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AL focused on chief adviser

Jalil places 31-point proposal at 70-minute meeting with Bhuiyan; reform dialogue resumes today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The much-awaited dialogue over electoral reforms between ruling BNP and main opposition Awami League (AL) began yesterday with the AL asking for resolving first the issue of appointment of the chief adviser to the caretaker government.

After the 70-minute one-to-one parley at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil at a joint press conference said they will sit today to continue the talks after discussing yesterday's outcome with their party high command.

"Abdul Jalil on behalf of the Awami League and 14-party opposition combine placed their demands before me. I asked for explanations for each of the demands and he explained them. Now I will discuss the opposition proposals with my party," Bhuiyan said at the brief press conference in the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban at 1:00pm.

Jalil, also coordinator of the 14-party opposition combine, said he placed the 31-point proposals for

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PHOTO: STAR

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, left, and Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil exchange a few words after a press conference following first day's reform talks at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday.

JS draws more attention than before

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders and lawmakers of the ruling BNP, opposition Awami League (AL) and their allies, journalists and commoners thronged the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) Bhaban yesterday as the crucial talks between the two parties got underway in a festive mood.

Leaders and lawmakers of BNP and Awami League (AL) started to gather at the dialogue venue much before the kick-off of the long-awaited talks. They expressed hope

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US, EU, UK hail talks

UNB, Dhaka

The United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union yesterday welcomed the initiation of dialogue between BNP and Awami League (AL), saying that it would pave the way for free and fair elections with participation of all political parties.

In his reaction, British High Commissioner in Bangladesh Anwar Choudhury welcomed the dialogue and expressed the hope that both the parties would be able to find a way of resolving the differences over the coming elections.

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Bangladesh closes trade deficit with India by 14pc

Exports rose 68pc in 2005-06

MONJUR MAHMUD

The country's trade deficit with India narrowed by around 14 percent in the last financial year when exports rose sharply and imports declined moderately.

Exports to India shot up by 68 percent, amounting to \$241.96 million in fiscal 2005-06. In the preceding year, they stood at

\$143.66 million only.

On the other hand, imports from India dropped by around 8 percent, totalling \$1,868 million in the last financial year from \$2,025.78 million in FY 2004-05, according to Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) statistics.

The trade deficit with the neighbouring country ballooned to a record \$2,003 million in 2003-04. However, it came down to \$1,882

million in the following year and \$1,626 million in FY 05-06.

"Exports to the northeastern states of India increased substantially in the last financial year," Mir Sahabuddin Mohammad, vice-chairman of Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), told The Daily Star.

Explaining, he said the banks in

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Malaysia again bans Bangladeshi workers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Malaysian government once again imposed a ban on recruiting Bangladeshi workers--only two months after lifting a similar ban--as the agencies concerned failed to send 21,988 workers who had been allowed to enter that country.

Ishak Mohamed, enforcement director of Malaysian immigration department, yesterday told AFP that they have decided on a temporary ban suspecting that the workers are

entering the country ignoring the proper system set by the government.

The Malaysian government blamed the recruiting agencies in Bangladesh for failing to send workers as of now although it was scheduled to start from August. The Malaysian government said the agencies are trying to undermine the scheme for making higher profits.

Members of Bangladesh

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ASSAULT ON SHOOTERS Sportsmen for trial of cops before Eid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sportsmen and officials of the arena yesterday threatened to

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Please turn to page 16 for Election 2007: A New Arithmetic. Nazim Kamran Choudhury's sensational analysis of the upcoming polls.



RMG workers' minimum wage fixed at Tk 1,662

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Minimum Wage Board yesterday announced the final pay structure for the workers in the readymade garment (RMG) sector fixing Tk 1,662.50 as the minimum monthly wage including basic salary, house rent and other allowances for the entry-level workers.

All the six members of the board signed the final recommendation, which will be sent to the government on the next working day.

The board yesterday announced two separate pay structures for the garment workers and the employees.

There are seven grades for the workers and four grades for the employees. Minimum wage for

grade one workers will be a total of Tk 5,140 including basic salary, house rent and allowances, Tk 3,840 for grade two, Tk 2,449 for grade three and Tk 2,250 for grade four, Tk 2,046 for grade five and Tk 1,851 for grade six.

Total monthly wage for apprentice workers will be Tk 1,200.

Minimum wage for grade one employees will be Tk 3,580 including basic salary, house rent and allowances, Tk 2,800 for grade two, Tk 2,449 for grade three and Tk 1,851 for grade four.

The board announced a three-tier draft proposal on September 12 but finally backtracked in the face of severe opposition from the garment owners.

"This time we have reached a

consensus for the minimum wages for the garment workers and employees. We considered the final pay structure as reasonable in view of the workers' demand and the owners' ability," said Anwarul Haque, chairman of the government-formed Minimum Wage Board, at the end of six-hour meeting at its office yesterday.

After announcing the draft proposal, the board received more than 400 opinions and objections and prepared the final recommendation taking those into account, he added.

"It will be very difficult for the owners to pay Tk 1,662.50 for the seventh grade and minimum wages in other grades for the workers. We have agreed despite all

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