# Political blame game

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, political secretary to the Awami League chief Saber Hossain Chowdhury and filmmaker Tarek Masud were in the panel in Dhaka. The London panel comprised Baroness Uddin, the first Bangladeshi in the House of Lords and Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam

BBC's Hardtalk presenter Stephen Sackur and presenter Nisha Pillai moderated the debate from Dhaka and London respectively. A group of young people in Dhaka

and a similar group from Diaspora community in London participated in the debate Issues like Bangladesh topping the

corrupt nations in the world for five consecutive years, rising militancy, role of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), fair election, religion-based politics and education and condition of Ahmadiyya community mainly featured in the debate.

Nazmul Huda said the constitution of the country fully guarantees democracy and democratic rights of every citizen. Admitting corruption in the government, he alleged that corruption was also injected by the donor agencies. The present government has

formed the ACC for removing corruption, he mentioned.

Responding to a guery on activities of the ACC, he alleged that its functioning is being disrupted due to frequent gatherings of journalists there.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury alleged that instead of admitting the problem of corruption, the ruling alliance always blames the opposition for it. Besides,

FROM PAGE 1

Commission (EC).

capital and adjacent districts.

gather near the secretariat area.

under the heavy security plan.

**TIGHT SECURITY** 

14-party sit-in

#### the government is not protecting the rights of the minority communities, ainlyAhmadiyyas.

Saber also said his party's claim of irregularities in the previous election is based on specific allegations of vote

**REUTERS**, Kabul

US military said.

blown up, it said.

day's fighting.

tion

spring offensive had begun.

they were attempting to escape.

headquarters buildings,"

Large caches of munitions, includ-

ng bomb-making material, were

seized in the captured buildings and

Despite the rising violence, the

United States is planning to trim its

force of more than 18,000 troops in

Afghanistan by several thousand,

while Nato partners, including Britain,

Canada and the Netherlands are

Some British troops are already

based in Helmand and up to 3,300 will

soon arrive. A spokesman for the force

said he had no information on whether

government, vowed more violence.

Residents of the area, speaking

by phone, said there had been

civilian casualties in the fighting. A

US military spokesman said he had

no reports of civilians being hurt.

No power cut

Mizanur Rahman Minu MP.

FROM PAGE 1

cohorts and seize

retaliate.

CONFLICT HEATS UP

military said in a statement.

sending about 6,000 more.

the US

On the role of Islam in Bangladeshi society, Mahfuz Anam said there is a mixture of Bangalee and Islamic culture in the country

We are proud of Islam as well as Bangalee culture, but to move forward we need democracy, industrialisation and modernisation of our society."

The Daily Star editor criticised the government for lack of accountability and oppressing the opposition parties. Tarek Masud feared that if democ-

racy cannot sustain in Bangladesh, it might be planted from outside. "We do not want to have such democracy". Expressing concern over the rise of

militancy in the country, he stressed addressing it quickly The debate would be broadcast on

BBC world television on April 4 and 9.A radio version of the debate would be broadcast on BBC World Service radio on April 9.

#### Grounded Biman FROM PAGE 16

The passengers including 159 bound for overseas destinations boarded in time the BG-114 flight scheduled to leave Svlhet at 6:45pm. But it could not take off

espite repeated attempts. Engineers who were dispatched to Sylhet the same night repaired the aircraft that took off at 6.45pm yesterday, said an official of Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

#### US, Canadian PDB to incur colossal Revenue soldiers die in FROM PAGE 1 power plant since this coal-rich region

NEWS

out

lovalists.

we narticinate?

coal-fired power in the near future.

for six plants. "There was no offer for

three sites and the remaining three

had six proposals," an official pointed

From August last year, the govern-

ment tried to award small power plant

deals to various BNP lawmakers,

ministers and loyalists through a

selection process'. However, as the

World Bank took a tough stand on this

issue, the blatant attempt to 'reward'

party men stopped and the govern-

ment then embarked on a tender

process. But the process essentially

remains focussed on 'rewarding

private power policy, tender for such

projects can only be floated by the

Power Cell, and not the PDB or the

REB. But this policy has been violated.

developer, requesting anonymity,

says that after getting all confusing

signals from the government, he has

decided not to participate in any of

these bids. "These bids will go to some

pre-selected people. So, why should

who participated in one such tender.

any other bids, for a different reason, "I

prices are going to be at least 100

percent higher than that of any com-

bined cycle power plant. It means that

the PDB and REB will face serious

financial challenges to pay the power

bidders' response is good in some

areas but not in all areas. "Yesterday,

we have received four bids in Sylhei

and two in Jessore," he said. "On April

4, we will open tender for three plants

the polls, meaning he still may not be

warned that the vote probably would

not fill all 500 seats in parliament as

required by law to confirm a new

should go ahead and has styled the

election as a referendum on his rule.

He has promised not to take office it

he wins less than 50 percent of the

Bangkok on Saturday in the biggest

demonstration so far. The opposition

has rejected Thaksin's offer to form a

government coalition if he wins,

has come from the middle-class in

Bangkok but a poll Tuesday indicated

that moving the rallies into the centre

of the capital could cost the demon-

new location is worth the risk even

though police say it will make the

public unhappy because of the traffic

am," said political analyst Siripan

he demonstration in a ma

"The protesters think moving to a

The main support for protesters

nsisting that he must stand down.

Around 100,000 people rallied in

The election commission has

Thaksin has insisted that the polls

in Raishahi. Sikalbaha and Svlhet."

A senior PDB official however said

developers for power.

able to govern.

prime minister.

strators support.

Nogsuan.

Chief of Summit Power Aziz Khan

An executive of a power plant

Sources mentioned that as per the

## Taliban attack

that too at high prices. "We thought these plants are meant for emergency. But now the PDB is being forced to sign deals for 15 years. Officially we don't know why," a senior official said.

The Taliban attacked a military base in Spearheaded by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and pushed by Afghanistan yesterday, killing a US and a Canadian soldier and losing 32 the power ministry, the PDB has of their own men, and declared a recently selected three skid-mount power projects on a 15-year rental The two foreign soldiers and 12 basis. The PDB yesterday opened Taliban were killed in the initial attack bids for two more skid-mount power by a large Taliban force on the base in projects and is set to go for another seven. In addition, the Rural the southern province of Helmand. the Electrification Board (REB) is process-US-led forces, backed by aircraft, ing six such tenders and the Power later attacked the Taliban forces as Cell is evaluating 10 such tenders.

Sources said the idea of wholesale "In continuing fighting in Helmand rental from skid-mount power plants is the brain-child of some high officials of Province, coalition forces killed 20 the PMO. The motive is to raise power insurgents and destroyed two Taliban supply before the next election and giving the deals to businessmen close to the ruling BNP or even some influ-

ential party men. "Even though load shedding is set to hover between 1,000 MW to 1500 MW this summer because the government miserably failed in this sector, the vested interest groups have not given up bids to make fortune at the cost of the state," said a PDB official.

So far, the PDB has selected bids for three skid-mount power plants --Shahjibazar 80 MW, Bogra 40 MW and Thakurgaon 20 MW. It has forwarded its selection to the power ministry and the ministry will soon place it before the cabinet purchase committee for its approva

British troops were involved in yester-The Shahiibazar gas-fired skidmount plant asks for a power price of The Taliban, fighting to oust foreign Tk 3.30 per unit. The PDB will sell the troops and the Western-backed same at Tk 1.9 per unit, incurring a loss of Tk 8 crore a month from this plant alone. The annual loss will be Tk 96 The weather is warming and Taliban crore. The Bogra gas-fired 40 MW plant will charge Tk 3.1 per unit. PDB's attacks on coalition and Afghan forces have begun," Taliban spokesman Mullah Mohammad Hanif said by loss here will be slightly less than Tk 4 crore a month. telephone from an undisclosed loca-

The Thakurgaon plant will be oilfired as there is no gas supply in that region. And this plant will charge an astonishing Tk 12 per unit for 15 years. PDB officials themselves are surprised at the selection of this site for a

# Thousands march

FROM PAGE 16

busiest junctions in Bangkok. supply of gas to Rajshahi through Organisers, taking their protests pipeline for the sixth time yesterday at against Prime Minister Thaksin a rally led by the Rajshahi City Mayor Sȟinawatra downtown after weeks of rallies elsewhere in the city, planned The ruling alliance has fulfilled 17 to use the trucks as a stage to address the crowd later in the eveout of 19 of its pledges made before

> Draped across the side of the mall hung a banner that read: "Thak, your time is up."

Traffic ground to a standstill for kilometres on a major road near the protest, as the city's public transport system added trains to the service to help the many commuters who decided to avoid driving downtown.

Protest leader Chamlong Srimuang said demonstrators would spend at least two nights on the street outside the mall, where police have Manju set out for Machpara at about warned that they could be jailed for disrupting traffic on already clogged 3:30am yesterday to arrest his streets. When they reached

"Police can go ahead and arrest and prosecute us," he said before the rally got under way.

Manju's accomplices opened fire on Justice Minister Chidchai the law enforcers, forcing them to Vanasathidya had threatened to file Police said Manju, son of late criminal defamation charges against Afsar Mondol of Uaynagar village five protest leaders if they went

# FROM PAGE 16

NBR Chairman Khairuzzaman Chowdhury, who attended the meeting, said revenue earning grew is expected to add thousands of MW of 13 percent to Tk 19,807 crore during PDB sources said these three bids the first eight months of the current were selected through floating tenders fiscal year.

He said the amount will be around 60 percent of the total target of Tk 35,652 crore. The NBR chief expects that they will be able to achieve 98 percent of the revenue target by the end of the fiscal.

He said VAT collection grew 22 percent compared to the collection of the same period of last year while income tax collection rose to 18 percent and customs duty only 5 percent.

"The slow growth of customs duty was due to reduction in the duty rates." said the NBR chairman.

## World can learn

FROM PAGE 16 Referring to the activities of 33,000 trained volunteers involved in the disaster preparedness programme in the coastal areas of Bangladesh, he said every country around the world should undertake such programme to face natural calami-

The former US president described Bangladesh as a model of disaster preparedness.

Food and Disaster Management Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf led the Bangladesh delega tion to the conference. Some 2.800 also says he would not participate in representatives from 129 countries participated in the conference. would not like to submit bids as the

German Foreign Minister Dr Frank Walter Stinmeiner also lauded the disaster preparedness programme of Bangladesh, particularly on cyclone.

Sir David King, chief scientific advisor of the United Kingdom (UK), said Bangladesh is playing a role in facing natural disasters far advanced than other countries of the world.

## PM takes

FROM PAGE 1 position during the period of the caretaker government... there will be no chance to rig the poll," she said

The prime minister said people will cast their votes again for those who have been doing politics of development and production to make the country prosperous and self-reliant.

Pointing to the arrest of JMB kingpins, the BNP chairperson said the opposition party was unhappy with the arrest of the top terrorists.

"Because they had an intention to damage the image of the government through unleashing terrorism and anarchism with the help of the terrorists," she alleged.

The rally was also addressed, reference of the funds. among others, by BNP Secretary Council of Ministers (SMC) on April 20 General and LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Post and in Dhaka will review and finalise the Telecommunications

Minister Aminul Hague, Women Affairs Minister Khurshid Jahan Haque, Deputy Minister for Land Ruhul Kuddus Talukder Dulu. State Minister for Cultural Affairs Selima Rahman, Political Secretary to the Prime Minister Harris Chowdhury, State Minister for Power Iqbal Hasan Mahmud and State Minister for Labour and Employment Aman

Dhaka, Islamabad Safta implementation arrangements

DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 30, 2006

5

The meeting will also review the

progress towards launching of trade

iberalisation programme (TLP) under

Safta with effect from July 1, 2006

rom the seven member countries of

the South Asian Association for

Commerce and trade ministers

The highest decision-making body

framework. As per the agreement, the

SMC will meet once a year or more as

and when considered necessary by

districts at Chuadanga to discuss

Sources said the meeting dis-

cussed the latest positions of the

outlawed groups, especially the four

factions of Purba Banglar

Communist Party (BPCP), which are

more active than others. The SPs

briefed the Rab DG on the extremists

drive against Islamist militants in the

Meherpur were asked to intensify

their drive against banned Islamist

Bangladesh (JMB) as police are vet

to submit charge sheets in the cases

filed for the August 17 serial blasts in

The meeting also discussed the

The SPs of Chuadanga and

the signing states.

FROM PAGE 1

the operation.

four districts.

Rab ready

activities in their districts.

among the contracting states

FROM PAGE 16 Council of Ministers (SMC) on April

Islamabad is due to host the meetng of Saarc finance ministers on April 14-15, which will finalise the modalities of different funds, including the South Asia Development Fund (SADF) Saarc Development Fund (SDF) and Saarc Poverty Alleviation Fund.

Regional Cooperation (Saarc) -The 3-day first meeting of Saarc Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Standing Committee, comprised of Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri the foreign secretaries of the member Lanka -- will attend the meeting. For Nepal, the date for launching of the states, will explore ways and prepare recommendations on how to reorgan-TLP has been agreed for August 1. ise and strengthen Saarc and its of Safta, the SMC is responsible for secretariat further. It will also determine the terms and conditions for new administration and implementation of membership and observer status of this agreement and decisions and arrangements made within its legal

the association. The 13th Saarc Summit in Dhaka in November last year approved Afghanistan as its new member and China and Japan as observers. Meantime, the USA and South Korea have also applied for observer status.

The standing committee will also prepare draft plan and programmes for the 2006-2015 decade as the 13th summit proclaimed it the "Saarc Decade for Poverty Alleviation," designating it as the "Decade of Implementation

Ahead of the Saarc Standing Committee meet, Saarc Programming Committee comprising senior officials of Saarc will meet on April 7-9 to workout the agenda for the foreign secretaries level talks.

Meantime, the Saarc financial experts has recommended modalities and operational aspects for the creation of the proposed Saarc Development Fund (SDF), as the umbrella financing institution for all Saarc projects and programmes.

The SDF will have different outlets one of which will be Saarc Poverty Alleviation Fund. There is a proposal to raise \$300 million under it to undertake poverty alleviation and social developoutfit Jama'atul Muiahideen ment projects. India has already committed to contribute \$100 million for the fund. The funds may be mobilised from within and beyond the region.

support to vulnerable and disadvan-

(SADF) will have several windows,

including economic and social wings

Already existing, it has \$6 million in its

coffers with the fund still remain

Officials said the Saarc finance

ministers will finalise the modalities of

contribution of the member states for

the funds and criteria to receive funds.

The South Asia Development Fund

taged segments of the society.

unutilised.

the two districts. A dozen of underground parties The economic window of the are carrying out extremism in the reserve would fund other nonregion and they have around 4,000 infrastructure commercial projects, armed cadres, according to police. while the social window would have In July 1999, a total of 2,492 principal focus on poverty alleviation. It cadres of various outlawed organiwould also fund regional projects on education, health, and human sations surrendered under a genresource development and extend

eral amnesty and deposited around 2,500 firearms to the police. Of the parties, PBCP has four factions --- PBCP (Marxist-Leninist),

PBCP (Janajuddha), PBCP (Communist War) and PBCP (Red Flag). Tapan Malitha is leading the Janajuddha while Rony Biswas is the

supremo of the Communist War faction. Rahul Raj is leading the Red Flag outfit. Sumon, who led the PBČP (M-L), was killed in "crossfire' in Khulna a few months back.

from UN and donor countries. They will Chuadanga police announced also prepare the guidelines, opera-Tk 1 lakh bounty on each of the 20 tional principles as well as terms of hardened outlaws on September 23 last year. Of them, Selim of The first meeting of the Safta Chuadanga was killed in "crossfire' last month while the rest are still evading arrest.

# Land grabbers feast

FROM PAGE 1 retrieve the land from them," he quoted the Environment and Forest Minister Tariqul Islam as telling the meeting. Encroachers have grabbed some

to make the task even harder.

Politicians, businessmen and

local elite dominate the list of grab-

bers, forest officials told The Daily

Star yesterday. "Whenever we move to recover a

land they file case against us, laying

claim to the land. They even submit

false documents to the court and take

out injunctions against the recovery

drive," a meeting source quoted a

officials have made some progress

58,265 acres in Tangail district while

the forest department has recovered

only 2,190 acres. Of 15,366 acres

that had been grabbed in Gazipur

district 2.536 have been recovered

district administration a memoran-

dum addressed to the prime minister

Krishak Sangram Samity (BKSS),

the farmers' procession paraded

different roads of the town, raising

slogans against frequent load shed-

ding of power that is hampering Irri-

boro cultivation, and for smooth

supply of electricity. Participants in the procession

also shouted slogans blaming the government for 'failure' to ensure

adequate supply of power, and against the resident engineer of local

PDB holding him responsible for severe load shedding.

developed cracks due to lack of

water, and the crops are being dam-

aged in this peak season, the men-

Chaired by BKSS Vice President

held a rally to press their demand.

machines.

ioned.

Organised by Bangladesh

seeking redress of their problems.

said the forest department report.

FROM PAGE 1

only in six out of the 24 districts.

According to the report, the forest

Grabbers had taken hold of

senior official as saying.

had lost its control over 36,113 acres of land, and of those, it has recovered only 4,226 acres. In Sylhet district, the grabbers had illegally acquired

In Mymensingh, the department

going to observe its 11:00am-1:00pm sit-in programme as part of outside the security belt. their ongoing movement demand-**OPPOSITION PREPARATION** 

ing reforms in the caretaker government system and Election Sources in the opposition parties said they have instructed their activists to gather at different points including Matsya Bhaban, Kakrail Dainik Bangla crossing, Shapla Chattar, Golap Shah Shrine and peaceful way of protest.

The meeting asked all thana unit leaders to mobilise a massive showdown to give an "appropriate answer" to the government ban on rallies and procession around the secretariat. It directed all opposition leaders to stage peaceful demonstration in front of every police barricade.

The government puts an area of around two-and-a-half kilometre radius of Bangladesh Secretariat government stand today.

Home ministry sources said

Shahbagh intersection areas, before proceeding towards the secretariat. Senior leaders of the opposition will lead the processions participated by people from different parts of the Insiders in the government said ministers, state ministers, deputy ministers and secretaries were asked

office on Bangabandhu Avenue. to go to their workplaces earlier than the usual office time. Besides, visitors' access to the secretariat has also been restricted for the day. Sources said the DMP has orchestrated an all-out security measures, putting up barb-wired fences at all strategic points, so that the opposition demonstrators cannot

Meanwhile, an emergency meeting of the 14-party alliance took place yesterday evening at Jalil's residence. The meeting decided to plan next programmes after observing the

day, discussing last minute preparations for their programme. The meetings also resolved to go through the

responsibilities for the consequences if law enforcers prevent us from practising our democratic rights to protest peacefully," 14-party opposition combine Coordinator and AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said vesterday at a meeting at the party

restriction will be imposed on traffic movement in the area from **RESTRICTED AREAS** anıgnt.

He hoped the opposition will observe its programme peacefully

Leaders of the AL and its left allies held a number of meetings vester-

# "The government will have to bear

the 2001 elections, Minu told the The demands for gas supply, setting up of full-fledged TV studio,

introduction of three inter-city trains on Dhaka-Rajshahi route, restart of silk factories and setting up of test cricket venue were not vet fulfilled.

Outlaw killed FROM PAGE 16 a contingent of police along with

Around 7,000 members of police and armed police battalion have been deployed in and around the secretariat. The Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) has also been kept alert as reserved force.

Law enforcers will take position on the roofs of high-rise buildings around the secretariat. Besides, the police dog squad, fire brigade units and water cannons have been positioned at different strategic points Plainclothesmen will also be on guard to ward off any violence attempted by the agitating opposition activists.

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar told The Daily Star last night that the secretariat is the nerve centre of the government and it is the government's responsibility to ensure its security.

in the Dhanmondi Club playground,

where 25 councillors from each of

the BCL's 88 organisational districts

and the current central leaders will

a council preparation committee

headed by its Vice President

Shahajada said they expect to

Shahajada Mohiuddin, with 14 sub-

complete all preparations for the

council by today, adding the new

central committee might be smaller

in size but have more secretarial

committees working under it.

The BCL meanwhile has formed

get together.

posts.

Non-students vie

The areas and roads that fall under the government ban include Osmani Udyan, Abdul Gani Road and from its west end to Bangabazar and Dovel Chattar via High Court intersection. South GPO Link Road to House Building crossing to Matsya Bhaban roundabout via Topkhana Road and Kadam fountain.

The restriction also includes the areas from Noor Hossain Square to the south gate of Baitul Mukarram Mosque, Topkhana crossing to Kasturi restaurant at Bijoynagar, and the old diabetic association office in Segun Bagicha to Carpet Lane near Shilpakala Academy. All roads, lanes and playgrounds

in these areas are also under the ban

under Kushtia Sadar upazila received bullets during the "shootout" and died instantly.

They said Manju was wanted in seven cases including three for murder.

Chapaygachi area of the village,

#### Guardian sues FROM PAGE 16

After hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate Syed Mohammad Mujibul Haq directed the officer-incharge of Lalbagh Police Station to take the case as first information report (FIR) on an investigation into the matter. The sued JCD college unit

leaders are Selina Sultana Nishita, Arifa Sultana Ruma, Taslima Akhter Rehana. Shawkat Ara Urmi. Afrin Jahan Sima, Sagar, Rosy, Rupali, Mitu, Jeny and Happy. JCD leaders have been conducting shady 'seat dealings' in four residential hostels of the college

with the help of college administration and BNP lawmaker Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, Hasina Momtaz stated in the case.

wing JCD's involvement in distribu-

tion of residential seats in exchange

To foil the students' movement.

the college authorities directed the

principal Jahan-e-Gulshan said the

college -- Hasna Khatun Hostel,

Razia Hostel. Khodeza Khatun

Hostel and Jebunnesa Hostel -- will

The four residential hostels of the

March 13. the statement said.

The JCD leaders accused in the case evicted at least 20 legal students from Khodeza Khatun Hostel on March 6. the case statement said, adding that as the students informed the then principal Prof Feroza Begum of the matter, she termed the students as 'street airls'.

of money, it said.

day, it added.

resume today.

press release added.

activities of the college

and said strict action would be taken

said, "But to ensure better leadercouncils regularly in the future."

BCL Vice President Baloram Podder as the chief election commissioner of the council will oversee the voting by about 2,600 to 2,700 councillors to form the new committee. The ballot will begin at 9:00am and end at 5:00pm on April 4 without any break and the results will be announced the same day. But generally, BCL activists are

in doubt whether the election process will be a fair one, as they fear the present BCL top shots will probably manipulate the votes in favour of the candidates of their choice.

Allegations of bribing are also rife. The last national council on April 3, 2002 was also held amid intense lobbying, muscle flexing and bribery.

One of the central vice presidents and two candidates are reportedly doling out handsome amounts of money and mobile phone cards to the councillors to manipulate the polls. They are also

allegedly arranging bus tickets, and board and lodging in the capital for the BCL district unit leaders.

One candidate even admitted to The Daily Star that he is spending money to woe councillors to support

But, BCL President Liagat Sikder brushed off the allegation of bribing against any one found quilty.

He blamed oppression by the 4party coalition government for the delay in arranging councils and ship I think that it's necessary to hold

Those whom the AL high-ups are reportedly considering as the next central president and general secretary of the BCL include Rafigul Islam Kotowal, Marufa Akther Poppy, Ashraful Azim Rubon, Saifuzzaman Shekhor, Zakir Hossain Maruf and Qamrul Hasan Khokon

Among other aspirants for the top two posts are Khan Mainul Islam Mostak, Delwar Hossain, Miraj Hossain, Jahir Uddin Mahmud Lipton, Mazhar Anam Norsheduzzaman Selim, Salauddin Mahmud Chowdhury, Momin Patwari, Abdul Alim, Hemayet Uddin, Sheikh Reza and Gaffer

Dewan Razib. Insiders said at least one month after the national council, new committees of BCL Dhaka University and Dhaka City North

and South units will be formed

through holding unit councils.

ahead with the latest protest

Thaksin, who was in his northern home town of Chiang Mai for religious services, said he had cancelled his own rally for Friday evening in a downtown park to avoid any clashes with the protesters.

"Their move to Siam Paragon is an attempt by protest leaders to incite violence, but government will still be open for political reforms after the election," he said.

Thaksin called Sunday's election three years early hoping to win another mandate and to end protests that intensified in February over his family's 1.9 billion dollar tax-free stock sale.

Demonstrators accuse him of corruption and abuse of power.

The self-made billionaire, who remains hugely popular in poor rural areas, is expected to win the vote -but opposition parties are boycotting

## Criminal case

FROM PAGE 16

In his complaint, Amirul Hassan Balu of Manikganj, now residing at Sutrapur in the city, said he went to Chief Whip Khondaker Delwar Hossain to show him some documents regarding his house on July 12 last year

But the chief whip was not home at that time. His son Paban told him that General students of the college he could solve the problem for Tk began demonstration on March 8 5,000. against the ruling BNP's student

Balu and his relatives went to Paban with Tk 5,000 on July 15. But Paban and his accomplices at gunpoint forced him to put his signature on two stamps, Balu said.

He further alleged that on March 26 residential students to vacate the he was picked up and taken to dormitories for indefinite period on Paban's house. They demanded he give them within a week Tk 2 lakh that As the students refused to leave he had received in advance from his the dormitories and continued tenants in February this year.

protesting the college authority's The complainant went to Kotwal decision by taking to street, the JCD activists launched an attack on the Police Station to file a case but the demonstrating students and forced police refused to take the case.

them out of the dormitories the next Paban told The Daily Star that the charges against him are false. Meanwhile, a press release Claiming that he possesses the proper signed by Eden College acting documents, he said the case was filed to tarnish his image. college academic activities will

Earlier on February 28 last year, he was held for firing on a fax-phone shop owner in the city's Kotwali area and a case in that connection is still pending with a Dhaka court.

Besides, four other extortion cases reopen on March 3, 4, 5 and 6, the were filed against Paban, his brother Abdul Hamid Dablu in September the Dhaka University Teachers same year.

Association yesterday asked the The investigation officers had Eden College authorities to open submitted final reports in those cases the four dormitories for the students as the charges brought against them before resumption of the academic were proved false.

commercial district marks the first time that the rallies will have had a

serious impact on businesses. Wednesday's protest has led Siam Paragon and two other malls occupying prime retail space to close their doors for two days to avoid

possible clashes with protesters. Retail analysts have forecast lost sales at around 600 million baht (15.4

million dollars).

**EC** Secretariat

FROM PAGE 1 and government offices concerned not to transfer any official engaged in the task for preparing the fresh electoral roll until it is completed sources said

The transfer proved a curse for some district election officers who had filed cases against the EC Secretariat challenging its promotion rules, sources said

District Election Officer Syed Mohammad Musa was transferred from Rajshahi to Comilla, Majibur Rahman from Barisal to Satkhira, Monirul Islam from Satkhira to Barisal, Bibhor Kumar Biswas from Madaripur to Narail, Golam Ali from Narail to Madaripur, Abdul Wadud from Rajbari to Tangail, Alimuzzaman from Tangail to Rajbari, Hasanuzzaman from Narsingdi to Dhaka, and Abul Kashem Molla from Dhaka to

Mezbahuddin Ahmed was brought to the Election Training

upazila election officer of Chapainawabganj, was transferred to Dhaka while Sufia Jahan, assistant election officer of Rajshahi, was

Meanwhile, the task for preparing the controversial electoral roll is yet to complete and uncertainty

The field level task of collecting information about prospective voters set off across the country on January 1 amid huge controversy and was scheduled to end by January 31. The publication of the draft voter list was scheduled for February 28.

The EC, however, failed to meet

Ullah Aman

### Robbers throw FROM PAGE 1

upazila, was killed when he was run over by the same truck.

Police said the robbers stopped the rice-laden truck placing an empty truck on the Dinajpur-Rangpur highway. Some of them took control of the vehicle and started rushing towards Badargani while the others sped away with the empty truck towards Taraganj.

A few minutes later a passenge bus from Dhaka chased the riceladen truck that prompted the robbers to throw the truck driver, his helper Shantosh Kumar and rice trader Haran Chandra from the speeding vehicle.

Seriously injured Shantosh and Haran were rushed to Rangpur Medical College Hospital. The police later recovered the truck with rice at Modhupur and arrested three of the robbers.

## US wants Saarc

FROM PAGE 1 regional association," the official added

Earlier, South Korea had formally asked for becoming an observer of the association.

Ambassador of the Republic of South Korea to Bangladesh Seong Ung handed over the request letter to Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan on March 8.

The foreign ministry official said as the current chair of Saarc, Bangladesh is happy to note that a number of countries have expressed their interest to be associated with the forum, especially following the signing of the Safta (South Asia Free Trade Area) agreement

"Dhaka will advise the Saarc Secretariat to process the requests made by the USA and South Korea," he added.

Official sources said the terms and conditions for new membership and observer status would be finalised at the first meeting of the Saarc Standing Committee, comprised of the foreign secretaries of the member states, on April 10-12 in Dhaka.

The terms and conditions will then be approved at the meet of Saarc Ministers' Council due to take place in Dhaka in July this year. The council comprises the foreign ministers of the member countries.

During the 13th Saarc summit in Saifullah Laskar, the rally was Dhaka in November last year, the Saarc adressed by among others Abul Khair, Ali Nur Khan Bablu, Kamrul leaders granted new membership to Afghanistan and observer status to China and Japan. Haque Liku, Kamruzzaman Rajesh,

13.078 acres of forestland. The fores 1.88.857 acres of forestland across 24 districts, said the forest departdepartment has recovered infinitesimal 288 acres.

ment in a report placed before the parliamentary body. Officials of the ministry and the forest department In Sunamgani, 6, 814 acres of land had gone to the hands of grabsaid the grabbers are so powerful bers while the forest department has that they [forest officials] are having got back only 16 acres and in difficulty in recovering the land. Besides, there are legal complexities Moulvibazar, it has retrieved 31 acres out of 5, 218 acres grabbed land.

According to the forest department report, there has been barely any progress in recovering grabbed land in 18 districts. Of those, 20,901 acres have been grabbed in Cox's Bazar district, 8,892 acres in Dinajpur, 15,859 acres in Chittagong, 2, 794 acres in Panchagarh, 2,065 acres in Naogaon, 2, 380 acres in Jamalpur, 1,703 acres in Sherpur, 92 acres in Netrakona, 700 acres in Laxmipur, 1,200 acres in Noakhali, 300 acres in Rangpur, 200 acres in Nilphamari, 820 acres in Thakurgaon, 522 acres in Rangamati, seven acres in Bandarban, 70 acres in Dhaka, 467 acres in Comilla and 28 acres in Habigani district.

# Farmers clash

Abdul Kader, Abdus Samad, Jalal Uddin, Haroon ur Rashid

The memorandum submitted to the deputy commissioner contains a six-point demand that included smooth supply of electricity, compensation for damage to pump machines and stern action against PDB officials responsible for system loss and plunder of public money.

A UNB report from Chapainawanganj adds: At least five people were injured in a clash between BNP activists and demonstrators at Kansat in Shibgani upazila vesterdav during a hartal protesting frequent load shedding.

Later, they gathered in front of the Hartal supporters blocked PDB office, blocked the road and Chapainawabgani-Sonamasiid road at different points, disrupting road link Speakers at the rally said farmers with Sonamasiid land port during the now cannot irrigate their lands as

hartal from 6:00 am to-3:00 pm. their pump machines remain inoper-The demonstrators also brought ative due to frequent load shedding out a procession and damaged a and low voltage. Such erratic power welcome arch at Gopalpur, set up by supply is also causing damage to the local BNP for the prime minister's Irri-boro lands have dried up and visit to Rajshahi.

The hartal was called by Palli Bidyut Unnayan Sangram Parishad.

Meanwhile, people of Kansat have been agitating for the last six months for adequate power supply in the area. Nine people were killed in police firing on the demonstrators at Kansat on January 23.

Institute in Dhaka from Gazipui while Shah Alam replaced him as the district election officer. Shahidul Islam Pramanik,

transferred to Comilla.

hangs on its fate.

the deadline several times and extended the date for collecting information up to March 30.

Narsingdi