Key JMB den busted

Rangpur Superintendent of Police (SP) Mahbub Mohsin said, "We asked the government high-ups to freeze the bank accounts and investigate the transac-THERAID

informed Rangpur SP Mohsin about the operation only after cordoning off the SP Mohshin rushed to the spot with a large contingent of police and aided in

On information, a Nilphamari police team led by SP Soheb Ahmed went to the

Noorpur house at 10:00pm. They

the raid that continued until 6:00am vesterday.

The raid was conducted on information disclosed by JMB leader Hafez Saidur Rahman arrested in Kurigram on November 18 in connection with the August 17 countrywide orchestrated bomb blasts.

However, some sources said the police received the information about Awal's hide-out from Awukat, a militant hailing from Dimla of Nilphamari arrested earlier and now undergoing Cell (JIC) in Dhaka.

The police could not contact the owner of the house, Abu Musa Mohammed Johurul Hoque, a former trade union leader of Shyampur Sugar Mills. He was at his village home in Baderganj upazila.

Musa, a former Awami League activist joined the workers front of Jatiya Party immediately before he retired from his job around two years ago. The police held Musa's son and the caretaker of the house named Nasima.

Police sources said Nasima claimed she came to know that the man living in the second-floor flat was the son-in-law of the IMB chief only after his November 18 arrest in Thakurgaon.

She said Awal posed as a fruit trader and gave his name as Rafiqul Islam. Rangpur Kotwali Police Station Officerin-Charge Bazlur Rahman told The Daily Star Awal lived at the rented flat with his wife and a child for two and a

A police officer preferring anonymity said. "Awal came to stay in Rangpur to organise the local JMB members and to carry out bombing operations in the adjoining districts.'

An official of Detective Branch of police said JMB planned to keep Rangpur peaceful in order to hide its base and intended to kill judges and political leaders of the adjoining

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police of Rajshahi Range Baharul Alam visited the Noorpur house vesterday morning. He admitted that JMB has a strong network in the region and its members may have plans to carry out more destructive operations in the northern districts as they did on August

A case under the explosives act was lodged with Kotwali police yesterday afternoon.

Our Nilphamari correspondent quoting some police officials adds: Veiled women used to frequent Awal's flat. The operations of JMB in the northern region used to be coordinated from this flat. The four-room apartment has adequate arrangements for accommodating visitors.

After the arrest of Awal, his wife and

DEATHTHREATS TO JUDGES UNB reports a JMB suicide squad

threatened to kill Munshiganj District and Sessions Judge Monsoor Ali and Additional District and Sessions Judge Monir Hossain Patwari along with their family members if they do not quit their iobs immediately. The militants in a letter to Judge

Monsoor Ali said the rule of Allah must be implemented instead of the existing laws. The letter was mailed Tuesday.

Earlier on October 10, JMB cadres threatened in a letter to bomb the

NURIAHAN KNEW IMB CHIEF

Our court correspondent reports that Nurjahan, the woman arrested in Dhaka for renting a house to JMB chief Abdur Rahman's family, gave a confessional statement to Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Nani Gopal Biswas yester-day. She admitted to knowing that Rahman was the chief of JMB and still renting her house to his son-in-law Awal

Khilgaon police produced her before the court at the end of her remand. She said Awal sometimes used to

stay in the flat but it was his wife Afifa who would hand over the rent to her. NOAKHALI

Our Noakhali correspondent reports:

The police submitted a charge sheet against Abdur Rahman, JMB Operations Commander Siddiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai and a cadre named Masumur Rahman Masum, charging them with involvement in the August 17 country

According to the charge sheet, Rahman and Bangla Bhai instigated Masum to make the bomb strike in the name of establishing an Islamic rule in

wide bomb blasts.

Thirty-four people were named as prosecution witnesses in the charge

Masum, son of Mofazzel Hossain hails from Narayanganj. Locals caught him red handed on November 3 soor after he hurled a bomb at a Laxminus judge. A man name Abdur was killed in the attack.

Later Masum confessed to having link with the August 17 serial blasts.

Meanwhile, the police arrested five suspected militants from a rented house near Tamruddi Bazar under Hatia unazila in Noakhali on Tuesday night.

Hatia Police Station Second Officer Sub-Inspector Farid told The Daily Star the arrestees rented the house a few months ago in guise of small vendors and have been working to inspire people in Islamist activities.

The arrestees are Mozammel Haq, 20, from Dinajpur, Mizanur Rahmar Dulal, 22, from Barguna, Mohammad Yunus, 16, from Charfashion in Bhola, Tajul Islam, 20, from Lalmohan in Bhola, and Kazi Abu Taleb, 24 from Pahartoli in Chittagong. They were arrested after local residents had informed the law enforcers about their BRAHMANBARIA

The DB police in Brahmanbaria submit ted a charge sheet against six JMB members yesterday accusing them of blasting bombs in the district on August

Our Brahmanbaria correspondent eports the six accused are Deen Islam, Saifullah Akand, Shamim Mia, Sohagh Mia, Moji Chowdhury and Shah Alam. Alam is still in hiding. Fifty-two people were named as prosecution witnesses in

Our Dinajpur correspondent reports that the scheduled visit of the Indian high commissioner to Kantanagar temple on Tuesday was cancelled following arrests of three suspected militants from the temple area Sunday

The police arrested Monir Hossain and Shah Alam of Brahmanbaria and Rabiul Islam of Satkhira when they were moving around suspiciously in the Raash Mela being held near the temple. Our staff correspondent in Sylher reports that an anonymous caller

Tuesday night threatened to blow up a newspaper office, the courts and the vernment offices in Sylhet. An official of the Dainik Kazirbazar, Bangla daily of the city informed journalists that the caller had said, "We will blow up the courts tomorrow, as the newspa

against the bomb attacks it will also face the same fate". When the recipient of the call asked for the identity of the caller, he declined and said, "What I had to say, has already

per also has been engaged in writing

Terrorism

irrespective of their party affiliation and opinions agree that terrorism and corruption are the main problems of the country. Dr Kamal urged the students to be united to free the country from militancv

The Gano Forum president said the Public Service Commission (PSC) failed to play its neutral role as the question paper of the most important examination in the country has leaked out.

He said the people expect the government to run the country following the main state principles. "The main state principles enshrined in the constitution can not be violated," he said. Dr Kamal said the people of the

country must be aware and conscious of their rights and laws of the country He said the people in the country wan the safety of their lives and properties.

Chhatra Dhara Adviser Commander Abdur Rouf and Habibur Rahman, father of the slain BUET student Sony also spoke in the meeting.

Philippines see a rate of 25 percent

return in such cases. In comparison with

that rate, ours is much low. It is only 5

19 decision, sent 150 ansar-VDP women

aged between 25 and 30 years to Saudi

Arabia to work as housemaids in July

giving them a one-month training at

month, had to pay Tk 35,000 each to

recruiting agencies for arranging their

The women, assured of 400 rials a

State minister for Expatriates

Welfare and Overseas Employment

Mohammed Quamrul Islam, Home

Secretary Safar Raj Hossain, the director

general of ansar, and representatives of

four recruiting agents were present at

Three more people were killed and

five others injured as a bus and a

private car collided at Gokul under

Bogra district on the Bogra-Rangpur

reached Gokul, a bus from the oppo-

site direction collided with it and the

car driver, Md Shahin, died instantly,

while two others -- both named

Shamsul Islam -- one a student of

Akbar Ali College and the other son of

Mukhter Hossain from Jaypurhat,

As the private car from Bogra

Shafipur Ansar Academy.

travel to Saudi Arabia.

11 die

FROM PAGE 16

highway.

The government, following its June

percent," said the government official.

Govt won't stop

However, the government believes

on August 16.

these are very minor and stray incidents. Moreover, the four recruiting agents. who sent female ansars to Saudi Arabia, have asked the government to take initiative to send more female ansars to

countries. An inter-ministerial meeting held at the home ministry yesterday discussed the problems and complaints of the female ansars working in Saudi Arabia. State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar chaired the meet-

the Middle East and other European

"Most of the female ansars returned on their own," a government official, who was present at the meeting, told

reporters. The official mentioned homesickness, work pressure and failure to adapt

with the culture and food as reasons for The official said the number of

sexually harassed ansars are not over two to three. The meeting also formed a four-

member committee headed by the additional secretary of the foreign ministry to look into the problems of the female ansars.

 $\hbox{``Committee members will talk to the}\\$ ansars, the recruiting agents, ansar officials and will fly, if need be, to Saudi Arabia and talk with Saudi officials and the employers to find a remedy," the source said. The committee will submit its report in 45 days.

As many as 406 female ansars were sent to Saudi Arabia to do household work and 19 of them came back, the

meeting was told. "India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the

At least five people were injured in the incident.

died later, witnesses said.

Police sent the dead bodies to hospital for autopsy.

Dawn-to-dusk

Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), left 11-party

alliance and National Awami Party (NAP) declared the shutdown from Tuesday's rally at Paltan Maidan. To drum up support for today's hartal, the 14-party yesterday

brought out processions and staged demonstrations in the city and other parts of the country. AL General Secretary and Coordinator of the opposition combine Abdul Jalil urged people to make the hartal a success. Ambulances, newspaper vehicles,

drug stores, garbage carrying vehicles and other emergency vehicles will remain outside the purview of the 6:00am to 6:00pm shutdown. The government will deploy

around 5,000 police, BDR, Rab and Ansar personnel in the capital to prevent any untoward incident.

The opposition combine has declared a series of agitation programmes for the next two months to press home their demands that include reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission for a free, fair and neutral election

They also threatened to go for indefinite hartals and other tougher programmes if the BNP-Jamaat alliance government stay in power without realising their demands FRESHTRANSPORT STRIKE

Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation called the transport strike from today demanding realisation of their three-point demands that include stopping extortion on the highways, harassment of the transport workers, random requisition of vehicles and introduction of weighing system for the overloaded trucks.

Some leaders of the pro-BNP North Bengal Transport Workers Federation earlier enforced the nationwide transport strike on Monday and Tuesday demanding release of their leader Mujibur Rahman. The strike was withdrawn Tuesday evening shortly after the opposition's grand rally ended. Mujibur was released on bail on the same night.

Meanwhile, a section of transport vorkers yesterday enforced a strike in Dinajpur district protesting the release of Muiibur Rahman.

Farhad Hossain Chowdhury, general secretary of Dinajpur Motor Transport Group, threatened to launch a tougher action programme if Mujibur is not punished.

BFUI condemns

FROM PAGE 16

the time remained silent when her cabinet colleagues and party legislators launched the attack on the media. The speaker instigated them to enact a new law against what they called 'vellow journalism", the BFUJ leaders said in a statement.

The journalists' leaders bitterly criticised the speaker, deputy speaker and some state ministers and BNP lawmakers for 'irresponsible' comments made by them against the

"Besides, the anti-media comments made by the prime minister, Finance Minister, Law Minister, Foreign Minister, Shipping Minister and Industries Minister made the journalists more vulnerable and tarnished the image of the country," they added.

The journalists' leaders also alleged that these provocative comments by the government high-ups against the media, also encourages its field-level leaders to journalist repres-

Painting a gloomy picture of repression on journalists during the last four years of the alliance government, the BFUJ leaders said: "Though 13 journalists were killed during the period, trial of any such killing is yet to

"Moreover, the government created hindrance to holding a national convention protesting against the ournalists' repression," they added.

Regarding ruling BNP lawmaker's demand for enacting a new law the media, the leaders said: "The journalists will not accept any new act to control the media."

They also urged the journalists' to continue their works with professional attitude defying the threat.

The signatories to the statement included BFUJ President Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Secretary General Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul. President of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) Altaf Mahmud and General Secretary Shah Alamgir, CUJ President and General Secretary Mostaq Ahmed and Shahidul-Alam and leaders of other journal-

116 mostly

Many were overstayers although at least 14 had entered Singapore

The group had been living in squalid offices that had been turned into dormitories, with up to 14 peo-

The man who rented them the premises has been referred to police or allegedly harbouring immigration offenders, the report said. Immigration officials were not

mmediately available for comment. Those found guilty of overstaying or illegal entry in Singapore can be jailed for up to six months and receive at least three strokes of the

BNP offers talks

The talks offer came in the wake of the Awami League (AL)-led opposition alliance's 23-point common minimum national programme, which is virtually its election manifesto, announced from Tuesday's grand rally at the city's Paltan

BNP stalwart and Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahamn also proposed a dialogue with the opposition on their demands.

The government) also is in favour of reforming election regulations for the sake of free and fair elections. "But for that they (opposition) will have to come to parlia ment. We cannot have a dialogue at Paltan Maidan," Saifur told journalists yesterday at his Secretariat office. On the 23-point demand, Mannan

Bhuiyan said, "BNP also has the same

demands. Many of these demands have already been realised while some others are in the process of being met." Regarding reforms in the caretaker government and the Election Commission, Bhuiyan said BNP also wants to do everything for holding free and fair elections. "The opposition parties should come to parliament and

raise their demands there. We are ready to consider any suggestions to rid the elections of black money and terrorism. My party will be the beneficiary if polls are held in a free and fair manner," he The BNP secretary general however ruled out the opposition demand for appointing chief adviser of caretaker government on the basis of consensus of

all quarters, "In the present context, it is

difficult to find a person who is accept-

able to all. This is a confusing demand," Rejecting the demand for resigna tion of the government, Bhuiyan said the opposition had been making this demand since the first day of this the government. An elected government cannot be forced out of power in this way. "If a grand rally could dislodge an elected government, our government would have to resign every month," he observed.

He advised the opposition to wait for the public mandate in the next elec-

The present government's tenure will expire just after 10 months. So, instead of wasting their (opposition) energy by agitating in the streets demanding the government's resignation, they should utilise the time by mobilising public support in their favour, Bhuiyan thought. Asked about the huge gathering at

Tuesdya's grand rally, he said the number of people attending a rally is no indicator of popularity. The LGRD minister mentioned that

the government took adequate security

measures to ensure that the opposition

peaceful manner.

He denied allegations that people were barred from attending the rally saying police did only what was necessary to make sure that no untoward incidents could take place at the rally.

Bhuiyan expressed his happiness at the demand that BNP should not give any access to terrorists and their godfathers or allow them to join the election race. But the AL itself is yet to expel any godfather from the party, he said, adding it only half-expelled Hazary.

BNP has not created any godfathers, and it is the AL who had created and patronised godfathers," Bhuiyan

He said his party will soon go for mass contact, organise grand rallies and meetings and announce its political programmes aimed at the coming elections, and not to counter the oppo sition programmes.

PMO order

FROM PAGE 16

The police served the order to the organisers at 2:00pm when the workshop was in progress.

The organisers stopped the workshop after receiving the order. A total of 68 representatives from

different NGOs were participating in the workshop to find ways to resolve the land disputes as well as to raise a 'uniform demand' to ensure the land rights of the indigenous people in the Six NGOs -- Hill Tracts NGO forum

(HTNF), Tangya, Maleya, Mrochet, Kateng and Movement for the Protection of Forests and Land Rights in CHT (MPFLR), jointly organised the workshop with the financial assistance from the Royal Danish Embassy in The organisers later protested the

government order to stop the workshop. At a press conference in the evening they termed the move 'undemocratic' and 'unconstitutional.' The PMO office might have been misguided by wrong information and

influenced to stop the workshop, said

Goutam Dewan, former chairman of

Rangamati Hill District Council. "We held such workshops earlier, but there was no bar," he added. "We arrange the workshop with the participation of grassroots people to find out concrete solutions to the land disputes. It could help the government

in this regard," Goutam said.

Lalit Chandra Chakma, secretary of HTNF, Shaktipad Tripura, advocate Shaktiman Chakma, Santushita Chakma Bakul, Tuku Talukder and Sudatta Bikash Tanchangya, among others, were present at the press

Govt mulls lifting

Bangladesh embassies, and offer shelter and legal support to emigrant female workers, said Mosharraf Hossain, president of Baira.

Baira has already established a training centre in Dhaka and developed a training module emulating the Indonesian one and proposed to make obtaining of certificates before departure mandatory, he added. It proposed taking of Tk 10,000 as

security deposit from the recruiting agencies against each worker to ensure in-house accountability of its members, which will be refundable at the end of the probationary period of It also suggested that all the Baira

members should be allowed to send

female workers, mainly domestic

helps, to all the Middle East countries, which is now confined only to the Baira is also seeking assistance and support from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for

post-migration management, Abdul The Overseas Workers Researchers' Centre, a joint office of 10 countries that send workers

abroad, is going to be set up soon in Kuwait which will add impetus to migrants' rights issues, he added. "If Baira gets full government

support, Bangladesh can send one to two lakh female workers to the Middle Eastern countries alone and the country will receive two billion dollars more every year as remittance by the workers", said Mosharraf Hossain, Migration experts and civil society

leaders think the move is laudable, as it establishes the constitutional right of both men and women to free movement and work, which has been restricted in many ways for long. "But the issue of protection of female workers should no way be

compromised. The recommendations from Baira must be reviewed very critically before finalising the decision and its implementation should be ensured without any breach", said Dr Tasneem Siddiqui, chair of the Refugee and Migratory Movement and Research Unit (RMMRU) of Dhaka University.

State Minister Quamrul Islam said, "Baira has to take the responsibility for ensuring the rights of the workers, as sending women to foreign

PM urges people

At another public meeting at Daulatkhan Bazar ground, the prime minister urged people to help arrest the extremists, saving that these elements will have to face tough punishment.

"Those who killed judges, inno-

cent people and want to attack police

in the name of religion are enemies of Islam, enemies of the nation--they are terrorists," she told the meeting. They have no faith in Islamic values and want to disturb peace and discipline in the country. The govern-

ment will not spare anyone of them, she warned. "People in Bangladesh are peaceloving, they do not believe in religious militancy," she said, adding that the BNP-led alliance government has ensured communal harmony and

their religious festivals. **BLASTS OPPOSITION**

The prime minister censured her political opponents for calling hartal and creating chaos on the streets instead of joining parliament. "The opposition has perceived

that they will not be able to assume

power in future; they cannot even

dream of it... They hold rally at Paltan,

create chaos and damage vehicles,"

extended all-out cooperation to all

religious communities in celebrating

On the boycott of parliament by the Awami League, Khaleda said the opposition MPs are enjoying all privileges and travelling abroad on red passport. "Without coming to parliament, people's problems cannot be resolved," she said and urged them to come to parliament, shunning hartal and violence.

"They are letting loose chaos on the streets and calling hartals to obstruct the development works initiated by the BNP government,"

The prime minister alleged that the opposition is launching false campaign abroad that there is no communal harmony in Bangladesh. But, she said it is during the Awami League rule that Hindu temples were grabbed and women repressed.

She called for people's unity

against all terrorist activities and

pleted this month for preparing a new conspiracies. She also urged all to voter list. work for advancing the process of peace, development and democracy. Earlier, the prime minister unveiled the plaques of municipal

February", he added. buildings of Daulatkhan and Borhanuddin and laid the foundation stone of Banglabazar Growth Center. She also inaugurated the first phase of Daulatkhan town- protection Affairs ministries, Aziz said.

High-ups

called 'fake news'.

The lawmakers too are demanding that the press council should be strengthened as they believe that the existing law is inadequate to control the

The existing provision in the law empowers the press council to warn, admonish or censure the editor or journalist of a newspaper or news agency, if it is proved that they committed any professional misconduct or breach of the code of journalistic ethics.

The provision also provides for an opportunity of hearing of the editor or journalist concerned and for holding an inquiry as prescribed in the act.

The press council chairman in the report observed that the provision is being violated frequently. "I hope the ministry concerned will immediately concentrate on the issue to bring an acceptable amendment to the law," he suggested.

LAWMAKERS CONTINUE CRITICISING THE PRESS

Like the previous day, parliament yesterday witnessed another spell of broadside against the media as Jamaate-Islami lawmaker Shah Mohammad Ruhul Quddus accused the press of damaging the country's democracy.

"Some newspapers in the name of freedom of press are damaging our democracy by practising yellow journalism," Quddus said expressing his support to the ruling BNP lawmakers' demand for enactment of a tough law against the media.

Replying to his point of order, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar said the press cannot be controlled without enacting a new law as the press is enjoying freedom guaranteed by the constitution. "The chairman of the press council also told me that journalists do not care about the warning [issued by the council]," he said.

Agree to reforms

obstruction, arrest, and harassment of the opposition leaders and workers

willing to join Tuesday's grand rally. But the opposition's proposed discussion with the government over the reforms in the caretaker government and the EC will have to be held outside parliament, he added. Later, the opposition combine

brought out a procession that paraded city thoroughfares chanting slogans in support of today's hartal. On Tuesday, top opposition eaders at the Paltan Maidan rally announced that they would not

participate in any election without

reforms in the caretaker government

Earlier on July 15, the opposition combine gave a 31-point guideline for the reforms that include appointment of the chief advisor to the care taker government through consultation with political parties. Jalil posed a question to BNP

Bhuiyan as to why the government created obstacles on the way of people's joining the opposition rally and staged a "drama of transport strike" if they were not afraid of getting toppled by the grand rally. Despite widespread arrests, torture, and repression by Rab and police, the government could not

Secretary General Abdul Mannan

people will show victory sign as days of BNP-Jamaat government are Other speakers at the rally asked the government to accept the proposal of reforms in the caretaker government and the EC systems and

resist the mass wave," he said, adding

that the day is not far away when the

hold elections soon. Presided over by Dhaka City AL General Secretary Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, the rally was addressed, among others, by Gono Forum leader Mostafa Mohsin Montu, JSD leader Mir Hossain Akhter, Workers Party leader Kamrul Ahsan, Gonotontri party leader Shawkat Ali and Samyabadi Dal leader Harun Chowdhury.

CEC Aziz

FROM PAGE 1 He had also said the EC would take steps to increase the existing ceiling of election expenditure in the national elections, and to bring back its (EC) authority to cancel one's candidature in the elections for violating electoral

But no such initiative has been taken in the last six months since his taking office.

As the mainstream opposition

parties reiterated their demand for

reforms in the EC at Tuesday's grand rally in the city, Aziz again said yesterday the EC has taken initiatives to reform election laws He did the same on July 15 this year when the opposition parties jointly announced their 31-point guideline

for reforms in the caretaker govern-

The CEC yesterday stressed that an independent EC is a must for holding elections in a free and fair manner.

ment system and the EC.

Asked about the opposition announcement not to participate in elections without reforms in the EC, he said necessary initiatives have already been taken in this regard in consultation with Election Commissioners Aziz said recruitment of two lakh 40

thousand data collectors and 60

thousand supervisors would be com-

"Preparatory work for new voter list will begin in the first week of January and be completed by

The EC has taken initiatives for the first time since 1990 to include people of the enclaves in the voter list, and will start in this regard following permission from the Home and Foreign

NGOs asked to work

Institute of Administrative Management (BIAM) auditorium yesterday.

The finance minister alleged that when the NGO officials go to seminars or workshops abroad, they do not even bother to contact or cooperate with the government delegation. There is an impression abroad that

it is the NGOs that are doing everything and the government is doing nothing", Saifur said, adding, "This has emerged as a disturbing factor for the government.' Emphasising the need for a healthy partnership between the NGOs and the government, he said, "It is the

in later." The finance minister gave away the first instalment of Tk 1,00,000 each to 58 small NGOs at the programme.

government that first took all the good

initiatives in education and health

sectors. The NGOs and others joined

The NGO foundation started its ourney with a fund of Tk 100 crore to provide grants to the local small and medium NGOs, which do not have the support of any foreign funds.

Cabinet Secretary and foundation Chairman Dr Sadat Hussain said 58 small NGOs from 45 districts were

grant of Tk 2,00,000 each, of which the first instalment was given away yester-

Joint Finance Secretary and Managing Director of the foundation Md Abdul Majid said the awardees, selected on the basis of some select criteria, have been working in the remote areas of 80 upazilas in the fields of education, community-based rehabilitation of the disabled, sanitation, drinking water, agriculture and

others. The eight-member governing board of the foundation comprises M Hafizuddin Khan, managing director of Social Development Foundation Abdul Muyeed Chowdhury, chairman of Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh, Rokia A Rahman, president of Women Entrepreneurs Association, Dr Fakruddin Ahmed, managing director of Palli Karmashahayak Foundation, M Khalid Shams, managing director of grameen Telecom, Rasheda K Cowdhury, executive director of Gana Shakkharata Abhijan-CAMPE, Md Shafiqul Haq Chowdhury, president of

ASA, and CQK Mustaq Ahmed, direc-

tor general of NGO Affairs Bureau.

Top Sunni leader

In a recent meeting of Iraqi factions, the restoration of internal security and the buildup of the Iraqi army were given high priority -- as well as calls for a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops.

In televised remarks in Washington, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice indicated that troop reductions could be imminent.

"The president has said that as soon as Iragi forces are ready, we want to see a reduction in our own forces, and I think those days are going to be coming fairly soon when Iraqis are going to be more and more capable of carrying out the functions to secure their own future," Rice told Fox News Channel. About 159,000 US troops are cur-

first democratically-elected permanent government since the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein dictatorship in April Once the election is over, the number of US troops is expected to be brought

rently deployed in Iraq ahead of the vote

that is expected to produce the country's

officials refer to as the "baseline." Rice insisted that for the US troop withdrawal to begin, Iraqi security forces should demonstrate their ability to "hold

The remarks come amid increasing

discussion over the presence of US

back to about 138,000, which US defense

troops in Iraq from not just the Iraqi end but from the US Congress as well. A poll published Tuesday also showed that 63 percent of Americans were in favor of bringing troops home from Iraq in the next year. Another 61 percent doubted that democracy and

stability would come to Iraq. US authorities are eager to show that steady transfer of responsibility to the Iragis is ongoing, with regular announcements of successful joint military operations between US and Iraqi forces as well as the handover of bases. "The Iraqi Army has been the main

Tuesday. "They continue to exhibit professionalism and resolve in securing their country." A ceremony handing over a massive

palace complex of Saddam that had

effort in many of our operations," said

Colonel John L. Gronski of the US

marines in Ramadi in statement

housed three different US military units since the invasion to the Iraqi government was disrupted on Tuesday by an unsuccessful mortar attack. The shell, which did not explode,

briefly sent attendees running for cover,

including US ambassador to Iraq Zalmay

Khalilzad and US commander General George Casey. Meanwhile in the northern city of Kirkuk, police and civilians sifting through the rubble of car bomb discovered three more bodies, raising the toll

from Tuesday's attack to 22 dead.

policeman in a crowded market area was used to lure police into an ambush when a car bomb rammed a patrol car arriving at the scene. The attack took place in a largely

Turkoman area in a city known for its

ethnic tensions between Sunni Arabs

A small explosion and shooting of a

Kurds and Turkomans Iraqi government efforts to combat the insurgency has taken a new tack over the past two days with an offer by President Jalal Talabani, while in Cairo

negotiate with insurgents.

He followed this up with a landmark visit to Iran that concluded Wednesday with assurances from the Iranians to "Iran is interested in our security just as it is interested in its own security,' Talabani said as he was seen off by hardline Iranian President Mahmoud

me: that there are no limits to Iran's cooperation with and support for the Iragi people and government." Iran has often been accused of supporting insurgent attacks against US

and British forces, a charge Iran denies.

Ahmadinejad. "They all said one thing to

(AFP, Reuters)

Speaker

parliament," he said, adding that it is possible to get remedy under the

existing law on some issues. AL lawmaker Panchanon Bisaws JP (Ershad) lawmaker GM Quader, Mashiur Rahman Ranga and Golam Habib Dulal had submitted 29 notices to the parliament secretariat,

demanding discussions on the issues

would reduce the domestic price if the

international price goes down below

Because, he argued, the govern-

ment has already lost \$600 million in

subsidising the petroleum prices.

Besides, he said, there is not much

probability of the international fuel

prices to fall much lower that the

On the IMF condition of appoint-

ing an adviser to Agrani Bank, an NCB,

for availing of the PRGF. Saifur said

they could not find any suitable per-

Talking on this issue, Saifur

digressed a little, saying the donors

want to see oversight bodies like tax

ombudsman and human rights com-

mission. "But where do we find the

right persons for these offices," he

asked. For instance, he said, "I had to

face a lot of hassles from my cabinet

colleagues in setting up the Anti-

Corruption Commission. We made

the legislation, appointed commis-

sioners, gave manpower, but if they

don't work, I cannot be held liable for

Terming some of the IMF condi-

tions contradictory, the minister said

on the one hand, they want the letter of

credit (LC) margin to go but, on the

other hand, they ask the government

to reduce imports. Again, he pointed

out, they advocate for tight monetary

policy and at the same time ask the

"I told them we have not seen

much good coming out of applying

current level.

son for the job.

\$50, he said, "It's out of the question."

IMF for another

scheduled to be disbursed in December. Among the conditions, three major ones are appointing an adviser to Agrani Bank, restructuring the boards of nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) and introducing an audit cell at the National Board of

Saifur said, as the government is

short of its targets in fulfilling some of

the conditions, a mission member told

him, "You said you would cover four miles, but in reality you have trudged only two." Meeting sources said, though the coalition government has increased the petroleum prices as many as eight times, the last being in September, the IMF mission was not satisfied with the current price level, which is much

lower than that in other countries and

the international market. Due to the large gap between the international and the domestic fuel prices, Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) that imports petroleum products has incurred a oss of around Tk 40 billion, said Saifur Rahman. The BPC also is burdened with a mammoth Tk 80 billion outstanding loan drawn from the NCBs.

The fuel price gap was the main cause for the depletion of foreign exchange reserve to \$2.5 billion from its average level of \$3 billion plus. It also boosted the public sector bank borrowing significantly in the current fiscal year, finance ministry sources As the IMF mission pointed out

fuel prices, the minister admitted that the price gap has become a major burden on the public exchequer, but he said. "We have to decide in this regard considering the socioeconomic sustainability. When a reporter mentioned that fuel prices have been on the decline in

the international market for quite a

while and asked Saifur whether he

these facts and asked Saifur to readjust

your policies, but have achieved better results implementing our own," Saifur told the press at the post-meeting briefing.

central bank's affairs.

said there is a stay order of the court on this move. But the case would be vacated soon and then the government will go forward with the privatisation, he told the IMF mission.

On another condition, of privatising Rupali Bank, the finance minister