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Garment workers bring out a procession from Mukhtangan in the capital yesterday demanding immediate declaration of their minimum wage. PHOTO: STAR

## RMG workers resume agitation

DU CORRESPONDENT

Different labour organisations launched agitation programmes in the capital and other adjacent areas as the three-month deadline for fixing the minimum wage for garment workers ended Thursday without any agreement on the issue.

Following a severe labour unrest in the garment sector, the government formed a board on May 31 and asked it to recommend a pay structure for workers within three months but the board's meeting on August 29 ended without any decision.

The National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) and Bangladesh Poshak Shilpo Stramik Federation (BPSFF) held separate demonstrations in the city yesterday demanding immediate declaration of a new minimum wage. Otherwise they would go for tougher movements including strike.

## PM trying to influence army, alleges AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League Central Working Committee (ALCWC) has alleged that Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is exercising extra-constitutional powers by giving guidelines to the army about its role in the next election.

"Though the next caretaker government will fix the army's role in the next election, the prime minister has started giving directives to the army about its electoral role," the ALCWC observed at a meeting yesterday.

As the prime minister and BNP chief has no confidence in her party leaders and workers for their massive corruption, she (PM) is using the army in distributing VGF cards among the poor, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said, briefing newsmen when the meeting was adjourned.

The meeting chaired by party chief Sheikh Hasina was held at

AL's Dhanmondi office in the capital.

Hasina, also leader of the opposition in parliament, in her speech blasted the BNP-Jamaat coalition government for appointing another election commissioner on 'political grounds'. This is part of its conspiracy to hold election as per a blueprint, ignoring the people's demand for electoral reforms.

"We have been demanding reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC) to ensure that the next parliamentary election is held in a free, fair and impartial manner. But they (government) have appointed another election commissioner, proving that they do not want a free, fair and neutral election held in the country," Hasina said.

The AL chief said caretaker government system was formulated to ensure a non-party and neutral government, which would create a congenial atmosphere for

a free and fair election. "But Justice KM Hasan (who will head the next caretaker gov't) is not a neutral person since he was international affairs secretary of the BNP. And for this, no free and fair polls can be held under him," Hasina said.

On the issue of government-opposition dialogue on reform proposals, Hasina said while BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan speaks of one-to-one talks (Mannan Bhuiyan-Abdul Jalil), the prime minister opposes the reforms and says the next election will be held as per the constitutional process. This proves that she (PM) neither wants dialogue nor election, she added.

The AL chief said the government even did not reply to the opposition's latest letter on dialogue. Because of dwindling public support for it, the government is dilly-dallying over the reform proposals. Mentioning the PM's

## 29 die in Iran air disaster, 148 survive

AFP, Tehran

Twenty-nine people were killed yesterday when an Iranian airliner caught fire after landing in the northeastern city of Mashhad, Iran's civil aviation chief said, lowering earlier reports of up to 80 dead.

Talking to state television, the Civil Aviation Organization's Nuroollah Rezaei Niaraki said 29 bodies had been recovered from the plane, 43 people were injured and the rest of the 148 people on board survived unhurt.

He added that some of those injured had been treated as outpatients at Mashhad hospitals.

State television had earlier said the death toll on the flight to Mashhad from the southern port city of Bandar Abbas was at least 80.

Niaraki also said that since the flight crew survived the crash, a better understanding on the cause of the accident will surface.

Previously state media reported that the Russian-made Tupolev 154, on an internal flight from the southern port of Bandar Abbas,

## 28 on Cox's Bazar land grabbers' list

Offshore forest depleting fast

MUAZZEM HOSSAIN SHAKIL, Cox's Bazar

The Chittagong Coastal Forest Department has published a list of 28 land grabbers featuring some local union parishad (UP) chairmen and political leaders, and sought the administration's intervention in its drive to recover the public lands and forests.

Paraban, a manmade forest along the offshore areas of Kutubjom, Baro Moheshkhali and Ghatibhanga, is among the forestland grabbed.

Shahidullah, Baro Moheshkhali UP chairman and brother of local ruling party lawmaker Alamgir Mohammad Mahfuz Ullah Farid, Anwar Pasha Chowdhury, president of Moheshkhali upazila AL, and Sharif Badsha, former UP chairman of Baro Moheshkhali, among others, figure in the list that came out on August 17, official sources said.

Despite cases filed by the forest department, land grabbing in the district continues unabated mainly to set up enclosures for shrimp cultivation.

The wholesale land grabbing and destruction of forests have stirred up anger among the local environmentalists, journalists, lawyers and citizens' groups.

Concerned especially over rapid destruction of Paraban, the locals had earlier staged demonstrations for a government move declaring the area an exclusive tourist zone. They had also submitted memorandums to the local administration seeking immediate measures to conserve the forest.

The lands and forests close to the coast are being grabbed at an outrageous pace across five upazilas of the district. Court orders for recovery of the lands could not yet be enforced, as most of the encroachers are influential leaders of the ruling party, said sources at the forest department.

In the last four and a half years, the land grabbing has exceeded all previous records when the forest department officials had to play a mere onlooker's role.

According to forest officials, out of 27,293 acres forestland in the district, 12,000 acres have already fallen into the hands of grabbers during that period.

These 28 people have grabbed a total of 1,435 acres public lands and forests, forest department sources said.

The department has filed 458 cases against 1,843 encroachers in the last four years, they added.

Courts on different occasions have ordered recovery of 912 acres



Remains of fast depleting manmade Paraban forest in Moheshkhali upazila under Chittagong district. Influential people are encroaching on the forests along the coastal areas to make shrimp enclosures. PHOTO: STAR

## Ahab to float 'Insaf', contest next election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh (Ahab) will soon float a new political party styled 'Insaf' and field candidates to contest the next general election from at least 65 constituencies that are widely considered as the ruling alliance strongholds.

Addressing a grand conference at Mukhtangan in the capital, leaders of Ahab yesterday said they have already agreed in principle to target those seats in Rajshahi and Khulna divisions that were won by the four-party alliance in the last election.

"We'll soon announce the launch of Insaf [justice] and put up candidates in 60 to 65 seats. We'll go all-out to win 20 to 25 seats defeating the BNP-Jamaat alliance," said Acting Ameer of Ahab Shaikh Abdus Samad Salafi, speaking as the chief guest.

Blasting the alliance government, he said three crore Ahab followers will strive to exact a terrible revenge on the four-party alliance by making sure they lose

## Appointment of new EC seen as pressure tactics

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The appointment of a new election commissioner is meant to keep pressure on Awami League (AL)-led 14-party opposition coalition while an influential section of the government is currently planning to appoint another commissioner soon to ensure the ruling alliance's control on the Election Commission (EC), sources within the government said.

Meanwhile, opposition leaders and civil society personalities expressed their fears that the latest decision of the government to appoint a new election commissioner, while ignoring the opposition's demand for electoral reforms, will deepen the present political crisis by making it more difficult to hold a free and fair election accepted by all.

Ruling party leaders however believe that the decision will

strengthen the EC for holding a free and fair election.

In a sudden move on Thursday the government decided to appoint Mahmud Hasan Monsur, a former secretary to the defence ministry, as an election commissioner. He is likely to take oath tomorrow.

Hafiz Uddin Khan, former adviser to a caretaker government said, "It is a wrong decision to appoint a new commissioner when there is no alternative to restructuring the EC for holding an acceptable election."

The opposition leaders strongly condemned the appointment of Monsur saying he had been promoted to the post of a secretary under the 'presidential quota' and he is not a neutral person at all. But the ruling party leaders dispute the claim.

"He hasn't taken the oath yet so

## 14-party to lay siege to EC on Sept 6, PMO Sept 12

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 14-party opposition combine will lay siege to the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat on September 6 and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on September 12, seeking to force the ruling alliance to accept the proposals for electoral reforms.

The decision came at a meeting of the combined parties following an Awami League Central Working Committee (ALCWC) meet yesterday.

The ALCWC meeting held at the party's Dhanmondi office was presided over by Leader of the Opposition and AL President Sheikh Hasina. Resolutions adopted at the nine-hour long discussion will be issued today, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told journalists after the meeting that started at 10:00am and continued till 9:30pm with a three-hour break from 1:00pm.

## BSE, BDR trade fire in Satkhira Zakiganj tense

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) fired on two camps of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in sadar and Kalaroa upazilas early yesterday, triggering fresh tension across the border between the two countries.

Situation also was tense along the Zakiganj borders hours into a high level meeting between the two border guards as the BSF opened fires on some Bangladeshi farmers on Thursday while they were returning home from cropland.

Shabana, 12, daughter of Majnu Miah of Aior village, was seriously injured in the firing.

UNB reports: Official and local sources said the BSF men of Tarali camp fired a shot targeting the Kakdaanga BDR camp at about 5:00am yesterday. The BDR jawans replied the unprovoked firing with fourshots.

## Tehran won't give up an iota of its nuclear rights

Says Ahmadinejad reacting to IAEA report

AFP, Tehran

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sent a curt message to global powers yesterday vowing Iran "will not give up one iota" of its nuclear rights, in the first official reaction to a critical International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report.

"The enemies should know Iranians are standing firm on obtaining their rights and will not give up one iota of their nuclear rights," Ahmadinejad told a rally in the northwestern city of Makou, state media reported.

On Thursday, the UN nuclear watchdog concluded in a confidential report that the Islamic republic had not suspended its enrichment-related activities, as demanded by the Security Council's five permanent members along with Germany.

The deputy chief of Iran's nuclear agency insisted the report was "not negative" and vowed to continue uranium enrichment for research purposes while keeping open negotiations with the international community.

"The report is very factual and adds that the Iranian nuclear programme is under the supervision of the IAEA and that there has been no deviation" towards any

## Criminal killed in Bagerhat 'shootout'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A notorious robber of the Sundarbans was killed in an encounter between members of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and his accomplices at West Bisharighata under Morrelganj Police Station of Bagerhat district early yesterday.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of Rab-6 arrested Mujibur Aratdar, 50, also an illegal arms trader, at Tafalbari Bazar under Swarankhola upazila of the district on Thursday night.

On his confessional statement, the Rab men along with Mujibur set out for Bisharighata at about 2:40am to arrest his cohorts and recover illegal firearms.

## 4 bullet-hit as shop owners at Fulbaria clash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-five people were injured, four by bullets, in a clash between two groups of shop owners at Fulbaria near Gulistan in the city yesterday.

Witnesses said the clash ensued when some people of the former committee of Bangabazar Hawkers' Samity Market (BHSM) Owners' Association swooped on the members of the new committee during a meeting at around 11:30am.

The new committee arranged the meeting on the rooftop of the newly constructed Dhaka Trade Centre, which was built demolishing shops of erstwhile Bangabazar Hawkers' Samity Market to allocate 637 shops housed in the four-storey trade centre.

Bullet-hit Ruhul Amin, Azam Hossain, Ratan Chandra Shil and

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**Regional dialogue in Tangail today**  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 14<sup>th</sup> regional dialogue on "National Election 2007: Civil Society Initiative for Accountable Development" will be held in Tangail today.

It is being held as part of a series of programmes jointly organised by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Channel I.

Eminent academics and professionals, development and cultural activists, public representatives and political leaders and civil