

AL softens talks

FROM PAGE 1
interim government would take charge.

HASINA'S BBC INTERVIEW
Sheikh Hasina alleged that the government has been plotting so that no opposition party takes part in the upcoming parliamentary election.

During an interview with the BBC Bangla Service yesterday Hasina said they want the talks to put an end to the political crisis. "But the government has been creating obstacles to prevent the main opposition party from taking part in the election," she accused.

The AL chief said the initiative must come from the government. "I will sit with my party and alliance leaders to decide what we can do under the circumstances," Hasina said adding, "If they [the ruling party] sit for discussions, they have to meet some of our demands. They are hatching a fresh conspiracy, as they do not want to accept any of our demands."

Asked what would the 14-party do if the problems were not solved through discussions,

Hasina said, "If they (the government) do not accept anything, I will urge the people to come to Dhaka with whatever they have and to do everything necessary so that the government is forced to accept the demands."

About the government's allegation that the AL is pushing the country into a confrontational situation, Hasina asked whether the people have their right to come to Dhaka or not? The AL chief said the people will come to Dhaka to protect their rights.

She said the present government instead of the caretaker government have to implement the electoral reforms to solve the crisis.

On the government's allegation that AL does not want to participate in the next election, Hasina said the government knows very well that the people will not vote for the ruling alliance candidates and it will not come back to power if a free, fair, and neutral election is held in the country.

"So, the government has been looking for excuses so that no one can participate in the election," she said adding, "Well, let them implement our reform proposals and then they will see whether we participate in the election or not."

"If an election is to be held in the country, it must be free and fair after implementing our reform proposals," Hasina reiterated.

Afghan suicide

FROM PAGE 16
Nato troops were in the area at the time but none was hurt, an alliance spokesman said.

Near Kabul, a roadside bomb killed an Italian Nato soldier and seriously wounded two compatriots.

The Taliban claimed both blasts.

Two years ago, suicide attacks were rare in Afghanistan, but this year there have been dozens of such attacks aimed at the government and foreign forces.

Among the dead in the Helmand blast were six policemen and soldiers. The rest were civilians, many queuing to do paperwork for a pilgrimage to Mecca, officials said.

"It was a suicide attack on a road in front of the governor's office," police official Mohammad Ayoub said in Lashkar Gah.

Taliban spokesman Qari Mohammad Yousuf claimed responsibility saying the bomber was from Helmand. A suicide blast in a market in the same town killed 17 people on August 28.

Another Taliban spokesman claimed responsibility for the blast just south of Kabul that targeted an armoured personnel carrier. Nato said five soldiers were wounded.

The violence this year has raised concerns for the country, a central battlefield in the war on terrorism. Optimism that followed successful elections in 2004 and 2005 has evaporated.

The United States, which had been hoping to trim its Afghan force, has about 20,000 troops in the country. Nato, waging its biggest ground operation, has a

similar number and is seeking more.

Twenty Taliban were killed in a clash in the southern province of Uruzgan on Monday, Nato said. In Paktika province on the Pakistani border, a suicide bomber's explosives went off accidentally, killing him and six accomplices, an official said.

The Taliban have surged in strength because of links with the booming drugs trade and the support of militant networks in Pakistan. They are also capitalising on anger over poverty and corruption, analysts say.

While more active, the Taliban have suffered heavy casualties. Well over 2,000 have been killed this year, according to figures from Nato, the U.S. military and the government. The Taliban reject the figures.

Nearly 140 foreign troops have been killed in fighting or accidents during operations since January.

EU okays

FROM PAGE 16
not make the mistake of thinking that accession would mean all the country's problems would be solved.

The conditions are tougher than those imposed on previous new members, observers say.

The BBC's Oana Lungescu in Strasbourg says they are intended both as a reassurance for EU citizens, only half of whom support further enlargement, and as a warning to Turkey and the Balkan nations still lobbying for EU membership.

Thai junta

FROM PAGE 16
involved in politics."

Thaksin had been accused of abusing his office by placing relatives in key positions and overseeing massive electoral fraud to stay in power. He was also facing public anger over alleged widespread corruption.

Sonthi told AFP it was "75 percent confirmed" which person would become the new prime minister, adding that he had met for 45 minutes on Monday with the top adviser to Thailand's revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Thailand's media has tipped former World Trade Organization boss Supachai Panitchpakdi as the military's preferred choice, with the Nation newspaper reporting he had tentatively agreed to take the job.

The king's endorsement of the generals is widely credited with helping to prevent violence after the country's first coup in 15 years.

The junta also tried to soothe market concerns by appointing a high-powered team of economic advisers Tuesday, headed by central bank chief Pridiyathorn Devakula.

One of the junta members, Lieutenant General Winai Phattiyakul, also tried to address international concerns in a British radio interview, describing the military takeover as "political change rather than a coup."

"We just tried to do the best for our country. Sometimes it is not easy for people from outside of the country to understand," he told BBC radio.

Since taking power, the generals have banned public gatherings, dismissed parliament, the cabinet and the highest courts, assumed legislative powers and

Standing bodies

FROM PAGE 16
member Abdul Mannan moved the draft in the House.

As per the amendments, the questions for the minister's question-answer session will be selected by lottery. However, it will not be applicable to the prime minister's question-answer session.

The ministers must send a written answer in the first three days of the next session to the notices of public interest that would not be accepted by the speaker.

Included among the amendments was repealing of provision that says a lawmaker shall bow to the chair while entering or leaving the House and also while taking or leaving the seat. The proposal was put forward by a Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker.

The amendments regarding formation of the standing committees were carried out to stem the trend of taking a long time to form the standing committees. The current eighth and the previous seventh parliament had completed forming the committees after about two years since the first sitting.

Earlier, the standing committee finalised the report, rejecting suggestions for introducing an 'opposition's day' in parliament. It also excluded the proposal for sending the proposed national budget to parliamentary bodies for scrutiny.

The UNDP (United Nations Development Fund) had recommended that 'opposition days' be introduced to provide adequate time for the opposition lawmakers in parliament. It also suggested allowing the opposition lawmakers to head some of the standing committees to ensure greater accountability of the government.

Dhaka seeks

FROM PAGE 16
eradicate poverty.

He called for resumption of the Doha Development Round to ensure special and differential treatment for the LDCs.

The foreign minister stressed the need for liberalising free movement of labour and cited studies that showed that a modest commitment under GATS mode IV would offer substantial welfare gains for both developing and developed countries.

On the issue of terrorism, Morshed reiterated Bangladesh's stand against terrorism, saying that it is professed and carried out by a handful few and the victims are the vast majority of innocent men, women and children.

He informed the UN General Assembly that the BNP government passed tough laws to punish the terrorists whom Prime Minister Khaleda Zia dubbed repeatedly as "enemies of Islam, democracy, development, humanity, the people and the country".

The foreign minister highlighted the economic achievements of the government, stating that "after maintaining a growth rate of nearly 6 percent for the last five years, we expect a growth rate of 6.7 percent this fiscal year."

He also informed that the present government would complete its tenure towards the end of next month and would hand over power to a neutral caretaker government in accordance with the provisions of the constitution.

Earlier, Morshed attended the OIC ministerial meeting, which addressed a range of issues concerning the Islamic world. He condemned in unequivocal term the recent Israeli aggression in Lebanon.

The foreign minister said the international community should not merely remain focused on acts and outcomes of terrorism. "It must also address its root causes, including the political and social injustices perpetrated against many communities worldwide," he said.

On the sidelines of UNGA, Italy's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Vittorio Craxi and Guatemala's Foreign Minister Gert Rosenthal met Morshed Khan and discussed bilateral issues.

The Guatemalan foreign minister sought Bangladesh's support for their candidature for a non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

Heated debate

FROM PAGE 1
House about the findings of the investigation into the killing.

Blasting the government for political appointment in the administration, Awami League (AL) lawmaker Faruq Khan said Jamaat leader and social welfare minister appointed his personal secretary as the DC of Madaripur where he [minister] will contest the next election.

He urged the Speaker to give a direction to the government about the matter. Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar in his ruling said the Ministry of Establishment based on its fit list made the appointment. So, the House has nothing to do about it.

Criticising the government, AL lawmaker Rahmat Ali said people are suffering due to price hike of essentials. The government has failed to take necessary measure to prevent it.

KEPZ gets licence

FROM PAGE 1
the previous Awami League (AL) government although the process of setting up the KEPZ started back in 1995 under the previous BNP government.

From early 2002, the PMO formed several committees to look into 'irregularities' in the KEPZ and the private EPZ Act that was framed during the AL rule. The first committee verbally asked the KEPZ authorities why they needed an area as huge as 2,500 acres and hinted that they could do away with 500 acres.

Then in November 2003, a high-powered committee headed by the principal secretary recommended that there is no need to change the Private EPZ Act and said, 'in the interest of national image and foreign investment', the KEPZ should be allowed to function without any delay.

Despite this, the issue remained nearly shelved while the KEPZ authorities kept on requesting the government to issue operating licence. At one stage, a powerful minister's son approached the KEPZ authorities indicating that he can resolve all the troubles for a 'fee' of \$ 3 million.

Between 2002 and 2006, many foreign investors visited the KEPZ site expressing their interest to invest there. Youngone group on the other hand diverted more than \$40 million, earmarked for investment in the KEPZ, to Vietnam, China and India.

Youngone started its operation back in 1978 in Bangladesh and grew into a massive company through its operations here. It made 25 percent investment in five EPZs of the country with its 17 units employing more than 36,000

people. Youngone's annual exports from Bangladesh are worth about \$400 million.

KEPZ overview
The KEPZ was conceived during Khaleda Zia's visit to South Korea as prime minister of the previous BNP government in 1995.

After the change of government in 1996, Youngone applied for 2,700 acres of land by the Karnaphuli river opposite to Chittagong airport at a hilly location, and the land ministry in November 1996 approved 2,526 acres. Of this, about 1,700 acres belong to the government and the rest to individuals.

Side by side, the government approved the Private EPZ Act. And the KEPZ was registered as a company in 1996.

More than 60 percent of the site land consists of hills and ditches and 40 percent are usable for industrial establishments. The other EPZs like Chittagong and Dhaka EPZs are neither a model for the KEPZ nor have the same strategic location.

Both the CEPZ and DEPZ are set up on plain land and are well connected to the cities. The KEPZ is situated in an environmentally sensitive area beside the Karnaphuli river. The CEPZ and DEPZ accommodates only industrial units whereas the KEPZ layout consists of dorms, recreational facilities like golf course, school, training centres, convention centres and guest house. Unlike other EPZs, it will accommodate 100,000 people.

Jubok

FROM PAGE 1
International Finance, Investment and Commerce (IFIC) Bank Ltd. Around two lakh shares worth Tk 18.27 crore changed hands on the block market of Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) on Sunday at Tk 900 each while 1.98 lakh shares worth Tk 17.87 crore changed hands yesterday. Jubok purchased each share at Tk 750 five months back.

Latif Securities Limited sold all the shares to AB Bank foundation through 14 and six deals respectively, market sources said, adding that Jubok holds some eight lakh shares of IFIC Bank.

Jubok, which is involved with businesses in telecommunications, housing and real estate development, tourism, health, ceramic, sea foods, IT, hatchery and nursery, agro-biotech industry and capital management, is also planning to sell off lands from its housing and real estate development project to collect funds.

If there is a shortage of fund following the initiatives, Jubok will take loan from banks to return the deposits to its members, Jubok sources said.

Executive Director of Jubok Hossain Al Masum could not be contacted for comments despite repeated attempts.

JS session

FROM PAGE 1
Roushan Ershad attended the meeting.

The current session of the parliament was supposed to wrap up on September 27 as per the previous meeting of the Business Advisory Committee held on September 10. Now the committee has decided to continue the session on September 29 and October 1, 3 and 4.

Parliament Secretariat sources said five new bills will be tabled and passed in the session while it received notices for another five bills on Monday.

According to the sources, the new bills include Ziaur Rahman University Bill 2006, Carmichael University Bill 2006, Islami University (amendment) Bill 2006, and Madrasa Education (amendment) Bill, 2006.

Bills yet to be passed include the International Financial Organisations (amendment) Bill 2004, Bank Company (amendment) Bill 2004, Code of Criminal Procedure (amendment) Bill 2006, Public Servants (Dismissal on conviction) (amendment) Bill 2006, and Contempt of Court Bill 2006.

JMB leaders

FROM PAGE 1
it has become a custom," he added.

Some of jail officials said they are now examining the contents of the government circular, including on what perspective it was issued and whether its effect is still valid.

However, prisons sources said only the jail authorities have the jurisdiction to fix the date for execution of the convicts.

As per rules, the convicted militants, who were read out the warrant for execution on Friday and Saturday, will be able to appeal against the death penalty in seven days ending on September 29 and 30.

So, if the convicts do not appeal against the verdict by next Friday or Saturday, the prisons authorities can hang them on any day of the following week after October 21, said a prisons official.

Even if the prisons officials maintain the government circular and fix a date after the Ramadan, it is possible to execute the death sentence before the government hands over power to the caretaker government.

The prisons officials will get four days if the Ramadan ends on October 23 and three days if the Ramadan ends on October 24 to execute the death sentence. There is no rule against execution on Eid day, said a top jail official.

If any of the seven condemned militants does not appeal or seek mercy from the president in due time, the jail authorities will fix the execution date and inform the home ministry about it.

"If the home ministry suggests adjusting the date, the jail authorities can change the date. But the new date must be set before October 28," he said.

"We will proceed as per the regulations," Inspector General Prisons Brigadier General Zakir Hasan told The Daily Star yesterday.

Meantime, confusion has arisen over counting of the 21-day time-bar as many said the counting will start from the day of reading out the warrant of execution before the convicts. According to them, the 21-day period ends on October 13 and 14.

The period for the execution, in that case, ends on October 20 and 21. If the jail authorities do not follow the government circular, they can execute the verdict during the Ramadan.

MAMUN'S APPEAL
Iftokar Mamun sent his appeal through the Kashimpur jail authorities on Monday. The SC registrar received the appeal yesterday.

SC Registrar Fazlul Karim told The Daily Star that he asked the jail authorities to stay the execution of Mamun until disposal of his appeal in the Supreme Court. The appeal may be placed before the SC chamber judge on October 5, he said.

The five other convicts are JMB chief Abdur Rahman, Siddiqul Islam Bangla Bhai, Ataur Rahman Sunny, Abdul Awal and Khaled Saifullah. None of them has yet placed any appeal against the HC verdict.

However, family sources said they are preparing to appeal for Bangla Bhai, Awal and Saifullah.

Workers reject

FROM PAGE 1
He said according to the new bill workers in state owned industries have to retire at the age of 57, which may result in an increase in unemployment.

"As Bangladesh ratified the code of conduct of ILO, it cannot pass a bill bypassing ILO regulations," said Ray Romesh Chandra, president of Jatiya Sramik League.

He said according to ILO regulations workers have the right to select their leaders, any worker can be a labour leader.

"But according to the Labour Bill 2006, former or retired workers of the industrial sector will not be able to become a leader of the workers, which is completely in violation of ILO regulations," he said.

According to earlier laws, the workers of industrial and service sectors could bargain with the management or owners of factories for settling their wages, working hours, overtime, and other related issues.

"But the new bill only allows the workers working in the industrial sector to bargain with the management to establish their rights. Unfortunately, at the same time workers in the service sector will not be able to bargain with the management to get the same rights," Romesh said.

Industrial and service sector workers have to work 10 hours a day if the new bill is enacted.

According to the International Trade Organisation framework, any foreign company have the right to refuse to import goods from a company where workers have to work over eight hours a day, said Abul Hossain, a leader of the garment workers.

"So, the provision of a 10-hour work day will ultimately hamper the country's industrial growth, especially it will stand as a barrier regarding compliance with international labour laws in the garment industry," he said adding, "if the bill finally becomes a law, foreign buyers might refuse to import Bangladeshi products in the name of compliance if they wish."

Bangladesh Jatiya Sramik Jote President Shirin Akhtar said the new bill is completely against the interest of the workers.

She criticised the process of passing the bill in the parliament.

The government held 33 meetings to finalise the bill but unfortunately the demands of the workers are not reflected in the final bill, she said adding, "The government violated the ILO convention in preparing the bill which is absolutely contrary to the labour's interest."

The minimum wage will be revised every five years, according to the new bill.

"Where garment factory owners violated the earlier provision of revising the minimum wage every three years, how can we believe that the same group will revise it every five years," Shirin Akhtar said.

She urged the prime minister to further discuss the bill in the parliament and to bring amendments to it.

Najma Akhtar, another labour leader in the garment sector said the new labour bill is unacceptable and unfriendly to the workers.

"We will call for strikes and tougher programmes against the bill," she said.

Terming the new bill as 'not a bad one', Jafrul Hasan, general secretary of government backed Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, said the new bill will bring good things for the workers as a whole, although it has some bad sides.

"Earlier we had 27 labour laws in the country. As a result, there was no perfect implementation of the laws as one law contradicted the other," he said adding, "The new bill simplified most of the complexities in the earlier laws so that implementation of the labour law can become easier."

Garments Sramik Sangram Parishad called for a workers strike in the garment sector scheduled for October 1 as part of protesting the new bill.

Bangladesh Workers Party, Bangladesh Textile Sramik Federation, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Garment Workers Unity Forum, and Sramik Karmochari Sangram Parishad also rejected the bill and demanded that the bill not be turned into a law.

Japan PM

FROM PAGE 16
policy hawk but vague on the economy, Abe, 52, filled his first cabinet with trusted hands after the departure of veteran premier Junichiro Koizumi, who remains popular.

Abe vowed four times to his fellow lawmakers after he was voted into office in a party-line parliamentary vote. He and his cabinet were later ceremonially received by Emperor Akihito.

"As the first premier born after the war, I will lead firmly in the right direction. I will make Japan a country full of chances, kindness and dynamism. I will begin creating a new country," Abe told a televised news conference.

Abe has vowed to rewrite the US-imposed 1947 constitution, under which Tokyo renounced the right to a military, and has been outspoken in his reading of the country's past, a strained subject among nations that suffered under Japanese imperialism.

But Abe promised to "make efforts" to resume talks with China.

"A peacefully developing China is the most important country for Japan," Abe said.

Chinese President Hu Jintao refused to meet Koizumi because of the latter's repeated visits to a war shrine linked to Japan's militarist past.

"In many senses, it was Koizumi and Hu Jintao who could not get along. But now we have a new prime minister, Abe, so as foreign minister I will make efforts to arrange a meeting between Abe and Hu Jintao," said Taro Aso, who kept his job as top diplomat.

Aso said the summit may take place on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific forum in Vietnam in November.

The influential Japan Business Federation, in an unusually open public appeal, called in a statement for Abe to "strengthen relations of trust with neighboring countries including China and South Korea."

China said warmer bilateral ties hinged on the Yasukuni war shrine issue.

Asked if Hu would commit to a meeting with Abe, foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang said: "For the moment the Chinese position hasn't changed."

Abe is known to have views to the right of Koizumi on history but has not said if he will also visit the Yasukuni shrine, which honors war dead and war criminals alike.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said she expected to see Japan move closer to China under Abe.

"I think the Chinese will be receptive to that," she said in an interview with The New York Post.

Abe has vowed that the United States and Japan will "break sweat" together, meaning they would promote joint peacekeeping operations abroad and share more of the security burden.

Abe rose to prominence as a hawk on North Korea, demanding action against the communist state for its past abductions of Japanese nationals. He has established a new position in his cabinet at state ministerial level to handle the emotionally charged issue.

post. He is a 55-year-old, Harvard-educated free trade advocate seen as part of a new generation of Japanese politicians.

But most of Abe's appointments are ruling party stalwarts. Analysts said his line-up showed he would focus on political issues such as the constitution rather than the economy, which is recovering after a collapse in the 1990s.

"Abe's choices are careful and not adventurous, compared with what Koizumi did in picking cabinet members," said Hideo Otake, a professor of politics at Kyoto University.

"This is probably because Abe is young and he doesn't have enough contacts with politicians to decide personnel affairs completely by himself," he said.

In a symbolic step, Abe, a wealthy third-generation politician, said he was slashing his salary by 30 percent.

Abe also set up a ministerial portfolio to tackle income disparity, which critics said was a fallout of Koizumi's free-market reforms.

Koizumi, 64, is one of Japan's most popular leaders in modern times and the longest-serving premier in three decades.

Abe and staff at the premier's office offered him applause and flowers as Koizumi, who broke the mould in Japanese politics with his flamboyant style, chaired his final cabinet meeting.

"Thank you all," Koizumi said. "We will help support Mr. Abe. Please take care of your health."

Durga Puja

FROM PAGE 16
traffic police will be deployed at the streets adjacent to the puja mandaps during the five-day celebrations.

Special security has been arranged for puja mandaps across the country for peaceful celebration of the September 28-October 2 festival, State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar said at the meeting.

Leaders of Bangladesh Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad, Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad, Mahanagar Sarbajaneen Puja Committee demanded allocation of more budget for the puja.

Religious affairs ministry allocates only Tk 200 to 300 per puja mandap but the expenditure for a puja mandap ranges from Tk 1 lakh to 10 lakh, said Jayanta Sen Dipu, president of Mohanagar Sarbajaneen Puja Committee.

The main puja mandap in the capital is at Dhakeshwari National Temple. Large puja mandaps have also been put up at Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University, Ramkrishna Mission, Ramna Kali Mandir, Siddheswari Kali Mandir, Tanti Bazar, Shankhari Bazar, Bangla Bazar, Mohakkhal and Farmgate.

Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad said around 19,000 puja mandaps have been put up in the country including 156 in the capital.

Official sources, however, put the number of puja mandaps at 26,000