

# 25 arrested Rohingyas

**FROM PAGE 1**

operatives. They were identified as Abul Kalam, 55, Abu Taher, 45, Ershad Anam, 56, Kalim Ullah, 28, Saif Ullah, 29, Noor Mohammad, 55, Lokman Hakim, 52, Nurul Islam, 53, Hafiz Ullah, 40, Mohammad Sabbir, 30, Mohammad Yunus, 55, Shamsul Alam, 20, Moulana Sekander Ullah, 55, Mohammad Ishaq, 55, Mozaffar Hossain, 45, Mohammad Ibrahim, 50, Saiful Islam, 25, Mohammad Zinnah, 35, Saifur Rahman, 22, Mostafa Kamal, 43, Syed Alam, 35, Ziaul Hasan, 36, Mohammad Osman, 54, Abul Kalam, 50, and Mohammad Rafique, 33.

Tipped off, a DB team on Friday evening raided the office of Chittagong Research and Cultural Society (CRCS) on Jubilee Road and made the arrests. CRCS is an organisation of the Rohingya community.

After the arrest, they all were detained at DB office and interrogated by the intelligence personnel. They were shown arrested in a case filed under section 54 with Kotwali Police Station.

The DB police in the charges brought against the arrestees said they all have come from different Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar and Teknaf and belong to Myanmar-based insurgent groups.

DB inspectors Delwar and Salah Uddin defended the state while 20 lawyers led by Advocate Ibrahim Hossain Babul stood for the accused.

Babul contended that the 25 people are established businessmen of the country.

Our staff correspondent from

Rajshahi adds: Latiful Kabir Anwar, the BNP activist arrested for suspected links to the August 17 blasts in Rajshahi, runs a homeopath medicine store in front of Hatim Khan Ahle Hadith mosque, said police.

Police have filed a petition seeking five days' remand for him. The chief metropolitan magistrate will hear the prayer today.

Sources said Anwar might soon be sent to the Joint Interrogation Cell in Dhaka.

He was often seen with Bangla Bhai and sometimes in Bangla Bhai's vehicle during the militant leader's so-called vigilante operations last year, said locals.

Quoting Anwar, his friends said that Bangla Bhai visited him in his house on May 23 last year.

His neighbours said his medicine store remains closed during the daytime and is usually opened in the evening until midnight.

Police found that Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh workers and Bangla Bhai's men had been frequenting the store for the last few weeks.

In another development, a patrol team of Gulshan police arrested a youth in IPH Staff Quarters area at about 9:45pm Friday with six home-made bombs, adds our staff correspondent.

The arrestee, Shahabuddin alias Salahuddin, 22, was wandering the roads with a paper bag containing the bombs.

Police filed a case against him under the Explosive Substances Act.

# Bimstec to keep

**FROM PAGE 1**

During the meeting, several sub-groups discussed issues like linguistic and textual improvement of the draft agreement, rules of origin, sensitive lists, anti-dumping measures, safeguard measures and revenue loss compensation as sidelines of the negotiation.

"We have satisfactorily advanced in the process and hope that all other remaining issues could be settled during the next two scheduled meetings," Fazlur Raham, the Bangladesh delegation leader and a deputy secretary of the commerce ministry, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The representatives from all the member countries have shown much enthusiasm to complete the negotiation within the timeframe to make the forum a meaningful regional platform for economic cooperation, he said.

Delegates also discussed some priority sectors such as trade and investment, technology, tourism, transport and communication, energy and fisheries.

They agreed to expand cooperation to a number of new areas -- culture, education, public health (including HIV/Aids, malaria, tuberculosis, and polio), protection of biodiversity and traditional knowledge, rural community development, small and medium-scale enterprise, construction, environment, information and communications technology, bio-

technology, weather and climate research, natural disaster mitigation and management.

The meeting decided to form a joint committee to monitor the advancement of the forum and to establish its own rules of procedure to run the forthcoming meetings.

A decision was taken about how a member country will solve any problem created in relation to any state or region of another member.

Among some 40 representatives of the Bimstec countries, the majority came from Thailand and India, who noticeably attempted to protect their own interests by inserting or deleting paragraphs or articles from the draft agreement.

Following the next round of Bimstec meetings in New Delhi in November this year, the final meeting will be held in Kathmandu, Nepal in December the same year.

The agreement, with provisions for reducing tariffs in two phases till 2012, will enable the least developed member countries -- Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan to reap special benefits, sources said.

The member countries, however, differed on possible changes in customs tariff.

Initially, the free trade agreement will cover only products, but services and investment are expected to be included after 2007.

# Hasina asks Khaleda

**FROM PAGE 16**

Dhanmondi court to an audience of leaders and activists of the BNP and the Jatiya Party from Chapainawabganj when they called on her and joined the Awami League.

Citing official statements that 'some criminals came from India' for the August 17 serial bombings, Hasina questioned where the intelligence agencies like NSI, SB and CID were when foreign criminals entered Bangladesh and blasted hundreds of bombs.

"Were the intelligence agencies sleeping during the bomb attacks? Some foreign criminals came, exploded bombs and returned home... Is it believable? None believes such falsehoods," the opposition leader said in a pungent criticism of her political foes.

In fact, she said, the government has no headache for the people who are passing days amid immense sufferings due to price hike of essentials, "communal terrorism", and "corruption".

"The BNP-Jamaat government has turned a prosperous country into a ruined one. We left a surplus of 26 lakh tons of rice at the end of our tenure. And now people are dying for scarcity of food," she told the function.

Hasina alleged that the government is indifferent to provide adequate aid for the 'monga' victims in country's northern districts.

The AL chief was also critical of the prime minister for her claim in the October 10 speech about people's per capita income.

She alleged the government-sponsored criminals are attacking the minority people and anti-government leaders and activists.

Welcoming the newcomers, Hasina urged the countrymen to wage a tough movement and topple the present "undemocratic government".

Among others, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, presidium members Motia Chowdhury, Suranjit Sengupta, Tofail Ahmed and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Abdul wadud were present.

# Saifur, Bhuiyan blast

**FROM PAGE 1**

the ruling BNP at a meeting at the Prodhannomtri Bhaban.

While the grassroots level leaders expressed severe resentment on the price hike of essentials and acute crisis of power, and warned of hurdles in the next parliamentary elections in case of non-improvement, the finance minister told about "internationally acclaimed" success of the government in last four years.

"But it seems by reading newspaper headlines that the country is being rotten," he said, adding that the main opposition is launching propaganda on the price of essentials.

Echoing the same voice, Abdul

## 2 outlaws

**FROM PAGE 16**

Rab-5 sources at Pabna said they had arrested Mokhtar Hossain Bachchu, 25, at C&B Bazar in Bera upazila on Friday and took him to the zonal headquarters for interrogation.

Following his statement, a Rab team took him to the Chakdarpara village early yesterday to recover hidden weapons and arrest his accomplices.

Rab officials said as they reached a nearby Dhophagata village at about 2:00am, the outlaws opened fire on them, prompting the law enforcers to retaliate.

Mokhtar died on the spot when he was caught in the crossfire. His accomplices, however, managed to escape, the Rab officials added.

One shutter gun, three bullets and some sharp weapons were recovered from the spot.

The body was sent to the Pabna General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Rab sources said Mokhtar was accused in a number of cases, including three for murder.

Our Magura correspondent reports: A regional leader of outlawed Gono Mukti Fouz (GMF) was killed in "crossfire" during a shootout between his accomplices and the police in Shailakupa upazila of Jhenidah district in the early hours yesterday.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team of Sreepur Police Station raided Mashalia village in the upazila in Magura district and arrested Baka, 40, alias Bijoy alias Biplob around 1:30am and took him to the police station for interrogation.

Police later took him to Thakur Malithia village in Shailakupa to recover arms. As they reached a field in the village around 3:45am, the GMF operatives opened fire on them. Police retaliated with shots, causing an hour-long gunfight.

Baka, caught in the crossfire, died on the spot while he attempted to flee, police claimed.

Two police constables, Firoz and Monir, were also injured during the shootout.

Police retrieved two country-made guns, two shutter guns and six bullets from the spot.

Baka, hailed from village Borobari-Bogra in Shailakupa upazila, was accused in 12 criminal cases including eight for murder.

**50 students**

**FROM PAGE 16**

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were torn up.

Eleven critically injured were admitted to local hospitals.

A large number of police were deployed while the college authorities directed the students to leave the dormitories and declared the college closed for an indefinite period to bring the situation under control.

Ziaur Rahman, a first year honours student and Shibir activist, last Friday tore up a poster of Bangabandhu that had been attached to the wall of the Muslim Hall on the occasion of August 15.

The BCL activists attacked Shibir activists when they gathered in front of the Bangla Department at about 10:00am yesterday, prompting them to counter attack, leaving at least 10 Shibir activists injured.

The Shibir leaders then regrouped before attacking BCL men, which left BCL Dinajpur Government College Unit President Irfat Latif Irfan and another activist, Sabbir Ahmed, seriously injured.

The authorities deployed police on the college campus to quell tension, but Shibir activists, ignoring the police presence, threw brickbats at the BCL activists, prompting them to retaliate.

Following the violence, the college principal, Masuma Khatun, directed the students to leave dormitories and declared the college closed for an indefinite time.

But the Shibir activists ignored the order and went on attacking and ransacking the Muslim Hall and harassing the hall super, Mokbul Hossain.

At about 4:00pm, BCL activists beat up a Shibir man in front of the PTI near the college, but the police brought the situation under control.

Dinajpur Town Shibir Unit Vice President Abu Sayem told The Daily Star that BCL men, with assistance from outsiders, attacked the Shibir activists. But the BCL college unit president, Irfan Latif Setu, said they were not present at the college during the clash, as the college was closed.

"The Shibir activists first attacked the common students and they resisted the attacks with the help of the BCL activists," he headed.

The chase and counter-chase continued as of the filing of this report yesterday evening.

## 18 killed

**FROM PAGE 1**

Fifteen of the victims were identified as Badsha Miah, 35, of Pirgachha village; Sudev Chandra, 35, son of Sunil Chandra of Bisa village; Parul Rani, 21, wife of Milon of Balai village; Smrity, 25, wife of Rabiul of Bhabria village; Nirab, 1, of Balai; Khudeja Bibi, 55; Hasan, 25, of Kalai village; Pulok Chowdhury, son of Shailendra Chowdhury of Kalai; Mani, 8; Alok, 12; Ballab, 8; and Gitali Rani, 36, wife of Amal Chandra, of Bogra; Fatema Bibi, 60, wife of Sattar, of Sonadanga village; Rehana, 25, wife of Babu Miah of Joypurhat; Abdur Razzak, student of Joypurhat Government College; and Bulbuli, 26, of Sonakandi village.

# Moudud's pledges remain elusive

**FROM PAGE 1**

were the politically motivated appointment of judges at the country's highest seat of justice.

Allegations have also been rife that the two-year extension of the service age of judges introduced by the 14th constitutional amendment had the ulterior motive to secure the immediate past chief justice, KM Hassan, as the chief adviser of the next caretaker government. The suspicion gave rise to a wide and nasty dustup that still clouds the country's political and judicial planes.

The scandalised lawyers have recently declared to boycott the annual get-together of the Supreme Court tomorrow, if the 'politically appointed' 19 judges attend the function.

Moudud, the barrister turned politician, also displayed complete indifference and took no initiative to dispose of the long drawn-out Bangabandhu murder case. He ruled out the option of appointing ad hoc judges at the Appellate Division to enable it in hearing the case.

Though Moudud, who has the distinction of serving both the military rulers of the country -- Zia and Ershad, has the ready rhetoric that he has achieved a significant improvement in the judiciary, the facts sketch a difference scene.

To begin with, in violation of his party's 2001 electoral pledges, Moudud did nothing to separate the judiciary and to form a human rights commission in the last four years of his current ministerial tenure.

Despite constitutional bindings, the separation of the judiciary from the executive wing of the state remains still a far cry due to obvious reluctance and foot-dragging of the government. It has sought and managed more than 20 time extensions from the Supreme Court to carry out the court's 12-point directive on separation of the judiciary.

That the ruling coalition is really out of its depth on keeping this electoral pledge can be perceived from the fact that the government took seven more time extensions even after Moudud had announced that they would not seek any more time extension for executing the 12-point directive.

The confusion and contradictory statements and acts are frequent. On one occasion, the law minister said it would take six to seven years to make the judiciary independent. But, his ministry in a letter last year told the Supreme Court that it was difficult to assess how much time the government needed to comply with the 12-point directive, as the entire administration, including the higher authorities, was busy grappling with a devastating flood.

Once again, Moudud said the judiciary cannot be separated from the executive merely at the directive of the Supreme Court, adding both the wings need to work in a co-ordinated way to reach the goal.

He, however, admitted that, "We have failed to comply with the Supreme Court's directives for separating the judiciary from the executive."

In 2001, the caretaker government finalised a work plan to separate the judiciary. Necessary drafts had been prepared for approval at the last advisory council meeting on October 2. But, after the October 1 general elections, BNP chief Khaleda Zia asked Caretaker Government Chief Adviser Latifur Rahman over telephone to leave the issue to be dealt by her elected government.

Khaleda also pointed out to Justice Rahman that in her party's election manifesto it had promised to separate the judiciary, and thus halted the caretaker government's move.

At about 4:00pm, BCL activists beat up a Shibir man in front of the PTI near the college, but the police brought the situation under control.

Dinajpur Town Shibir Unit Vice President Abu Sayem told The Daily Star that BCL men, with assistance from outsiders, attacked the Shibir activists. But the BCL college unit president, Irfan Latif Setu, said they were not present at the college during the clash, as the college was closed.

"The Shibir activists first attacked the common students and they resisted the attacks with the help of the BCL activists," he headed.

The chase and counter-chase continued as of the filing of this report yesterday evening.

Lawyers and judges have been

accusing the government of grossly politicising the process of appointment and confirmation of judges. The angry solicitors also declared never to address the 'controversial' judges as 'my lord'.

According to the allegations, most of the newly recruited judges had been affiliated with the parties in power. A BNP lawmaker of the sixth parliament is among them, as are a number of pro-coalition lawyers who contested the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) polls on ruling party tickets.

It was also seen as bizarre the way KM Hasan had been made the chief justice, superseding two senior judges of the Appellate Division. Defending the move, the law minister said they have corrected an injustice made to the man by the previous Awami League government.

Ironically, Moudud himself set a milestone in doing wrong to a senior judge, Justice Syed Amirul Islam, by superseding him on three occasions.

**CONTRIVERSY OVER FAIZEE'S CERTIFICATE**

In the recent past a doubt expressed time and again by the SCBA about the authenticity of LLB certificate of Justice Faisal Mahmud Faizee threatened to undermine the image and dignity of the high courts.

The SCBA also alleged Faizee provided confusing information while receiving his Bar Council certificate. The allegations triggering off wide-spread furore among the legal practitioners, prompting President Iajuddin on June 30 this year to direct the law ministry to investigate the allegations. But the ministry apparently turned a deaf ear to the directive, SCBA leaders said.

The Supreme Court lawyers are still continuing with a movement demanding dismissal of Faizee and cancellation of the appointments of the 19 judges.

At one stage of the movement, the High Court had clamped down a ban on all sorts of demonstration, agitation etc on the court premises.

**OMISSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

The law ministry made little progress towards forming a Human Rights Commission (HRC), as is directed by the constitution and pledged by the BNP before the 2001 elections. A draft bill of a National Human Rights Commission prepared about two years back has since been gathering moss at the law ministry.

On December 10, 2001, the government formed a cabinet committee led by Moudud to draft the bill. After a series of meeting, the committee finalised the draft and sent it to the Cabinet Division on January 23 last year.

The bill was eventually placed before the cabinet meeting in the same year, but the cabinet sent it back to the law ministry for further scrutiny. Then the draft bill was put on ice at the ministry.

At an international conference here in September last year, when a donor agency representative expressed dissatisfaction at the government's failure to form a national human rights commission, the law minister said differences of opinion among the ministers have been blocking the efforts to establish the commission.

"I had a great difficulty in convincing my cabinet colleagues about the commission, which is now under their consideration. We are committed to setting up the commission. I hope I will be able to convince my cabinet colleagues about its necessity," he went on.

At a press conference arranged on the occasion of the coalition government's four years in office, Moudud once again said, "We have failed to complete formation of the HRC to date. But we have prepared a draft of an HRC Act, which is now under consideration of the cabinet committee. I am optimistic that we will be able to constitute the HRC."

**THE ISSUE OF OMBUDSMAN**

In 1980, the then government had passed a bill for introducing the office of an ombudsman to meet a constitutional binding, and after 22 years, on January 6, 2002, the present coalition government brought the act into force through a gazette notification.

However, on February 11, 2002, the law ministry proposed to the cabinet amending some provisions of the act. The cabinet formed a committee to scrutinise the amendment bill. Since then, no-one knows what has happened to the bill.

However, the government has

adopted a policy of introducing ombudsmen sector-wise and has already set up a tax ombudsman this year.

**INDIFFERENCE TO MUJIB MURDER CASE**

The Bangabandhu murder case, pending with the highest court since August 2001 for shortage of judge, is unlikely to be disposed of in the next two years, unless the government appoints at least two judges to the Appellate Division.

But, the government is doing nothing to appoint any ad hoc judges to the Appellate Division. In response to a letter of the former Chief Justice Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury in October 2001, Moudud simply ruled out any such appointment.

One may call it a coincidence, but the fact is not a single hearing of the case has been taken place since the BNP-led government came to power in October 2001.

**PRESIDENTIAL AMNESTY TO MURDER CONVICT**

The minister has also been grilled for his shady opinion about the presidential amnesty granted to a BNP man, Mohiuddin Jhinto, who had been sentenced to death in a double murder case.

The parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry in July last blamed the law minister for not giving an appropriate opinion after examining all the documents of the double murder case.

Moudud tried to pass the buck on to the home ministry, accusing it of suppressing information about the much-talked about amnesty granted last January.

Many lawyers of the country demanded resignation of the law minister, while he continued to deny any connection with Jhinto. But, in the meanwhile, Moudud's picture with Jhinto was published in different newspapers, proving his denial a lie.

**FAILURE TO MAKE JS EFFECTIVE**

Moudud, as the minister of parliamentary affairs, also could make no headway in making the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) effective.

Rather, he made a move to gag the ruling BNP lawmakers. In a letter to the speaker this year, he suggested the BNP lawmakers should seek prior permission from the prime minister to place any private members bills in parliament. And, in compliance with the letter, the speaker did not allow any private members bill to be tabled in the house.

The parliamentary standing committee on private members bill and resolution on several occasions blasted the speaker and the law minister, accusing them of making the parliament dysfunctional.

In a clear contradiction to his promise and the electoral pledges of the BNP, Moudud reintroduced 45 reserved seats for women in parliament with a provision of indirect election. The BNP had promised to increase the number of women's reserved seats and to provide for direct elections to them.

**SUCCESS!**

The law minister has claimed success in formulating a number of laws, though some of which are controversial too. The government has enacted and amended 137 laws, including 54 important laws, during its last four years in office.

Of those, the law ministry itself formulated 46 laws, including the indemnity law that acquits the law enforcers of the killings they had done during the Operation Clean Heart. The minister argues the government has achieved tremendous success by instituting speedy trial tribunals, launching alternate dispute resolution (ADR) system, forming Orthorhin Adalots (money loan courts) and providing legal aid to poor litigants.

Besides, the ministry amended the women repression act, and formulated two acts to control acid and acid-related crimes. It also repealed the public safety act but not the much talked-about special power act, though the BNP had promised to do that before 2001 polls.

Another of its success was formulating and placing the bill in parliament to constitute the anti corruption commission. But it took over seven months for the law minister to pass the bill and another three months to publish a notification in the gazette. Though belated and befuddled, the commission has started its operations.

# Leaders decry price

**FROM PAGE 1**

however, asked the grassroots leaders to project the successes of the coalition government.

Fifteen out of 17 grassroots level leaders speaking yesterday criticised the government for the price hike of essentials, power shortages, bomb attacks and the party's internal conflicts.

Leaders from Dhaka, Khulna and Barisal divisions will attend the programme today.

Responding to the price hike issue, the senior leaders put the blame on the price hike in the international market and criticised the media. They said the government has taken all-out measures to lower the price of essentials.

But Abdul Hye Selim, president of the party's Compianganj upazila unit, said: "We cannot make people believe that the prices of essentials in Bangladesh are the lowest in the world and the purchasing capacity of people has increased."

General Secretary of Dinajpur district BNP, Ashraful Alam, said the villagers are experiencing a severe power crisis.

"The government's achievements in rural electrification have been faded by the present crisis of power. Now people are blaming the government for the crisis."

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Health Minister Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain, however, described various achievements of the government and asked the party leaders to tell the people about these successes.

Saifur and Bhuiyan blamed the media for "misreporting" on the price hike of essentials and undermining the government's success.

"We will get more seats in the next election by dint of our countrywide development works and tremendous success in different areas," Saifur said.

Awami League will not get more than 50 seats, he predicted.

Mannan Bhuiyan, also secretary general of the party, asked the grassroots level leaders not to be worried by reading the newspapers.

But participants said they are being questioned by people in their respective areas for the price hike of essentials and electricity crisis.

"Some responsible ministers, including the commerce minister, are saying many words that sound good, but we cannot feel the people with those words," Abul Mansur, organising secretary of Brahmanbaria district unit of BNP, said.

"Awami League will launch a cam-

paign presenting a comparison between the prices of essentials of their regime and the present days. We will also have to face it in the next election. Development works alone will not save us," he argued.

"The talk of millions and billions of dollars will not bring any benefit. Lower the prices of rice, pulses and other essentials," the district level leader said.

Ashraful Haque Babul, president of the Saidpur municipality unit of BNP, said they had come to join such a discussion a year ago in a very enthusiastic mood. "But today I am noticing some sort of depression among them. What happened in a year?" he questioned.

Referring to the jumbo cabinet, Prof Nurullah Majumdar of Langolcourt unit said ministers had faced a debacle in the 1996 election. He suggested gearing up mass contact to avoid recurrence of such a debacle in the next election.

About the serial bomb blasts on August 17, Shahidul Islam Bachchu from Natore said the government intelligence agencies' failure to dig out the mystery of the Chittagong and Bogra arms hauls have led to such country-wide bomb attacks.

## Family demands

**FROM PAGE 16**

disposal of the killing case.

The family and leaders and activists of four organisations formed a human chain for one hour at Muktangan in the city at 11:00am to press home the demands.

Mehendigang Unnayan Sangram Parishad, Muktiyoddha Foundation, Barisal Division Awami Forum and Dakkhin Bangla Jubo Kalyan Samiti took part in the human chain.

Kamrul Islam Momin, 22, was gunned down in front of their Ibrahimpur house on September 13.

Abdur Razzak, his father, filled a murder case with Kafilur Police Station against Rafiqul and his 27 accomplices. Police have so far arrested 13 people.

"But the main accused in the case, Rafiq, is still at large," Momin's brother Shamsul Islam said.

He alleged they went to Kafilur Police Station to file a general diary, as the former OC is threatening them with death, but police did not record it.

"Rafiqul has one and a half bigha of land next to our house. We built a boundary wall three months ago as he had tried to encroach on our land. This move made him furious," Momin's brother added.

"Local goon Taqi threatened us over the phone when we started constructing the wall. He demanded that we should stop the construction and pay him Tk 5 lakh," he said.

# Russia, US clash

**FROM PAGE 16**

differing positions of Russia and the United States on the Iran nuclear question, the spectacle of Lavrov and Rice arguing over the specific point of the enrichment process was an unusual occurrence and underscored their split.

Following her talks with Lavrov, and before leaving Russia for London and talks with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Rice travelled outside Moscow to meet President Vladimir Putin at his official country residence.

The Russian leader evoked Rice's trip earlier in the week through Central Asia, a region where Moscow and Washington are jockeying for influence.

"I would like to congratulate you on the results of your trip to Central Asia, and I know this trip was very successful," Putin told Rice.

With a subtle twist of diplomatic irony, the ex-KGB officer Putin added: "If you could kindly tell us about the results of your trip in greater detail, we would appreciate that."

Rice said the United States felt it had a strong partnership with Russia, which allowed the two countries to "get together so frequently and talk on a whole range of issues before us."

The United States suspects Iran may use its fledgling nuclear power program, being developed with help from Russia, to hide development of nuclear weapons and has sought to have the issue taken up by the UN Security Council, which has the power to impose sanctions.

Russia says it shares US opposition to Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, but insists there is no evidence that Tehran was trying to do so -- indeed that it could not do so even if it wanted to, using the Russian technology it is using to build its first nuclear power station at Bushehr.

## Rebels attack

**FROM PAGE 16**

voters had yet arrived, he said.

Sunni-backed insurgents have vowed to disrupt the democratic process and three Iraqi soldiers were killed in a bomb blast near Sadiya, northeast of Baghdad, as they inspected a polling station, an interior ministry source said.

West of Baghdad, a civilian was shot dead during an attack on police near a polling station.

Several stations in Baghdad were fired upon Friday and Saturday despite the heightened security, and a sabotage attack on a power line cut electricity to the capital and the main southern city of Basra, plunging both into darkness late Friday.

At 8:30 a.m., a small rocket exploded near a polling station in northern Baghdad, slightly wounding one civilian, said police Lt. Thaeer Mahmood.

A mortar round also fell near a Baghdad polling station at 9 a.m., but it did not explode, said police Maj. Falah Al-Mhamadawi.

In Ramadi, 70 miles west of Baghdad, fighting erupted at about 7 a.m. between a small group of insurgents and US troops patrolling the mostly empty streets, said police Lt. Lt. Mohammed Al-Obaidi. No injuries were immediately reported.

South of Basra, three armed men attacked an empty polling station at 3 a.m. The three were arrested, said police Capt. Mushtaq Kadim.

Sunni-led insurgents had vowed to wreck Saturday's referendum at about 6,000 polling stations across Iraq. In the 19 days before the voting, nearly 450 people were killed by insurgents using suicide car bombs, roadside bombs and drive-by shootings.

# Islamabad postpones

**FROM PAGE 1**

caused by it," a statement issued by the Pakistan Foreign Office said yesterday.

"Despite the difficult situation and widespread devastation in earthquake, Pakistan is committed to keep the Saarc process moving and is looking forward to attend the 13th summit," it added.

New dates for the meetings will be announced after consultations with the Saarc Secretariat and other Saarc countries - India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, the statement said.

The 7.6 magnitude earthquake hit Pakistan, Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Indian Kashmir on October 8, leaving thousands dead and homeless.

Meanwhile, a news report of PTI said notwithstanding the earthquake in Pakistan, the Saarc Summit in Dhaka is expected to go ahead as scheduled.

Asked about the status of the preparatory meetings ahead of the summit, the spokesman at the External Affairs Ministry said, "I have no information of any cancellations,

changes or postponements". Besides, there is still about a month to go for the meeting of leaders from the seven-member regional grouping.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has confirmed his participation in the summit postponed twice-- the first time in the wake of the tsunami affecting three Saarc countries and the second time due to developments in Bangladesh and Nepal.

Under the Saarc Charter, it is mandatory for the participation of the top leadership of all the member nations for the summit to take place.