New workers' wage low

FROM PAGE 16 proposed by the Minimum Wage Board to be implemented in a phased manner since even this would be a 127 per cent rise from the erstwhile Tk 930 and would obviously require substantial adjustment on the part of the entrepreneurs.

However, proposed wage for the first year at Tk 1,604 is less even when only inflation-adjusted wage (about Tk 1,773) for FY2006 is considered, he said. "Also, the proposed wage for year 2 and year 3 at Tk 1,890 and Tk 2,117 comes to about Tk 1,750 and Tk 1,815 in today's value if an eight per cent per annum inflation rate is accounted for."

Once the quota on Chinese export to the EU and USA is phased out after 2008, the price of apparels, which has already been under pres-sure in recent years, is likely to be pushed down further, Mustafiz

The government cannot absolve itself from the responsibility to help the sector remain competitive in view of the emerging uncertainties and competitive pressure, he said, adding that disruption in power supply, infrastructural bottlenecks and corruption account for a significantpart of entrepreneur's cost.

"Concrete support measures will need to be put in place by the govern-ment to reduce the cost of doing business...so that this sector, so critically important for our economy and our country, could continue to survive and

Zaid Bakth, research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), said the minimum wage should be around Tk 2,000 considering the poverty line and the fact that there is no controversy over the need of the

pay structure is a partial one and I think a comprehensive study regard-ing wage for the garment workers and their productivity should have

Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, president of Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA), said the proposed minimum wage of Tk 1,604 for the first year has been closer to what the ers are less aggrieved and the workers are comparatively more aggrieved."

If the income of the poverty line is

taken into consideration, which is around Tk 1,100, the proposed minimum wage is a bit over than the benchmark, he noted.

On the other hand, prices of Bangladeshi products in the global market have gone down substantially. "As a result, profitability has also declined. So, higher wage increase will lead to factory closure," the BEA president observed

But the total process of recommending a salary structure has been handled very poorly. Due emphasis should have been given to both the owners and the workers through close discussion, Kholiquzzaman said. It was possible to minimise the difference substantially between what the workers were demanding and what the owners were offering,

MA Razzak, associate professor of economics at Dhaka University, said the proposed minimum wage of Tk 1,604 in the first year for the unskilled workers has been lower than what should have been. If the minimum wage in the 1993-94 fiscal is considered as a benchmark, taking inflation into account, it should have been betweenTk1,725toTk1,770.

If the inflation rate continues to be sixper cent, the minimum wage in the third year should be Tk 2,109. So, the proposed wage of Tk 2,117 from the year 2008 is acceptable, he observed.

However, the wage hike ingrades I and II is lower and has not been even adjusted with inflation, Razzak noted. "But, I am not worried about it because these grades are for the skilled workers and there is a good demand for them.

The wage is going to rise by Tk 700 on an average and a factory having roughly 500 workers will need to pay Tk 42 lakh a year, he said, adding that it would be very difficult for the factories depending on sub-contract to absorb this hike. If these factories cannot adsorb the initial pressure, wage hike in the second and third years would be very difficult in that

"The role of the government will be very crucial because survival for the RMG exporters would be very difficult if port congestion, electricity problem and other infrastructural ssues are not addressed properly,"

The Minimum Wage Board at its

It also proposed formation of

parliamentary committees on the

first day of a parliament's session

with the opposition lawmakers heading the committees to ensure

must have written constitution.

same posts for more than two terms,

Presiding over the convention, Shujan Central Committee President

Prof Muzaffer Ahmed said, "We want

to see democracy in our everyday life. Without financial clarity of the MPs,

the reforms in the EC or caretaker

that there should be a citizens booth

in each polling centre to observe

any block allocation of funds as they

use that for partisan interests, they

Hossain of Ain O Shalish Kendra,

Participants in the convention felt

Lawmakers should not be given

Speakers included Dr Hamida

government will not be effective.

Shujan demanded.

Ship alert system

NEWS

25th meeting on September 12 recommended a three-tier proposal

to be implemented in three years

with Tk 1,604 as the minimum gross

salary in the first year up to June 30,

be Tk 1,890 in the second year and Tk

2,117.50 in the third year starting

However, both owners and workers rejected the proposed pay structure. The employees thought it did

not match their expectation while the employers feared factory closure

if the proposed wage hike is imple-

The board earlier held 24 meet-

ings after it had been formed on May

31 but could not reach a consensus. Following a severe labour unrest in

he country's premier export-

earning sector, the government formed the wage board and asked it to recommend a pay structure for the

workers within three months.

The government and leaders of

garment owners and workers at a

meeting on June 12 inked a 10-point

memorandum of understanding (MoU) after a series of discussions,

and decided to implement those in

phases to address labour unrest and ensure labour rights and peaceful

arrestees are being implicated in

different cases where unknown

are part of their regular drive. Sources said the authorities are

shifting many prisoners from the

Dhaka Central Jail to other jails to

create space for the new arrestees.

Meanwhile, a team of four police officers led by Joint

Commissioner of Detective Branch

Awami League General Secretary

Abdul Jalil yesterday afternoon at

his Mercantile Bank office at

to instruct his party activists not to

carry sticks or explosives during

tomorrow's rally. They also informed Jalil about the security

measures taken for the rally,

The police team requested Jalil

of Police Shahidul Islam met

However, police said the arrests

persons had been made accused.

atmosphere in the factories.

Mass arrest

FROM PAGE 16

Motifheel.

from July 1, 2008.

The minimum gross salary would

Immediately after the alert system failure, Captain AKM Shafiqullah, director general (DG) of shipping, wrote to the Chittagong Port Authority (GPA) chairman asking him to restore the alert system by activating the mobile sets urgently.

"The continuation of the situation will make our ports and vessels non-compliant with the ISPS code, leading to major implication at national and international level," wrote Captain Shafigullah.

CPA Chairman AM Shahadat Hossain, on the other hand, termed the news of the security alert system collapse a 'rumour' and claimed that the ISPS codes have been 100 per cent maintained in

Asked about the letter of the shipping DG, the CPA chairman said the port authority got the cell phones disconnected on the understanding that they were no longer required following full implementation of the ISPS code.

The collapse of security alert might be a conspiracy to tarnish the image of the port at the international level, said a CPA official

requesting anonymity. The ISPS alert system at Chittagong and Mongla ports facilitates any ship having a piracy, security incident or any other unlawful activity while in port or at sea to contact the ISPS cell.

After implementation of the ISPS system in July 2004, Bangladesh was listed in 'white category' in International Maritime Organisation.

The shipping agents and many shipping companies are desperately inquiring of the port authority about the security system failure, said a source.

Two ships of HRC Shipping and shipping agents failed to communicate with the ISPS cell due to the system failure while none of the ISPS officials could be contacted, the source said.

The CPA stopped taking the services of those three vital cell phones without prior notice, keeping the shipping agents and others concerned totally in the dark about the security position of the ports.

"We have come to your country only to listen to you and not to make any comments," Andrew Bruce said when asked if they have any suggestions for resolving the current political crisis to pave the way for holding peaceful elections. He agreed with the journalists that tolerance and patience of political leaders are crying need in a critical political situation as exists in

(Ershad). The closed-door meetings with the leaders at a local hotel

When asked, leaders of the four political parties told journalists that the visiting mission wanted to know about electoral reforms, reforms in the Election Commission and caretaker government. Matters relating to law and order also came up for discussion.

"We have told them that a free and fair election is not at all possible with the defectively updated voter list," said General Secretary of the district AL Mostafa Rashidi

City BNP Convenor and lawmaker Ali Asgar Lobi, and Nayeb-e-Amir of city Jamaat Shafigul Islam said they have informed the EU team that law and order is quite congenial for holding a peaceful election with 'properly updated' voter list.

The delegation included Ana

EU team

The mission came to Khulna press club at about noon and wanted to know from local journalists if there would be any problem in gathering information on the polls day for correct reporting in newspapers. Some journalists told them they did not get easy access to polling centres in the last national elections despite showing their identity

Bangladesh now.

Earlier on Fiday night, the EU team held separate meetings with local leaders of the BNP and its ally in the ruling coalition Jamaat-e-Islami, the main opposition Awami League (AL) and Jatiya Party lasted about three and a half hours from 7:00 pm.

Beatriz Martins, Hanna Roberts, Victor Perez, Pascaline Krone and Charles Whitely.

Hasina terms

the president of main opposition Awami League (AL), claimed. Speaking at different rallies in

Tangail and Jamalpur yesterday the AL chief said immediately after the prime minister had called for a general secretary level discussion. the BNP secretary general was admitted to hospital with sickness,

'We will participate in the

She reiterated her belief that no

"The constitution says impartial

She predicted that although the

She said President Iajuddin Ahmed was also sent to hospital after he had been 'made ill' the same way.

Justice KM Hasan," she said.

Former prime minister Hasina told the crowd at a rally that no election will be allowed to be held on the soil of Bangladesh under

Lt Colonel Syed Ariful Azam, commanding officer of BDR 17 Justice KM Hasan and MA Aziz, the most likely chief of the next caretaker government and the current chief election commissioner upcoming election but not under

version, he added.

Daily Star last night that he wants a judicial probe into the incident. He blamed the death on BDR excesses.

FROM PAGE 16

A report on formation of the BCL committee by him was published in

The three expelled leaders -

movement and they had introduced parliamentary form of government. None has the strength to thwart the democratic process," she said. Finance Minister M Saifur

Rahman, PM's Political Secretary Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury, M Naser Rahman, Khaleda Rabbani and MM Shahin, among others, addressed the meeting presided over

of Bahadurpur and Mohishakandi caught a boat carrying Indian bidis on the river Birong. As they were waiting to hand the contraband to police, some BDR men from the nearby Noakot camp came to the village and asked them to give those As the villagers did not agree to do

Laws need to be formulated so that legislators do not get involved in local governments, the proposals so, a heated argument followed and at one stage, a scuffle broke out between the locals and the border Political parties must get regis-tered with the EC and the parties President and general secretary of any party must not remain in the

succumbed to his injuries within minutes while Bayes died at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, family members said.

safe passage through the river

Battalion of Sunamganj, told The Daily Star yesterday that the BDR men had no alternative but to fire as an unruly mob attacked a patrol to snatch the bidis that it had seized.

Meanwhile, the BDR men picked up at least 40 people from the villages after the incident. All of them how everwere released the same day.

Chhatak AKM Lutfur Rahman who caught the boat while the BDR tried to take possession of the contraband

Local ruling party lawmaker Kolim Uddin Ahmed Milon told The

injuries to head, right arm and knee.

The Daily Starthe previous day. Witnesses said, at least 30 BCL

Saiful Islam, Alaul Islam Saikat, Tarek, Faisal. *Asraf. Abu Abbas Bhuiyan. Mizan, Nuruzzaman, Ziko and Titu launched the attack on the journal ists at about 12:00noon. They also threatened Masum Al Zaki, DU correspondent of the daily Bangladesh Observer, at the Teacher Student Centre right after the attack.

Disgruntled activists of the BCL arranged the press conference to protest expulsion of three of its leaders from the organisation. They also brought allegations of corruption and irregularities against the president and the general secretary in formation of the central committee. Mizanur Rahman of Jahurul Haque Hall, Meherul Hasan Sohel of SM Hall and Akhtaruzzaman Panir were

activists forcefully entered the Dhaka University Journalists' Association (DUJA) office in a bid to foil a press conference and assaulted a number of journalists there.

Different student organisations and cultural bodies condemned the attack on journalists. Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and Samajtantrik Chhatra Front leaders issued separate statements protesting the attack.

Addressing different rallies on her way to Jamalpur, Hasina sought votes for boat, the electoral symbol of AL in the upcoming election, and pledged that her party will curb the upward spiralling of prices of

Addressing a rally at Dhonbari in Tangail, the AL president formally announced Dr Abdur Razzak MP as AL's next candidate from that constituency in the next election and sought votes for him.

Urging the party activists and supporters to come to Dhaka to join the opposition coalition's grand rally on September 18, the AL chief instructed them to build resistance if the government tries to obstruct them from coming to

ment reduces price hikes of essentials ahead of Ramadan. She also urged the police, army, and civil administration to remain neutral reminding them that they are public servants.

'Many of the high ups in the government including Khaleda Zia, and her sons may flee the country immediately after handing over power to the caretaker government, fearing the wrath of the people. Then who will save you?" Hasina warned the law enforcers referring to the police beatings of AL leaders Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Mohammad Nasim, Asaduzzaman Noor and Haji Selim during recent opposition demonstrations

The AL president addressed rallies on Balijuri High School ground in Madarganj, on Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Fisheries College premises in Melandah upazila, on Jamalpur Central Sheheed Minar premises, at Dikpait Bazar under Sharisabari in lamalpur, and at Kalihati Bus Stand, Ghatail, Dhonbari and Madhupur upazilas in Tangail.

seas while hundreds of people in long queues stood silently for a long time on both sides of the Dhaka-Jamalpur highway to greet Hasina. Meanwhile, at least 25 AL activ-

ists were injured as ruling BNP carders attacked different AL processions at Melandah upazila bazar, at Mahmudpur, Nangla and Kulia unions under the upazila, and at Kolabadha under Dhurmut union in Jamalpur. Protesting the attacks, Hasina instructed her party activist to prepare for counter

panied her.

Verdict

FROM PAGE 1
The trial of the plot allotment case began in 1998. The court completed

its hearing on August 13 this year. The court framed charges against Ershad and acquitted the then Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) chairman Rahamat Ullah on March 9, 1992 as no conclusive evidence was found against him.

Mohammad Sajjad Hossain, an official of the now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac), filed the case against Ershad with Motijheel Police Station on April 22, 1991. The investi-gation officer (IO) of the case pressed charges against Ershad and Rahamat Ullah on December 9 the same year.

The prosecution claimed that the then president Ershad directed authorities concerned to allot plots in Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara and Uttara residential areas to 49 people during 1988-1990, violating the government and Rajuk provisions.

The court recorded statements of only four prosecution witnesses since the beginning of trial on April

The court could not complete arguments of the case as the prose-cution and the defence had sought time on different excuses since

Ershad was acquitted in three graft cases last month amid speculations about his joining the ruling BNP-led alliance ahead of the next parliamentary elections.

lamaat

Earlier on Thursday, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia proposed the dialogue that is seen to be an icebreaker in the current stalemate in

The PM's invitation to the opposition followed repeated pressure from the international community including National Democratic Institute (NDI), European Union (EU) exploratory mission and the latest move of US Ambassador Patricia A Butenis.

The Jamaat leader castigated the foreign delegates for their interference in Bangladesh politics.

They are interfering in our election, but what did they do in their turn? The 'Florida blunder' is yet to be forgotten," he said.

BNP must first talk to Jamaat regarding the dialogue, he said. adding that they will hold a meeting with the BNP policymakers when BNP Secretary General Mannan Bhuiyan recovers from illness.

Doctor jailed FROM PAGE 16

and died on his way to a private hospital in Comilla two hours into

When the news of the kid's death spread, angry people brought out a procession accusing the doctor. Being informed, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

A case was filed by police, following which Dr Murtaza and three of his staff were arrested. Another accused staff Sajeda Akhtar surren-

Nitun

FROM PAGE 16 last glimpse of the legendary artist whose body was kept there for an hour from 11:00am.

The mourners stood in silence as bugles played the last post as a tribute to Nitun Kundu the freedom fighter. A police contingent presented guard of honour in reverence for his contribution to the country's liberation.

Floral wreaths laid by people on the coffin of Nitun Kundu turned it a huge shrine of flowers.

"We are grateful to the government that it has shown the honour to a freedom fighter he deserves," Animesh Kundu, son of the late artist, told The Daily Star. Nitun Kundu is no more today.

but as long as the country will exist he will remain alive in the mind of people for his role in the Liberation War and his artistic works," said a mourner.

State Minister for Cultural Affairs Selima Rahman, Awami League leader Obaidul Quader, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu, Communist Party of Bangladesh General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim, cultural personalities Ramendu Majumder, Ferdousi Majumder, litterateur Syed Shamsul Haque, artist Qayyum Chowdhury, among others, were present at the Shaheed Minar.

Earlier at 10:00am, the body of Nitun Kundu was taken to the Institute of Fine Arts on the Dhaka University campus where teachers and students paid their last tribute to the deceased artist.

From the Shaheed Minar, the body was taken to the Shyampur factory of international-standard furniture maker Otobi where its founder fell unconscious on Tuesday following a heart attack.

Officials and employees of Otobi paid their last respect to Nitun Kundu, who founded the company in 1975. Later, his body was taken to the

Postagola cremation ground. Nitun Kundu's son Animesh and daughter Amiti torched the funeral pyre in a sombre atmosphere around 1:30pm. Nitun Kundu, the famed sculp-

tor of Shabash Bangladesh on the Rajshahi University campus--a tribute to the martyrs of the Liberation War, and the Saarc Fountain at Karwan Bazar, passed away on Friday.

Pope 'sorry'

Islamic faith, he (the Pope) hopes they will be helped to understand

his words in their true sense." Before the statement, the tide of Muslim criticism of the Roman Catholic leader swelled on Saturday.

Yemen's president became the first head of state publicly to denounce him and threatened to review ties with the Vatican unless he apologized. Ali Abdullah Saleh, campaigning for re-election, told voters at a rally Benedict had wronged Islam.

Two churches -- neither of them Catholic -- were fire-West Bank, bombed in the although no one was hurt.

But Chancellor Angela Merkel and other German politicians defended his comments, saying he had been misunderstood. "It was an invitation to dia-

logue between religions, she told the mass-circulation Bild newspaper in an interview. "What Benedict XVI emphasized was a decisive and uncompromising renunciation of all forms of violence in the name of religion."

"He should apologize to Muslims," the president of the German Council of Muslims, Ayyub Axel Koehler, told the Neue Presse newspaper on Saturday. 'That would be a contribution toward unwinding the tension and creating clarity.'

Support for that view came from the New York Times, which said in an editorial on Saturday he must issue a "deep and persuasive" apology for quotes used in his speech.

"The world listens carefully to the words of any pope. And it is tragic and dangerous when one sows pain, either deliberately or carelessly," it said. "He needs to offer a deep and persuasive apolcan also heal."

The Pope on Tuesday repeated criticism of the Prophet Mohammad by the 14th century Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus, who said everything Mohammad brought was evil 'such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."

The Pope, who used the terms "jihad" and "holy war" in his lecture, added "violence isincompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul." Muslim figures continued to

assail those comments. "How can (the Pope) limply that Muslims are the creators of terrorism in the world while it is the followers of Christianity who have aggressed against every country of the Islamic world?" prominent Saudi cleric Salman

al-Odeh said. "Who attacked Afghanistan and who invaded Iraq? ... The Pope's statements are an attempt to put a religious cover on injustice and political aggression practiced by the American

administration against Muslims." Turkey's nationalist paper Vatan quoted Salih Kapusuz, head of the ruling Justice and Development Party's parliamentary group as saying: "The mentality of the Crusades has

"(Benedict) will go down in history in the same category as leaders such as Hitler and Mussolini.

But Turkey's English-language Daily News, while deploring the Pope's comments, said: "We just disagree with this vendetta-like approach of continuing to abuse the Pope after his spokesman made a statement saying that he respected Islam and did not

6 Asian nations

international religious freedom, said there was a possibility that one or more from the six nations could be added to a blacklist of "countries of particular concern" that includes China, Myanmar, North Korea and Vietnam The blacklist is renewed annually and the State Department is expected to publish an update in

coming weeks.

In this year's report, the State
Department emerged with two

prised Myanmar, China, North Korea, Iran, Sudan, Eritrea, Saudi

including the eight, where religious freedom was seen with "significant interest" were Afghanistan, Brunei,

The list of 20 countries are ones freedom issues in the world, Hanford said at a media briefing after Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice launched the report covering

ous violators of religious freedom. I think it's fair to say that if we add any countries this year (to the Countries of Particular Concern), probably they'll come from that list," Hanford

In Vietnam, overall, respect for religious freedom has improved, the report said. Hanford hinted the country could be removed from the

department's blacklist. The religious freedom report

Barapukuria FROM PAGE 16

tion soon, said Power Development Board (PDB) sources in Dinajpur. However, the officials claimed that the plant would resume pro-

duction within the next four to five Negligence of the officials concerned and poor machinery provided by the supplier and their non-cooperation with PDB are the main reasons of the plant's recur-

plant sources. Sources also alleged gross irregularities in procurement of a turbine where the design was changed without the approval of the author-

ring malfunction, alleged power

The consultant of the project deviated from the turbine design without consulting PDB and later argued that the changed design was "better". PDB, however, was not convinced

Top officials of the plant were tight-lipped over the matter and did not disclose information on the plant's overall condition.

()li FROM PAGE 16

right to take action against him. He is determined to strike back if any action is taken against him. The meeting is part of Oli's

campaign to mobilise support to his move across the country.

salience of religion in all the big issues in Asia -- extremism, terror ism, democratic transition and

senior policy analyst with the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, a Congressmandated panel. "Policy makers and diplomats-ignore religion at their peril," he

integration of countries such as

China and Vietnam into the interna-

tional system," said Scott Flipse, a

said. "More and more the salience of religion is becoming an international relations strategic factor." The commission each year

recommends to Rice which countries should be blacklisted. In Afghanistan, the report this year cited "a conservative culture of intolerance, which at times manifested in acts of harassment and violence against reform-minded

Muslims and religious minorities. Oil-rich Brunei was accused of of religions other than official Islam while in India "some extremists continued to perceive ineffective prosecution of attacks on religious ninorities" as a "signal that they could commit such violence with

impunity. In addition, religious conversion remained a highly contentious issue and terrorists carried out deadly violence against religious targets in India, itsaid.

In Laos, the authorities were accused in the report of "intolerance" for minority religious practice, especially by evangelical Pakistan was cited for having

"discriminatory legislation and the government's failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different faith. This fostered religious intolerance and acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities,

lighted "violent resistance" by some Buddhists to Christian church activity of particularly evangelical

There also were sporadic attacks on Christian churches by Buddhist

Factory workers

FROM PAGE 16 Accessories Limited refrained from work, staged a sit-in and vowed not to get back to work until their demands are met.

Permanent status of job with appointment letters, minimum basic wage of Tk 2,030, maximum eight work hours per shift, overtime payment for additional work, one day weekly holiday and maternity leave for women workers are the highlights of the 15-point charter.

A worker at Uttara Sweater

Factory alleged that the factory authorities terminate them arbitrarily and corrupt officials take bribes to reappoint the terminated employee.

ers by employing them on temporary or contractual basis. Shah Alam, project director of UEPZ, said appointment letters for the workers would be issued very

Security has been beefed up in the UEPZ area to prevent any unto-

ward situation.

observed.

thrive," Mustafizsaid.

He, however, said, "The proposed

owners were offering. "So, the own-

Citizens forum FROM PAGE 16 elected in the next election, it can

hold elections (in future), and care-taker government will not be

required," he told journalists.

have to work intensively on it."

Or Kamal said the constitution has become ineffective. The people, who are the owners of the country. have become helpless, powerless and victims of political parties. The people should be made aware that they are the owners of the state, not the political parties. He added, "We

have not yet been brought to book, and the use of money and arms in elections continues virtually destroying democracy. Shujan proposed that honest and neutral chief election commissioner and election commissioners have to

be appointed in consultation with

The Election Commission (EC)

the opposition parties.

of many bomb attacks and killings

He regretted that the perpetrators

Secretariat should be free from control of the Prime Minister's Office and have its own budget and authority to appoint its officials and employees, it suggested. "A separate service cadre should be created for

The EC should be empowered to cancel candidature if any candidate orhis/heragent commits any serious crime during the election, the rec-

The speaker should be appointed from the opposition, and he/she has

to leave political party, the forum

ommendations said.

Gloomy prospect formal initiative to sit with the

opposition following the prime

dialogue itself is formal. Is any

"The prime minister's offer of a

minister's latest proposal.

formal or written proposal necessary when the prime minister herself made the offer publicly?" Harris Chowdhury, political secretary to the prime minister told journalists on Friday. On Thursday, at a public rally in Banchharampur Khaleda pro-

posed a secretary-level dialogue

between her party and the main

opposition on the opposition's

demand for reforms in the system of caretaker government and the Election Commission. BNP Secretary General also LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan was admitted to a hospital with chest pain on the same day and he is likely to fly to Singapore for better

Political analysts predict that the possibility of starting the much desired dialogue might be delayed if the BNP secretary general remains in a hospital for more days. Meanwhile, the opposition camp is now busy with the prepara-

tion to gather 'a million people' in

the grand rally tomorrow at Paltan

Maidan from where the coalition

will announce its final round of

treatment

agitation programmes to realise the reform agenda. AL will hold a meeting of its central working committee (ALCWC) today with its chief Sheikh Hasina in the chair. The 6:00pm meeting will discuss the

Muhammad Jahangir of Centre for Development Communication, laleya Rehman of Democracy Watch, Dr Zafarullah Chowdhury of

Gonoshasthya Kendra, Justice

Ebadul Haque and Badre Alam Khan.

party's strategy ahead of tomorrow's grand rally After the ALCWC meeting, its leaders will meet their 14-party

Sources said the opposition

leaders will finalise their agitation

programmes that will be announced from the Paltan rally tomorrow.

coalition partners at 8:00pm.

Least bothered FROM PAGE 1 to power with two-thirds majority and hopes to come to power again

with two-thirds majority.

want to sustain their party.

come up to the path of peace, democracy and development as they like chaos, destruction and anarchy', she said. The PM advised her main political opponent (Awami League) to think about participating in election and come to the correct path if they

They [opposition] do not want to

All the political parties except one want to contest the election and that one wants to foil the election foreseeing their defeat, she said, adding that power cannot be assumed through backdoor by unleashing indiscipline She said her party, along with the people, restored democracy through

Harris Chowdhury, lawmakers by local BNP President Abdul Hafiz.

BDR fires

FROM PAGE 1 Earlier at about 5:00am, the villagers

guards. Soon hundreds of people came out of their houses and hemmed in the BDR men who replied with volleys of gunfire.

Of the injured, 20 were undergo and Chhatak Upazila Health The protesters alleged that the

Upazila Nirbahi Officer of

But the BDR gave a different

5 journos

workers led by Sohel Rana Tipu, will be compelled to meet the demand," Hasina said. hatching conspiracies to deprive the people of their right to franchise in the upcoming election, the

Earlier in June, a group of BCL

Giasuddin, a grocer, sustained bullet wounds in his abdomen and

BDR men had already had a bargain with the smugglers for ensuring a

credible election is possible under Justice KM Hasan and Justice MA Aziz as they are BNP partisans. caretaker government. But KM

Hasan is not a neutral person as he was an international affairs secretary of BNP," Hasina said. She warned the prime minister that no election will be allowed to be held without the participation

> prime minister is not interested in carrying out electoral reforms, she will be finally forced to accept the reforms. "She (PM) did not want to accept the opposition's demand for reforms in the system of caretaker government before 1996 election, but finally she was forced to accept it and this time also she

AL president said they proposed electoral reforms in order to ensure that the people can exercise their democratic right of voting freely. She said her party always wants elections to be held in the country but the elections should be held in a free, fair and neutral manner so

that every voter can vote according

people's vote, when you claim

flourishing development in the

country?" Hasina threw a question

to her counterpart adding that if

the PM was confident then she

"Why do you (PM) want to steal

to his or her will.

Accusing the prime minister of

would carry out the electoral reforms and accept the people's mandate in the next election. Hasina instructed her party leaders and activist to check whether their names are on the voter roll. She also directed them to form vote protection committees to monitor the polls.

essentials if voted to power.

She demanded that the govern-

All the rallies turned into human

The opposition leader returned to Dhaka at night. AL leaders Suranjit Sengupta, Motia Chowdhury, Abdul Mannan, Abdur Rahman, Dr Abdur Razzak, Mirza MA Jalil, Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Mirza Azam, Bahauddin Nasim, Pankaj Debnath, Barrister Taposh SM Kamal, and Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury among others accom-

ogy, demonstrating that words intend to offend Muslims."

FROM PAGE 16 included in a "significant" list of violators of religious freedom in the US State Department's annual International Religious Freedom Report 2006. John Hanford, US envoy for

categories of countries.
The first list of eight "countries of particular concern" or "severe" violators of religious freedom com-Arabia and Vietnam.

Cuba, Egypt, India, Israel and Occupied Territories, Laos, Pakistan, Russia, Sri Lanka, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. that we just felt gave a good overview of some of the dynamics that constitute this past year of religious

197 countries and territories. "Yes, I think generally speaking they reflect some of the more seri-

thereportsaid. In Sri Lanka, the report highillustrates "the importance and the

extremists, it said. able to perform without interrup-

Another worker on condition of anonymity complained that the authorities are exploiting the work-

soon and other demands of the workers are under the consideration of the government high ups.