The proposal on swearing-in of

lawmakers is least important, as the

existing provision of the constitu-

tion is enough, which is why no

controversy has been triggered over

the issue. As per the constitution,

the first sitting of each new parlia-

ment after general elections will

have to be summoned within 30

The outgoing speaker usually swears in the lawmakers-elect in 10

days after elections, but the new

proposal makes it mandatory for

office of the lawmakers in three days. In the event of the speaker's

failure, the chief election commis-

sioner will swear in the lawmakers

tory elections to local government

bodies within 90 days on expiry of

their tenure presents another prob-

lem. It says an interim administra-

tor in government service will take

over the charge of each of the bodies

during the period between dissolu-

4,500 such administrators will need to be appointed to oversee the

activities of union parishads (UP)

for instance. Presently, an elected

UP representative hands over

charge to another elected represen-

tative after elections to the local

government tier. Experts now fear

increased government interference

in the functions of the local govern-

elections every five years, but pend-

ing cases on demarcation of constit-

can delay the polls process. Under

the new provision, legal barriers and

pending cases will not prevent

dissolution of the organisations and

tions to the bodies ignoring the

pending cases will severely under-

Azad Mancha

(BCL), student wing of main oppo-

sition party Awami League, yester-

day laid a siege to the VC's office

demanding immediate release of

its leader Abu Abbas, arrest of the

real attackers' of Prof Azad, pun-

ishment of the JCD men and police

for attacking general students and

The BCL leaders at a rally in

front of the VC office demanded

the DU authorities to take initia-

tives for Abbas' release. They threatened to go for an indefinite

Experts observe allowing elec-

staging of elections, as well.

mine the rule of law.

FROM PAGE 12

journalists.

The existing election law dictates

ncies or election irregularities

the new provision will give way to

It means as many as around

tion of and elections to the bodies.

The other proposal on manda-

in the following three days.

speaker to conduct the oath of

days of the polls.

### Return to JS, quit hartal Lalmoni Express

opposition causes countrywide. "The Awami League has long been isolated from the people because of its misdeeds when in power and nowadays it has become further and completely alienated due to its anti-people programmes and campaigns. So, people don't respond to its calls ... if it persists in such programmes, it'll disappear." So, she counselled the AL that it still had time to gain back people's confidence by returning to the Jatiya Sangsad (JS), leaving the path of hartals, vehicle burning and destructive acts.

Khaleda alleged the AL when in power ruined all sate institutions including education and didn't believe in democracy, rule of law and development. To produce a contrast, she mentioned a few of her government's development programmes and claimed a balanced development was now taking

State Minister for Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment and local BNP lawmaker Major (Retd) Quamrul Islam presided over

BNP Secretary General and LGRD Minister A Mannan Bhuiyan, Health Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, Women and Children Affairs Minister Khurshid Jahan Haq, Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Housing

and Public Affairs Minister Mirza Abbas, State Minister for Labour Amanullah Aman, Jativatabadi Jubo Dal President Barkatullah Bulu and General Secretary Moazzem Hossain Alal MP, City BNP General Secretary Abdus Salam, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal President Shahabuddin Laltu and other local leaders of BNP and its front organisations also addressed the rally Besides, Information Ministér Tariqul İslam, Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and some other senior BNP leaders were also

Charging AL President Sheikh Hasina for spreading false and misleading information Mannan Bhuiyan alleged all figures related to murder, rape and other crimes disseminated by Hasina were absolutely false.

He said the government withdrew the false and politically motivated cases filed against BNP leaders and activists during the previous regime of AL, but not the murder cases without investigation.

Moudud Ahmed said the government ensured rule of law in the country and introduced speedy trial that meted out 456 death sentences for various gruesome crimes.

Earlier, Khaleda inaugurated construction of Gulshan-Badda-Progoti Sarani Link Road and said that a good number of development works would be undertaken soon.

## Initiate nat'l dialogue

economic decisions must be taken based on a strategy which ensures development benefits for all, expands employment opportuniproductive activities.

In a charter placed before the elite audience, he also showed the ways of establishing the rule of law by appointing an independent ism and communalism.

economic development in Bangladesh", the Gono Forum president referred to various important issues -- absence of good governance, citizen's initiative, role of business community and activation of parliament.

for the current session of parliament to give the highest priority in its agenda to a serious review of the law and order situation, and overall national security. The opposition should be involved in this review,"

Referring to his visit across the

country for last couple of months and talks with commoners and professionals ahead of the planned national convention to be held on March 14. Dr Kamal said people underlined the need for restoration of the rule of law.

It could only be done through impartial and effective law enforcement and immediate end to political interference, which provided protection to criminals, he said, mentioning that the same view was reflected by the members of a parliamentary standing committee.

On political patronisation of criminals, the Gono Forum president said this was seen as the main cause why law enforcement agencies were seen to be failing to discharge their duties. "No effective inquiry was taking place, offenders were not detected even after several months elapsed," he said.

"The deterioration of law and order, the terrorisation of citizens by politically-patronised godfathers, political interference in law enforcement and the role of black money which had been taking place under successive governments, has continued to deteriorate," Dr Kamal

### IS reserved seats

FROM PAGE 12

strate her sincerity towards our

Shirin Akhter, president of minister assured them of consider-

the time has not yet come for the women to take part in direct polls.

Among others, Rokeya Kabir, executive director of Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha, Prof Mahmuda Islam of Women for

Former law minister Abdul Matin Khasru said the decision for proportionate distribution is not only very much contrary to the spirit of democracy, but also a sheer disregard for the women by this government. He said the proposed bill does not provide any accountability for the women

parliamentarians, as there are no seats provisioned with it. Ivy Rahman of Mahila Awami League called for a social move-

ment to reject the decision. Bangladesh Communist Party

(CPB) said that the decision is a betrayal and it is a ploy to distribute

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) rejecting the decision said it goes against the consensus among all women's rights groups and political parties in favour of direct election. They also said the move would institutionalise the partisan politics and demanded 64 reserved seats for women in parliament.

Bangladesh Workers' Party at its meeting chaired by its President Rashed Khan Menon declared the move as unacceptable and said it is an insult to our women.

#### HC issues

FROM PAGE 12

The bench comprising Justice M Abdul Matin and Justice Syed Refat Ahmed yesterday also stayed the order of suspension on the peti-

The contempt rule was issued upon the IGP Shahudul Huq, Assistant IGP (Security) AKM Shahidul Haq, Deputy Police Commissioner of Chittagong M M a h b u b M o h s i n a n d Superintendent of Police, Jessore, M Shahidul Islam Shahidul Islam.

Earlier on January 27, the High Court in a contempt case found the IGP guilty of misconduct and fined him Tk2000. The Supreme Court had stayed execution of the High Court variety.

Advocate Ozaer Farooq and Mohammad Hossain appeared for the petitioner.

### BNP for no-hartal

past failed to produce any tangible

Mannan Bhuiyan was critical about the AL's boycott of the parliament. "This is a pre-planned design of the opposition to make the parliament dysfunctional."

He urged the AL to return to the House and make itself heard. "Sangsad is made of ruling and opposition parties. We want the parliament to be at the centre of all

the government's resignation, he said: "We shall not resign even a day before expiry of the government's tenure. We must be given the full five-year term to finish our work."

"Is there a situation in Bangladesh that allows the AL to win if an election is held now? Even if they win such an election and a vear later the BNP demands resignation of the government -- do that mean we will have to hold

elections every year? "If we fail to fulfil people's expectations, then voters will give their verdict when an election is held after our tenure ends. Two-and-ahalf years is not enough to evaluate

the success or failure of the govern-

Mannan Bhuiyan levelled charges against the ÅL of nurturing and protecting criminals. "BNP does not protect criminals. We are uncompromising on the issue of curbing terrorism," he said.

About the recent attack by BNP's student wing Jativatabadi Čhhatra Dal (JCD) on peaceful demonstrations at Dhaka University, he said he had asked JCD leaders about the alleged incident and they told him they were not involved in it.

He claimed the government did not hinder political activities of the opposition but police prevented its aders when they tried to break the

Reporters also pointed out to him that the cabinet's approval of a proposal Monday ran counter to BNP's election pledge of women's direct election to the parliament. He said: "It is because we could not determine the mechanism for holding such an election even though we had discussed the issue many women leaders and groups.

DRU General Secretary Saleh Shibli introduced the discussion and DRU President Alamgir

### detained for station demand

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha** 

Locals yesterday held up Lalmoni Express for three hours from noon demanding stoppage at Bonarpara railway station for the recently introduced train

An angry mob halted the capital-bound train at Bonarpara, some 16 km off Gaibandha, putting up barricade on tracks and snap-ping railway signal system.

The inter-city express rolled on tracks at around 3:00pm only after the deputy commissioner, Gaibandha and superintendent of local police went to the spot and brought the situation under control

Railway authorities also sus-pended Abdul Baten Mondal, stationmaster at Bonarpara station, for negligence in duty, sources said.

Talking to journalists at Gaibandha station, the divisional railway manager, Lalmonirhat said the agitators withdrew the blockade after Communications Minister Nazmul Huda assured them of solving the issue through dialogue

During its maiden journey on March 7, locals blocked the express train at the same spot for an hour to press home their demand.

#### Ctg port to sell off 500 unclaimed containers

UNB, Chittagong

To free space for smooth loading and unloading in the Chittagong Port shed, the authorities have decided to put unclaimed 500 containers on auction that may fetch some Tk 200

The Chittagong Port Authority and Customs Authority jointly took the decision at a meeting Monday.

"The auction process of various cargoes worth Tk 200 crore will be completed in three months," said Customs Commissioner AM Mosrur Ahmed after the meeting

The meeting was held at the Port Bhaban in presence of port Chairman AMM Shahadat Hossain and the Customs Commissioner. Meeting sources said the decision was taken to make 10 percent space of

the port free for smooth port opera-A total of 13,000 tons of unclaimed goods have been left abandoned in he port shed for several years. Of the total, 9,000 tons will be auctioned and the rest 4,000 tons of beverage items

#### 5 Guantanamo Britons head home

 $\textbf{REUTERS,} \ London$ 

Five Britons jailed for more than two years at the U.S. Guantanamo base in Cuba headed home Tuesday -- posing anti-terror police a dilemma over whether to release them to families or keep them behind bars.

The men, held since late 2001 or early 2002 with more than 600 others suspected of fighting with the Taliban in Afghanistan or supporting al Qaeda, were expected to reach the Northolt military air base near London around 7 nm around7 p.m.

#### Azad's health

for better treatment.

Jalil said in a press release that the AL is holding talks with Azad's family for his transfer to a foreign hospital and sought government

cooperation in this regard. People are confused due to the differences between the family members' statements and ISPR bulletins about his health, he

#### Dhaka, Delhi

FROM PAGE 1

trade missions in some northeastern Indian states like Tripura and Bangladesh raised the issues of

various non-tariff barriers India has imposed in importing goods from Bangladesh Regarding the huge trade deficit in favour of India, Shashank said

the deficit and all other related issues could be resolved once bilateral trade negotiation begins. He also expressed satisfaction at Bangladesh's decision to sign the

Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation) free trade agreement very soon. Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury

BIMST-EC (Bangladesh-India-

hinted to reporters that the next bilateral trade negotiation might take place later this month or early next month. He said the Indian side wanted to know about Bangladesh's position on gas export and broached

the idea of setting up gas-based industries in the border areas in the absence of any positive decision on gas export. Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Veena Sikri was present

during the discussions. The first round of negotiations for bilateral FTA was held in October last year. The second round was scheduled to be held at Delhi in January this year but was shifted to March. But that has also been postponed citing lack of preparation on both sides

## Angry China warns

Preferring not to be named, a minister told The Daily Star yesterday that the Chinese ambassador also met him and vented sheer frustration at the development.

"He told me the Taiwan issue will not only have negative impact on bilateral relations between the two countries but will also inflict unimaginable damage on Bangladesh," the minister said.

The envoy also claimed China has definite information that Taiwanese visa is being issued from the newly established trade representative office in Dhaka, said another influential minister. Quoting Chinese intelligence

report, he even told the minister

that his country has had the infor-

mation that a quarter within the

government and a particular min-

stry allowed Taiwan to open its office in favour of huge kickbacks. During meetings, the ministers and policymakers assured the envoy of looking into the serious allegation and informed him that police have already seized the signboard of the trade office on

Monday night, sources said.

Bangladesh has not shifted from its "One China Policy" and will never recognise Taiwan as a separate state, the state's bigwigs reiterated Dhaka's position to Chai Xi. The ambassador however said his

country is no longer so sure about Dhaka's real stance, sources said.

He even cautioned them that Bangladesh would require a long time to repair the damage caused to the relationship. It will be hard for China to trust Bangladesh the way it did before, he said.

Realising the gravity of the Chinese reaction, the government top guns are going to meet the prime minister soon to devise ways to mend the twisted relationships. China is also unhappy over the Bangladesh's lack of interest in

implementing project agreements. The two countries signed MoUs

two years back but the projects did not move forward as yet These schemes include 210mw Thermal Power Plant at Khulna, the Development of North Dhaka (East) Sewerage Treatment Plant Pagla Water Treatment Project. The first two projects were under suppliers credit scheme

while the Pagla project was

summed up as inflated one. These projects were supposed to kick-start during prime minister's tour of China last year. But the visit ended in an anti-climactic fashion when Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman urged his opposite number to renegotiate these projects, as not all the deals were favourable to Bangladesh. And there had been no progress since

## Employers for fresh

recommend such a step.

Under the Minimum Wages Ordinance 1961, the government can determine minimum wages for specific sectors only, not for all, the

delegation said. Institution of a uniform national minimum wage should be avoided for the sake of industrial growth, as conditions of business, costing, marketing and so on vary from place to place, the delegates

Forcing the industries to pay beyond their capacity will only lead to large-scale business closure, they told the minister, according to a BĚF statement.

The delegation drew the minister's attention to a reference to the Minimum Wages Board made by the labour ministry in an agreement with the Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (Skop). The BEF pointed out that sealing agreement with any unregistered body like Skop to meet its demands is illegal as per the Industrial Relations Ordinance 1969.

The BEF and its affiliated organisations -- Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and

### **50 VDP members** food-poisoned

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Fifty VDP officials fell sick, 13 of them critically, from food poisoning Monday.

(VDP) officials of Rajshahi division came here on March 6 on a training programme. After taking rice, daal and crushed potato at supper, 50 of them became sick. The ailing officials alleged that

they were being fed sub-standard food since they turned up here. They even objected when they were served the low-quality meal Monday The infected are receiving saline.

said Abdul Mannan, officer-incharge of the district adjutant. He also told newspersons that he does not know whether the afflicted are suffering from food poisoning.

Only Tk 40 per head is sanctioned for food every day, Mannan said, adding they have to manage three meals with it.

Exporters Association, Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, Bangladesh Jute Mills Association and 19 other trade associations -will jointly file a writ petition against the government move on setting the national minimum wages, the statement said.

The BEF however asked the government to introduce trade union rights in the export processing zones (EPZs), as it felt the government should not take the risk of losing GSP facilities of the US for a few establishments in the EPZs, whose combined exports amounted to \$1.2 billion against the country's total export earnings of about \$6.5 billion in 2002-2003.

'Trade unionism will not bring any harm to the EPZ establish ments if outsiders aren't allowed to be office-bearers of the trade unions," the BEF statement read.

State Minister for LGRD Ziaul Huq Zia and BEF Secretary General CK Hyder were also present, among others, at the meeting held at the Secretariat.

#### **Govt quarter** robbed in **Azimpur**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Robbers vesterday vandalised furniture and looted cash, gold and valuables said to be worth about Tk 6 lakh from a government quarter at Azimpur in Lalbagh.

The robbers broke into the house on the second floor of Azimpur Officer's Quarter when the residents - Prof Nilufar Anam, chairman of Government Titumir College, and her husband Md Enamul Kabir, senior information officer of Department of Film and Publication (DFP) and also editor of the daily Nabaroon, -- went out at 11:00am.

"We returned home at 4:30pm to find all the foreign locks broken," said Nilufar, adding, "The robbers left me penniless leaving my home

empty. The robbers ransacked antic furniture, two steel almirahs and looted around 60 tola gold, Tk 20,000 and a Tk 30,000-cheque.

A case was filed with Lalbagh

### Pakistan tests N-capable

FROM PAGE 12

countries won independence from Britain in 1947.

The statement said Pakistan had informed neighbouring countries about the test as a "confidencebuilding" measure.

The test came after Israel last

week concluded a deal to sell India a

strategic airborne radar system despite warming ties between Islamabad and New Delhi. Pakistan says the new missile exceeds the 930-mile reach of the Ghauri, previously its longest-range

missile, which some experts say was developed with North Korean help. The test of the Shaheen II comes amid intense scrutiny of Pakistan's nuclear program after revelations that its scientists sold nuclear secrets to Iran, North Korea and

"Our strategic force goals are guided by the concept of minimum credible deterrence and that's why we have to test these missiles from spokesman Masood Khan said Monday.

Khan said India and Pakistan had a policy of informing each other ahead of missile tests. He said the aim of the test would be to ensure the "reach" of the missile was sufficient to deter

aggression and "prevent military

India concluded a deal last week to buy an Israeli Phalcon airborne radar system, which Pakistan has complained will threaten its security and require steps to keep a balance between the two countries. The Phalcon system can detect

aircraft hundreds of miles away, can

intercept radio transmissions, and put large parts of Pakistan under indian surveillance, including disputed Kashmir, which has been the trigger for two of the rivals' three But the arms disagreement has

not stopped a thawing in relations

that has led to a reopening of air, bus

and rail links. The two countries are

due to hold peace talks in May or June on all issues in dispute, including Kashmir. AFP adds: Japan said yesterday it was regrettable that Pakistan had tested another ballistic missile despite the international push to halt the proliferation of weapons of

Earlier Pakistan's military said it had test-fired an intermediate range surface-to-surface ballistic missile, capable of carrying a nuclear warhead deep into rival India. The test was the first of the locally-built Shaheen II or Hatf-VI

missile, which can carry warheads

mass destruction.

up to 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles). "It is regrettable that Pakistan conducted a ballistic missile test... despite efforts by the international community for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles,' the foreign ministry said in a statement.

"The Japanese government

hopes that the test will not bring

about a negative effect on the posi-

and Pakistan towards improving their relations," it added. The statement called on Pakistan to "respond sincerely" to the international community's

### slate decision to abolish local govt units

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Municipal Association of Bangladesh (Mab) yesterday expressed concern over a recent cabinet decision on appointing government officials in different local government bodies after abolishing those units. Mab members at an emergency

meeting said the decision contra-dicted Article 59 of the constitution and also a High Court verdict, a Urging the government to withhold its decision, it further said the

measure would cripple local government units instead of strength It also threatened to organise a rally of elected public representatives of various local government bodies in the capital and seek legal

redress if the government sticks to its stand, it added. Azmat Ullah Khan, president of the Mab and chairman of Tongi municipality, chaired the meeting.

The cabinet at a meeting on Monday decided to appoint civil servants in different local govern ment units after abolishing those.

#### Spiralling prices Laila Akhtar a long-time customer

at New Market. Traders explained that the increase in lentil prices is due to the usual supply shortage at this time of the year. Karwan Bazar wholesalers hoped the prices would come down to Tk 40-45 a kg in a month with fresh supplies from the current season's output.

Prices of flour and atta have jumped by Tk 12 and Tk 6-7 a kg. A two kg flour pack now sells at Tk 44 at Shantinagar Bazar and New Market Bazar, rising from Tk 36 a week ago. Traders blamed the increase on wheat price hike world

Battery chicken prices that shot up sharply in the wake of the recent bird flu scare still remain high while packed milk powder now sells at Tk 224 against the previous price of Tk But prices of onions have come down from Tk 22 to Tk 18 a kg in case of imported Indian onions and

variety while mutton prices have fallen sharply to Tk 150 a kg from Tk 180 over the last one week. Prices of beef and vegetables remained stable while rice prices marked slight changes.

from Tk 20 to Tk 16 a kg for local

### Banshkhali

him some specific questions. Mahbub first said a gang of 12 set fire to the house of Tejendra Lal Shil and his family at village Sadhanpara in Banshkhali. He claimed he tried to extinguish the fire and to dis-suade others from committing the

Then he said, "Of the 12, six including Mokhtar, Dola Meah, Rubel, Akbar, Aminul Haq and me entered the house and six others were on guard outside. As the family members threw acid on us, Rubel ordered us to set the house afire.

He went on, "We followed his orders, shut all the doors and windows and Rubel set fire to the house."

"I was scheduled to leave for Saudi Arabia on March 13," he added. At one stage, Mahbub named Mokhtar as leader of the gang and

again said Dola Meah led the attack-Replying to a query, Mahbub quoted Mokhtar as saying a local BNP leader and union parishad chairman, who is nephew of a state minister, hired them to do an important job but they did not know

At this stage, ASP (DSB) Abdul Khaleque intervened again and asked him not to give 'irrelevant' statements before journalists.

## Gen Mustafiz

FROM PAGE 1

brigadiers because of what he said was his father-in-law's influence on the then president HM Ershad. Prominent lawver Dr Kamal

Hossain on behalf of Mustafiz

issued the notice titled "Notice of Demand for Justice" terming the recommendation of the Jatiya Sangsad body as misconstruction. "This is a deliberate misconstruction of the provisions of Army Regulations," the notice says. Referring to Mustafiz's entry to

politics after retirement. Mahbub.

also BNP lawmaker, told the

February 26 meeting the army

organogram did not support the

rank of a four-star general and

alleged the promotion was given on political grounds. Dr Kamal in the notice referred the respondents to the page 202 of the army regulations, which high lights the post of a general to be appointed by the president.

"It further appears the parlia mentary standing committee of defence was not fully apprised of the legal position and past precedents in this regard," he added Dr Kamal asked the government

to consider the legal position and

precedents before proceeding

against his client further, which he said would meet legal challenge. Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury, Defence Secretary Ehsanul Haque, President's Secretary Meshbahuddin Ahmad and Major General Abdul Matin, also president's military secretary,

were served with the notice.

## Municipal chiefs | Women's political

previous occasions: the elections to women's seats will take place after the elections to 300 general

This means the ruling BNP has shifted from its poll pledge of introducing the provision of direct elections to the women's reserved seats and increasing the number of such seats. The other proposed changes in the constitution do not hold any significance except for the one that provides for mandatory display of the portraits of the president and the prime minister in offices of government, semi-government and autonomous organisations. The provision however is widely viewed as a politically motivated agenda of

The issue of women's effective representation in parliament is as old as the country itself and the indirect election to the reserved seats started immediately independence and ran through to 2001 with a two-year pause from 1988 to

The 1972 constitution had the provision of 15 reserved seats for women and following an amendment the number was raised to 30 while the tenure of the reserved seats was extended to 15 years from 10 years. As the tenure of the seats expired in 1988, the fourth parliament had no reserved seats for

The Ershad government how-ever amended the constitution in 1990, providing for another 10 years' extension to the reserved seats ignoring the demand of the women's rights groups for direct polls to the reserved seats. The tenure expired in 2001 with dissolution of the seventh parliament. The eight parliament started its journey on October 28, 2001 without the reserved seats.

The Awami League government introduced a bill in the seventh parliament in June 17, 2000 seeking an additional 10-year extension to the reserved seats, which the women's rights groups rejected. They also demanded introduction of direct elections and an increase in the number. However, the AL regime could

not get the bill passed in the House due to its dearth of a two-thirds majority, unlike the incumbent coalition government, for amending the constitution. At that time, the main opposition BNP was boycotting parliament and had not attended any meeting while the bill was at the parliamentary standing committee on the law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry for scrutiny. The BNP had then declared that it would resolve the

strike if their demands were not issue in the eighth parliament. This time around, no scope is The BCL will submit a memothere for a broader discussion with randum to the DU VC today. BCL the opposition on the bill when it President Liagat Sikder, General goes to the standing committee on law ministry for scrutiny as all the Secretary Nazrul Islam Babu, Delwar Hossain, president of BCI eight lawmakers who sit on the DU unit, among others, were present at the rally.

# Tamil rebels reject

despite the amnesty offer made through the Bishop of Batticaloa Kingsley Swamipillai.

crucial body belong to the BNP.

"It is ridiculous," Varadan told AFP by telephone. "It is they who should think of being forgiven by our people (in the east) for the sacrifices made to protect the land and the people of Wanni (in the north).

Karuna, who is an ethnic Tamil from the east of the island, broke away last week after accusing the LTTE's northern-based leadership of hogging key positions despite the bulk of the Tiger fighting force coming from the east.

Varadan said it was the east that

had sent thousands of fighters to

protect the lands of the northern

Tamils, known as Jaffna Tamils, while the easterners better known as Batticaloa Tamils were used as cannon fodder. LTTE political wing leader S. P. Thamilselvan said in remarks published on the rebels' website Tuesday that Karuna was acting

alone and did not have support among the rank and file. However, the eastern district of

Batticaloa where Karuna holds

swav was paralysed by a one-day strike called Monday to express

support for him.

open Tuesday, but most parents kept back their children fearing an eruption of violence. Most shops remained closed although there was no formal strike called for Tuesday. Bishop Swamipillai led a delegation of prominent citizens of

Batticaloa to hold talks with

Thamilselvan, who had originally

Residents said schools were

offered the amnesty to Karuna on Saturday when he announced his dismissal from the LTTE. "They (the Tiger leadership) assured that their actions to restore normalcy will not in any way affect the people or the LTTE cadres in the Batticaloa-Ampara Districts.'

the main Tiger group said in a statement. Both sides have said they were keen to avoid a factional war, although Karuna's faction said it

reserved the right to self-defence. The crisis within the Tamil Tigers come just ahead of Sri Lankan elections on April 2, in which rebel proxies could play a decisive role.

## Hartals for four straight

political gatherings.

and continue to deploy armed policemen around the lawful rallies of political parties, I will file a writ petition with the High Court,' warned AL presidium member Suranjit Sengupta, quoting police laws that do not allow such force deployment around peaceful

To protest an attack on eminent writer Humayun Azad and demand the BNP-led coalition's resignation, the AL and the three leftleaning parties enforced a hartal on March 6, a fifth since February 12. Central AL leaders including Abdul Jalil, Tofail Ahmed, Amir

Hossain Amu, Motia Chowdhury, Rahmat Ali, Obaidul Kader, Akhtaruzzaman and Sultan Mohammad Mansur Ahmad called on people to unite against what they said was tyranny of the BNP-Jamaat coalition.

An AL organising secretary, Abdul Mannan, told the rally the main opposition would go for a two-to four-day hartal at the end of this month. On BNP Secretary General

Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan's statement vowing to face the opposition politically, Jalil, also AL general secretary, said his party was ready to face the BNP politically too, if it comes up front shedding back-ups The four parties held their second simultaneous antigovernment programmes through esterday's demonstrations across the country. Protesting the attack on Azad

government oppression and demanding resignation of Home

Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, the JSD, CPB and WP demonstrated in front of their party offices and brought out processions without police bstruction. Another constituent of the 11-

party alliance, Bangladesher majtantrik Dal, also held a rally in Muktangan calling on people to

#### HC rules

FROM PAGE 1 comprising Justice Shah Abu Naim

Mominur Rahman and Justice Abdul Awal stayed execution of the DMP order on July 14, 2003 following a writ petition against the order. Yesterday's court order empowers the DMP to fine vehicles with

into effect after 30 days. Assistant Attorney General Zaman Akter Bulbul represented the government and ABM Nurul

extra bumpers once the rule comes

Islam stood for the writ petitioner

#### ombudsman, impartial functioning of police and freeing the politics and election from black money, terror-In his speech on "political reforms to promote democracy and

'A sensible approach would be

press for cancelling the government's decision. It would demon-

ing the demand, but in reality he Avsha Khanum accused the law minister of uttering very objectionable words in parliament as he said

Women and Shifa Hafiz of Brac attended the conference. Besides, different political parties and social activists continued to reject the government's decision.

opposition leaders over phone within a couple of days, although such efforts by him in the recent

Rejecting the AL's demand for