Jamaat has links to

Tigers revel

becoming the first Bangladesh captain to declare in Test cricket.

The second innings declaration came at 271 for nine, leaving the West Indies 336 to win off 29

Left with the highly improbable, if not impossible, task, West Indies were 113 without loss when the two captains agreed to a draw with Chris Gayle undefeated on 66 and Devon Smith 40.

A beaming Bashar said: "It was a total team effort. Whenever we needed someone to step up they

Shortly after tea, wicketkeeper Mashud brought up his century driving a flighted delivery from man-of-the-match Chris Gayle through cover for four.

Before the ball reached the ropes, the former Bangladesh captain was already being embraced by number eleven batsman Tareq Aziz.

The doughty cricketer occupied the crease for 5-1/2 hours to nite 13 fours from 281 balls.

When the two looked towards the dressing room, they witnessed something that no Bangladeshi cricketers saw before.

Standing alongside cheering

at them to come back. Bangladesh just declared an innings for the first time in their four-year his-Next stop is Jamaica where the

teammates, Bashar was gesturing

Windies will try to give back a few of the compliments in the second and final Test, starting Friday.

"I am very happy for the boys. We gained a lot of positives from this match, but every time we play there is always room to improve,

"We will take the positives from this match and try and improve on them in Jamaica.

(Scorecards and related stories on page 13)

petition with the HC on May 23.

A division bench of the HC directed the RO to reconsider allo-

cation of "Kula" to Mannan, But the RO refused again on the grounds

that the election law did not allow a

and received a stay order on the by-election until June 12. However, the

EC officials lodged an appeal

against the stay order with the chamber judge the same day and the judge referred the matter to the

The chief justice formed a special

bench of thé Appellate Division in

the same night to hear the appeal.

The special bench however referred

it to the full bench on May 29 after

ing the appeal on Sunday found

been alleging flaws in the process of

filing the appeal since it was lodged, but the appellants said those were

The full bench that started hear-

The BDB candidate has all along

Things took a dramatic turn

hen Chief Election Commissioner

(CEC) MA Syed denied to have

signed the warrant of attorney or the

The court then summoned the EC file and found that it had the

signed approval of the CEC. A flab-

bergasted CEC insisted that he

knew nothing about EC's approving the move to file the appeal.

EČ's approving the move.

Fuel station

go on strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

from June 15

The owners and employees of

petrol pumps and tank-lorries on June 15 are going on an indefinite strike to protest extortion and harassment by police in the capital.

The leaders and employees in a

The strike will include all depots

statement yesterday said they had threatened to go on an indefinite

strike if the government failed to stop police extortion at different

in Dhaka and Narayanganj, the statement said. The leaders and

employees will restrain from sup-

plying fuel to the airlines and fuel traders, the statement added.

meeting of the fuel providers ásso-

ciation, tank-lorry owners associa-tion and tank-lorry workers associ-

ation at Sharif Mansion in Motijheel.

A nine-member committee with Sazzadul Karim Kabul as convenor was formed at the meet-

It's all rumour

Pressed to elaborate, the CEC said

The CEC had also termed the

appeal filing a fraud. On Tuesday, he

said he was not sure whether he gave

Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali told reporters yes-

terday that the EC did not file any

appeal. "We did not hold any meeting nor did we decide to file the

"If the chief election commis-

sioner gave the approval, he did so on

his own, the Election Commission is

not a party to it. According to the law,

the Election Commission is com-

prised of all other commissioners,'

Many at the EC Secretariat said the confusion is an outcome of the

ongoing conflict between the CEC and EC Secretary SM Zakaria. Asked

whether he was responsible for all that happened over the approval,

Zakaria said he was on the right track and did nothing wrong.

election commissioner advised the

CEC to remove the ambiguity about

the approval issue and speaking his mind. He also suggested holding of an EC meeting to discuss the situa-

tion, but the CEC disagreed with him.

is sub judice and should be disposed of in court, the source added.

The CEC's view is that the matter

A source close to the CEC said an

ohammad Ali told reporters.

he would talk later after knowing

about the Supreme Court judgement on the appeal petition filed on behalf

approving the appeal filing.

of the Election Commission.

the approval.

appeal," he added.

The decision was made at a joint

points in the capital by June 14.

owners to

hearing the matter for two days.

vs in filing the appeal.

Mannan again moved the HC

reconsideration of the issue.

No by-polls on June 6

'bench' instead of 'Kula' to Mannan should not be declared illegal and why the EC should not be directed to Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud,

lawyer of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) candidate in the Ramna-Teigaon constituency Major (retd) Abdul Mannan, who won the legal battle, termed the verdict historical.

He said by delivering such a timely verdict, the Supreme Court has saved the nation from another farcical by-election like the one in Magura in 1994 during rule of BNP government.

The Supreme Court upheld its image and proved that it is always ready to deliver in favour of justice without any hesitation, Rokan

Mannan termed the judgement a victory for people and democracy of the country against conspiracy"

Barrister Rafiq Ul-Haq and Barrister Tanjib Ul-Alam also stood for Mannan in the case.

TH Khan, the counsel of the appellants, accepted the verdict, but said it was not told why the prayer was rejected. There was no other court above the full bench, so they had to accept the judgement,

Legal experts say the fate of the by-poll will be decided at the HC and it is likely to face more legal tangles once the court disposes of

There would however still be scopes to file leave-to-appeal petition against the judgement, and filing of such a petition will further delay by-poll. **SUŠPĖNSEIN**

COURTROOM

The SC bench sat at 9:10am yesterday to hear the arguments of the both sides and heard the lawvers' submission for one and a half hours before adjourning for $10\,\mathrm{minutes}$.

Counsels of both sides, curious lawyers, representatives of different officials and newspersons crammed the court in animated

After the break, the chief justice delivered the verdict at 11:00am. **HOWTHE DRAMA** UNFOLDED

The legal tangle surfaced in the wake of refusal by the RO of Dhaka-10 to allocate "Kula" to BDB candidate Abdul Mannan. The refusal

Hotelier gunned down in Kushtia

5 policemen suspended apparently over law and

order downslide

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Extortionists gunned down a hotelier on Tuesday night in Kushtia on refusal to pay them money, adding to the long line of killings in the south-

western district over the last few Witnesses said an armed gang of seven tied to a criminal outfit, Abed Bahini, stormed Gopal Hotel and Restaurant in Khoksa at about

9:30pm and left its owner Surojit Kumar Saha fatally injured in a hail of The 24-year-old son of Dulal Chandra Saha from Kamlapur village bled to death at Faridpur Medica

College Hospital after he was shifted from Khoksa Health Complex for better treatment

His family linked the killing to his refusal to give the extortionists Tk 1 lakh in illegal toll they demanded from him seven days ago.

The killing came barely 30 hours after Matiur Řahman, joint convenor of Kushtia district Awami Sechhashebak League, was gunned

down on Monday. Local businesspeople shuttered shops and other businesses and moved out into streets in procession to protest the murder and demand arrest of the killers.

District police authorities suspended five policemen, including Assistant Sub-Inspector Santosh Kumar of Khoksa Police Station, apparently over law and order downslide underlined by the latest

Rivals killed eight underground operatives in a turf war in Baghdanga village in Sadar upazila, 40 kilome ters off the district headquarters, on Sunday. At least 23 people were murdered in the district last month.

accidents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least seven people were killed and 28 others injured in road accidents in Chittagong, Tangail and Bogra

Our Chittagong Correspondent reported that a truck-jeep collision on the Chittagong-Rangamati Highway at Raozan left four people illed and ten injured.

The dead are Shahabuddin, 26, Bijoy Barua, 50, Abul Basher, 30, and Mohammad Yusuf, 21. Shahabuddin and Bijoy died on the spot while Bas-her and Yusuf on the way to hospital.

Police and witnesses said the accident occurred at Shantirdwip near Gohira under the upazila at around 9.30am.

The injured are undergoing reatment at Chittagong Medical Hospital (CMCH) and local health complex. A case was filed with

Raozan Políce Station. In Tangail, two person were killed and 17 others injured when a Dhaka bound passenger bus from Gaibandha skidded off the Dhaka-Tangail Highway and fell into a ditch in the afternoon.

The identity of the dead could not be known. Police and locals sent the injured passengers to Tangail Sadar Hospital.

According to our Bogra Correspondent, an unidentified women aged about 25 was killed when a roller of the Roads and Highways hit a rickshaw from behind at Chelopara in the town at cround 10:30am

The rickshawpuller, injured in the accident, was admitted to Bogra Mohammad Ali Hospital.

Cop held with heroin worth Tk 4.5 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Narcotics Control Department officials vesterday recovered heroin worth about Tk 4.5 lakh and held two, including a cop, from a hotel in the city.

The recovery also revealed alleged involvement of another cop in drugs smuggling in the city. Acting on a tip off, a team of the

department raided Hotel Midtown n Station Road and seized 46-gram heroine from a room at around 10:00am, sources said. The officials also held constable Rafiqul Islam of Shaheb Nagar in

Ishwarganj in Mymensingh and Abdul Gafur of Khazuria Chairmanbari in Chittagong. Rafiqul, however, alleged one

driver Bakaul of General Railway Police, who is involved in phensidyl and drugs smuggling in Chittagong Railway Station areas, has plotted against them. Following his information, the Rapid Action Battalion on May 26

seized 2,500 bottles of phensidyl from Kadamtali bus stand, Gafur said. The lot belonged to Bakaul, who has avenged his loss through the conspiracy, he alleged.

Narcotics Control Department handed them over to police.

Motorcycle garage owner shot dead

UNB, Dhaka

A motorcycle garage owner was shot dead by unidentified assailants in front of his house in the city's Khilgaon area on Tuesday

The victim was identified as M Sabuj, 20, son of Abul Kashem of Kunjaban, Khilgaon.

Police quoted family sources as saying a gang of four called Sabuj out of his residence at about 10:30pm and sprayed bullets on him. He sustained four bullets in the head, chest and abdomen.

Sabuj was rushed to a nearby clinic and then shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where he

Held PBCP cadre names 20 others

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Police yesterday obtained names of 20 Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) cadres, including their Chuadanga chief, and a bank account from arrested PBCP cadre Badrul Alam Pintu.

Outlawed PBCP's Chuadanga boss Monirul Islam and some stu-dents of Rajshahi University and Rajshahi Government College were, among others, in the list given by Badrul Alam Pintu, who was held from a house in Hajrapukur on May

"Following Pintu's confessional statement, we raided a house in Hajrapukur and found an Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd. cheque," said Detective Branch (DB) Subinspector Ahsanul Kabir.

The cheque belongs to Moniruzzaman and his wife Nazma Zaman, who have a deposit of Tk 10.48 lakh in their account, police sources said.

"We requested the bank officials to suspend transaction of the account until the account is frozen," Kabir said, adding Moniruzzaman is known as Monirul Islam in

Monirul was arrested in Chudanga six months back. Out on bail, he started PBCP operation in Rajshahi.

^{7 killed in road} | Dhaka included

The telecoms watchdog earlier decided to award fixed phone licence to three more private operators to increase Bangladesh's tele-density, which is the lowest in South Asia.

Westec Limited, QC Telecom Limited and Jalalabad Telecom Limited (JTL) have qualified for the fixed phone licence. Bangla Phone Limited and Ranks Telecom Limited have also prelimi-

narily qualified but are required to fulfil certain criteria, BTRC officials said. Private operators would be able to meet a huge demand for fixed phones in the capital through prompt deployment of either CDMA 2000 1x or wireless local loop (WLL) technology that enables phone

Currently, state-owned Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) enjoys monopoly in providing fixed line telephones in the capital. About half of the BTTB's over 800,000 telephones are in Dhaka.

without wired network, the BTRC

Westec Limited and QC Telecom Limited will launch service in South-East Zone consisting of Brahmanbaria, Comilla, Chandpur, Lakshmipur, Noakhali, Feni, Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Khagrachhari, Rangamati and

The JTL would launch operations North-East zone including Sunamganj, Sylhet, Habiganj, Moulvibazar, Sherpur, Jamalpur Netrakona, Mymensingh, Kishoreganj, Tangail, Munshiganj Manikganj, Narayanganj excluding the district headquarters, Gazipur excluding the district headquarters Tongi, Dhaka excluding Dhaka city, Jinjira and Savar.

the lowest in South Asia, according to the statistics of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Only 1.56 of 100 people have access to telecoms facility, the 2003 data of the UN telecoms watchdog say. Cell-phones outnumber fixed line telephones in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's teledensity is still

which has 0.55 fixed line telephone per 100 inhabitants. The number of mobile phones per 100 people stands at 1.01. Apart from the BTTB's fixed phone, Bangladesh Rural Telecom

Authority and Sheba Telecom also provide a few thousand fixed phones via WLL technology. The cellular phones provided by four operators in foreign joint ventures number about

Saifur for village-centric

to accelerate their activities. Under

the drive, some powers of the ministries will be gradually devolved to city corporations and district, upazila and union parishads, he Credit flow to villages will also be

increased, he said, adding the budget will have instructions and directions for banks to sanction loans on the basis of entrepreneurial initiatives and dynamism rather than collateral requirements. Under the 'caring and village-centric reform', the government will ake special steps to provide finan-

cial assistance to agro-based indus-

ries, the finance minister said

Irrigation will get a range of sup-ports, including subsidy, canal

digging and construction of embankment, Saifur added. According to his plan, the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) will be transformed into a Seed Corporation and adequate funds provided to strengthen its activities.

The minister also announced that the safety net programme, like old age allowance and widow allowance, would be further expanded.

The budget will also attach priority to infrastructure development in rural areas in order to facilitate farmers in marketing their produces better. "On the priority list for budget allocations, railways and inland water transport will come next to the agriculture sector,'

On law and order and extortion situations, the minister said the government had already taken measures to strengthen the police force and budget allocation would also be increased to make police a more effective instrument for providing security to citizens. He believes, "Economic development cannot sustain without proper

Saifur also said some institutional reforms would take place in the new policies to ensure transparency and accountability as well as optimum utilisation of the scarce resources.

Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan and National Board of Revenue Chairman Khairuzzaman Chowdhury were also present at the meeting held at the finance ministry

Delhi offers

Bangladesh by pipeline to India, was forced to redraw its plans as Dhaka refused to allow exports.

The company now plans to supply 200 million cubic feet a day to the domestic market by 2006. Bibiyana, which holds about 5.5 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves,

does not produce any gas at pres-"They (Bangladesh) have to decide if they have exportable surplus. Whenever they reach such a decision, they will have no objec-

tion to exporting gas to India,' Aiyar said. Asked how soon Bangladesh will be able to assess its gas reserves

and exportable surplus, Morshed said, "When we find out." He also rubbished the numerous studies carried out to establish

Bangladesh's gas reserves saying "studies cannot give you gas, only real drilling gives." Aiyar also raised the issue of using Bangladesh as the transit

route for transporting India's share of gas in the gigantic A-1 field in offshore Myanmar. To this, Morshed responded, saying Bangladesh had no objection to a pipeline travelling through its territory if constructed on

Stop yearend burst

FROM PAGE 1

in taking project and removing obstacles to their implementation to avoid additional expenditure.

"The old and long habit of taking up projects hurriedly at the end of fiscal year even by ignoring normal procedures must be stopped. Unutlised fund should to surrendered in case of non-completion of projects and programmes.'

Khaleda said it emerged as a culture of spending allocated project funds in a hurry at the end of every fiscal year, but this ten-dency should be stopped. She listed her government's

development programmes and programmes to raise the skills and efficiency of public servants. She said her government took a programme to provide seven-year training for 600 mid-ranking offi-

cials to raise their skills. An initiative to build a 'Scholar Civil Servant' has also been taken and around 3,000 officials will be given the opportunity to obtain PhD and MS degrees at a cost of Tk 1,500 crore, she said. Briefing reporters after the

nearly three-hour meeting from 12:30pm, Cabinet Secretary Dr Saadat Hussain said 80 percent of decisions and government orders were implemented through tireless efforts in the last two and a half Thirty of the 42 secretaries who

attended the function spoke. Prime Minister's Political Secretary MA Harris Chowdhury

was present on the occasion. Acting Secretary to the premier AHM Nurul Islam was remarkable by absence.

mutual beneficiary terms indicating Dhaka's keenness in levying a **RIVER INTERLINKING**

On the interlinking of rivers, Indian Water Resources Minister

Priyaranjan Dasmunsi assured Morshed that nothing would be done to the detriment of Bangladesh. "Sharing of water resources is as

much a concern to India's eastern region as to Bangladesh," he said, adding all issues relating to water share would be resolved amicably. Morshed had also a 15-minute courtesy call on former Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Two outlaws lynched

election results. "Recently, I have checked the accounts of a city corporation. There I found the mayor of the STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Two armed cadres of the Janajuddho faction of outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) were killed in mob beating near a orphanage at Malghar Union under Fakirhat upazila of Bagerhat district early yesterday.

They were identified as Hasibul Islam, 28, and Rakibul, 26. According to police, five PBCP cadres went to Malghar at about

4:00am to realise tolls from some shrimp traders. Sensing the presence of the PBCP cadres, locals surrounded them and held the two, Hasib and Rakib, while the rest managed to flee.

They beat the two mercilessly, resulting in their death on the spot. Police recovered the bodies yesterday morning and sent them to Bagerhat Sadar Hospital for

300 cheated

New Delhi, when he met FBCCI (Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry) President Abdul Awal Mintoo at the Federation Bhaban here yesterday. The Bangladeshi workers have

been temporarily allowed to stay in Laos, the ambassador said. They also discussed matters relating to expansion of economic cooperation and bilateral trade

between Bangladesh and Laos. Since there is no direct trade between Bangladesh and Laos, which was an election pledge of the both Douangsithi and Mintoo agreed that there should be direct

ness bodies of the two countries. They also agreed to sign a joint cooperation agreement between the two apex business bodies for enhancing trade and economic cooperation between the private sectors of Bangladesh and Laos.

trade and also exchange of visit by

trade delegations from apex busi-

Khulna city **BNP** leader held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Joint forces yesterday arrested a city BNP leader accused of three murders from his house in Musalmun-para under Khulna

Moin Jamaddar, 33, also accused in three cases filed under the explosive Act, was being questioned at the joint forces camp in Batiaghata until yesterday after-Police alleged Moin, who was

out on bail, used to harbour armed

cadres of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party's (PBCP) Janajuddha faction to commit murders, tender manipulation and extortion in the southeast region. Moin is charged with killing Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD central Vice-president Waliduzzaman Chanchal on

October 18, 1998 and businessperson Ruhul Amin and mechanic Hanif of Nirala residential area in Two senior leaders and a law-maker of ruling BNP, meanwhile, are interfering in the interrogation

and pressing to let him off, said a high official of Khulna Metropolitan Police seeking ano-

Kidnappers

Police said Nasim was abducted from Raja Birat market on May 29. His family failed to trace him despite an exhaustive search.

Nasim's father Kamrul received a call on his mobile phone the next day and the anonymous caller demanded Tk 50,000 as ransom for the release of his son. As told by the caller, he rushed to Gabtoli in Dhaka and met one Saju of Raja Birat who agreed to settle the matter. Kamrul however became suspicious of Saju and with the help of locals caught Saju and brought him to Raja Birat.

Police arrested Saju after the father filed the case against two

According to Saju's confessional statement, police recovered Nasim's body from a ditch in village Bhuya. The other accused is still at large.

ZIA branches

action on the basis of intelligence report and instruction from the finance ministry, a ministry official said preferring anonymity. Sonali, Janata and Agrani banks

formed separate committees to investigate the allegation and sent inspection teams to their ZIA branches yesterday. Officials at the head offices of the banks however told The Daily Star

vesterday that the accused officers

and staff were involved not in hundi business, an illegal way of transferring money, but in underhand foreign currency trading. Sources said the bank officers and staff get involved in buying and selling of foreign currency when-

ever they are posted at the airport

branches and are usually trans-

City mayors

ferred after a certain time.

"and the local bodies also do not push for any tax fearing negative

corporation bought a Pajero and was charging Tk 24 lakh a year for its petrol alone." "In a city corporation there are 200 sweepers. But among them only about 50 actually clean city roads. The rest serve personal purposes of the mayors and the

ward commissioners," he pointed "The same goes with the other city corporations in Chittagong, Khulna, Sylhet and other places,"

Pry teachers

Minister on Primary and Mass Education Prof Jahan Ara Begum on Monday rejected nationalisation of the non-government primary teachers' jobs

It (nationalisation) was a "slip of tongue" before the 2001 general elections, she said while inaugurating a workshop styled Introducing Public Evaluation Examinations after Finishing Class III and V at the Directorate of Primary and Mass Education in Mirpur in the city. Thirty non-government pri-

mary teachers are taking part in the

fast-unto-death programme and at least five among them fell sick. The conditions of several others deteriorated yesterday and they were given intravenous fluid due to dehydration and other complica-The teachers earlier observed a hunger strike programme to drum up support in favour of their demand for nationalisation of jobs

Bangladesh Nationalist Party There are about 75,500 teachers at 19,428 registered nongovernment primary schools, according to government statistics.

Mirza Abdul Jalil, president of the Krishak League, among other leaders, went to Muktangaon to express solidarity with the teachbomb went off.

16 extremist outfits

Hasina alleges at city rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday alleged that the ruling coalition constituent Jamaate-Islami had links to 12 to 16 religious extremist outfits operating in Bangladesh.

Blaming what she termed the free-fall of law and order partially on he organiations, she said they had countrywide networks and trained their operatives in armed combat.

Hasina, also the president of main

opposition Awami League, was addressing leaders and workers of the Rickshaw Malik Sramik Oikya Sangram Parishad at the party headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue. She accused the government of

protection for them. Pegging the government as corrupt and terrorists,' she said:
"The entire country is now hostage to criminals patronised by the ruling

unfettering fundamentalist extremists people, instead of providing

coalition. They have transformed the peaceful country into a land of ter-

The alliance government is now

trying to cling to power using black money and illegal arms, she alleged. "Innocent people are being killed every day in a planned way and it appears that the government has nothing to do to stop the crimes. Khaleda Zia's administration is

totally dysfunctional." Hasina also accused the ruling alliance of conspiring to kill popular AL leaders, indulging in unabated corruption and falling to check price spiral of essentials.

The AL chief urged rickshaw-pullers to observe the 24-hour hartal on June 5, called simultaneously by the Awami League and its labour front organisation Jatiya Sramik League, demanding punishment to the killers of lawmaker Ahsanullah

Senior party leaders were present

Security concerns

terrorists were present on both sides of the border but that did not mean either Indian or Bangladesh government was harbouring them. "What is important that govern-

ments in the two countries are taking action against them," the foreign minister added. "I see a great deal of pomposity of the media in both countries when it comes to negatives. We have to change that mindset. On if a bilateral free trade agree ment (FTA) was off the table because

of difficulties it has run into, Morshed shot back saying: "If there is a perception that Bangladesh is not interested in FTA and that it has run into hitches, it is wrong. After all, we have signed framework of agreement for free trade with a number of Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) countries in the last two years." He pointed out that a joint working group set up last year to discuss FTA has already held two rounds of

negotiation and the process was on

track. But he declined to spell out when FTA would be clinched, saying negotiation is a continuous process.

Morshed indicated that Bangladesh would be willing to allow

Gandhi commended Bangladesh for its programmes on poverty

Officials of the US embassy met with foreign ministry officials yesterday afternoon to discuss the itinerary of Rumsfeld's visit.

The US secretary is coming to

Bangladesh as part a three-nation tour that will also take him to reports. Rumsfeld's visit is the second by a top US official after Secretary of State

Colin Powell made a stopover in Dhakain June last year. Rumsfeld is expected to hold talks with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan.

government takes over on June 30.

mortar round that missed a US

convoy, witnesses said. Gunfire reverberated through the largely deserted streets as Sadr fighters took positions near the mosque, where gunbattles have raged in past days. Tanks and Humvees rolled into the center of the city at midmorning, prompting terrified civilians to scramble for

Five people were killed in the fighting, hospital sources said. In skirmishes lasting about an hour, two militiamen were injured, fighters said.

three, officials in al-Sadr's office Fighters threatened to conduct suicide operations if talks meant to

"We will use explosive belts to attack the US tanks," said one fighter, Ali Hussein.

The car bomb in Baghdad exploded in the city's Azimiyah district in the north of the capital. Hospital official Nazdar Kadhim said five Iraqis died and 33 were hurt, including five children. Wailing relatives of the injured gathered at the hospital, only to be stopped from going into the emergency room.

elections schedule.

He also wanted to know why certain EC officials were so hyperactive in the process of this case.

Asked if at a later stage, natural gas from Bangladesh could also be pumped into the proposed Myanmar-India pipeline, Morshed said it was for experts to sit down and discuss a South Asian energy grid.

Morshed who called on him as the special envoy of Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia also met Sonia Gandhi for half an hour during

alleviation, girls' education and microcredit.

Security scurry ahead

FROM PAGE 12

Malaysia and Singapore. He will be accompanied by a 40-member media team besides officials, BSS

He will hold a press conference His visit to Malaysia and Bangladesh is viewed as part of the latest US efforts to shore up support from the Muslim-majority nations to send troops to Iraq under UN umbrella after the interim Iraqi

12 killed

FROM PAGE 12 suffered shrapnel wounds from a

cover.

Al-Sadr's forces and US troops also exchanged gunfire in the Shia district of Baghdad known as Sadr City, killing one fighter and injured

calm the situation failed.

Witnesses said two blasts occurred -- an initial explosion followed by a second one that went off just as a crowd had gathered. A convoy of sport utility vehicles, favored by Western contractors, had passed by moments before the

In Singapore, Rumsfeld is set to present the keynote speech at the Asia Security Conference, reports a Singapore daily.

Meanwhile, the US secretary's visit to Dhaka coincides with the hartal on Saturday called separately

Rumsfeld's visit be out of the purview of the 24-hour hartal from Saturday morning. "The hartal is aimed to protest misdeeds and misrule of the govern-ment, not Rumsfeld's visit. His visit

"Though his (RUmsfeld's) visit is yet to be confirmed, We don't want to hamper activities of a foreign guest," he said.

front organisations have taken all preparations to make the hartal a Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) will hold a rally at Muktangon tomorrow protesting Rumsfeld's

EC APPEAL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

ment tampering in filing of an appeal against High Court's stay order on Dhaka-10 by-polls.

Main opposition Awami League

yesterday demanded an independ-

ent inquiry into the alleged docu-

The Supreme Court, which turned down yesterday the appeal petition filed by the Election Commission (EC), earlier found irregularities in the appeal papers that the attorney general's office presented.

Saber, also an organising secretary of AL, noted that if investigations were not done on the alleged

"Bangladesh is a pragmatic country. If there is a win-win situation, we are willing to consider the pipeline even though India has not put for-ward any specific proposal on this," he said, referring to his meeting with Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar who had raised

a pipeline through its territory to carry natural gas from Myanmar to India if there is a "win-win situation"

for his country

with Bangladesh would be resolved

by the main opposition Awami League (AL) and its labour wing Jatiya Sramik League. But the AL vesterday announced

will be out of the purview hartal," Obaidul Kader, AL joint general secretary, told The Daily Star last

Obaidul Kader however ruled out any possibility of curtailing the hartal period as, he said, the party and its

AL demands independent inquiry

"If we all want to protect the election process from manipulation in future, this incident (alleged tampering) has to be inquired independently, and persons in this need to be identified," said Saber Hossain Chowdhury, political secretary to the Opposition Leader and AL President Sheikh Hasina.

Besides, lawyers of the Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh candidate Major (retired) Abdul Mannan had also alleged tampering with the by

wrongdoing then people would lose confidence in EC and the electoral process as well.

Manmohan Singh on Tuesday asserted that all outstanding issues through sustained cooperation and consultation.

which he handed over to her a letter from Khaleda.