesterday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, "This includes current and former Bangladeshi officials, members of pro-government and opposition political parties, and members of law enforcement, the judiciary, and security services."

The US notified the Bangladesh government of this decision on May 3.

"The holding of free and fair elections is the responsibility of everyone -- voters, political parties, the government, the security forces, civil society, and the media. I am announcing this policy to lend our support to all those seeking to advance democracy in Bangladesh," he said.

Blinken further said actions that undermine the democratic election process include vote rigging, voter intimidation, the use of violence to prevent people from exercising their right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and the use of measures designed to prevent political parties, voters, civil society, or the media from disseminating their views.

The US State Department said these visa restrictions are not directed against the government or the Awami League.

"The United States does not support any particular political party.

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Nothing but AL's pride at stake

Zahangir's mother may mount a serious challenge to Azmat if polling is fair

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA and ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

In a crucial battle of egos for the ruling Awami League, Gazipur city goes to polls to pick its mayor and councillors today, just a few months ahead of the general election.

Although the BNP boycotted the election, people are still paying close attention to the city as they want to see what the election day unfolds.

Everyone running for mayor, except AL nominee Azmat Ullah Khan, has expressed concerns over the voting atmosphere.

After Gazipur, city corporation elections will be held in four other cities. The national election is scheduled to be held either in December this year or January next year.

These local government elections hold major significance for political parties, the Election Commission (EC), and the government.

"With major opposition BNP absent in the election, the race will not be competitive at all," he said.

Although the government and the EC have made promises of a free and fair election, the constituents lack enthusiasm due to what many say is the BNP's absence.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Alau recently said the Gazipur city election was of paramount importance for the EC mostly because the national election was right around the corner.

The international communities are also keeping an eye on the election, he said, adding that Gazipur election should be a model.

But as soon as the aspirants hit their campaign trails on May 9, AL's dominance became all too obvious. The independents and the



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POLLING
8:00am-4:00pm
VOTERS
11.79 lakh
WARDS
57
POLLING CENTRES
480
ASPIRANTS
MAYOR
8
COUNCILLOR
246
COUNCILLOR
(reserved for women)
79

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

COUNCILLOR POST
EC scraps
candidature
of AL-backed
contender

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a rare move just a day before the Gazipur city election, the Election Commission yesterday cancelled the candidature of Azizur Rahman, the ruling Awami League-backed councillor candidate in ward-40.

Addressing a rally at Pubail's Kaler Bazar on Monday, Azizur said no one expects the supporters of 'boat' (electoral symbol of the AL mayor candidate) would be allowed to enter the polling centres.

The EC later received an allegation in this regard.

EC Secretary Md Jahangir Alam said the allegation against Azizur was found to be true and his candidature was cancelled "for the sake of a fair election".

Azizur's statement created an atmosphere of fear. Reports on the statement were published in the media, said Jahangir.

The EC had asked the returning officer to investigate the allegation and submit a report. During the probe, the allegation was found to be true and the candidate

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RACE FOR COUNCILLOR
BNP struggling to
rein in grassroots

DWOHA CHOWDHURY

Ignoring the BNP's decision of boycotting the five city polls, some 25 grassroots party leaders, including six incumbent councillors, have filed nomination forms to run for councillor in the June 21 Sylhet city polls.

Although the councillor elections are not held along party lines, the BNP is taking tough actions against its leaders for participating in the city polls.

The opposition party has already expelled 29 leaders for life for taking part in today's Gazipur city polls.

Sylhet BNP is struggling to refrain some grassroots leaders from participating in the councillor polls despite holding several meetings with them.

The party now hopes that its leaders will withdraw by June 1, the last date for withdrawal of candidature. The last date for filing nomination papers was May 23.

The BNP was mostly worried about whether Sylhet Mayor Ariful Haque Chowdhury, also a member of the party central committee, would run in the election as an independent.

Ariful on May 20 declared that he would not take part in the city polls.

A day before Ariful's announcement, former joint convener of Sylhet city BNP Rezaul Hasan Koyes Ludhi, also an incumbent councillor, said he decided not to participate in the election.

Six incumbent councillors who have filed nomination forms are Farhad Chowdhury Shamim, former joint convener of Sylhet city BNP and also the councillor of ward-6, Syed Tawfiqul Hadi, former organising secretary of Sylhet city BNP and also the councillor of ward-1, Abdur Rakib Tuhin, councillor of ward-21, Nazrul Islam Munim, councillor of ward-14, and ABM Zillur Rahman, councillor of ward-18.

Rokhsana Begum Shahnaz, president of Sylhet city Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal and also a councillor for the reserved seat for women in ward-9, has submitted her nomination paper to vie for councillor in ward-25.

Besides, Sylhet District Mohila Dal President Shaleha Koiri Shepi and Sylhet District Chhatra Dal President Altaf Hussain Sumon have filed their nomination forms to participate in the councillor polls.

Abdul Quiyam Chowdhury, president of Sylhet district BNP,

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Doha promises
Dhaka larger
supply of LNG

Amir holds talks with Hasina;
she says next polls under AL govt

UNB, Doha

Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani has assured Bangladesh of providing all sorts of facilities regarding a larger supply of LNG from his country.

He gave the assurance to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during a meeting with her at the Amiri Diwan in Doha yesterday.

The two leaders discussed different issues of bilateral cooperation on energy, business, investment, manpower and development of Bangladesh.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen briefed the media after the meeting.

The amir said the negotiation on signing of a new contract on larger supply of energy from Qatar to Bangladesh remains pending for a few months.

The contract may be signed anytime soon, said Momen. Amir Sheikh Tamim praised Hasina's leadership.

The premier said she has the only goal to turn Bangladesh into a developed country as dreamt by her father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"We have progressed to some extent. But my work has not finished yet. I want to work more. But I alone can't do it. I seek your assistance. I need more investment... You can come with investment for mutual benefits," the PM told the amir.

Hasina invited Sheikh Tamim to visit Bangladesh this year, if possible.

The amir said he would definitely visit Bangladesh.

About the fear of losing jobs among Bangladeshi workers in Qatar, the amir said 370,000 Bangladeshi are currently staying in the Gulf country and they are



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Around 600 BNP men sued over Dhaka clash

Many unnamed people also made accused

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have sued scores of BNP leaders and activists in three separate cases filed over Tuesday's clash in the capital's Science Lab area.

Officers filed two cases with Dhamondi Police Station under the Explosives Act and the Special Powers Act, accusing 52 named and "many" other unnamed BNP activists, said Ekram Ali Mia, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Twenty-seven people detained during the clash were accused in the cases, he said, adding that a Dhaka court yesterday placed 12 of them on a one-day remand each.

At New Market Police Station, a sub-inspector accused 46 named and around 500 unnamed BNP activists.

BNP Standing Committee Member Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, Publicity Affairs Secretary Shahiduddin Chowdhury Annie, BNP Chairperson's Adviser Abul Khair Bhuiyan and Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal President Sultan Salabuddin Tuku are among the accused in the case.

Police arrested 10 BNP activists yesterday and included their names in the list of accused.

All three complaints mentioned attempted murder of police personnel, arson, vandalism, unlawful gathering, obstruction law enforcers, and explosion of crude bombs.

At least 100 BNP activists and 10 police personnel were injured when police and marching activists clashed in the capital's Science Lab area on Tuesday afternoon.

