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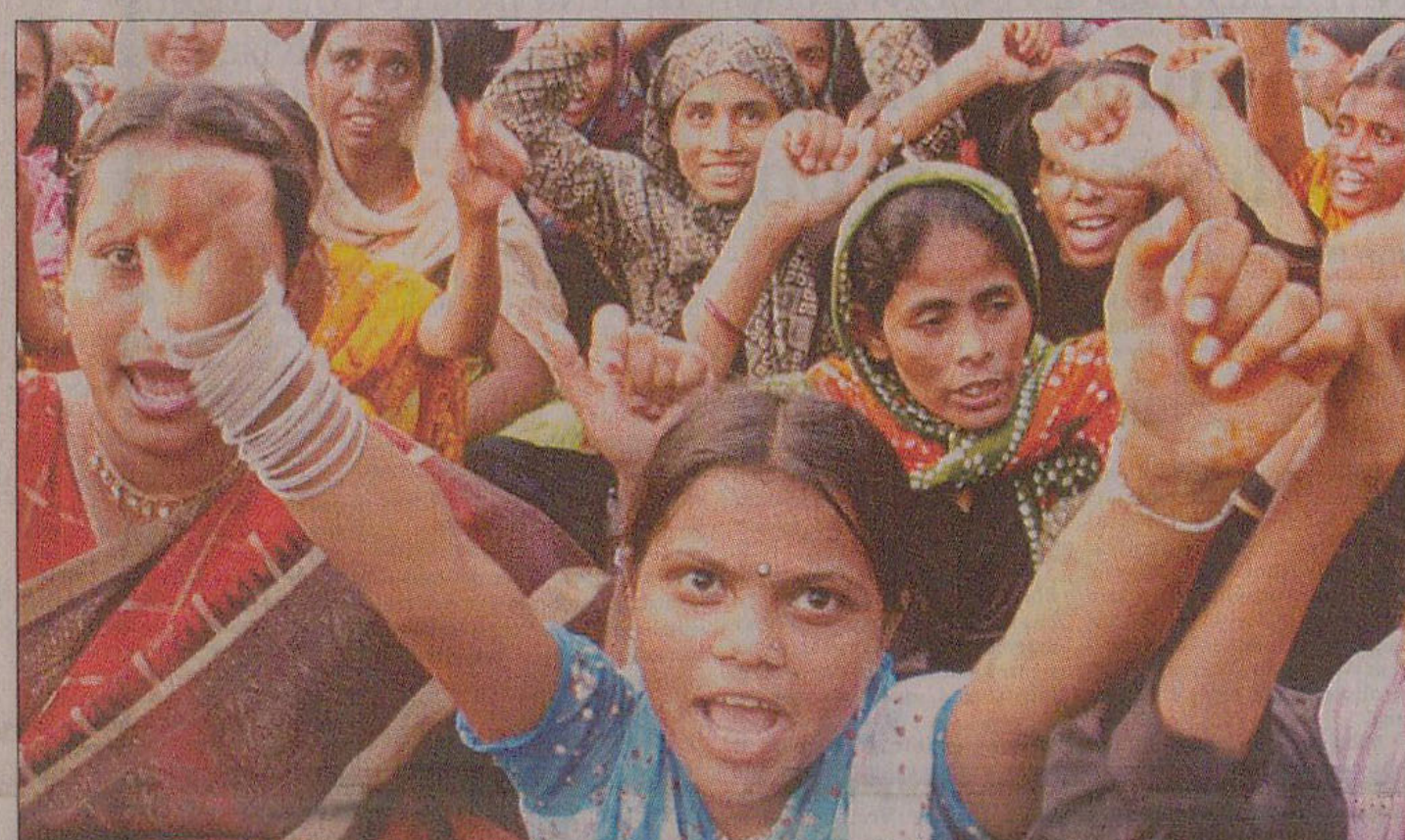
Hope rekindles for a last-minute dialogue

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN
Repeated pressure from the international community seems to have rekindled the hope of a dialogue between the ruling and the opposition parties over the proposed electoral reforms before the hand-over of power to the caretaker government next month.

League (AL) general secretary to resolve the current political dispute at the negotiating table. They are ready to mediate the much-awaited talks if the two parties respond positively, added the sources. Both the opposing sides are under pressure also from the civil society and business community to hold a dialogue on the reform issue. In a latest development, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on Thursday

called for a dialogue between the secretaries-general to break the stand-off. The opposition leaders have questioned the sincerity of the call but in their immediate reaction they did not reject the offer. They said the government must prove their sincerity by developing a ground for the talks. "It rests with the government to create a climate in which a fruitful dialogue can take place," AL

General Secretary Abdul Jalil told The Daily Star yesterday. He added that first they will have to be convinced that the prime minister's offer is genuine as on different occasions she had rejected the reform proposals. BNP Vice-chairman and Agriculture Minister MK Anwar yesterday told the reporters, "The prime minister has done her part and now it all depends on the way



Garment workers demonstrate at Muktangan in the capital yesterday demanding re-fixing of their minimum wage. PHOTO: STAR

EU TEAM IN SATKHIRA Hindus say they feel insecure as polls near

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira
Local Hindu leaders yesterday informed the visiting European Union (EU) representatives that they would not cast vote in the next general election as they are being "threatened not to vote". The EU delegation yesterday visited different areas of Kaliganj upazila to exchange views with local political leaders and people of different religious communities on the coming election. "In the last general election, we voted and only for that our houses were set on fire, lands were grabbed, our daughters and wives were raped, young men were tortured and we were driven out of homes," one of the Hindu leaders told the visitors at Bathuadanga. Local Hindu leaders including Gobindo Sarker, Parimal Kumar Mondol and Sabita Rani Sarker said as the election is nearing, they are feeling insecure due to 'repeated threats' as in the previous pre-election period. The EU team also met local

RMG WAGE STRUCTURE Owners question role of neutral board member, call for fresh negotiations

MONJUR MAHMUD
Garment factory owners formally lodged a complaint against the neutral member of the Minimum Wage Board, requesting the board to re-assess and re-discuss the proposed pay structure for garment workers. Annisul Huq, a director of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), who is also the representative of garment factory owners on the board, on Thursday sent a letter to the chairman of the board, alleging that the proposed wage structure had been submitted at the eleventh hour literally leaving no time for evaluating it properly. Questioning the role of the neutral member, Huq explained that he had unilaterally submitted

a proposal before any proposal came from the employers' side at the 25th meeting of the board on September 12. "We formally complained that as a neutral member of the board, he failed to maintain his neutrality," Huq said on Thursday at a joint news briefing by two leading associations representing the owners in the readymade garment sector. The complaint came after leading trade bodies blamed the government and the wage board for announcing an incomplete, one-sided and inconsistent pay structure giving priority to political gains ahead of the next election without considering its impact on the industry. Only three members of the board -- Chairman Anwarul Haque, neutral member Iqbal

RMG workers agitate for Tk 3,000 minimum wage
STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Different organisations representing garment workers continued their agitation yesterday rejecting the proposed pay structure and urging the workers to be prepared for a tougher movement against severe exploitation by garment factory owners. Calling for immediately implementing the tripartite agreement signed on June 12 among the government, workers and the owners, leaders of the workers' organisations said the wages should be fixed at a level where the workers can survive in the face of price hikes of essentials and rising living cost. Speaking at a conference of Textile Garments Worker's Federation in Dhaka as chief guest, Haider Akbar Khan Rano, a politburo member of Bangladesh Workers Party, expressed solidarity with the workers and urged them to strengthen their unity. He also urged the owners to clear all outstanding wages and Eid bonuses before October 16.

5,000 flee homes as BDR, BSF trade fire on Zakiganj borders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet
About 5,000 panicked inhabitants of at least five villages left their homesteads as gunfight erupted between the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) on Zakiganj borders on Thursday night. The exchange of several hundred gunshots continued until 10:20pm after the BSF started firing at the Uttarkul BDR outpost, sources said. Panic-stricken villagers of Uttarkul, Kazipara, Dighali, Salehpur and Binnapara left their village homes within an hour following the gunfight. Hundreds of people were seen on the Sylhet-Zakiganj road at 11:00pm on Thursday night

Probe targeted attacks, identify cops: AI Atrocity during opposition programmes condemned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Condemning the recent 'targeted' police attacks on Awami League (AL) leaders, human rights watchdog Amnesty International asked the government to set up an independent, impartial and competent body to investigate the atrocities. Police attacked opposition activists during their recent programmes of laying sieges to the Election Commission Secretariat and Prime Minister's Office demanding electoral reforms. "Such investigation should identify the police personnel who carried out the attacks and the senior police officials under whose command the attacks took place," said a press release of the interna-

tional human rights watchdog. "Its remit should also be expanded to identify any other government connivance in these attacks," added the release published on Amnesty International's official website on Thursday. Those identified as perpetrators of the attacks should be brought to justice without delay in proceedings which meet international standards of fairness, the release said. Amnesty International is also urging the Government of Bangladesh to ensure the safety and security of opposition leaders and activists taking part in rallies and demonstrations. Under no circumstances should the government allow law enforcement

Saber goes to UK for better treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Doctors of Gleneagles Hospital in Singapore diagnosed damage to the third cranial nerve of Saber Hossain Chowdhury due to trauma in the head, causing him to have double vision, according to family sources. He left for London yesterday for further neuro-ophthalmological tests and appropriate treatment. The injury to the nerve caused his right eye to be misaligned relative to the left eye, the sources said. Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina's Political Secretary Saber, who is also an organising secretary of Awami League, was critically injured when police beat him even after knowing his identity during the 14-party demonstrations against the Election Commission on September 6. The family sources said Saber

VIGOROUS AGITATION AFTER SEPT 18 Opposition plans indefinite hartal, siege and sit-ins

HASAN JAHID TUSHER
The Awami League (AL) led 14-party opposition combine will go for even tougher programmes including an indefinite hartal, siege and sit-ins in the capital and elsewhere in the country if the alliance government does not accept the proposals for electoral reforms by September 18. Leader of the Opposition Sheikh

Hasina will announce the final round of agitation at a grand rally in the capital on September 18. Senior leaders of the opposition parties will draw up a list of the programmes tomorrow night. Hasina will approve the draft on the morning of the rally day with a view to keeping the programmes secret till the formal announcement, sources close to the AL president said.



Artist Nitun Kundu passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Nitun Kundu, a freedom fighter and the famed sculptor of Shabash Bangladesh on the Rajshahi University campus--a tribute to the martyrs of the country's Liberation War, is no more. The great artist died at the BIRDEM Cardiac Hospital in the capital yesterday morning after struggling for life for over two days. He was 71. Nitun Kundu was admitted to hospital on Tuesday after he fell unconscious following a heart attack and had been on the ventilator since Wednesday. Hearing the death news, hundreds of people including

State honour this morning

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
The government yesterday announced that deceased sculptor and freedom fighter Nitun Kundu will be given state honour at his funeral at the Central Shaheed Minar today at 11:00am. The body of Nitun Kundu will be first taken to the Institute of Fine Arts on the Dhaka University campus at 10:00am today.



A famous poster by Nitun Kundu during the Liberation War.

Kailashtila oil goes untapped just for small extra cost

SHARIER KHAN
For a few lakh taka additional expenditure, the Sylhet Gas Field Authority (SGFL) is refraining from tapping oil resources of the large Kailashtila gas field, where it is now drilling the fifth gas well. Sources said the SGFL with its own fund has deployed national exploration company Bapex to drill the fifth well up to a depth of 3,200 metres in this old gas field. Available data says that the field has promising oil sand at a depth of 3,300 metres. Though some experts have suggested drilling of this well to tap the oil sand, due to bureaucratic tangles and lack of understanding

at the top level of Petrobangla --the mother company of SGFL-- the well is all set to be finished without reaching the oil sand. The expenditure for this additional drilling would be only a few lakh taka and it would take just a couple of days to reach the target. In 1988, when the SGFL drilled the third and fourth development wells in this field with funds from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), it had hit the oil sand. It also ran test flow of the oil and produced 522 barrels of oil per day for a few days till the ADB stopped the venture, asking the authorities to focus on gas production only. "There is clear evidence that

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