Secretary Mohiuddin Khan Mohan, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (ICD) Assistant General Secretary Amiruzzaman Khan Shimul and Organising Secretary Abdul Quader, JCD Dhaka City (South) President Rafigul Alam Mojnu and General Secretary (GS) Yasin Ali, its Dhaka City unit Joint Secretary Robin, Dhaka University unit GS

Investigation Officer of the case SI Altaf Hossain told The Daily Star yesterday evening that they are yet

Saiful Islam Firoz, JCD leaders

Nurul Islam Nayon and Habibur

Rashid Habib and

Swechchhasebak Dal leader Zakir

to arrest any of them. In the FIR, the complainant said that on April 17, the accused gathered at the EC gate an hour after BNP reformist Hafiz Uddin supporters came there and held rally and staged demonstrations. As a result, public order and security at that place had come under threat.

Besides, law and order was disrupted seriously as the accused made provocative speeches and chased their rivals violating the Emergency Powers Rules 2007, which ban all sorts of procession, plainant added.

delayed as it took time to collect names and addresses of the

accused. Denouncing the case, BNP Secretary General Khandakar Delwar Hossain yesterday said that the case was filed as part of a blueprint to destroy the nationalist

"Destruction of the nationalist forces won't be allowed," he was quoted as saying by BNP acting Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed, in protest at the filing of the case against his party people

Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda invited both BNP's reformist faction leader and acting secretary general Maj (retd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed and BNP's Khaleda-nominated Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain to the EC Secretariat for talks.

Both the factions accepted the invitation and Hafiz Uddin-led delegation met with CEC Huda and other election commissioners first on April 17.

As the Hafiz-led group was

45 held FROM PAGE 16

they were forced to forge passports to return home since their employers in China. Malaysia kept the original ones.

They had gone to Malaysia between three months and 13 years ago and they stopped working for their employers due to torture and poor salaries, the arrestees told immigration officials.

Their employers never returned the passports they submitted before appointment.

An immigration official requesting anonymity said many of them showed him marks of torture on

their bodies. Airport police said the immigration officials arrested them after

they landed on a GMG flight Friday. Immigration Inspector SM Azizul Haque filed a case with Airport Police Station yesterday accusing 97 people including the arrestees, officials of their recruiting agencies and a number of brokers.

invitation to participate in talks.

Against this backdrop, police

authorities plan to deploy at least

eight platoons of police personnel

to beef up security in the EC

Secretariat areas to avert any

unwarranted incidents during the

BNP acting chairperson appointed

by the party standing committee,

in the last couple of days tried to

persuade senior leaders of pro-

Khaleda faction to join the talks

But policymakers of pro-

Khaleda faction, who vehemently

opposed the EC's invitation to

Saifur-led faction, did not respond

to their rival's move, BNP sources

last minute to participate in talks

with the Election Commission

together with them (pro-Khaleda

faction)," BNP Standing

Committee Member Lt Gen (retd)

Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily

continue even if they [leaders of

pro-Khaleda faction) do not join us

for the talks," said Mahbubur, also a

Gen (retd) Hannan Shah however

categorically said in the last couple

of days they would not join the EC's

polls reform talks with Saifur-led

tary general of BNP, yesterday said

the EC is not holding talks with the

talks does not arise at all. If any

senior leader of the party is seen to

take part in the talks, then every-

body will understand under what

circumstances they did so," said

to the BNP Standing Committee's

October 29 controversial meeting

which some of its members were

led BNP faction, the EC would wrap

up its dialogue with political par-

ties, and send its electoral reform

proposals to the caretaker govern-

ment to make those into laws.

With today's talks with Saifur-

In this connection, he referred

Nazrul, a pro-Khaleda leader.

reportedly forced to attend.

Nazrul Islam Khan, joint secre-

"So, the question of joining the

BNP chairperson's adviser Brig

policymaker of Saifur-led faction.

"The unification move will

"We will however wait till the

Meanwhile, Saifur Rahman,

talks, police sources said.

with the EC together.

Star yesterday.

party faction.

mainstream of BNP.

Saifur group sits

leaving the secretariat through an alternative road, the pro-Khaleda faction supporters chanted slogans

in front of the EC office. A 15-member delegation of the Delwar faction, led by standing committee member Chowdhury Tanvir Ahmed Siddiqui, met with the EC later the same day. Delwar did not attend the meeting.

Soon after the BNP leaders came out after the meeting, the faction's supporters outside chanted slogans against the CEC. Meanwhile, at least six key

leaders of pro-Khaleda faction reportedly went into hiding last night to escape possible arrest in Party's standing committee

member Tanvir Ahmed Siddiqui, BNP chairperson's adviser Brig Gen (retd) ASM Hannan Shah, Joint Secretary General Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, acting Office Secretary Ruhul Kabir Rizvi and former lawmaker Sohrab Uddin kept away from their homes since last evening, sources said.

Khaleda-appointed Secretary General Khandakar Delwar Hossain could not be contacted over telephone last night.

Talking to The Daily Star, one of rally and demonstration, the com- the leaders requesting anonymity said, "We are out of our homes to He said the filing of the case was avoid possible harassment." He however declined to disclose where he was.

A number of the leaders cellphones were turned off.

Sources said police late last night started the hunt down for the BNP leaders including the ones who allegedly violated the EPR. Several leaders who have been opposing talks between the Election Commission and the Saifur-led faction of BNP went into hiding fearing they would be arrested in the case.

FROM PAGE 16

has begun the railway extension project on its side to link with the Nepal-China border," Baral said. The Chinese communist party

delegation told Nepalese officials that the railway link would be ready in five years time, said Baral. The Nepal border town of Khasa lies some 80 kilometres (50 miles)

north of the ancient capital Kathmandu. "The railway network will be important for increasing trade and

tourism for both countries," Baral added. Landlocked and impoverished

Nepal is wedged between India and Analysts said such a rail link could

reduce Nepal's reliance on India for many of its goods from drugs to transport vehicles and spare parts, cotton textiles and cement. Many Nepalese are uneasy with what they say is New Delhi's domi-

nance of the Himalayan nation's India is Nepal's largest trading

partner, accounting for more than 60 percent of its trade.

The two countries recently renewed a bilateral trade treaty which allows duty-free imports into

'Nepal's economy is heavily dependent on India. Once the railway service comes into operation it will lessen dependence on India within a decade or so," Madhavi Singh Shah, economics professor at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan University

The Saifur-led faction, which

was also invited on November 5 last

year to sit with the EC on November

22, has completed its preparations

don't have any major objections to

cal parties on September 12 last

year and was supposed to com-

plete the process in November last

year, according to the electoral

roadmap announced by it. But it

could not complete the talks within

the timeframe due to the nagging

to Saifur-led faction for reform

talks had triggered widespread

controversy as Saifur loyalists are

reportedly enjoying the blessings

of the military-backed caretaker

the High Court (HC) on November

18 last year ordered a stay on the

November 5 invitation following a

writ petition filed by Khaleda Zia.

The HC recently ruled that the writ

was not maintainable, clearing the

Saifur-led BNP faction for talks as

its move to reunite the party failed.

Chief Election Commissioner

(CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda on April

17 said the EC wanted to sit with a

united BNP, and did not want to

deal with factions. It however sits

The EC held talks with 15 other

political parties twice since

September 12 last year. But no

additional police forces were

deployed to ensure law and order

ties planned to step up security

during talks between the EC and

Saifur-led BNP faction since its

rival faction is annoyed, sources

sures, Deputy Commissioner,

Tejgaon Division of Dhaka

Metropolitan Police (DMP),

Mahbubor Rahman said necessary

measures will be taken to ensure

Asked about the security mea-

But this time the police authori-

today with a faction of the party.

SECURITYFORTALKS

during the talks.

mentioned.

law and order.

On April 22, the EC again invited

way for talks with the party.

The EC however could not hold

The EC's November 5 invitation

the EC's reform proposals.

BNP issue.

Sources in the faction said they

The EC started talks with politi-

Govt asked

FROM PAGE 16

"How come some advisers rushed to the ulemas and formed a committee after the chief adviser had announced the policy on behalf of the council of advisers? And why a religious quarter was given the task neglecting experts and rights activists," Hameeda Hossain said, adding that chief of Hathazari Madrasa, whose students attacked Hathazari Police Station, was on the review committee.

Human rights activist Khushi Kabir said the policy was formed not only basing one religion, it aims at development of women irrespective of religion and giving in to the group's pressure would mean paving the way for turning the country into a fascist Islamist state.

Asking the government to make its stance clear regarding the policy, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad President Ayesha Khanam pointed out that the policy is not for Muslim women alone.

Most of the Muslim countries have moved away from traditional provisions over the ages, Bangladesh has also done that. There are only a few cases like the inheritance issue where we are maintaining it here, Shahdeen Malik said referring to Resolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1929 and the law regarding custody of chil-

"It cannot be done in the case of inheritance because there is a shortage of people to talk honestly about it with an open mind," he

Blasting the role of the Baitul Mukarram Khatib, former finance minister AMA Muhit said there is no provision for priesthood in

The government did not permit Samajik Protirodh Committee to hold a meeting on April 25 but the fundamentalist forces did not bother to seek permission and indulged in violence, the speakers mentioned.

The participants demanded stopping religion-based politics and use of mosques for political purposes.

ABM Musa, Syed Abul Moksud, Zafrullah Chowdhury, Badiul Alam Majumder, Farzana Islam and Ruhin Hossain Prince also participated in the discussion.

Hasina

FROM PAGE 1

back to the makeshift jail as the hospital authorities discharged her after providing her with necessary medical treatment.

Hasina is likely to be produced before a Dhaka Divisional Special Judge's court today relocated to the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex in connection with the MiG-29 corruption case.

New unity proposal

FROM PAGE 1

According to the proposal, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, who was expelled by party Chairperson Khaleda Zia hours before her arrest last year, would have to be reinstated in the party and appointed as a member of the standing committee that would run the party in the chairperson's absence.

Party insiders said Speaker Sircar yesterday invited Delwar to his office to discuss the proposal after Saifur Rahman and Bhuiyan, two top leaders of the splinter group of reformists, had requested Sircar over the phone to place their proposal to Delwar.

The meeting between the two leaders started at 2:45pm and asted 45 minutes.

Delwar neither rejected nor accepted the proposal, saying that he did not have any objection to it as long as the detained chairperson of the party approves it, the insiders said adding that Delwar also reiterated his insistence on scrapping the standing committee's decision taken on October 29 last year, before considering the new proposal.

Delwar earlier informed Saifur of his stance on the October 29 meeting when the latter made several phone calls to him, urging the need for holding discussions any reform talks with BNP so far as over the unity of the party.

On October 29 last year, a BNP standing committee meeting held at Saifur's Gulshan residence appointed Saifur Rahman as acting chairperson and Maj (retd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed as acting secretary general of the party.

During the same meeting, the committee also overturned Khaleda's expulsion order of Bhuiyan, reinstated him in the party and appointed him as a member of the standing commit-

However, RA Gani, Chowdhury Tanveer Ahmed Siddique, Khandaker Mahbubuddin Ahmad and M Shamsul Islam -- four of the standing committee members who attended the meeting, later claimed that they did not gather for any formal meeting on October 29 as it was only an informal tea party.

Maj (retd) Hafiz later held a secret meeting with Hannan Shah, adviser to the BNP chairperson, in a Gulshan house. Their meeting, however, failed to reach any understanding.

Acting Chairperson Saifur's recent attempts to reach the senior pro-Khaleda leaders over phone were also unsuccessful.

FAO warns of 'civil war'

FROM PAGE 16 this had often made the implementation of FAO policies fall foul to those of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. "It's true that the World Bank and the (IMF) have, over the past two decades, policies which have dismantled systems put in place to protect farmers in Third World countries, notably in Africa," he

"(But) I should say that the World Bank has done a mea culpa, because it has recognised its policies in Africa were not good and that it has to change them. However, he denied that price rises of up to 120 percent in rice's

case would prove beneficial to developing world farmers. "There has to be investment in the management of water," he said. "In Africa, on 96 percent of

land, production is dependent upon rainfall. "When you factor in poor rural transport networks ... and inadequate storage facilities, (these countries) lose between 40 and 60

percent of production each year. The FAO director-general welcomed an idea for global institutions to establish a food security fund, in the way the international community rallied to battle AIDS from the 1980s.

"I think that this proposition merits serious examination, Diouf said. "But how do we make sure that funds are in addition to resources mobilised by the World Bank, regional development banks, the EU and its bilateral aid programmes?

them to launch a movement to

Jatiya Party Chairman HM

Ershad however announced that

his party will contest the election

even if the two major parties, AL

If the next parliamentary

election leaves room for its credi-

bility to be questioned, the post

election political scenario might

turn volatile again, in which case,

the post election code of conduct

for politicos, even if formulated

before then, might not work after

all for restoring normalcy in the

country's political arena, the

be questioned, if any major polit-

ical party does not participate in

it. So, the government should

sincerely create an environment

conducive to holding a free and

fair poll with participation of all

political parties," former adviser

to a caretaker government Maj

Gen (retd) Moinul Hossain

wants to formulate the politicos'

code of conduct with consent of

political parties through holding

a planned national dialogue with

them to move away from the

culture of parliament boycotts,

street agitations, and hartals,

talks' with the political parties,

the caretaker government advis-

ers are seeking opinions of politi-

cal leaders to ensure a jump-start

of the journey to a sustainable

moves for sweeping electoral

reforms to keep the next parlia-

mentary election free from influ-

ence of black money and muscle,

so honest candidates may con-

for holding a credible parliamen-

tary election ensuring participa-

tion of all major political parties

as the post election scenario

Iajuddin Ahmed-led caretaker

government however said an

environment conducive to all

political parties' participation in

the election is yet to be on the

will have to take fresh initiatives

to ensure participation of all

major political parties in the

upcoming election," the former

adviser said asking not to be

Hafizuddin Khan, another former

adviser to a caretaker govern-

ment, said if any of the two major

parties, AL or BNP, boycotts the

next parliamentary election then

the road to a sustainable democ-

racy might become much bump-

function in absence of a strong

opposition party," he observed.

"The parliament can't properly

Under the circumstances, the

analysts suggest that both BNP

factions resolve their differences

for greater interest of the nation,

thinking if a faction of BNP boy-

cotts the election, the prevailing

crisis might keep haunting the

body politic of the country even

however said he thinks an envi-

ronment conducive to all parties' let the people deliver their ver-

participation in election prevails, dict. The people cast their votes

excepting BNP of course. He said quite consciously," the former

the government should keep CEC told The Daily Star.

ier than expected.

after the poll.

"The caretaker government

A former adviser to President

largely depends on it.

horizon.

The analysts stress the need

Meanwhile, the EC initiated

democracy.

In the ongoing 'unofficial

sources in the government said.

The caretaker government

Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

"Credibility of the election will

FROM PAGE 1

and BNP, boycott it.

analysts predict.

Credible poll

Diouf stopped short of calling for a moratorium on biofuel development -- which the UN's Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food Jean Ziegler, recently called

"crime against humanity". He called instead for a conference on food security in Rome on June 3-5, -- which will be attended by French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva -- to trigger informed research.

Diouf also pulled back from developing world calls to lower agriculture subsidies and open up access to markets in the United States and Europe -- instead pressing for similar subsidies for farmers in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

"There are two solutions: end subsidies everywhere, or give them to everyone. I prefer the latter," he said.

Diouf said the the international credit crunch and faults in global financial markets could not be blamed for food price rises.

"Obviously, there are always interactions, but the real problem of the food crisis is insufficient global supply due to climactic phenomenons, already low stocks and growing demand among emerging countries such as China and India.

"To that you can add the demand for biofuels which has diverted food towards energy.

"The growth in world population is 78.5 million people each year, and by 2050, the global population will have risen from six to nine billion," Diouf said.

trying to assist the BNP factions

in resolving the differences

bring reforms to political parties

however triggered an enormous

controversy, as many political

leaders and analysts accused it of

working behind the scenes to

bring splits in the parties instead.

five advisers to the caretaker

government who are engaged in

'unofficial talks' with the political

parties, already talked to Saifur-

led faction of BNP, while the EC

also invited only Saifur loyalists

of the party to sit with it today in

ments, political analysts observe

that a split in BNP has been for-

mally recognised, giving rise to

questions regarding the EC's

In light of the latest develop-

an electoral reform dialogue.

In another development, the

The government's moves to

between them.

CNG three-wheeler

FROM PAGE 1 The raised fares took effect from yesterday.

The communication ministry during a meeting raised the fare following recommendations made by the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) yesterday.

The meeting chaired by Communication Secretary Mahbubur Rahman and attended by BRTA Chairman Sunil Kanti Bose was held at the communication ministry. Earlier in the day, BRTA officials

sat with representatives of transport owners' and employees' asso ciation before making their recom mendations. The BRTA officials proposed the waiting-charge for autorickshaws

be fixed at Tk 0.85 per minute but the communications ministry fixeditatTk1. The waiting-charges for non-AC and AC taxis were not increased

since their minimum fares were doubled, Ismail said. Asked whether the fare of CNGrun buses would increase, he said

the CNG-run buses have been charging the same as diesel-run buses despite running on CNG. This taxi-fare hike is the first since the introduction of CNG-run vehicles in 1998. The CNG-run

autorickshaw fare was adjusted May 1 last year. The government initially encouraged people to convert their vehicles to run on CNG, one of the cleaner fossil fuels. Its use became

popular since price of gasoline rose in phases in domestic and global markets. After four years, the government raised the price of a cubic metre of CNG to Tk 16.75 from Tk 8.5 Thursday in order to reduce the losses Petrobangla was incurring

due to the upward trend of prices of

Dr Kamal

petroleum in global market.

FROM PAGE 16

from Sherpur, Faridpur, Kishoreganj, Narsinghdi, Gazipur and other divisional headquarters under Dhaka attended the meeting presided over by Mafizul Islam Khan, president of Gono Forum, Manikganj unit. Addressing the meet as chief

guest, Dr Kamal Hossein said, "National unity is imperative to meet the present national challenge." While talking about the cor-

rupt politicians detained at the moment, Dr Kamal questioned why politicians, who had engaged in all kinds of corruption and arrested for the same, were being referred to as political prisoners.

He urged all representatives to bring a meaningful change through a meaningful election. Dr Kamal also said that he

make the programme a success

The district unit leaders have

Leaders of the district units have

AL acting General Secretary

Syed Ashraful Islam gave the

instruction to district unit leaders

over telephone as they were con-

fused about how to go on with the

token hunger strike programme

amid the state of emergency, and

ban on indoor politics except in the

have been instructed to observe

the programme either at the dis-

trict press clubs or bar council

premises. If the authorities do not

allow this, then they should

observe it inside religion establish-

AL sources said Syed Ashraf told

the district leaders that they have to

make the token hunger strike a

success without violating the EPR

since it is the first political

programme for the party presi-

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL)

-- Abdul Wadud Khokon, Rafiqul

Islam Katowal, Morsheduzzaman

Selim, Alamgir Hasan and Imran

Miah -- conveyed Ashraf's instruc-

tion to leaders of 64 districts units

over telephone from Hasina's

from the acting general secretary to

hold the programme either at press

club or bar council premises. If the

administration obstructs it, we will

observe the programme in

mosques and pray for our leader

[Hasina]," said Asgar Ali, general

secretary of Kushtia district AL

"We have received instruction

political office at Dhanmondi.

Some former leaders of

dent's release since her arrest.

ments including mosques.

The party's district unit leaders

already done so, party sources last

credibility in the process. Saifur-led faction will be in a much better position for getting would serve his country to the end registered as BNP with the EC and for being allowed to inherit the traditional BNP election AL men asked symbol, a sheaf of paddy, once the electoral reform talk between FROM PAGE 1 the EC and the faction is held

without violating the Emergency today. And if it turns out to be so, pro-Power Rules (EPR). Khaleda faction of BNP will have to take a new name to get regisalso been asked to instruct upazila, tered with the EC, which has been thana, union and village units of proposed to be made mandatory the party to observe the 10:00am to for a political party seeking to 4:00pm programme in all educacontest in the parliamentary tional institutions and mosques.

election. If the factions of BNP fail to reunite before getting registered with the EC, yet another volatile political situation might raise its ugly head when the EC will ask the parties to get registered for contesting in the poll.

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hussain vesterday however told reporters that the EC believes there will be a lot of opportunities for the feuding BNP factions to reconcile ahead of the poll. Chief Election Commissioner

(CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda on Monday however said reunification of BNP is a distant possibility. The commission decided to hold talks with only Saifur-led faction since its move to reunite the party had failed.

The latest developments in Awami League, the other major political party, shed some light on simmering unrest within it too, suggesting that it might face trouble in carrying out agitation programmes to free its detained chief Sheikh Hasina. Referring to the current situa-

Talking to The Daily Star, M tion of the political parties, former adviser Moinul said there are signs of restlessness and discord within and among the parties. The government should help and assist them to reduce the discord instead of increasing it, to ensure law and order following possible withdrawal of the state of emergency, Moinul asserted.

Former CEC Justice Abdur Rouf said the prevailing situation has been manufactured and the people are very much conscious about it, they understand everything. About the activities of the

"We have already instructed our upazila, thana, union and village incumbent caretaker government level leaders to observe the and the EC, the former CEC said programme in mosques and eduthey do not have the jurisdiction cational institutions," he said when to decide what kinds of people contacted over phone last night. Former adviser Hafizuddin should be elected in the next poll. Laxmipur district unit President "Let there be an election and

unit.

M Alauddin said, "We have got instruction from the party leadership to make the programme a complete success."

Pakistan, Taliban

FROM PAGE 16 five-week-old civilian administration is seeking to distance itself from that US-backed approach, which

many here argue only fueled mili-

The Pakistani government says its envoys are talking with elders of the South Waziristan region's Mahsud tribe. The tribe is accused of sheltering militants involved in attacks inside Pakistan and across the border in Afghanistan. One member of the tribe, Baitullah Mehsud, leads Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and is considered the country's top Taliban leader. He has been accused of links to al-Qaeda and responsibility for a wave of suicide bombings, including the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Bhutto's own party has not blamed Mehsud for her killing. One of the failed deals

under Musharraf was with Mehsud. The senior official told The Associated Press that a draft of a 15point deal under negotiation included a commitment from the Mahsud tribe to stop attacks on Pakistani government targets and to prevent their territory from being used for terrorism in Afghanistan.

The official, who asked for anonymity because of the sensitivity of his job, said it also included a commitment to evict foreigners from

In return, the government would gradually withdraw the army, deliver development projects, create jobs and discuss any conflicts that arise with the tribal elders.

There would also be an exchange of prisoners, the official said.

Government officials say publicly that their talks with the Mahsud tribe in South Waziristan and groups elsewhere in the tribal areas are an attempt to isolate al-Qaeda elements in the border region, considered a likely hiding place for Osama bin Laden. The intelligence official said the

government knew that elders were discussing the draft accord with militants. He said the outcome of the talks was uncertain. He wouldn't say

whether the government had received any response from Mehsud. Umar claimed militants across the region were ready for peace if the government met their demands to withdraw the army and release 200 militant prisoners in exchange for as many as 100 people, mostly security

forces, held captive by the militants. He insisted that militants will continue to attack US forces in Afghanistan, but suggested "if America wants peace in the area through negotiations and dialogue we are ready for talks with the Americans.

Tehrik-e-Taliban distributed fliers this week urging its followers to observe a cease-fire to give the peace talks a chance and saving violators would be "strung upside down in public and punished. However, a five-week lull in vio-

lence was shattered at 6 a.m. Friday when the bomb went off between a police station and a market area in the northwestern city of Mardan, said Akhbar Ali Shah, a senior police official.

The bomb killed one police officer and two men working at a small restaurant near the police station. Twenty-six people, including 18 policemen, were wounded.

Umar said militants carried out the attack to avenge the death of a Taliban commander slain by police about 10 days ago when he came to Mardan for his brother's wedding. "We have a cease-fire with the

government. But wherever the government will take action against us and will kill our friends, we will take revenge," Umar told AP by phone from an undisclosed location.

He said the Taliban have given a "good response" to the government's offer of talks, which were

Seismic survey

acre of the forestland known as Khashiya Punji. The Khashias lost around 200 betel leaf plants in the

Meanwhile, after Chevron started to trigger explosions as part of its survey since Friday morning, panic gripped the locals and wild animals alike as the deafening explosions jolted the area violently. The tremor and the shockwave damaged many structures including the building of a mosque, said

Environmentalists and different organisations have been protesting the government decision that allowed Chevron Bangladesh to conduct 3D seismic survey for gas exploration in the national forest of the country.

Various organisations including Paribesh Bachao Andolan and Save Environment Movement (SEM) yesterday expressed concern at the incidents in the forest and urged the government to take necessary mea- has primarily started its activities sures for saving the delicate forestry in one centre at Jackson Heights it and wildlife in the national park.

Even though Chevron was conducting survey in the area that caught fire, the Chevron authorities did not play their role in saving the forestry from the fire, said SEM in a statement. Aside from that, Chevron is not

conforming to the restrictions on

drilling on hills in the forest, said Prof Rafigur Rahman, president of co-management committee of Nishargo Sahayata Prokalpo. Director of external affairs at Chevron Bangladesh said such explosions at gas survey sites are

normal and the explosions should

not cause any harm to the environment or the wildlife. Lawachhara, also a reserve forest of the country, is home to at least 167 species of plants, four species of amphibians, six species of reptiles, 246 species of birds and

20 species of mammals. Existing laws of the country prohibit certain activities including mining in a national park.

being carried out through tribal leaders. He also claimed a peace deal could be signed within a week after a proposed tribal jirga, or council of

Mohammad Adeel, a leader of one of the parties in the new government, said the Mardan blast would

not derail the talks. "Even in the peace talks these things happen. Even after the agreement some people will come and they will break the agreement but we will be very patient," Adeel said. He said he could not predict "how many days, how many weeks or how many months" it would take to reach an agreement.

Partex Group

illegal use of urea fertiliser in production of particleboards. The joint forces raided Star Particle Board Mill, an organ of Partex Group at Kuripara on Friday

fertiliser from its premises. Urea is used as raw material in producing particleboards, as it's cheaper to extract nitrogen from the fertiliser than import nitrogen from abroad. Urea is 46 per cent nitrogen.

night and seized 1,224 sacks of urea

However use of industrial use of urea as a raw material is banned in the country. Experts however say that this ban is often defied, causing acute shortage of the fertiliser in agricultural sectors during peak demand periods.

The five people sued are Chairman of the Partex Group MA Hashem, his son and the Vicechairman of the company Aziz Al Kaisar, the General Manager Kamruzzaman, and Lutful Kabir and Abul Hasib -- general manager and manager of Star Particle Board Mill respectively.

Magistrate Kamaruzzaman sealed the Star mill warehouse yesterday morning. The sacks recovered from the

mill were labeled 'Zia Fertiliser' and were collected from Alamgir of Nazma Enterprise in Charshindu village under Ghorashal in Narshingdi district.

Officials and employees of the mill turned away journalists from the mill yesterday, refusing to make any comment about the incident.

50pc higher trade In his letter to the IMF, Aziz said the

country needs to import ten times more rice than usual at 70 percent higher prices, which is accompanied by increased imports of fertiliser to ensure local production.

He said there is a short-term need for additional imports worth more than \$600 million, while exports have been reduced by \$60 million following last year's floods_ and cyclone was media and and

The pressure on trade is visible in the first eight months of the current fiscal year with a trade imbalance of \$3.2 billion compared to \$2.06 billion in the same period of FY07--a 55 percent jump in one year.

The central bank sources said figures from that period reveal a widening gap between imports and exports with import growth of 20.36 percent compared to 11.32 percent growth in exports. Between July 2007 and April 17

this year, imports of rice, wheat, chemical fertiliser, edible oil and milk have gone up 121 percent costing \$2.7 billion. Rice imports alone have gone up by 692 percent from \$99 million in FY07 to \$792 million in FY08. Wheat imports have gone up by 84

FY07 to \$493 million in the current fiscal year. The IMF projects an additional \$1 billion expenditure for oil imports--both crude and edible oil--requiring at least \$3.2 billion in FY08 compared to \$2.2 billion of

percent, rising from \$268 million in

In these eight months, petroleum products worth \$1.58 billion

have already been imported. As per a projection of the energy ministry also \$3.2 billion would be needed for importing petroleum

products. However, the central bank sources said the pressure on the balance of payments will not affect foreign exchange reserves significantly because of strong remittance growth and increased foreign aid over the last year.

Prof Yunus

FROM PAGE 16 popularity among entrepreneurs in New York.

The micro-credit guru also expressed his satisfaction at the fact that people of different ethnic communities in the USA are interested to get involved with the programmes of Grameen America. Although the Grameen America

has a target of having at least a thousand members in a year. Coordinator of the Grameen America Shah Newaz informed

that no security documentation would be needed to take loan from the organisation except providing the proof of legal status in the USA. "Additionally, the borrower will have to prove that he or she is a

member of low income group," he

Shah Newaz said the Grameen America representatives would make decision on giving loan between US\$ 500 and \$ 3,000 to a borrower according to his or her income and need. After inaugurating the office of

the Grameen America, Dr Yunus

gave a brief speech at Delhi Palace restaurant at Jackson Heights. Bangladesh Consul General in New York M Shamsul Hoque,

among others, was present. Later, Dr Yunus paid a courtesy visit to Muktadhara at Jackson Heights.