Wage hike riddle

Bhattacharya, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). 'It is not demand-pull because industrial growth has been moderate -- clocking 6.6 percent the last fiscal year and 4 percent till September this fiscal year. More importantly there is no sign of large increase in labour demand. Rather a large retrenchment, about 51,000 people, has taken place due to the closures of stateowned enterprises including the Adamjee Jute Mills and textile mills. It will be an exciting situation if in a labour abundant country the economy faces tightness in the labour market. However, the mid-level skill categories may experience some demand-pull.

Even looking at the people seeking jobs abroad, the scenario does not change much since no blip in migration is visible and the number of going people abroad was at the average of around 241,000 last year.

And readymade garment factory owners, the single largest employer in totality, vow that the entry level wage for workers did not change much. Their claim is -- the change in the last one year was about 2-5 percent. Neither do they feel any labour crunch although migration of workers is a bit too frequent. But low wage and general dissatisfaction may give a better answer to such phenomenon than demand for labour.

Now, contrary to the notion that a real increase in wage has led to the rise in inflation, it is also strongly viewed that rise in consumer prices led to wage hike. Wage rates are quite often determined by the prices of waged goods which is basically food

"The wage hike is a cost-pull phenomenon," said Dr Debapriya. Factors like increases in prices of essential items, prices of diesel and utility prices during FY03 and exchange rate adjustment are having their reflections.

The other explanation may be that inflation rate is not capturing the full length of the price increase particularly in case of the lower income group and seasonal variations cannot fully explain this, Dr

And if all that the BB says about demand for labour, wage increase as a result of wage-pushed inflation are true, the chill is where our competi-

nant at 9.94 percent growth in Julyptember of this fiscal year against last fiscal year's 9.4 percent. This wth was achieved through more than 12.6 percent increase in export volume in the face of about 2.7 percent decline in export price index.

So, what do the last two figures of export volume and price signify? May that competitiveness, after all, is not under threat since export volume going up and even at reduced prices. And when prices are cut, there seems to be no reason for wages to rise in real terms.

high, it creates a bad reputation in

the international maritime arena,

as it is often reported as piracy. In

comparison, the damages from

such incidents at Kalna and Haldia

in India, Indonesia, Somalia and

the Malacca Strait between

Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore

are very high. The pirates attack

with sophisticated firearms and

capture or divert the ships there,

killing and injuring captains and

crewmembers, Masum said, add-

ing this type of savage piracy never

According to Article 101 of the

United Nations Convention on the

Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a piracy

is an armed robbery that occurs in a

ship on high sea, outside jurisdic-

tion of any state. Any other vio-

lence or detention or act of depre-

dation directed against a ship or

person or property on its board happened within the jurisdiction

of a state is called an armed rob

International Maritime Bureau

compiles reports on all such crimi-

nal attacks on ships and the name

of Bangladesh is often placed at the

top because of the high frequency

The latest meeting of the com-

of such occurrences, Masum said.

mittee, entrusted with minimising

maritime crimes, was held in the

irst week of this month. The meet-

ing has decided to form a task force

which would sit every three

department doubted any progress

in the near future, as the main

committee itself could meet no

more than three times in the last

couple of years. Even the last meet-

ing was held after repeated remind-

ers by the shipping department,

CD cadre

blamed for

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

killings of two found at DU

The double murder in the capital

on Thursday was committed by a Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD)

cadre and his accomplices failing

to realise Tk 2 lakh in toll, the family

car trader Ismail Hossain and his

friend Yasin -- were found in a car

near Mohin Hall of Dhaka

told newsmen JCD cadre Tuhin

called her husband, a supporter of Awami League, over mobile phone

and demanded Tk 2 lakh. Tuhin

threatened him with dire conse-

quences Thursday morning if he

called Ismail over mobile phone at

h is phone-fax shop at Mohammadia Housing Society in Mohammadpur Thursday evening

and asked him to come to

Dhanmondi area. His friend Yasin,

a BNP supporter, came to the shop

at the time. Then they went out

three people fleeing," said a jour-

nalist, who was passing through Mohsin Hall area Thursday eve-

"I heard gun shots and found

Locals found the two persons in

Police said Ismail was a cadre of

The victims' bodies were

Shanaz filed a case with Ramna

a pool of blood in the car. Both were

a former AL lawmaker, a listed

criminal and an accused in more

handed over to their families after

autopsy at Dhaka Medical College

Police Station. No arrest was made

Hospital morgue yesterday.

shot in the head and shoulder.

than seven cases.

till last night.

together in Ismail's car.

Other sources said someone

did not pay the money, she added.

Ismail's wife Shanaz Begum

The bodies of the victims -- old

of one victim alleged yesterday.

University.

But sources at the shipping

months.

The Kuala Lumpur-based

happened in Bangladeshi waters.

microbus from Chittagong rammed a rickshaw, killing the rickshawpuller and two passengers

five-month span. Besides, many thefts go unreported, according to sources in the department.

But a high official at the shipping department said the situation has taken an alarming turn, as the number of such crimes in Bangladeshi ports has increased to no less than half a dozen a month.

According to the records, around 20 robbers, armed with knives and axes, boarded the ship Bright Star at Mongla Port on June 2 last. The marauders cut off the ship's moor ing ropes and stayed on board for about 30 minutes. But the watch guard on duty did not come forward to confront them, even after repeated calls, sources alleged.

On July 9, seven armed robbers attacked the MV Banga Biraj, held the deck crew hostage and fled with valuables from its storeroom, the ship informed the Piracy Reporting Centre in Kuala Lumpur.

The other ocean liners robbed at Chittagong and Mongla ports, from March to July 10, were; MV Prospects, MV Capean Michels, MV Andhika Aryandhi, MV Commander Express, MV Garrison Savanah, MV Jala Doot, MV Sea Cars and MVThor Falcon.

Contacted, Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain said the government had taken up an initiative for strengthening Bangladesh Coastguard to enable it keep a constant surveillance on the outer anchorage and the channels to stop such incidents.

Under this scheme, Tk 5 crore has already been disbursed to the Coastguard for procuring two patrol vessels. The vessels are now being fabricated and likely to start operating next year, the minister hoped.

Bangladesh Navy has also been asked to increase patrol in the Bay, he added.

CPA Chairman Shahadat Hossain refuted the allegation of armed robbery and pilferage on foreign ships at the port channel, saying sometimes some local engine boats had become victims of such robberies, but no foreign

He claimed such robberies had stopped after introduction of measures like mandatory registration by all engine boats plying the channel and the outer anchorage, painting the registered vessels in orange, and ban on fishing in the area.

Law-enforcement agencies have also been asked to conduct regular raids on coastal villages where the stolen goods are usually sold Shahadat said. The CPA has also decided to erect a high security tower to watch and monitor the channel round the clock, he added.

But, sources said the port authorities had failed to take effec $tive\,measures\,to\,stop\,such\,incidents$ even after several warnings and reminders from International Maritime Organisation (IMO) International Maritime Bureau (IMB), and Department of

Shipping. A very common form of such robbery is attacking a ship with lethal weapons like knives and axes and cutting away mooring ropes and zinc annedes (safety plates). The robbers come equipped with cutting machines for removing the annedes from beneath the ship

There are about 20 to 30 such annedes in a ship. The robbers sell their booty in the local market for hefty cash. The price of a sizable mooring rope is more than Tk one lakh while a small

piece of zinc annede fetches around

"We are always fearful of losing zinc plates, mooring ropes and other valuables from the ship whenever it anchors at Chittagong and Mongla, " said SK Abul Masum, a Bangladeshi Captain

working in a Japanese ship. According to Masum, although the damage from such an incident at Bangladeshi ports is not much

"It goes without saying that such wage inflation is often driven by the wage goods price inflation, which in turn erodes export competitiveness of the economy," the CPD in its forthcoming mid-term review of the

Debapriya said.

tiveness is going.

Already exports are almost stag-

Maritime crimes creep

Two of the dead were identified as Atahar Islam, 45, and rickshawpuller Abdus Sattar, 44. Identity of the other victim could not be known.

kill 8 in Bogra,

Eight people were killed and 20

others injured in separated road accidents in Comilla and Bogra yesterday and on Thursday night.

Of them, five were killed in Bogra and the rest in Comilla.

mishaps on Thursday night left five people dead and 23 others injured

in Sherpur and Nandigram upazilas, according to UNB.

The first accident occurred at

Dhunot Road Crossing at Sherpur

it about 10:30 pm in which five

labourers, three of a family, were run over and killed by a speeding

The dead are Abdur Rashid, 48,

Shahjahan's son Firojul

Natore Highway.

could not be known.

brother Shahjahan, 42,

Haq, 21, and Chandu Sheikh,

Police seized the night coach,

In another mishap on the same

others were injured in a bus-truck

collision at Omarpur on the Bogra-

Identity of the dead and injured

Our Comilla Correspondent

eported that three people were

killed in a road accident at Chaddagram on the Dhaka-

The accident took place at about 8:30 am when a Dhaka-bound

Chittagong Highway yesterday.

but its driver managed to flee.

In Bogra, two separated road

Comilla

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Deaf, dumb

FROM PAGE 12

his hands and legs," said Asma Akhter, a nurse.

"The boy also lacks mental growth and does not respond to any call or sign," she added

The child was later admitted to the DMCH children's ward. The social welfare department

agreed to take care of the child and appointed Saleha Begum Thursday attend to the child in hospital. "The boy can now walk a little and understand some signs,'

Saleha said, adding: "He can now make signs indicating his need to go to the bathroom." "We are hopeful of improving

his physical and mental health," said Social Welfare Officer Firoza

B Chy

FROM PAGE 12 make people aware of its emergence and future actions. The forum will also form units at different city neighbourhoods.

An earlier such move for bringing out procession in Rajshahi supporting Badruddoza's 'third political was thwarted week.

The former president, also the founding secretary general of ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party, had to step-down from the office of the head of state unceremoniously following deterioration of his relationship with the party. Lately he has triggered much sensation by publicly criticising the rise in corruption and criminal activities during Khaleda Zia's two-year plus rule.

On Wednesday last, Chowdhury was seen together with another former president Abdur Rahman Biswas and Gono Forum leader Kamal Hossain at the fourth founding anniversary of Kader Siddiqi's Krishak Sramik Janata League.

Monga over

In Godagari and Tanore upazilas of Rajshahi, Niamatpur and Manda of Naogaon and Nachol of Chapainawabganj, villagers formed 'samity' (association) to give loans to the needy persons during *monga*.

Asahab Ali of Chowkipukur village in Godagari took Tk 4,000 from the village samity. He paid back Tk 2000 in cash and the rest in kind-- seven maunds of paddy.

But Lokman Habib of Bhauspur had a poor harvest from a four-bigha plot he cultivated under sharecropping arrangement and gave his goat to the village samity to pay off his Tk 1000 loan.

Monga did not hit Barind region consisting of Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj and Naogaon districts with the same intensity as in the extreme north of greater Rangpur district but many areas of the usually draught-hit region have less harvest of aman this season than in the previous season owing to dearth of rainfall and irrigation, said growers and agriculturists.

Sources in the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) said aman production was estimated at 2.5 tonnes a hectare this year with more than 70 per cent harvest completed. Official records show 3.6 tonnes of aman output per hectare last year.

"This year aman harvest is good everywhere except in the Barind region, where nearly 5,000 hectares of land could not be cultivated due to draught", said Abdus Salam, DAE, additional director of Rajshahi Region.

Ansar Ali of Udhpur village in Godagari upazila, said he got only 50 maunds of *aman* paddy from his 14 bighas of land this year. "I got 152 maunds from the same land last year.

Road mishaps | 4 US soldiers killed

Westerners, embassies and an apartment block, as well as near the headquarters of the US-led occupation.

The US casualties brought to 210 the number of US combat deaths since Washington -- now under pressure over troop casual-ties as the 2004 presidential election approaches -- announced the end of major combat in Iraq on

In the northern city of Mosul, an army spokesman said three US troops were wounded on Friday in an ambush on their patrol. Witnesses said troops returning fire killed a taxi driver, but the military said it knew of no civilian

A Polish-led division of multinational troops said the Polish troops were attacked on Thursday night with bombs and small arms fire near Mahawil, about 80km south of

"Their injuries are not life-threatening," a spokesman for the division said.

Those attacks on US troops and their allies came as warning sirens wailed from within the US-led occupation headquarters in the ousted Iraqi leader's sprawling palace on the Tigris, where mortars thumped late on Thursday. A spokesman for US-led forces

confirmed only that there had been "impacts" in the area, without elaborating on casualties or dam-The Christmas guerrilla attacks in Baghdad were the most exten-

sive since Saddam's capture on December 13 and followed warnings by US officials that there could be spectacular attacks during the

Information Minister Sheikh

Musharraf's car was damaged but

that the president was unhurt in

the attack, which took place at a

petrol station just 2km from his

The attack was the second since

December 14 when the president's motorcade missed a powerful

explosion on a bridge by a matter of

seconds, also in Rawalpindi, the headquarters of Pakistan's mili-

Musharraf said "terrorists and

extremists" opposed to the global

fight against terror might have

plotted Thursday's attacks against

Prime Minister Zafarullah

Jamali said yesterday that the

suicide attack on the motorcade of

President Pervez Musharraf would

not upset the South Asian summit

told reporters after chairing a

"It will be held on schedule," he

Jamali said that the security

Leaders of the seven nation

system would be "revamped" in

the country following the twin

South Asian Association for

Regional Cooperation (Saarc)

which groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri

Lanka, are due to attend the sum-

Nizami, Amini, Sayeedi and the others, we will gherao you wherever we find you, "warned Mamtazi

from a demonstration he chaired at

Some fifteen hundred anti-

Ahmadiyyas of a conglomerate of Islamist outfits took part in the

demonstration jointly organised by Nabuwat Anodolon and Aamra

Dhakabashi, a socio-cultural organisation, on Shaheed Faruq

Road after Juma prayers yesterday.

"We will paralyse the whole country including the city if the

government does not evict the 'kaffir Ahmadiyyas' from the

Nakhalpara Ahmadiyya mosque by

Joint Secretary General of

January 9," Mamtazi threatened.

Nabuawat Andolon, Nazmul Haq said, "We will drive the

Ahmadiyyas out of their

Nakhalpara mosque and lay siege to other Ahmadiyya mosques

across the country simultaneously

agitation and paralyse the country for an indefinite period demanding

declaration of the Ahmadiyyas as

non-Muslims and freeing the

mosques from their occupation,"

"The government should keep

in mind that the previous Awami League government failed to retain

power as they declared fatwa

cal," said Shamsul Haq, president of Aamra Dhakabashi. "No Muslim

will accept Ahmadiyyas identifying themselves as Muslims and calling

their places of worship mosques

while at the same time carrying out

ing their late leader Mirza Golam

"We will not bother them if the

government declares them a

minority community and not identify them as Muslims," said Abdur Rahim of Khademul Islam

"The AL government failed to return to power as it shut down 250

madrassahs and the ruling alliance

will face the same fate if they do not meet our demands," said

Enayetullah Abbasi, a senioi

Zakir Hossain, Shamsul Haq

Nabuwat Andolon leader.

anti-Islamic activities and identify-

Ahmad as the last prophet.

"Ours demands are not politi-

llegal," he reminded.

"We will begin a countrywide

on January 9."

he added.

Parishad.

suicide bombings.

FROM PAGE 1

scheduled here for January 4-6.

residence.

Al-Qaeda blamed

Guerrillas fired rockets that hit the outside wall of the Iranian embassy, the Turkish embassy and a residential building next to the German embassy. The rockets blew a hole in the front wall of the Turkish mission and shattered

Shortly after nightfall, US forces using aircraft and artillery pounded suspected guerrilla hideouts on the outskirts of Baghdad for the third consecutive night as part of Operation Iron Grip, aimed at flushing guerrillas

Elephants

Khan told The Daily Star.

"We have also recommended to the Ministry of Forest and Environment for setting up electri-fied fencing side by side other barricades to scare off the elephants from crossing into human habitats," the DC said. The Minister for Forest and Environment was also apprised of the alarming situation during his recent visit to Rangamati, Jafor added.

A forest ministry team has already launched a feasibility study at and around the affected villages for taking up protective measures.

Sources said attacks by wild elephants had increased in recent times as growing human population in the hilly areas disturbed their natural habitats in the forests. A section of the marauding ele-phants also came from the neighbouring forests of India in search of food, sources added.

Following the attack some Indian analysts Friday said the

security situation was "dicey" for a

But Vajpayee's spokesman, Ashok Tandon, said the trip

the host country level. They will be reviewing the security scenario and

don't think any head will be

Musharraf also dismissed

speculation that the bombings were aimed at disrupting the South

"I am the target. People around me may be concerned but there is

no threat to citizens and leaders

coming for the summit," Musharraf said in a television

interview after the assassination

Husband tricks

Sitakunda upazila Zannatul Ferdous Selina, 20, acid, describing

burns in her mouth when she drank the acid. She was rushed to

Chittagong Medical College

Salina suffered serious acid

Police arrested Jamir following a

The participants later brought

Khatme Nabuwat Andolon will

out a procession and dispersed at

hold another demonstration at Mirpur-10 intersection on January

Commissioner Ashraful Huda said

police were yet to find leads to the

drowning, but the investigation was

"It's too early to comment about

He did not rule out the suggestion

Golam Rasul, deputy commis-

"The investigation in progress

sioner of DMP's north zone, said one

of their officers was probing into the

death, but did not hint its outcome.

will clear the fog of death," he said.

Some locals linked the children's death to a feud over the under-

construction building that housed

father of drowned Sonia and Jamil

and a relative of the property-owner

Imran, supplied materials to the

Mujibar, who lives on the build-

ing premises as a tenant and has a

share in the property, demanded a

space in the under-construction

construction of the building.

They said Mujibar Rahman

of any psycho's involvement.

cancelling their visit," Tandon told

"The review has to be done at

visit by Vajpayee to Pakistan.

'stands as it is."

AFP in New Delhi.

FROM PAGE 12

it as honey.

Bigots demand bill

case filed by Ahmad.

demonstration

the Sayedabad bridge.

Criminals

FROM PAGE 1

the incident.'

the tank.

building.

the crime.

his two children.

children' on loud speakers.

dumping them in.

Some locals said the cover of the

water tank was closed, suggesting

that someone locked the cover after

victims of possible help.

and relatives of UPDF leaders were

later and the rest still are still in captivity.

The PCJSS favours the CHT peace accord and the UPDF opposes it and the two are engaged in violent rivalry over it.

Missing schoolboy

(PS) Thursday afternoon and searched every possible place for him in vain.

Bhuter Bai at Goran. The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for autopsy. Our DMCH correspondent said there were bruises and other marks

of injuries on Shanta's ears, head and face. The young man killed in the Mohammadpur shoot out was identified as Humayun, 30, and the injured as Nuruzzaman alias

 $criminals\, and\, drug\, peddlers.$ including one for murder in 2000.

Locals rushed the three to the DMCH where doctors declared Humayun dead. Babu and Hossain Ali were admitted there.

involved in the killing.

Kazemi, Khabir Ahmed, Moklesur Rahman, Tafazzul Haq, Ataur Rahman Atiq and Azizur Rahman, among others, addressed the

She bitterly criticised the government for the deteriorating law and order and said, "Instead of a democratic government we are being ruled by a gang of 102 godfa-

the ruling alliance prevented AL leaders from reaching the town to join a party council, she added.

Responding to a recent comment of the prime minister, Hasina said people did not reject the AL rather they had voted for it in the last general elections. But, it was made to appear defeated as per a 'blueprint', she claimed.

pledging to unseat the government shortly through a popular move-

The AL chief alleged the ruling alliance activists are busy looting money and about Tk 24,000 crore has been plundered by them in the first two years of their rule. "Of the sum, the prime minister's family members have robbed Tk 11,000 crore and smuggled it overseas."

future, we will recover all that money and bring the plunderers to book," Hasina said. She said since the government assumed power it did not take up

anv new development project except for the 'goat rearing' one, which has failed miserably. On the country's literacy rate, the opposition leader said, "We had increased literacy rate to 66 percent from 45 percent in our five-

They alleged that Mujibar's running feud with Imran over the space and material payment demands might lead to the death of has been reduced to 60 percent in They suggested the rest of the the first two years of the present children paid the price of noticing government's rule.'

People saw Imran telling the police and others on Thursday that the children dropped to their death in the tank, locals claimed, adding he ties," she said. also launched the search for the 'lost

raised her own remuneration and perks because of price-hike, she didn't raise salaries of teachers or other professionals," she added.

Over 100 shops gutted in Bhola,

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

25 injured

Over 100 shops were gutted in a fire at a bazaar at Borhanuddin upazila headquarters under Bhola district yesterday morning. Fire service sources said the fire

originated from an electric short circuit at a grocery shop at about 9:00am and soon engulfed the adjacent shops On information, fire fighting

units from Bhola and Charfession rushed to the spot and brought the blaze under control at around 11:30am At least 25 people were injured while they were trying to extin-

guish the fire. Of them, two were admitted to upazila health complex and the rest were given first Deputy commissioner and police superintendent of Bhola

visited the bazaar and assured the

3 UPDF men

FROM PAGE 12

abducted allegedly by PCJSS cadres from Gargaichhari village in Khagrachhari in the early hours of

Fourteen of them were released

diary with Khilgaon Police Station

Tipped off by an unidentified

caller over phone yesterday police recovered Shanta's body lying abandoned at a house called

Shutki Babu, 25, and Hossain Ali, 40. Police identified the victims as

Police said Humayun was a partner of Nuruzzaman and Shutki . Babu, both of them Phensidylpeddlers. Humayun stood accused in a number of criminal cases He was arrested in June 9 this year

and was later freed on bail. Identifying himself as a trader Babu said at the DMCH, "We were talking with the owner of a general store at Qaderabad at about 8:05pm when a band of hooligans appeared suddenly and opened fire on us.'

Police said Babu's rival drug peddlers or criminals might be

Hasina

FROM PAGE 12

In Munshiganj, a 'godfather' of

"People are with us," she said

"If we are voted to power in

year term. But regrettably, that rate

"Instead of fulfilling the demands of the teachers, the present government has resorted to torment them with police atroci-

"Although Khaleda Zia has

Jewels of heritage turn rubble

Virtually levelled in yesterday's devastating earthquake, the historic heart of Bam was one of the wonders of Iran's cultural heritage, boasting a 2,000-year-old citadel that was the largest mud-brick structure in the world.

Built entirely of mud bricks,

clay, straw and the trunks of palm trees, the city's old quarter dates back to pre-Islamic times, although most of the monuments were from Iran's modern heyday under the Safavid rulers of the 16th and 17th centuries. Then, the city occupied six square kilometres, was sur-

rounded by a rampart with 38 towers, and had a population of between 9,000 and 13,000. Located in a vast plain between the Barez and Kabudi mountain ranges, Bam prospered because of pilgrims visiting its Zoroastrian fire

Road between the Far East and The five-storey citadel, constructed entirely from unbaked bricks, had undergone frequent repairs over the years but traced its origins back to the Parthian era

around the time of Christ.

temple and as a commercial and trading centre on the famous Silk

The city's grand mosque dates from the 10th century.

An oasis in the arid Dasht-e Kavir region known as the Emerald of the Desert, Bam boasts extensive underground water reserves, which have allowed the planting of rich palm groves and citrus gar-

The city is renowned of its oranges, tangerines and sweet emons, as well as dates.

Bam declined in importance following an Afghan invasion 1722. The city was used as a barracks for the army until 1932 and then completely ábandoned.

Intensive restoration work began in 1953 and had continued until today. The city has been declared a world heritage site by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco).

In the past, Bam was a major draw for the few foreign tourists visiting the Islamic republic.

But in recent years several overseas holiday makers have been kidnapped by the drug-traffickers who have plagued Iran's eastern borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan, turning the country into a major transit point for opium and cannabis destined for Europe and

10,000 feared dead

capital, Tehran, had collapsed in the earthquake, Iranian television said.

Witnesses said houses had been flattened and squares were packed with crying children and people left without a home, huddled in blankets to protect them from the cold. Corpses shrouded in blankets were hauled into vans.

parents, my grandmother and two sisters are under the rubble," said Maryam, 17. One old woman, disconsolate

"I have lost all my family. My

with grief, smeared her face with dirt, only able to utter: "My child, my Families scoured the rubble to salvage household goods.

The government requested international assistance, asking for sniffer dogs to help find the thousands feared trapped in the ruins. "The situation in Bam is worryng. The scale of the damage and death is widespread and the num-

ber of victims is high," Mohammad Ali Karimi, the governor general of Kerman province, told Iran's official Islamic Republic News Agency Adding to the crisis, both of the hospitals in Bam were destroyed in

the quake, forcing people to seek medical attention in the provincial capital of Kerman. Private vehicles have been banned from the roads to make room for emergency traffic. "We have no exact information

about the scale of the damage since all telephone communications with the cities of Bam, Jiroft and Kohnouj had been cut off," Karimi said. Mostafa Mohaghegh, a Red

Crescent official, told CNN that rescuers were busy providing food, shelter and medicine to those injured in the quake. In explaining the severity of the damage to the city, journalist Shirzad Bozorgmehr in Tehran said

Bam is an ancient city -- not

designed to withstand a major earthquake. He said army search

and rescue teams have been mobi-

Many people were believed to be buried under debris, state media said, appealing for people to donate

being done to take them out, Karimi said. Germany swiftly offered Iran help to try to find any survivors trapped under collapsed buildings.

A large part of Bam's ancient

"There are a lot of dead and

njured in Bam city and everything

citadel, one of Iran's best-loved tourist magnets, had been destroyed, Karimi said. The citadel, dating back 2,000 vears, contained fortifications. towers, buildings, stables and a mosque. State television said the

whole complex could have crum-Bam was located on the old Silk Road route between China and Europe used by merchants and travellers for centuries, and con-

tained inns, a gymnasium, a theological school and bazaars **QUAKE STRUCK AT NIGHT**

Witnesses said the road to Bam, a city and environs of some 200,000 people, was choked with ambuances and people desperate to find

family members. The quake struck at about 5:30am (0200 GMT) when most people in the city would probably

nave been asleep. The government mounted a major rescue operation in the dategrowing area where houses are traditionally made of mud-brick. The official IRNA news agency said Red Crescent rescue teams had been dispatched to Kerman prov-

"There was a lot of damage in (Bam)," Karimi said, adding that a

crisis headquarters had been set up. Another quake, measuring 4.0 on the Richter scale, hit the oil roducing town of Masjed Soleyman in the southwestern Khuzestan province, IRNA said

there were no reports of damage.

Ijtema begins today

Devotees from some 65 countries are likely to join the Ijtema being held regularly at the same place since 1966.

mosque, headquarters of the Tablig Jamaat, for the Ijtema Although the Ijtema formally begins today, local and foreign Islamic scholars started delivering

sermons after Juma prayers vester-

Four separate large tents have been put up at the northern corner of the ground to accommodate foreign guests and local leaders of the Tablig Jamaat.

The Ijtema field has been expanded this year through earthfilling on the northern and eastern sides. Slums and unauthorised houses have been evicted from the area with the help of law-enforcing agencies.

Additional police forces have been deployed at Tongi and surrounding areas for regulating traffic. The road from Uttara to College Gate has been made off-limits to non-motorised vehicles from Wednesday. Around 1,500 temporary sanitary latrines have been thrown up at different corners of the field in

addition to 700 permanent ones on the ground and a large sewerage pipe has also been laid on the northern side of the field, said Mohammad Yasin, a member of the Tablig Jamaat. Ablution facilities for the devotees have also been increased this time as around 12 permanent

necessary logistics and has taken adequate measures for maintaining law and order in the area during

is being pumped into them using half a dozen deep tube-wells.

Several thousand loudspeakers

Various social and religious

organisations have set up tempo-

The local administration directed hotel and restaurant owners to refrain from providing unhygienic foods. Tongi municipality and Gazipur district adminstration have jointly set up a con-

office has also kept a number of ambulances ready for the Ijtema participants.

cluding supplication.

"We strongly condemn this dastardly act and feel relaxed that you have escaped the suicide attack, thanks to the Almighty," the prime minister said.

FROM PAGE 12 injured a number of innocent

innocent people and conveyed sympathy to their bereaved fami-

have also been installed on the ground to broadcast the delibera-A large number of devotees tions round the clock. The local from neighbouring India and administration is also providing Pakistan have already arrived in Dhaka and had left Kakrail

rary medical camps for providing emergency treatment to the devo-

the litema.

trol room for monitoring law and order during the Ijtema. The 50-bed Tongi hospital has been kept standby to provide emergency treatment to the devo-The district civil surgeon's

The Biswa Ijtema ends on Monday morning through offering of the Åkheri Munajat or the con-

Khaleda

She condoled the deaths of

ponds were dug on the western and northern ends of the ground. Water

lised to the area.