African Union, UAE urge Ethiopia to quit Somalia

The United Arab Emirates vesterday called on Ethiopia to withdraw its troops from Somalia, where Islamist forces are fighting government troops backed by Addis Ababa.

The appeal was made by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Mohammad Hussein al-Shaali during a meeting in Abu Dhabi with Mahmud Ahmad Jaz, an envoy of Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi who delivered a message to UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin

Zayed al-Nahayan. Voicing the UAE's "concern" over the armed hostilities in Somalia, Shaali urged Addis Ababa to "halt this war" and called for "the with-drawal of foreign forces from Somalia." the state WAM news agency reported.

e also urged countries neighboring Somalia to "encourage national reconciliation among various Somali factions."

The UAE's call came after Ethiopian-backed Somali government troops ousted Islamist forces from a key southern town and rolled closer to the capital Mogadishu as a second week of heavy fighting

The African Union and the Arab League both called on Ethiopia on Wednesday to pull out thousands of its troops from Somalia.

The secretary general of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) meanwhile repeated an earlier call for Ethiopia to pull its troops out of the Horn of Africa country and appealed to all parties not to extend the fighting to

Fighting in Mogadishu is likely to lead to huge human losses," forcing thousands of civilians to flee and "exacerbating the humanitarian tragedy already unfolding" in Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu said in a statement issued at OIC headquarters in the Saudi city of

The Ethiopian government has given threats to its own country's security and the alleged Al-Qaeda links of Somalia's powerful Islamist movement as reasons for open military intervention backing the weak but internationally recognised government in its lawless Horn of Africa neighbour.

Meanwhile, the African Union yesterday told Ethiopia to pull out thousands of its troops from Somalia, where they are fighting alongside pro-government forces,

"We are calling for the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops without delay, AU Commission chairman Alpha Omar Konare said in the body's headquarters in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa.

"We appeal to all parties to cease hostilities without delay and resume dialogue that started in Khartoum under the aegis of the Arab League, the AU and IGAD." Konare said at the end of an AU and Arab League neeting here.

Earlier, the Arab League made a similar call after an emergency meeting in Cairo, warning that the conflict pitting Ethiopians and government fighters against a powerful Islamist movement could

"threaten the peace and stability of the Horn of Africa."

Ethiopian-Somali forces captured an key town north of Mogadishu and drove out its Islamist controllers on the eighth day of heavy fighting and

Fighting between the two sides erupted last week after the Islamists, who had demanded the withdrawal of Ethiopia troops from Somalia, launched an attack on the seat of the interim government in the southern central town of Baidoa.

FROM PAGE 1

Abdullah Harun, who was an ALled grand alliance candidate for Comilla-3, were rejected for being While former first vice-president

of FBCCI Mohammad Ali's nomination paper for the Narayanganj-4 seat has been rejected for defaulting on Tk 87 croré in loans. He was to run as an independent candidate after he did not receive nomination from the BNP. Ali said

(AL) district convener SM Akram's nomination paper has also been rejected for the Narayangani-5 seat for defaulting on a Tk 15 lakh oan from Dhaka Bank.

Protesting the rejection, Akram said, "I am not a loan defaulter. They rejected me on the same grounds for the 2001 elections, but appealed and won. I will appeal again this time

Former whip and nominee for the BNP-led four-party alliance Shahidul Haq Jamal from the Banaripara-Swarupkathi constituency also had his nomination paper rejected for being a loan

From the same seat, AKM Fayzul Haq, a former AL state minister and now an independent candidate, also had his nomination papers rejected for defaulting on a loan, reported our Barisal correspondent.

Golam Faruq Obhi, nominee of the Jatiya Party (Manju) in the Barisal-2 seat also had his nomina-

led grand alliance candidate in Barisal-6 Nasrin Jahan Ratna, who is Bakergani Municipality chairman and wife of JP (Ershad) Secretary General Ruhul Amin, was alsó

decisions were taken after a list of loan defaulters from Bangladesh Bank head office has been reached to Barisal election office by fax message after evening on lednesdav.

Former minister of BNP during Ziaur Rahman's government, Mayeedul Islam, had his nomination papers rejected for the constituency of Kurigram-4, because he

HM Ershad's ex-wife Bidisha running on an independent ticket had her nomination papers rejected for the seat of Dhaka-5, because her seconder's name was not found on the voter list for the constituency.

state, they urged the AL to cancel it.

with the anti-Liberation evil forces Muktangon in the capital

a secular, democratic and prosperous country for which the Liberation War was fought has been shattered due to the agreement, they said.

vote for those political parties who take the collaborators of the occupation forces in 1971 into their fold to gain benefits in the next general election, Mai Gen (retd) CR Dutta, a sector commander during the

"We never expected that the Awami League would resort to such a culpable act only to get vote in the election," he said

Parishad General Secretary Prof Nim Chandra Bhoumik said it is a matter of shame that the party, who led the Liberation War under the leadership of Sheikh Muiibur Rahman, signed an agreement that will weaken the democracy and secularism as well as the thousand years' spirit of harmony and peaceful

The deal contradicts with the AL ideology and goes against free thinkers and secularists, he added.

If implemented, the deal will encourage the country's conservative and communal forces to launch a broader movement that will frighten the religious minority and the progressive and liberal forces and drag the country into the dark ages.

He also warned of a tougher novement if the situation of the year 2001 repeats.

The prishad will form human chain at the divisional headquarters and other places on December 29

protesting the deal Parishad leaders addressed the rally presided over by advocate

Shirin Sikdar, a former ambassador. Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee demanded immediate cancellation of the five-point deal between the Awami League and

The calls came after allied were reportedly heading south.

Nominations

a loan-defaulter

he will appeal against the decision. Narayanganj Awami League's

tion papers rejected. The nomination paper of the AL-

Election office sources said the

forgot to sign his nomination paper.

The pact is against the spirit of the

Whatever excuse Awami League

Liberation War and an outright

violation of Bangladesh constitution

AL's deal with bigots

secular, democratic and welfare It is a misfortune for the nation that

and the UN charter of human rights. the party that has always been vocal said a press release of the Nirmul for building a progressive and secular Committee yesterday. nation, now signed such a contract General Secretary and 14-party the parishad leaders said at a rally at coordinator Abdul Jalil shows in The dream of making Bangladesh favour of the deal with extreme

fundamentalists, it is intended to legalise fatwa (Islamic decree), said the statement The minority community will not

Fanatics like Azizul Haque, Fazlul Haque Amini and Delwar Hossain Sayeedi through their fatwa announced quite a few eminent litterateurs and researchers as 'murtad' and such fatwa provoked the killing of Prof Humayun Azad, it said. Liberation War, said at the rally

The Nirmul committee statement said the provisions on which AL and Khelafat Majlish reached a consensus will drag the country into an age of darkness.

> The committee leaders urged the voters to remain watchful so that the anti-liberation forces and war criminals cannot have any entry into the parliament that has been achieved through the sacrifice of

Painter Hashem Khan, litterateur Anwara Syed haque, Prof Mahfuza Khanom, architect Robiul Hussain, artist Rafiqunnabi, Prof Muntassir Mamoon, sculptor Ferdousi Priyobhasini, wife of martyred intellectual Shyamoli Nasreen Chowdhury were among others to attend the meeting.

Demanding cancellation of Awami League's agreement with the fundamentalist forces, 20 women leaders in a joint statement yesterday announced women professionals' human chain programme in front of

the National Museum today. The signatories in the statement include Mahfuza Khanom, Shirin Akhtar, Hazera Sultana, Mahmuda Islam and Nasimun Ara Minu.

At a protest rally at Muktangon esterday, leaders of Jatiyo Mukti Council also condemned the AL-BKM agreement.

Cattle price

Last year, the lowest price of a camel was Tk 26,000 and the highest price was Tk one lakh. However, this year the lowest price is Tk one lakh while the highest price is Tk 170,000.

"I bought the camel at Tk 170,000," Abdur Rauf, a buyer, told this correspondent while leaving Gabtoli market after purchasing a camel. "I spent Tk 70,000 only to buy the same size camel last year," he added.

However a small number of goats were seen in the markets yesterday.

This year, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) gave permission to set up 13 temporary cattle markets at different parts of the

The markets were set up at Naya Bazar, Postogola, Agargaon Basti ground, Taltala Bus Stand, Meradiya Haat, Uttara Azampur, Kamalapur Brothers' Union ground, Hussaini Dalan Raod (from Chankharpul to Bakshibazar traffic signal), Dhupkhola ground, Rahmatganj playground, Jhigatala-Hazaribagh ground, Khilkhet Tanpara and Sunrise Sporting Club ground.

According to the traders, most cattle were brought from Kushtia. Thakurgaon, Meherpur, Faridpur, Rajbari, Sirajganj, Mymensingh,

Tangail and Manikganj. The DCC fixed the Hasil (commission) at five percent against the sale of each animal in the temporary markets and 4.25 percent for Gabtoli permanent market this

The authorities have beefed up security at the cattle markets to avoid any untoward situation.

Meanwhile, the government decided to set up mobile courts in different parts of the capital from January 2 to January 4 next year to check pollution by cattle waste. The DCC will conduct the mobile courts.

The government will also conduct different awareness programmes in electronic and print media to keep the city clean after the Eid, said a government hand-

Court to decide

FROM PAGE 16 Tania Amir and advocates Sheikh

Awsafur Rahman, Subrata Saha, Khairuzzaman Tipu, Khasruzzaman and Mamun Mahbub -- were granted anticipatory bail from the High Court (HC) following filing of the case against them.

Inspector Naimur Rahman of Detective Branch (DB), also IO of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the CMM's Court, Dhaka, showing 28 people as prosecution witnesses.

Barrister Omar Sadat, son-in-law of BNP leader and former minister Shahjahan Siraj, filed the criminal case with the CMM's Court on December 4 naming four lawyers and against 50 to 60 other unidentified lawvers and others for vandalising the offices of the chief justice and attorney general, and also for disturbing court proceedings on November 30.

Those named in the complaint are Rokanuddin Mahmud, Enayetur Rahim, Subrata Chowdhury and Sheikh Awsafur Rahman.

In his complaint, Omar Sadat said Rokan asked the accused lawvers and outsiders to vandalise the chief justice's chamber, courtrooms and other public property, and also to threaten the attorney general.

The vandalism on the SC premises took place after the chief justice stayed the proceedings of three writ petitions minutes before a HC bench was about to issue a rule on a writ challenging the legality of the president's takeover as chief adviser to the caretaker government.

Leaders of the 14-party alliance and other political parties filed the writ petitions that also challenged the chief adviser's activities, and announcement of the schedule for the next general election.

Yunus

FROM PAGE 1 Bangladeshi Nobel laureate's role in inventing micro credit.

The others who made it to the 'people who mattered' list are --Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Pope Benedict the 16th, Kim Jong-il of North Korea, US President George W Bush, US Vice President Cheni, Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, Al Gore, Russian President Vladimr Putin, Raul Castro of Cuba, Stephen Schwartzman, Muqtada al-Sadr, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and

Shinzo Abe of Japan. The magazine did not elect any 'Person of the Year' for this year as it traditionally does.

Yunus has also been identified as one of the world's 'Most Influential Men' this year. The Lifestyle section of famous Internet search engine MSN has placed Yunus as seventh in its 10-person

The 10 are -- Sacha Baron Cohen, Al Gore, Barack Obama, Chad Hurley and Steve Chen, Bashar Al-Assad, Stephen Colbert, Muhammad Yunus, George Clooney, Warren Buffett and Bill Gates, George W Bush.

Violence erupts

least 10 vehicles on nearby roads and vandalised several shops even before the DC, also the returning officer (RO), announced cancellation of the nomination of Ershad.

The agitated activists damaged furniture and windowpanes at the conference room of the DC's office where nomination papers of the candidates were being scrutinised. Police drove them out.

Party leaders Moshiur Rahman Ranga, Karim Uddin Bharosa, GM Quader and Noor Mohammad Mondol also left DC's office in

JP loyalists got agitated as the RO, Khandker Atiar Rahman, left the conference room at about 5:00pm without giving any decision on the nomination of their party Later, the RO told grand alliance

leaders including Mosaddeque

Hosen Bablu and Monsur Ahmed

that Ershad's nomination was

cancelled. Leaders of the alliance in Rangpur at a rally a Payera Square in the evening gave the hartal call. They also threatened to resist the election in the region if Ershad's

nomination is not accepted.

A report from Lalmonirhat says: Cancellation of Frshad's nomination for Lalmonirhat-3 (Lalmonirhat sadar upazila) seat sparked violent demonstrations by JP men. They vandalised two shops, damaged one motorcycle and blockaded some roads in the district town,

setting fire to old tires They also damaged chairs and tables at the DC's (RO) office. Lalmonirhat JP called a dawn to

dusk hartal in the district today. Reports of similar demonstrations were also received from

Kuriaram. Our staff correspondent in Sylhet adds: Jatiya Party has called a half-day hartal in Sylhet-3 constituency to protest cancellation of the nomination of party chief Ershad.

sioner, also the returning officer. announced cancellation of the nomination. Immediately after this, the JP

Earlier, the deputy commis-

activists and leaders took out a procession from the DC's office and marched towards South Surma area, denouncing the cancellation.

Ershad's nomination for Habiganj-3 was also cancelled.

DU session jam

Furthermore, over 200 examinations of Business Studies faculty and nine institutes of the university have been deferred during the same period, said office of the examination controller sources.

Prof AK Firoz Ahmed, proctor of DLL said master's and honours students in second, third and fourth vear from all the faculties and institutes have been directly affected as their examinations are likely to be deferred due to the crisis.

"Our third year final exams began in the last week of September. Since then, the schedule has been changed three times, but we are yet to complete the exams," said a student of English department. A fourth year student of Mass

said their honours final examination was scheduled to begin from last week of October after being deferred for the third time. They are still uncertain when their exam will "Our master's exam began on October 14 and was supposed to

end by December 4, but the

impasse is lengthening our stud-

Communication and Journalism

ies," said a student of Political Unscheduled closures cost the DU students at least 677 days in the last 16 academic sessions and 43 days in the current 2006-2007 session that began on July 1 this

uled closures in an academic year, on average, the university remained closed for more than 44 days a year due to student strikes, hartals and The 1991-1992 academic session had 94 lost academic days, the highest so far while the lowest was

18 days in 1997-1998. The univer-

sity remained closed for 35 days in

Apart from about 90 days sched-

1998-1999 session for floods. According to the proctor's office, DU academic days were suspended for 51 days in 1990-91 session, 94 days in 1991-92, 10 days in 1992-93, 22 days in 1993-94, 42 days in 1994-95, 55 days in 1995-96, 23 days in 1996-97, 18 days in 1997-98, 56 days in 1998-99, 23 days in 1999-2000, 22 days in 2000-2001, 69 days in 2001-2002, 72 days in 2002-2003, 19 days in 2003-2004, 74 days in

2004-2005 and 20 days in 2005-

On November 20 this year, Chhatra Sangram Parishad (CSP) an alliance of seven 14-party backed student bodies, called an indefinite strike in DU protesting the pro-BNP student body Jativatabadi Chhatra Dal's (JCD) attack on its leaders and activists on the day.

Since the student strike was imposed, the authorities could not take effective measures to ensure a congenial atmosphere on the campus for the coexistence of all student bodies at residential dormitories. Besides, the major student organisations also seemed to be willing to continue the impasse, a number of students alleged.

The two feuding major student bodies continue to blame each other for the bombings and armed violence on the campus and term each other "criminals" A number of CSP leaders

alleged that the JCD activists have

evicted the CSP activists from

residential dormitories and they are not allowing any CSP allies to conduct any organisational activities there. Prof AK Firoz said the administration is hoping to resolve the crisis by the first week of January so the

authorities can resume academic

activities by January 9 after the Eid-

ul Azha vacation. 'This January is a very crucial month for national politics. If national politics is stable during the period, we can resolve the crisis among the student bodies soon. The academic activities can resume then and the examination controller's office will then be able to conduct the deferred examinations within the shortest possible time,

Prof Firoz added. Vice Chancellor Prof SMA Faiz told The Daily Star that he observed that the situation became more complicated as the student bodies are rather loval to their parent organisations instead of ensuring the university's interest.

The authorities were very close to end to the standoff. But all on a sudden, a number of unexpected circumstances disrupted the effort. The administration has been working sincerely to break the standoff as soon as possible, hoped the VC.

Islamist allies

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish (BKM) Secretary General Abdur Rab Yusufi told The Daily Star. "We never believed in religious extremism, so why the talks on the issue of secularism.'

In a press statement on Tuesday night, the BKM termed the five-point memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the AL as a "historic milestone for peace and noncommunalism" and described the media reports on it as "false and confusing.'

Over media's highlighting of the 'fatwa' point in the MoU. BKM Chief Shaikhul Hadith Azizul Hague said that uneducated village leaders and other people under the cover of Islam misuse the fatwa in rural areas to torture women which is a violation of human rights. The MoU was signed to stop that violent practice, he added.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil signed the five-point MoU on Saturday with BKM, which came under fire from within the AL itself, its 14-party alliance partners and a cross-section of political parties and socio-cultural organisations. "There is no way we can accept

this agreement, as it contradicts our

23-point common national programme," said a 14-party alliance party leader terming the Islamists as religious fanatics. AL has nominated Maulana Habibur Rahman and Mufti Shahidul Islam to contest for the constituencies of Sylhet-6 and

Narail-2. Both of them are veterans

of the Soviet-Afghan war and have

oast militant links. Habibur had earlier given interviews supporting a The four other Islamist nominees

Taliban-style regime in Bangladesh. are -- BKM's Mufti Habibur Rahman for Mymensingh-5 and Maulana Tafazzal Haque for Sunamganj-1, while Sved Bahadur Shah of Islamic Front, Bangladesh will contest from the Chandpur-5 and Zaker Party's Mostafa Amir Faisal for Faridpur-4

constituency. Ex-BCL

FROM PAGE 16 A shutter gun and four bullets were recovered from the spot.

reported that a team of Rab-5 arrested Amjad at Barakpur village under Bherapara upazila. Receiving information that some cadres of Panna Bahini were

Our Kushtia correspondent

village, the Rab men cordoned off the house at 6:00pm and asked the gangsters to surrender. Instead of surrendering, the criminals opened fire, prompting the law enforcers to retaliate.

holding a meeting at a house of the

shot during the shootout and died on the spot, while his accomplices managed to flee. They also recovered a revolver and 12 bullets from the spot. Police said Amjad was an accused in 12

cases, including eight for murder.

Rab sources said Amiad was

He hailed from Mazdia village under Daulatpur upazila of Kushtia. With the death of Amjad, 14 men of Panna Bahini, including its chief Panna, have so far died in "shootout" with police and Rab.

Latifur Rahman

FROM PAGE 16

general meeting (AGM) held yesterday, according to an MCCI press

Rahman has investments in pharmaceuticals, electronics, insurance, tea and media sectors.

Feroz Rahim, managing director of Rahimafrooz Batteries Ltd. has been elected vice president of the chamber for the same term.

The members of the newly elected committee are -- M Shamsul Alam, deputy chairman of Reliance Insurance Ltd, Steve Banner, chief executive officer of The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) Ltd, Nasir A Choudhury, managing director and CEO of Green Delta Insurance Co Ltd, Amjad Khan Chowdhury, CEO of Agricultural Marketing Co Ltd, M Anis Ud Dowla, managing director of Advanced Chemical Industries Ltd, Imtiyaz Husain, chairman of Imtiyaz Hussain & Company, Md Nurul Islam, regional senior vice president (Middle East, Africa & South Asia-East) of American Life Insurance Company, Mahbub Jamil, chairman and managing director of Singer Bangladesh Ltd, Nihad Kabir, partner of Syed Ishtiag Ahmed & Associates, Obaidur Rahman Khan, director of Transcraft Ltd and Syed Nasim Manzur, managing director of Apex

Khelafat

FROM PAGE 1 right for all citizens of the country to practise their religion as enshrined in the constitution.

Criticism has been rife against Saturday's deal between the AL and Khelafat Majlish, mounting pressure on the AL.
"They [Khelafat Majlish] have

also agreed to protect communal harmony by creating a secular Bangladesh. It is a victory for secular politics," said Jalil in a statement, defending their fivepoint deal in yet another effort at damage control He said, "Nowhere in the MoU is it mentioned that new blasphemy

laws will be enacted. A blasphemy

law was enacted in 1920 during the

British rule in the Indian subcontinent. No such law has been passed in independent Bangladesh and will be enacted in future.' Noting that the parliament passes a law while the existing judiciary implements it, Jalil said 'This law and judicial system will

continue in future. No one else will

be given the authority. Jalil also denied having mentioned the Ahmadiyyas in any form in the five points of the MoU, saying the AL believes in secular politics. 'The Kadiyanis are not an exception to the Awami League's belief in the freedom of people irrespective of their religion, caste or creed.' He said Quami madrasa certifi-

cates will be recognised because

the Al wants to bring the large

number of rural Quami madrasa students into the mainstream education in an age of alobalisation. "The BNP-Jamaat government passed a law to recognise Quami madrasa But there was no decision on the nature of its curriculum, syllabus, legal basis or qualification for recognition. That is why there is an urgent need to

this issue," the statement read Jalil said all religious minorities, including the Kadiyanis, know that the AL is their true friends, and the Jamaat-e-Islami is the true enemy of the Ahmadiyya community.

establish rules and regulations on

Jalil also said, "As Muslims we want to state categorically that Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) is the final and greatest prophet. No Muslim can criticise or spread false rumours about Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and his disciples. The prophet is above all politics." He added, "We have always recognised Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)."

The AL general secretary also said fatwas given indiscriminately by people, who are not expert in the Quran and religion, have to be stopped.

He said those who had once tried to brand the AL as an enemy of Islam are now accusing it of being non-secular.

EC asks

FROM PAGE 16 an alliance in the upcoming national parliamentary elections. said an EC press release.

The mentioned political parties are being requested to send the names of the candidates and their constituencies by January 3, 2007 to the Election Commission," the release added.

The EC has already allocated election symbol for 76 political parties, while some other parties have applied for their election

Malaysia issues

FROM PAGE 1 'There will be no mercy. We will charge them... their companies will be blacklisted," he said according to the New Straits Times, adding that workers included whipping The 427 Bangladeshi workers.

mostly employed in the agricultural

and manufacturing sectors, had staved on in Malaysia after their work permits expired, he said. Malaysia is one of the largest importers of foreign labour in Asia. Foreign workers, both legal and illegal, number around 2.6 million of

its 10.5 million workforce. Since 1992, Malaysia has launched several operations against illegal workers, but each one has led to a labour shortage followed by a new wave of illegal immigration.

Ershad barred

against him' continues he might not contest the election. "I am eligible to contest the election, but they are obstructing me. Since I'm now in the grand alliance, I'll take my decision in consultation with the alliance partners," he said emerging from the meeting.

The grand electoral alliance, which includes AL-led 14-party, JP (Ershad), and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), yesterday threatened to launch a movement and boycott the election if vested guarters do

not refrain from 'conspiring'. In a couple of days, the grand alliance that filed nomination papers on Tuesday shifting from its rigid stance of not participating in the poll under the caretaker government led by President lajuddin Ahmed, will announce whether it will remain in the race, sources

AL President Sheikh Hasina, JP Chairman Ershad, and LDP President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury either in a joint news conference or in separate conferences today or tomorrow will inform the nation about their latest position on the election, sources said.

Senior leaders of the grand alliance started hectic consultations among themselves and the majority opinion is now in favour of quitting the race as in their view the atmosphere for a free and fair election is totally absent.

To create a congenial atmosphere, the alliance from its grand rally on December 18 came up with a set of demands including resignation of President lajuddin Ahmed from the post of chief adviser to the caretaker government, correction and publication of the voter list before announcing the election schedule, and depoliticisaiton of the police and civil administrations.

file nomination papers, but it has yet to make a formal announcement regarding whether it will participate in the election. It however repeatedly said it will make an announcement on

January 2, a day before the dead-

The alliance however on

December 24 suddenly decided to

line for withdrawing candidacies. Talking to reporters after the meeting between Ershad and Hasina yesterday, AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader, who attended the meeting, said a conspiracy is on to keep Ershad outside the race. "Tough agitation programmes like non-stop hartal, blockade and laying of a siege to Bangabhaban will be announced if the conspiracy continues," he

warned. "The administration hasn't been depoliticised yet. The Election Commission and Bangabhaban

working under the diktats of unseen forces. We're also thinking whether we'll participate in the election," Quader said. JP Secretary General ABM Ruhul Amin Hawlader termed

Ershad's disqualification as a

conspiracy by the immediate past

ruling party to keep him out of the

"Our participation in the election will be uncertain...we may withdraw our candidacies if our chairman is sent to jail as part of 'a political vendetta'." Ruhul Amin Hawlader

He however said they might appeal against the decision. "If we don't get justice, we will decide our next course of action consulting with Awami League." he said.

A delegation of JP rushed to the

EC to protest the RO's decision, but

the EC secretary informed that they

have nothing to do with the matter

at this stage. The offices of the ROs of the constituencies concerned communicated with each other vesterday and came up with a common decision of rejecting Frshad's nomina-

tion papers, sources said

Finding it difficult to take a decision on the issue of Ershad's nomination papers filed in Dhaka-5 constituency, RO Mahfuzur Rahman referred the matter to the

"I sent the matter to the Election Commission," Mahfuzur, also Dhaka divisional commissioner told reporters in his office before announcing his decision.

In the afternoon, he announced his decision saying, "I did what I

thought was right." The EC secretary however denied receiving any such referral from the RO. "The information is not correct. The Election Commission has nothing to do with the matter. The returning officer took the decision," EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar told report-

Sources said the EC is now documenting the Ershad case for adjudication if an appeal is filed against the rejection.

To decide the fate of Ershad's nomination papers for Habigani-3 constituency, sources said the RO, who is also the deputy commissioner of Habiganj district, held hearings twice in presence of both sides. He finally sought opinion from the district public prosecutor (PP), who is known as a pro-BNP lawyer and who was appointed as a PP during the immediate past government's regime.

The PP sent his opinion saying that Ershad's nomination papers should be declared unacceptable. Receiving the opinion, the RO rejected Ershad's nomination papers for Habiganj-3 constitu-

CASES AGAINST ERSHAD

corruption cases in August and

Ershad was relieved from five

September this year following an alleged negotiation with the immediate past BNP-led government promising that he would join the erstwhile ruling alliance. But in late November, Ershad started speaking against joining BNP-led fourparty alliance and suddenly a pending case against him picked

The High Court on December 14 upheld the trial court verdict in the Japanese boat purchase case, but cut the sentence from three years A Divisional Special Sessions

up speed.

with a fine of Tk 10,000 in a graft charge regarding purchase of Japanese boats. On December 19, Ershad filed a petition seeking a stay of the HC verdict. The same day he also filed a criminal miscellaneous petition

CMP) against the HC ruling.

Judge's Court on July 6, 1995

sentenced him to three years in jail

Court on December 26, the last day for filing nomination papers for the upcoming election, rejected Ershad's appeal and asked him to surrender before the trial court. The copy of the judgement was sent to the EC and to the office of

the returning officers hurriedly to

The chamber judge of Supreme

decide the fate of his nomination papers, sources said The constitution says that a person shall not be eligible to be a member of parliament if convicted and sentenced to at least two years in prison in a case of criminal offence involving moral turpitude

unless a period of five years has

elapsed since his release A widespread debate has begun on whether Ershad should be allowed to contest the polls. The state lawyers, who were appointed by the immediate past government, have been arguing that Ershad is not eligible for contesting the polls in accordance with the provision of the constitution. On the other hand, eminent jurists are arguing that Ershad is eligible to contest the polls since he already served two vears in iail in the case and because five years have already elapsed since his release in 1997.

Iran to reduce nuclear

Lawmakers first voted on the title of the bill and then on the fuller text which reads that "the government is obliged, following resolution 1737, to accelerate the nuclear

programme and revise its coopera-

tion with the IAEA".

Almost immediately after it was passed, the bill was approved as law by the hardline Guardians Council which vets all parliamentary legislation. Iran in February stopped allowing extensive UN access to its

atomic sites. But up until now it has still been allowing regular UN inspections of nuclear installations. After weeks of diplomatic wrangling, the UN Security Council on Saturday adopted a resolution which imposes restrictions on

Iran's nuclear industry and ballistic

missile programme. The debate in parliament was marked by a few dissenting voices from the minority reformists but the overwhelming majority spoke out in favour of retaliation.

"Rejecting this resolution means that a resolution that is even stricter will be passed in two months. The best solution is to establish a bridge with the other countries to reduce the tension," said reformist MP Nourredine

However a conservative

deputy, Ebrahim Karkhaneie, said that "no country has the right to renounce its legitimate rights under Iran's immediate reaction to

the UN sanctions resolution was to

announce it would press ahead

with plans to install 3,000 centri-

fuges to enrich uranium at its key

nuclear plant in Natanz, central

Officials have said they want Iran to celebrate a major step towards enriching uranium on an industrial scale when the country marks the 28th anniversary of the Islamic revolution in February.

Oil markets dived during the

quences of the continued defiance of Iran, the world's number four crude producer. Meanwhile, Iranian oil and gas officials have complained that US pressure on foreign banks not

to lend to Iran have resulted in

financing problems for key energy

past day on fears over the conse-

"Unfortunately, most of the foreign banks think politically instead of commercially and thus they impose some restrictions (on us)," the managing director of the Pars Oil and Gas Company, Akbar Torkan, was quoted as saying by the Sarmayeh newspaper.