Most of the total US casualties in

Iraq have occurred since Presiden

Bush declared an end to major

combat May 1 -- and many of have

been caused by insurgen

ambushes and roadside bombs like

the one Monday, which brought the American death toll to 496.

Details including the soldier's

identity were not immediately available.

ded Monday near an Army convoy in Ramadi but the military said no

US casualties were reported. Local

residents said two Iraqis were

killed when the Americans opened fire after the attack.

said that US soldiers uncovered a "large weapons cache" on Friday

with the help of an Iraqi in Ramadi

house, where they found dozens of

rocket-propelled grenades and a

handful of launchers, nearly 220

pounds of explosives, 16 remote

controlled homemade bombs and

They discovered that the per

centage of boys who attended high school decreased with radiation

doses greater than 100 mGy compared with the lowest dose of 1-20

mGy. The proportion of high school

attendees decreased from roughly

32 percent among those with no exposure to radiation, to 17 percent

among those who received > 250

Radiation of the brain during infancy also had a negative effect on tests of learning ability and logical

reasoning but not on tests of spatial

It is estimated that a head CT scan performed on an infant imparts a radiation dose of about

"Irradiation of the brain with

dose levels overlapping those imparted by CT can, in at least some

instances, adversely affect intellec-tual development," Hall and col-

Based on their findings, they think that "the risks and benefits of

CT scans in minor head trauma

120 mGy.

agues write.

two surface-to-air missiles, the

military said in a statement.

The Iraqi led the troops to a

a town west of Baghdad.

Earlier Monday, the US military

Another roadside bomb explo-

$Govt-opposition\ talks {\small \frac{Pabna\ Mental\ Hospital}{Seven\ held\ for}}$

leader of the opposition in parliament and discussed various issues including democracy, investment environment and human rights situation in Bangladesh.

US Ambassador in Dhaka Harry K Thomas and senior Awami League leaders were present in the meeting at the AL's Dhanmondi

"The discussion was very open and frank. Among other issues, we've talked about further US investment in Bangladesh," Crowley told the newspersons after the meeting.

He said Bangladesh is an important ally of the United States.

Congressman Meeks described Bangladesh as a moderate Muslim nation. Asked about alleged repression on minorities, he said: "We don't know the exact degree of plight of the minority, but media should not play in favour of the majority.

Briefing newsmen after the leeting, AL General Secretary meeting, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said as they discussed the two-vear rule of the coalition government various points like lack of good governance, corruption, terrorism and the law and order situation came up.

The AL leaders told the visiting delegation that they want to participate in parliament, but the atmosphere is not congenial. "For the sake of democracy, parliament needs to be made effective and functional in the true sense.

They informed the US Congressmen that the coalition government had failed to ensure good governance.

They said the main opposition Awami League also demanded mid-term election, "a natural phenomenon in a parliamentary democracy." The AL leaders said it is now the demand of the people.

"The 15-point demand is not for the party interest, it's for the sake of people, democracy and country. It's for ensuring good governance, creating an investment-friendly atmosphere and for economic

development of the nation," they told the US Congressmen.

During the meeting, the Awami League leaders gave a detailed cture of repression on the minority like Hindus, Christians, Garos and the Ahmadiyya.

Jalil said the Congressmen expressed concern over the repression on minorities, the state of press freedom and human rights viola

Quoting US Congressmen, Jalil said the government should not encourage the communal forces. All these things are coming out in the US media. These are counter productive and not good for investment in the country," he said.

AL International Affairs Secretary Sved Abul Hossain and Sheikh Hasina's Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury were present in the meeting.

Gulistan-Jatrabari

The DCC already held primary negotiations with the three companies and on the basis of the negotiations, the local government min istry yesterday placed a set of recommendations before the cabinet committee. But the committee rejected them and sough fresh recommendations.

The local government ministry proposed that the flyover toll rates hould range from Tk 5 to Tk 200 depending on the type of vehicle. A motor cycle will have to pay Tk 5, CNG autorickshaw Tk 10, car Tk 35, minibus Tk 100 and trailer Tk 200.

Its proposal also said toll rates will be increased every three years on the basis of inflation rate. The DCC will have 5 percent share of the toll without any investment in the project and also share the profit proportionately.

The ministry further proposed there should be no tax or VAT in any form on the investors but the cabinet body ruled out any tax

Decrease in joblessness

enrolment among poorer children," Rushidan said.

From the perspective of poverty analysis, not only the growth but the extent to which it is employmentfriendly is important, said BIDS Research Fellow Dr Nabiul Islam, who presented a paper to the semi-

The extent and nature of poverty reduction depend on how far economic growth is pro-people, said BIDS Director General Dr Quazi Shahabuddin who chaired the first session of the seminar.

Underscoring expansion of productive and enhanced wage-generating employment, Dr Nabiul said growth of the overall economy required the manufacturing sector to generate additional job oppor-

"Bangladesh labour force (civilian) is growing at an average annual growth rate of 4.5 percent and about 1.8 million people are added to the total workforce annu-

Ten killed

FROM PAGE 1

authorities to award suitable compensation to the families of the dead and ensure proper medical treatment of the injured, a communications ministry press release said yesterday.

In a message, the minister expressed his condolences to the victims' families and promised exemplary punishment to those whose negligence caused the

Rights and gender equity perspectives have to be integrated into the design of poverty alleviation strategies, said Shaheen Anam, the team leader of Manusher Ionno taking part in a panel discussion in the second session. UNDP Senior Advisor Dr Selim

Jahan, Dr Sajeda Amin of Population Council, New York, and BIDS Senior Research Fellow Simeen Mahmud, among others, took part in the panel discussion chaired by Professor Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, an independent

Public parks

rapid industrialisation and expansion of trade and business, capitalpolicies of the government

As the chamber leaders told the prime minister that Tk 3,000 crore

is being drained out annually for treatment abroad, she said the government had taken steps to build hospitals of international standard in Dhaka.

She called upon private entre preneurs to come forward in establishing such hospitals in joint venture and gave assurance of possible cooperation from the government.

Responding to their plea, the prime minister said one foreign physician will be permitted to practise at the hospitals here, taking one local physician each as

Exercise human values

diseases,

Mouchak scouting ground in Gazipur yesterday afternoon.

Nearly 12,000 boy scouts and 1,100 girl scouts from different schools and madrassahs of the country and neighbouring India participated in the eight-day moot.

Of the 154 countries having scouting movement, Bangladesh has the fifth largest number of scouts after Indonesia, US, the Philippines and India.

President of Bangladesh Scouts Monzurul Karim, Čhief National Commissioner of Scouts M Fazlur Rahman and President of the Jamboree Organising Committee Badiur Rahman also spoke.

Ministers, MPs and the elite including a large number of senior civil and military officials were

Describing this year's theme of Jamboree, "Scouting for Leadership" as a timely one, the prime minister said the present world has been facing the crisis of able leadership in different fields and erosion of values.

She asked the scouts to raise awareness for a better and positive life, healthy nature and pleasant environment

Khaleda said the country and the society can not prosper without skilled, active, realistic and selfreliant people.

Lauding the role of Bangladesh Scouts in different spheres of social life, the prime minister noted with admiration that they were actively

the repair of roads, tree planta-

tion, fish farming, prevention of

removal of malnutrition, distribution of saline and safe drinking water and in ensuring proper sanitation.

She witnessed a display which included a traditional song by the Bogra contingent. The Netrakona contingent staged a performance aimed at creating awareness for preserving the environment.

Girls of the Indian contingent, attired in traditional dresses of their different states, presented a dance sequence with the song Sare jahan se acchhaa ye $Hindust an \, ham ara".$

The prime minister also distributed crest and certificates among the outstanding scouts.

militant Pakistani groups) since

American officials believe that outlawed Pakistani militant groups are supported by elements of Pakistan 's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI).

"My guess is that the recent attacks on Musharraf could be a reflection of the changing perception among extremists of their ability to get along with Musharraf," said one State Department official who asked not to be identified.

"They are increasingly coming to see him as an enemy, and, frankly, it is a cause for worry for us. But from some perspectives that is a good development," he adds.

US soldier killed in **Baghdad blast** 'drug theft'

AP, Baghdad

A roadside bomb explosion yester-

day in the Iraqi capital killed one US soldier and wounded two,

bringing the American death toll to

nearly 500 since the start of fighting

Also yesterday, in a full-page newspaper ad, Iraq 's top Shia

Muslim cleric reiterated his

demand for the country's next

legislature to be elected as he hard-

ens his opposition to US plans for

The 1st Armored Divison soldier

killed was the first reported combat

death among US troops in Iraq

since Friday, when nine soldiers

were killed when a Black Hawk

medevac helicopter was shot down

attacks by anti-American insurgents have declined in frequency

since the capture of Saddam

Hussein, with an average of 17

attacks a day against US troops in

the past week compared to 30 a day

Children who suffer a head injury

are often routinely examined by a

CT scan. Now, a Swedish team has

found that radiation doses typically delivered by such a scan during

infancy may harm intellectual

While high doses of radiation to

the developing human brain are known to cause mental retardation,

it was not known if exposure to low doses "has more subtle effects on

cognitive function," Dr. Per Hall from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm and colleagues write in

this week's British Medical Journal.

To investigate, they analyzed

mental function and education in

roughly 3000 18- to 19-year-old men who had been given relatively low

doses of radiation before the age of

18 months to treat a type of birth-

mark called a cutaneous

Hall's group classified the sub-

ects into four radiation dose catego-

ries, measured in milligrays (mGy):

1-20, 21-100, 101-250, and over 250

CT scan radiation

may affect kids' IQ

before Saddam was seized Dec. 13.

US officials say incessant

regional caucuses.

near Falluiah.

REUTERS, New York

capacity later in life.

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Pabna police held seven people including four night guards of Pabna Mental Hospital in the last two days for their alleged link to the drug theft from the hospital's store on December 25.

Jessore police held Selim Reza Kalu, an alleged inter-district robber, from the district town on

Acting on Kalu's information. Dhanmondi police arrested Bazlu and Farid, both Jhalakathi residents, from Dhaka New Market area on Sunday morning.

Pabna police nabbed Sultan, Kazi Masud Rana, Musfiqur Rahman and Abdul Khaleque -- all night guards of the hospital -- on Sunday night for their alleged connection with the drug theft. Meanwhile, locals formed a

A section is trying to save the mastermind behind the stealing of costly drugs reportedly worth Tk 30 lakh, they alleged.

committee and demanded hand-

ng over of the country's lone

mental hospital to army medical

Programme on Masterda forced to cancel

CU CORRESPONDENT

Teachers and students of philosophy department at Chittagong University (CU) yesterday forcibly occupied university library auditorium where a left-leaning student front was to organise a discussion on the 70th execution by hanging day of anti-British movement organiser Masterda Surya Sen.

Chairperson of philosophy department led a group of his department's teachers and students and occupied the venue at 8:00am and accorded a freshers' The CU chapter of Samajtantrik

Chhatra Front (SCF), the student wing of Bangladesh Communist Party, alleged that they took necessary permission from the CU authority to hold the discussion at the venue. Despite several requests made

by the SCF activists to use the

venue, the department held their reception programme. "We informed the authority of this but it did nothing," an SCF

Protesting the incident, SCF activists brought out a procession

We're following Bangladesh laws,"

He said the retrenchment deci-

sion was made in line with the

banking reform measures followed

benefits had been offered to the

axed staff as per the bank's service

The bank on Thursday axed 31

The rest of the officers and

employees also resigned en masse

on Saturday showing solidarity

with their colleagues. But the

management neither accepted

their resignation nor withdrew the

The termination caused disrup-

tion in its operation as the remain-

ing staff abstained from work

The agitating staffs were hold-

ing a meeting yesterday night

where they were to decide the next

The termination letter offered

three months' salary to the officers

and four months' salary to the

employees. In addition, officers

were also offered Tk 1 lakh and

employees Tk 30,000 in lump

Habib Bank has been operating

in Bangladesh since 1976. Private

entrepreneurs in Pakistan took

blank," said the victim's father

Alauddin Mian, a kindergarten

teacher, who witnessed the inci-

Sohel's brother Selim linked

local youths 'Western' Titu and

Shahadat to the gang and said another local resident, Pappu,

called his brother to see him min-

"It all happened in 15 minutes.

The killers forced my father apart

when he scrambled to save Sohel.

They left the scene confirming his

Police blamed the killing on a

Unknown assailants gunned

down a mechanic of Titas Gas

Transmission and Distribution

Company Limited on Sunday

Locals found the blood-smeared, bullet-riddled body of

Shamsul Haque, 55, about 200

yards off Rajdhani Filling Station in

Demra at about 10:30pm and

informed police, who sent the body

Hossain filed a case with Demra

The victim's son-in-law Kawsar

to Mitford Hospital for autopsy.

utes before he was killed.

death," Selim said.

gangland turf war.

Police Station.

over it in December 2003.

JCD leader

termination notice on others.

vesterday afternoon.

course of action.

of 68 officers and employees in its

two branches in Dhaka and

rules, he added.

Chittagong.

on the campus and held a rally.

Habib Bank

US congressman

He said his visit to the 800-year old Hindu temple was symbolic of religious tolerance. "I am here to demonstrate that tolerance is the most important thing.

He also noted that an overwhelming number of Muslims in Bangladesh are "loving and peace ful" who want to live in peace with their neighbours of other religions.

He said the US wants to promote the pluralistic and moderate side of Bangladeshi society, but added that the existing friendly relations between the two countries must also include the element of honesty.

He said just as recent US actions in the international arena has received criticisms from Bangladesh, likewise the US also wants to take an honest and critical approach to the events here.

Appreciating the history of

Dhakeswari Temple, Crowley stressed restoration of some of its run-down structures. Kajol Debnath conducted the

meeting which was also addressed by Nim Bhoumik, general secretary of Hindu-Bouddha-Christian Oikya Parishad, CR Dutta (Bir Uttam) and Swapan Saha, presi dent of Mohanagari Sarbojonin Puja Udjapan Committee.

The Parishad leaders informed Crowley that their organisation is not communal, but democratic They also expressed solidarity with the US-led war on terror and hoped the US will assist the minorities in Bangladesh to achieve equal rights.

Particularly, they asked the US assistance in repealing the eighth amendment to the constitution that makes Islam the state religion, and overcoming conditions that, they said, forced the minorities to live like "second class citizens."

Freedom fighters

advisor of the interim government of 1971 Professor Mozaffer Ahmed The declaration of independence was actually made by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 7 in 1971 and Ziaur Rahman (late president) made a formal announcement on March 27, which was also required."

About the unity move by Dr Kamal Hossain and former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, he said they have created confusion in the political arena. "Both of them are not clear about what they are going to do in the name of forging national unity. Before launching any new move, we have to clarify our agendas and the goals for which we will fight again," he added.

Awami League (AL) leader Abdur Razzak said a government consisting of Jamaat leaders can never be a pro-liberation one. "Get united for the cause of the nation. Victory will be ours," he said. AL leader Tofail Ahmed said

Ziaur Rahman rehabilitated war criminals and introduced communal politics. Workers Party chief Rashed

Khan Menon described the reported remarks by Nazmul Huda about Jammat's anti-liberation role as a move to recognise the role of the collaborators of Pakistani occupation forces.

Presiding over the rally, Hasanul Haq Inu said the inclusion of Jamaat leaders in the cabinet is a new dimension in the country's

of the FFs in their lifetime. Inu stressed greater unity of all

pro-liberation political parties to dislodge the coalition government through a movement. National Professor Kabir

Chowdhury said the country is passing through a critical period as the anti-liberation forces now in power have shattered values of the Liberation War. JSD leader Nazmul Haq

Pradhan read out an obituary reference on the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with much of his family, killing of four national leaders, Col Abu Taher, Ziaur Rahman, Major General MA Manzur, Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf, Sheikh Fazlul Haq Moni and Quazi Aref Ahmed.

It also paid rich tributes to Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, Moni Singh, Manoranjan Dhar, General MAG Osmani General MA Rab, Major MA Jalil and Abdul Quddus Makhon. A 27-point declaration was

made at the rally, which included demands for ban on communal politics, special tribunals to try war criminals, end to distortion of the history of Liberation War and Tk 2,000 monthly honorarium for each freedom fighter. Sector commanders of the

Liberation War Major General (rtd) KM Shafiullah, Major General (rtd) CR Dutta, Col (rtd) Abu Osman Chowdhury and JSD leader Moinuddin Khan Badal, Syed Zafar Sazzad, Communist Party of Bangladesh leader Morshed Ali politics, greatly damaging the spirit and values of the Liberation War. and Sharif Nurul Ambia also He demanded proper recognition addressed the rally.

Rafiqul acting secy to pry edn ministry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has appointed Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Education Rafiqul Islam as acting secretary to the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education Education.

The post of secretary at the primary and mass education ministry fell vacant on expiry of a con-tract with Professor Tehmina Hussain.

Additional Secretary Ashabur Rahman, an officer on special duty (OSD) at the Ministry of Establish ment, was appointed additiona secretary to the education ministry, according to an official notifi-

Cabinet sends media bill for scrutiny

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet vesterday sent back the draft of the Private Broadcast Media (Radio and Television) Bill 2004 seeking to bring the private satellite channels under the government control for further scrutiny.

Information Minister Tariqul Islam placed the proposal for bringing the private satellite radio and television channel under a stringent legal framework for giving licences and overseeing the operation of the channels.

The information ministry has received about 30 applications for licences to set up satellite television channels. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia

chaired the weekly cabinet meeting that also approved the draft of the Bangladesh-Indonesia Trade Agreement, expected to be signed during her upcoming Jakarta visit. The cabinet also approved the

draft of the Adalat Sangskar Bastobayan (Shahayak Bidhan) Bill, The bill proposes to set up an online network of district civil courts in a groundbreaking step.

Iraq, Spain urge UN to return to Iraq

REUTERS, Baghdad

The foreign ministers of Spain and Iraq called yesterday for the United Nations to return to the USoccupied country as soon as possible to help oversee the upcoming handover of power back to Iraqis.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has said he still considers the security situation too precarious to risk allowing staff to return.

In October, UN international staff were pulled out following two suicide bombings at its headquarters, one of which killed 22 people, and an upsurge in attacks against humanitarian targets.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari said after talks with his Spanish counterpart Ana Palacio that Iraq's Governing Council wanted the United Nations to help oversee the process of handing sovereignty back to an Iraqi gov ernment by end-June.

Slum dwellers

FROM PAGE 1

They went into action after extra forces from Rajarbagh Police Line

joined them. Police clubbed the mob to bring the situation under control. They also arrested 11 from the spot.

The about 125 acres slum land was cleared on December 21 and

ZIA plunges FROM PAGE 1

(Desco), responsible for power distribution to the ZIA, said the disruption continued for nine minutes and they arranged alternative supply in no time.

"There are underground cables. Possibly, an earth fall took place somewhere, causing the disruption. But we are investigating the matter," Saleh Ahmed, managing director of the Desco, told the news

UPDF blocks

FROM PAGE 12

from them and they started blocking the road from Saturday," he

When contacted, the deputy commissioner of Khagrachhari admitted that he was informed of the incident. However, Chader Gari, a local vehicle to and from Teknaf, and pick-ups run by Pahari Samity were plying the roads.

The KBOA leaders meet today to discuss ways to solve the problem. However, UPDF leader Milton Chakma refuted the claim of his organisation's involvement in the road blockade programme.

UP chairman

The reason behind the killing could

not be immediately known.
However, a source at Raninagar
said the UP chairman might have
been murdered for his anti-PBCP

The victim's relative, Moslem Ali Azam, lodged a case with Raninagar Police Station but police failed to nab anyone till the writing of this report at 6:00 last evening.

Benazir appeals to let her return home

PTI, London

Appealing to Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf to allow both the exiled premiers to return home and be part of the Indo-Pak peace moves, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto has said that only after restoration of a democratic process would a political consensus lead to a durable peace dia-"When the democratic process

at that time would I be satisfied that a political consensus would lead to a durable peace process,' Benazir, who is currently in exile here told BBC programme Aapki Baat BBC Ke Saath broadcast last "In this regard, I have appealed to the Musharraf regime to allow

would be restored in Pakistan, only

both the exiled former prime ministers to return to the country and be a part of the peace process, so that the world can see this as a sincere effort of the army, civilian rule and people of all the four states of Pakistan, and not merely as a tactical manoeuvre"

Asked whether the Musharraf

Javanti's husband

FROM PAGE 12

saying Jayanti committed suicide, said officer-in-charge (OC) of Gulshan Police Station where Azam is undergoing interrogation on a four-day remand. The OC quoted the accused as

aying that the marks of injuries found on Jayanti's body were due to the scuffles they had earlier and not related to her death. He said Azam also denied having an affair with TV artiste Afsana

mother. Mimi also refuted the allegation. In a press release yesterday, Azam's sister and prominent TV artiste Shampa Reza requested newspapers to refrain from pre-senting a "biased" view of the incident so as not to influence the

case in any way and to allow the law

Mimi as alleged by the victim's

regime could be trusted and whether it had the power to implement what it promised, the chief of Pakistan People's Party said: "...for Pakistan to be trusted internationally, there would have to be political consensus internally. "Even if, today we were to say that a particular leader is sincere, he would not be there forever, and remember individual decisions are temporary, and not long-lasting.

"I feel that the people of South Asia are not ready to be cheated once again. We have to seize this opportunity and have an internal political consensus on the peace efforts with India."

exile in Saudi Arabia, Bhutto said: You are right, both of us are out of the political process of the country. General Musharraf has himself been saying that the opposition in the National Assembly takes directions from those out of the country. If the opposition leadership is out of the country, then what sort of democracy is there in Pakistan? I think it cannot be restored like this. Recently, Musharraf sought a vote of confidence. He did not win that. He struck an alliance with the MMA, and despite that had to resort to wrong counting. In Pakistan, the assemblies of the state have equal votes, but this time that was not the case. Punjab

Levy proposal

meeting, told journalists. The government will construct

"In the past, levy was imposed for constructing the Jamuna Bridge. But no account of that fund could be found later on.

Japan has already been con-

3-wheeler 'scam'

appeal added a new twist to the scam when he asked the committee to summon State Minister for Communications Salah Uddin Ahmed to probe allegations of corruption in allotment of land to set up CNG filling stations, an allegation long dogging the minis-

Daily Star yesterday. He denied the allegations of

corruption in land allotment. adding that he replied to them in July last year when his party colleague S A Khaleque brought the

land allocation After a heated debate between Huda and members on January 7, the standing committee formed a

auto-rickshaws The members said the ministry allowed Uttara Motors to import 10,000 auto-rickshaws and the company imported and sold 8,000 auto-rickshaws since 2003 at high

sold an auto-rickshaw at up to Tk 3.67 lakh against the real price of Tk

Five days after forming the subcommittee, the communications

Sunday appealed to the chairman of the standing committee to recast the probe body

The minister's letter reached the office of the standing committee chairman yesterday. Asked about the minister's

appeal, the chairman said: "The sub-committee was formed at the meeting of the committee on January 7, but no-one including the minister raise any objection."

"I will discuss the matter with the standing committee members and if they want a revamp, the subcommittee will be reconstituted accordingly."

The chairman said were also raised on land allotment to set up CNG filling stations, adding: "We may ask the state minister to clarify his position at a

committee meeting.

The next meeting of the standing committee is scheduled for February 14 when Huda's appeal to the chairman will be discussed.

If the members want to sit early, a special meeting may be called, he The sub-committee is likely to

sit today, said Ataur Rahman Khan,

one of its members and a ruling

BNP lawmaker. "I don't understand why the minister demands recast of the sub-committee after its formation.

We don't agree with him," he said. "As the allegations were raised, we want to probe them all thor-

Israeli president offers

favorably to Assad's recent call to resume peace talks broken off in 2000. Responding to the invitation, Syrian Expatriates Minister Buthaina Shaaban told CNN: "We need a serious response, this is not a serious response.

was interested in resuming peace talks where they stopped four years The negotiations in Shepherds-

any agreement on the future of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Sharon however said on Sunday

town, West Virginia ended without

He told his cabinet there was no need to re-start talks with Syria until reports that it wanted a dialogue were clarified.

divided only over the issue of control of a narrow strip of land at water's edge. Israel was ruled by a center-left government at the time.

late last year for unilateral steps to

Sharon has long opposed withdrawal from the strategic heights seized by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war and annexed in 1981 in a move not recognized internationally. Some 17,000 Jewish settlers and 20,000 Druze live on the Golan. It was not immediately clear if

Katsav had sought or received

Sharon's blessing for the invita-

tion, but Israeli Foreign Minister

Silvan Shalom expressed regrets that Syria had rejected the offer. "I am very sorry about it, and it shows the Syrian leadership is not serious about its willingness and readiness to resume negotiations with Israel," Shalom told reporters.

Katsav broached the proposal

 $amid\,a\,peace making\,dead lock\,with$ the Palestinians and threats by Sharon to embark on go-it-alone moves should a US-backed peace

Gaza and unilaterally draw a border in the absence of a peace deal. The rally was the biggest show of force by the pro-settler movement since Sharon revealed his proposal

Sharon's office had no comment on Katsav's invitation.

On her 'political future' and that of the other former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who is currently in

assembly was given more votes to ensure Musharraf's victory," she

FROM PAGE 12 M Saifur Rahman, who headed the

the Padma Bridge with its own fund and donor's assistance, he said.

ducting a feasibility study for a suitable location.

to take its own course.

But the communication minister's

"I don't know why he asked the chairman to summon me, if the committee wants to talk to me I can show up," Salah Uddin told The

charges in the Jatiya Sangsad. Khaleque accused the minister of taking Tk 25 lakh in bribes for the

three-member sub-committee to probe allegations of corruption in import and distribution of CNG

prices. They alleged that the company

She said Israel needed to say it

Israel's biggest reservoir. that talks could only begin if Syria "stops backing terrorism".

But officials have said the two sides, still technically at war, were

Agreement to resume the talks at the point at which they were suspended would effectively force Sharon to agree, even before sitting down at the negotiating table, to a pullout from almost all of the Golan Heights.

plan, stalled by violence, fail. Piling pressure on Sharon, tens of thousands of right-wingers protested in Tel Aviv on Sunday against his proposal to move some settlers from the West Bank and

separate from the Palestinians.