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Least bothered if anyone accepts talks offer or not Says PM

UNB, Borolekha, Moulvibazar

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said she offered discussion not being afraid of her political opponents' 'so-called' programmes but to bring them onto the 'right track' from the path of violence.

Khaleda, also chairperson of the ruling BNP, again said the next general election would be held in 2007 under a caretaker government according to the constitution.

"We are least bothered whether anyone accepts it or not," she told a big public meeting at PC High School ground.

The government side is not frightened of their (opposition) 'so-called' words and programmes, she said, adding, "We want to bring them onto the right path from the path of violence through discussion. BNP is a big party. It has come

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## Gloomy prospect for reform dialogue

### AL, BNP talk tough, bicker over 'formal proposal'

STAR REPORT

The ruling BNP and main opposition Awami League (AL) are at loggerheads over a 'formal proposal' for a secretary level dialogue between the rival parties on the political impasse centring reforms in the system of caretaker government and the Election Commission (EC).

Questioning the sincerity of the prime minister's offer of a dialogue, top opposition leaders yesterday said they will consider it only after getting a written proposal while the ruling party leaders declined to send any written offer.

Under the circumstances,

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday apparently returned to her previous hard line and declared that the next election will be held on time, no matter whether the main opposition coalition contests in it or not.

"We have made an offer of a dialogue, but it does not mean that we are afraid of your (opposition's) so-called movement," Khaleda said.

On the other hand, senior opposition leaders are also sticking to their stance saying they will continue street agitation even if there is a dialogue.

"We will not leave the street even if there is a dialogue. The

movement on the street will continue until the demand for reforms is realised," 14-party Coordinator also Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jalil said yesterday at a preparatory meeting ahead of tomorrow's opposition grand rally in the capital.

"Where is the formal proposal?" Jalil asked when replying a question about the prime minister's fresh call for a dialogue between the secretary general of BNP and the general secretary of AL.

Although the ruling BNP leaders stressed the urgency of settling the impasse at the discussion table, they said they will not take any

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### Hasina terms dialogue offer doublespeak

HASAN JAHID TUSHER, from Jamalpur

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday said Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's offer of a dialogue with the opposition is nothing but doublespeak.

The prime minister, who is also the chairperson of the ruling BNP, is actually neither interested in reforming the system of caretaker government and the Election Commission nor is she interested in holding the offered general secretary level dialogue, Hasina said.

"In the face of opposition coalition's preparation for an all out movement to force the government to accept the proposed electoral reforms, she [PM] hinted at the possibility of a general secretary level meeting," Hasina, who is also

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### Verdict of graft case against Ershad today

COURT CORRESPONDENT

After deferring twice earlier, a Dhaka court is likely to deliver today the verdict on the graft case against the deposed president and Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad.

The case was filed against Ershad in connection with the allotment of plots to 49 people including the then five ministers, while he was in power.

Judge SM Mojibur Rahman of the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court will deliver the verdict at 11:00am, court sources said.

The delivery of the verdict was adjourned on its earlier scheduled dates of August 27, as the court could not complete preparing the judgement and on September 11, due to a power cut in the court.

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### Jamaat not happy with proposed AL-BNP talk

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, a key partner in the BNP-led ruling coalition, yesterday expressed dissatisfaction over the proposed one-to-one dialogue between BNP and Awami League.

"The proposal is ambiguous still and we are waiting for a formal announcement," Jamaat's Assistant Secretary General Mohammad Kamaruzzaman told The Daily Star.

Since Awami League is now in movement to realise their demand for an 'acceptable' chief adviser to the caretaker government, all the allies of the coalition government must be included in the dialogue, he added.

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### BDR fires at villagers over smuggled bidi

#### 2 killed, 20 hurt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Two people were shot dead and at least 20 others injured as Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) men fired on the villagers protesting against the paramilitary force who were reportedly helping out smugglers at bordering Noakot in Sunamganj district yesterday.

The BDR officials, however, claimed that a patrol was forced to open fire as both the smugglers and the locals swooped on them to snatch a consignment of bootlegged bidi from across the border.

Six BDR men were also injured

in the clash with the villagers, they said adding that the villagers snatched two firearms and ammunition from the border guards.

Later, a rifle along with 100 rounds of bullet was recovered from a nearby graveyard.

The slain were identified as Giasuddin, 70, of village Noyajaliarpur under Companyganj upazila and Bayes Miah, 50, of Bahadurpur.

Locals alleged that the border guards shot at the villagers when they refused to hand over the smuggled bidis to them.

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### EU team gathers polls information from Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The visiting European Union (EU) Election Observation Exploratory Mission yesterday held two separate meetings with officials of the district election office and local journalists.

The EU team, which arrived in Khulna Friday evening, also met with local political leaders and members of parliament.

Headed by Andrew Bruce, the delegation members discussed with the election officials voter list updating, process of appointing polling agents, arrangements for maintaining law and order on the election day and role of officials conducting the election.

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### Glitch in ship alert system at sea ports

RAFIQ HASAN

Following a collapse of the international standard ship security alert system in Chittagong and Mongla ports since Thursday afternoon, the ships failing to get information about the security situation there are maintaining high alert although the two ports now maintain the highest security level one.

Ships generally contact the security alert system for getting information about the security level in a port while there are three internationally recognised security levels in the ports, sources said.

In case of security level one, the ships call in a port without any

hesitation, if it is two the ships take extra security measures before calling in the port while in case of security level three or lower, ships remain at the outer anchorage or leave the port area.

The security alert system established under International Ship and Port facility Security (ISPS) code collapsed at 4:00pm on that day due to disconnection of three mobile phone sets used for the purpose, sources said.

The alert system was established to provide quick information to the ships and the installation of ISPS code was made compulsory on July 1, 2004.

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### Pope 'sorry' for offence to Islam

REUTERS, Vatican City

Pope Benedict told Muslims on Saturday he was sorry they had found his speech on Islam offensive, expressing his respect for their faith and hoping they would understand the "true sense" of his words.

"The Holy Father is very sorry that some passages of his speech may have sounded offensive to the sensibilities of Muslim believers," Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone said in a statement.

The statement came amid mounting anger from Muslims

over remarks by the Pope in a speech in his native Germany on Tuesday that was seen as critical of their faith. Calls for him to apologise had spread beyond the Islamic world.

In that speech, the Pope appeared to endorse a Christian view, contested by most Muslims, that the early Muslims spread their religion by violence. Islamic fury erupted on Thursday and has cast doubt on a visit the Pope plans to Turkey in November.

But the Vatican statement said: "Confirming his respect and esteem for those who profess the

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