Blasts blown out

Chevron has denied its responsi-

bilities, saying the survey was not a

cause for the fire and that it did not

have its people there when the fire

broke out. Bangladesh Forest

Research Institute has made an

estimate that 900 plants of various

species and at least 28 big trees

were destroyed in the fire. The

place still smells of ash and looks

barren. Both the Forest

Department and locals said

Chevron workers were in the area

and had lunch before the fire and

they left the place just about 40

minutes before the flames leapt up.

We found explosive sites, wires and

equipment only about 15 feet from

the fire spot. With all likeliness, one

of the survey workers had callously

thrown a burning cigarette butt to

cause the inferno, but there are no

witnesses and Chevron forbids its

workers to carry any matches or

forest, we found a different kind of

threat to the forest. Thousands of

sawed-off tree stumps tell the story

of the mass-scale illegal logging

that is going on inside Lawachhara.

And many would say it happens in

connivance with the foresters. In

the two days we spent in the forest,

never had we met the famous

holook gibbons that Lawachhara is

so famous for. We once heard their

live in the forest will eventually

vanish as illegal loggers are felling

the tall trees. These primates live

on the high canopies and once the

teams, "tourists" are causing dis-

turbances to the wildlife. Blaring

loudspeakers, thousands of people

throng the forest everyday and the

forest authorities are just a silent

spectator to the onslaught. The

"picnic parties" litter the forest at

will and scare away the birds and

Lawachhara is supposed to be is

today only a shade of what it was

raids and patrol duty never yield any

result. "Those attacked were also on

patrol. Have they avoided attacks?"

late due to bad road condition.

He said police reached the spot

The natural forest that

And more than the survey

tall trees are gone, they will go too.

The 11 groups of gibbons that

loud cries though.

monkeys.

IGP'sVISIT

However, as we roamed the

cigarettes to the forest.

FROM PAGE 1 so brief that they hardly mattered.

Strangely, these observations starkly clash with the Lawachhara forester's testimony. He said the "blasts" are so loud that once he even fell off on the ground. "They [Chevron] are disturbing the forest with loud bangs and I am afraid the does which are now pregnant may have abortion from the noise," he said.

Obviously, he was not telling the truth and he might have reasons to distort facts. But the survey was undoubtedly badly timed. This is the breeding and nesting time for birds and animals and the widespread infiltration of survey workers into the forest will disturb them to some extent. We saw at least three jackals and a jungle cat, expecting babies any time and they looked frightened. It was also time for the hooded pitta to fly all the way from Southeast Asia for breeding at Lawachhara.

"When the explosion sites were chosen, we checked whether there were any bird nests around," said the IUCN zoologist, one of many who are constantly accompanying the blasting teams. "On many occasions we changed the sites because of nesting birds."

Phil Johnston, chief geophysicist of Chevron, said they have observed some "light movement" of birds after explosions and stated that the blasts never produce noises louder than 60 decibels.

"In fact, we wanted to start the survey in January to avoid the breeding season, but the permission came late and so we had no choice but to start it now," Johnston said.

Asked what Chevron would do if gas reserves are found inside the forest, Phil said they would "never dig well in the forest and would go for directional drilling from outside the forest". This means they would dig the well outside the forest and then bend the pipes to reach reserves inside the forest that would not affect the forest.

"This is a rare piece of forest and we do not intend to damage it in anyway," he said.

cartridges and some other evi-

dences from the spot of Friday's

A man identifying himself as Nikhil

Sarker, 'regional responsible per-

son of PBCP', telephoned two local

newsmen and claimed responsibil-

The two newsmen said the

caller vaunted about continuing

their attacks on law enforcers and

said they would also attack Rab and

leaflets while fleeing the scene. The

leaflets narrated PBCP activities and

called upon poor people to join the

outfit. They hailed guerrilla attacks

on law enforcers for what they said

is establishing the revolutionary

of law enforcers in villages must not

Local people blamed police for

'indifference' to outlaws' activities.

There have been no regular police

patrol and raids against outlaws and

militants in the region since

PBCP members in recent months.

One Afzal Hossain of

They also warned that 'sources'

people's power in the country.

to help them any more.

October last year.

POLICE INDIFFERENCE

The Friday attackers sprayed

OUTLAW'S ADMISSION

ity of the attack on police.

army personnel.

FROM PAGE 1

attack

But the forest was damaged in a and is vanishing fast.

FROM PAGE 16 most had come just to look. small area of one acre anyway when a fire broke out in a hill.

The desktop computers cost almost \$800 (£400), in a country where the average wage is under \$20 (£10) a month.

access to extra income, much of it from money sent by relatives living abroad.

in February, Raul Castro has ended a range of restrictions and allowed Cubans access to previously banned consumer goods.

phones and DVD players.

But only now have the first computer stocks arrived.

Internet access remains restricted to certain workplaces, schools and universities on the

bandwidth and is expensive to use.

Cuba's anti-American ally, Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez, is laying a new cable under the Caribbean.

It remains unclear whether, once the connection is completed, the authorities will then allow unrestricted access to the world wide web.

8 killed

FROM PAGE 1

ing since the capsize.

Reports received from different upazilas of Khulna, Bagerhat and Jessore said Friday night's nor'wester caused huge damages to IRRI-Boro crops and semi-pucca and thatched houses.

Meanwhile, our Benapole correspondent reported that a huge High alert in 5 N-dists piece of hail fell from the sky on the ground in Goga village of Sharsha upazila on Friday afternoon although there was no cloud or

Locals said the hail, which broke into hundreds of pieces, could weigh about 50kg but no one was

Delwar

IGP Noor Muhammad, addressing

local people at Taherpur police outpost, sought their assistance in combating outlaws' activities, and assured that general people would not be harassed. Some of you must have seen the

criminals and you should inform police about their identities. If you don't believe local police, you inform the SP, DIG. If you cannot trust police, you should inform Rab", said the IGP. And he gave his own mobile phone number requesting people to inform him about outlaws.

the criminals"

Additional IG (CID) Zabed Patwary and Additional IG (Special Branch) Baharul Alam.

ADMITTED TO DMCH Harmirkutsa said police took no

action despite repeated complaints to them about activities of He was admitted to the DMCH A businessman unwilling to be with severe head injuries.

named said he was threatened by outlaws over phone only a week ago. But police ignored his complaint saying the outlaws are no more able to conduct attacks.

Goalkandi union Parishad member Shefali Begum said police patrol decreased since the former officerin-charge (OC) was transferred in October last year.

Asked about this, a police source said former Bagmara OC Mirja Golam Sarwar was transferred after he had arrested 106 listed outlaws and 56 militants in regular raids till

October 2007. There have been no such raids since then. "The incident (on Friday) occurred at around 6.30pm and we reached the spot at around 8:00pm. But police took another half an hour

Phulbari highway

meeting to protest the develop-

ment of the coalmine in Phulbari.

Md. Aminul Islam Bablu and

General Secretary of Phulbari unit

of Oil, Gas Mineral Resources and

Port Protection Committee ASM

Nuruzzaman spoke at the meeting.

FROM PAGE 16

to reach there, (18km from police station)", said Mamunur Rashid, a local newsman. Minutes after the attackers left the scene chanting slogans, I found one policeman in a pool of blood. I expected pace. took him to a nearby village doctor.

The doctor advised taking him to hospital and informing police. I rushed to Taherpur police outpost in 15 minutes. But policemen didn't move to the spot which is only yards away", said Mokhlesur Rahman, a roadside shop-owner at Taherpur remained suspended. market

Bagmara OC Fayzul Islam said Shawkat Mahmud described the restrictions on press by the govern-

Criticising the role of the UN

"The UN needs to play a role in lifting the emergency and restora-

Cuba lifts ban

But some Cubans do have

Since taking over the presidency

In recent weeks thousands of Cubans have snapped up mobile

The government says it is unable to connect to the giant undersea fibre-optic cables because of the US trade embargo. All online connections today are via satellite which has limited

upazila during a nor'wester. The dead was identified as Hafizur Rahman Mukul, 45, of Senhati village under Digholia upazila of the district.

Two persons--Arabinda Das, 38, lecturer of Bagerhat Girls' College, and Alamgir Hossain, 32, field officer of an NGO, have been miss-

A general diary was filed with Bagerhat Sadar in this connection.

fortunately hurt in the incident.

government of "hatching conspir-

Sohrab Uddin, Selim Reza Habib

and Nurul Kabir Shaheen, Pabna

district BNP President Sirajul Islam

Sardar and General Secretary

Habibur Rahman Tota, among

others, were present during the

A delegation of Rajshahi

Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Samity led by

its General Secretary Advocate

Enamul Huq also met Delwar

demand for "unconditional"

release of detained former pre-

Hasina and urged the lawyers to

government cannot continue in

Uddin Ahmed, acting secretary

BNP, yesterday said unity in the

He, however, said both the

"I can assure party leaders and

factions of the party have to work to

workers that the party would be

united before the death anniver-

sary of late president Ziaur

Rahman [on May 30]," Hafiz told

"My son wanted to study and do a

respectable job when he grows up.

But now, all our hopes are shat-

tered," Bilquis Begum, the grief-

Biplab was their only child.

exemplary punishment to them.

stricken mother of Biplab, told The

Bilquis demanded immediate

The bodies of Biplab and Jewel

arrest of her child's killers and

were taken to their village homes in

respectively on Friday evening and

reporters at his Banani residence.

2 schoolboys

party is now "a matter of time"

Delwar once again voiced his

acy" to divide the BNP.

meeting.

yesterday.

the current crisis.

power," he said

reunite the party.

FROM PAGE 1

Daily Star.

buried there.

FROM PAGE 1 would be allowed in the country, he said, adding, "BNP will not participate in any election keeping party Chairperson Khaleda Zia in jail.

Demanding release of the political leaders, he asked the government to hold a credible election as soon as possible and hand over power to the elected representa-The secretary general appointed by Khaleda accused the

"Please assist us and see what exemplary actions we take against

He said those who do not help The IGP was accompanied by the party in bad times would not get any chance to lead the party. BNP acting Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed, former lawmakers

Our staff correspondent in Dhaka adds: Constable Sarwar Hossain, one of the four law enforcers injured in Friday's attack, was brought to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) from Rajshahi Medical College Hospital last night.

Akbar Ali

FROM PAGE 16

will fall in the hands of miscreants." the former adviser to the caretaker government said.

miers Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Prof Muzaffer Ahmad alleged that the owners of newspapers and media and ad-providers in play a strong role in overcoming Bangladesh force the newspapers and media not to publish the truth.

"We're talking about right to information of the public sector corruption, but it's not true that corruption exists only in the public sector, it is also widespread in the private sector," he said.

About the recent "slow-moving" anti-corruption drive by the Anticorruption Commission (ACC), he said the past and recent speeches of the ACC chairman prove that his organisation's drive against corruption is not moving with the

President of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul said World Press Freedom Day is being observed here at a time when the article 39 of the constitution that ensures the freedom of speech

Jatiya Press Club President ment after the 1/11 as "peculiar".

secretary general just before the declaration of emergency, he said it is not justifiable that the UN will have a role in expediting the declaration of emergency in a country through a letter.

Munshiganj and Mymensingh tion of democracy," he said.

Hold public hearings

NEWS

FROM PAGE 16

member for a three-year term. He raised a question whether the press council can ensure a responsible role of those involved with newspapers by only warning and censuring them. He placed "equipping the council with more powers" on the

The programme saw lively discussion as some of the discussants underscored amending the Press Council Act, 1974 by giving it some "teeth" to punish breach of journalistic ethics while others said they do not want to see yet another regulatory body for journalists and rather want the council to remove obstructions and help journalists perform their jobs better.

The law adviser as the chief guest of the programme underscored the need for public consultations before broadening the jurisdiction of the press council.

"Massive public consultation is required to see if the reach of the Press Council Act needs to be broadened," he said adding that it should not be seen as the state's police power and it needs to be seen whether it reflects the people's hopes and demands.

The law adviser joined others to say that freedom of the press is must but there should be restraint on

"Journalists' freedom helps them in their professional work. But, in a democratic society, sense of responsibility is intertwined with freedom," he said urging journalists to be more responsible and honest.

Delivering the welcome speech, Justice Ebadul said there is a lack of people's trust on the press council as many think it has failed to fulfil the expectations of the people and the journalists.

He suggested widening the Press Council Act's jurisdiction to stop activities that go against journalists' code of conduct.

He said journalists' track records should be looked into during issuance of accreditation cards. It needs to be considered whether state facilities should be limited or withdrawn altogether for newspapers that publish false and objectionable news hurting the rights of the people or the state.

Stressing the need for implementing existing laws, Jamil Osman, acting information secretary, backed Shelly's suggestion to involve the parliament in the chairman appointment process and empowering the

activities regarding newspapers. He said it would be positive for democracy if the council had more power for punitive actions agains people who breach journalistic

press council to criticise governmen

Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul and president of Jatiya Press Club Shawkat Mahmud asked the council to work harder to help the journalists perform their jobs. "The philosophy behind the formation of the press council was to strengthen newspapers from within

The objective would not be achieved

if it becomes another regulatory

body," Bulbul said. He suggested

However, senior journalist

giving the council the power to fine people and issue suo moto. The Independent Editor Mahbubul Alam, Observer Editor Igbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Amar Desh Editor Amanullah Kair, Bhorer Kagoj Editor Shyamol Dutt, Jaglul Ahmed Chowdhury of BSS and advocate Abdul Baset Majumder also took part in the discussion.

Gas crisis

FROM PAGE 16 however, said that they receive 85

mmcfd gas. The 24-Megawatt GBB renta

power station has already started power supply, which uses about mmcfd gas.

Another 20-Megawatt power station in Bogra and 11-Megawatt power station at Ullapara in Sirajganj will start operation in November, the officials said adding that the two power stations wil require 2.60 mmcfd gas for generating electricity.

PGCL Managing Director Saiful Alam Chowdhary has sent a letter to the director (Operation), Petro Bangla a few days ago requesting to increase the gas supply to 10 mmcfd for smooth supply to the three power stations, some CNG (Compressed Natural Gas) stations and the domestic connections.

ADB to provide loans

FROM PAGE 1

with limited land for farming and a limited water supply so agriculture yields must be increased over time," Kuroda said.

Prices for the benchmark Thai variety of rice, a food stable across much of Asia, are at about 1,000 dollars a tonne, up threefold from the last ADB annual meeting in Japan one year ago.

The jump in food prices is fuelling inflation globally and the ADB predicted it would hit 5.1 percent across Asia this year, its highest level since the Asian financial crisis a decade ago and is raising concerns of popular unrest.

The food crisis has been blamed

on poor harvests caused by drought, growing crops for biofuels instead of food, and surging demand, especially from China and India, for meat and dairy products as living standards rise. Karuda said the sharp rise in

prices for staples like rice was leading people to hoard food items, causing a vicious circle that leads to higher prices. "There is a kind of panic buying," he said.

On the eve of the meeting, donors pledged 11.3 billion dollars to the bank's Asian Development Fund, its key poverty alleviation mechanism, for the 2009-2012, a 60 percent increase over the last four year period.

The fund provides grants and low interest loans to Asia's poores countries to help them build roads provide clean water and electricity and agriculture infrastructure.

Last year entire ADB approved 10.1 billion dollars in loans, 673 million dollars in grant projects and technical assistance amounting to 243 million dollars last year.

Pakistan was the largest recipi-

ent of ADB aid last year followed by

Vietnam, India, China and Indonesia. Established in 1966, the ADB is owned by its 67 member countries -- 48 from the Asia-Pacific region, and 19 from elsewhere around the

world, including Spain. The lender has grown from develop infrastructure projects to promoting the role of the private sector in development.

Some 3,000 people -- business and government leaders, academics and representatives of nontaking part in the ADB's annual meeting, which is being held in Spain for the first time.

It holds the annual meeting outside of Asia every two years.

FROM PAGE 16

at least 5 months ahead of the possible election schedule, which might be announced in early November.

"An elected government must But, if it is promulgated this govern the country. A non-elected issues a gazette notification deter-Meanwhile, Maj (retd) Hafiz ness, said the senior EC official. general of the pro-Saifur faction of

> plans to specify the period for the code of conduct's effectiveness by issuing a gazette notification," the EC official said referring to the new

> period of its effectiveness, so the political parties may take their preparations for the poll without much restrictions, he added. which was promulgated in 1996, says the pre-poll period begins

suggesting to define the pre-poll period as starting from dissolution of the parliament and ending with publication of the election results through an official gazette.

Political parties will face some tures

helping Asian governments

governmental organisations -- are

Code of conduct

very next day of its promulgation,

month with the modifications, it will not be effective until the EC mining the period for its effective-"The Election Commission now

It means the commission now wants to somewhat relax the enforcement of the code of conduct, at least by shortening the

with the announcement of the election schedule and concludes with publication of the election results in an official gazette.

STRICT PROVISIONS

restrictions in carrying out their electoral activities during the prepoll period once the code of conduct becomes effective. The parties will not be allowed

to bring out processions or hold rallies for election campaigns without prior permissions from proper authorities, according to the proposed code of conduct. "Prior permissions from proper authorities will be necessary

through informing them of the specific time, date, and place for holding any procession or meeting for any election campaign programme during the pre-poll period," the proposed code of conduct says. 'Authorities' has been defined

as district magistrates or officials

authorised by district magistrates,

and police commissioners in metropolitan areas. The proposed code of conduct also recommends imposing a ban The existing code of conduct, on holding rallies and processions that might obstruct free public

It also suggests severe restrictions on pasting posters on walls and establishments in city corporation areas. None will be allowed But this time around, the EC to paste posters and leaflets on proposed to scrap the current rules buses, trucks, launches, or on any other vehicle, according to the proposals. Violation of the code of conduct

will be made an offence, which will be punishable with imprisonment, fine and cancellation of candida-

FROM PAGE 1

between the caretaker government and political parties as 'they are actually ruling the country from behind the scene'.

"It will be good to have dialogues with those (the army) who have been actually ruling the country, instead of the dummies, as neither the chief adviser nor any other adviser can take any decision independently," said Hannan Shah, an adviser to detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, while addressing the BBC Bangladesh Sanglap in Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the capital.

The pro-Khaleda BNP leader categorically said the army has been ruling the country with a government formed by them with people of their choice. "The entire nation is being ruled by the task forces and by a special intelligence agency, so we might reach somewhere having dialogues with them," said the former army official.

While Suranjit Sengupta said, 'As the army formed the caretaker government led by Fakhruddin Ahmed, they should be present at the dialogues as a part of the government.

Opposing the views of the two leaders of traditional archrivals AI and BNP, two other panellists --veteran journalist also cultural activist Kamal Lohani, and Country Director of Action Aid Bangladesh Farah Kabir --- said presence of the army at the dialogues will be improper. "It will not be possible to restore democracy by bringing in the army to the dialogues," said Kamal Lohani.

BBC Bangla Service in conjunction with BBC World Service Trust organised the Sanglap [dialogue] moderated by Kamal Ahmed.

Opposing the Election Commission's (EC) latest delimitation of parliamentary constituen cies, both leaders of AL and a faction of BNP observed that the parliamentary election might be delayed 'somehow', and warned that there might be incidents of cases being filed against the EC regarding the delimitation.

Replying to a query, all panellists said a design for delaying the holding of the next parliamentary election is at work in the name of holding local government elections first. They demanded that the EC holds the parliamentary election first. Suranjit suggested the commission to hold both local government and national polls simultaneously before December to ease public confusion.

The dialoguers also asked the government to make a clear statement before the nation regarding the money recovered through the ongoing anti-corruption drive.

Responding to another query

Brig Gen (retd) Hannan Shah said

the chiefs of BNP and AL --Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina have been detained illegally in an effort to humiliate them politically. Suranjit claimed that Hasina is innocent while false charges have

been brought against her. He demanded that the government releases the AL chief and send her abroad for treatment immediately. Both Hannan and Farah Kabir

asked the government to allow law to take its own course, so the legal rights of the chiefs of two most major political parties in the country may be ensured.

Indian prices

FROM PAGE 16 other foodstuffs, along with the

sky-high oil price, have fanned inflation worldwide. This has prompted many gov ernments to impose price controls and curb exports of essential

Fighting inflation is a top priority for India, where a much higher proportion of people's income is spent on food than in more devel-

oped countries. "Inflation could ease over the next few weeks, as the impact of these measures takes hold," said Gaurav Kapur, senior economist at ABN Amro bank in Mumbai.

"That said, risks still pretty much remain on the upside for inflation, especially considering that no relief seems to be in sight from the spiralling international ommodity prices

Huji man Suman FROM PAGE 16

The CID arrested Hasan raiding his home at Mohammadpur in the city on April 12. He has already made a confessional statement before a magistrate about the grenade attack carried out on an Awami League rally on August 21, 2004 which left 24 Awami League leaders and activists dead and scores more injured. Earlier, Huji leader Mufti Abdul

Hannan in his confessional statement regarding the Ramna Batamul blast said after receiving instructions from Huji top leaders, Sabbir and Jahangir Badar made the bombs. They later handed those over to Taher, Hasan and Faruq (students of Dhaka College) and several others who planted the bombs at the Batamul.

Release of Hasina Food crisis

FROM PAGE 1

total demand. Despite the positive developments, prices of food grains are not going to come down anytime soon, food ministry officials and economists alike predict.

According to Trading Corporation Bangladesh (TCB) report, the price of coarse rice ranged between Tk 33 and Tk 35 a kg a week ago. It did the same yesterday showing that Boro harvest and import did not yet have an effect on the price situation.

The trend will continue, said a food ministry official. "It's because the production cost has shot up by 54 percent in one year," he added.

On the other hand, import price too has increased sharply due to a global food crisis. The price of rice on the international market is increasing on a daily basis with many countries resorting to restrictions on export of their rice.

Meanwhile, five major rice exporting countries including Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar have agreed in principle to launch a platform styled OREC (Organisation of Rice Exporting Countries) to control rice prices on global market.

Thailand, the biggest rice exporter, has already said it wants to form an Opec-style cartel compris ing Mekong nations to gain more control over international prices. Talking to The Daily Star last

Over 150 Kurdish rebels killed in Iraq raids

AFP, Ankara

More than 150 Kurdish rebels from the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party have been killed in Turkish bombing raids carried out in north ern Iraq this week, the Turkish army said yesterday.

this operation allowed us to neutralise more than 150 terrorists," according to a statement on the Turkish armywebsite. Several senior PKK commanders may have been among the dead, the

"According to initial estimates,

caused "panic among (PKK) mem-The raids in the mountainous Qandil region which began late Thursday and continued into the night hit 43 targets including shelters and a PKK communications centre, which were all destroyed, the army

statement said, adding that the raids

The Oandil mountains straddle Iran, Iraq and Turkey and have long

been a separatist haven. Turkish warplanes have been bombing PKK positions in northern Iraq on and off since mid-December. In February, the army conducted a week-long ground offensive against rebel hideouts in the region, where Ankara estimates more than 2,000

militants take refuge. Turkey's parliament authorized cross-border military action against the rebels for a period of one year in October, paving the way for the ground offensive, which was preceded by five bombing raids on PKK targets in northern Iraq.

Washington on Friday endorsed

the air strikes, saying they targeted

PKK "terrorists' The PKK, listed as a terrorist group by Turkey and much of the international community, has been fighting for self-rule in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast since 1984. The conflict has claimed more than

night, Uttam Kumar Deb, head of research division at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said if they really go on to create a cartel the price of rice will increase and at the same time availability of the staple will decrease.

"So, Bangladesh should try to increase the production to meet the deficit," he observed adding that a hard time is ahead as supply even in the international market will be

limited He also said though the farmers are having a bumper Boro crop, the price would not mark any significant decrease as both production cost and scarcity of food grains in

the world market have increased. Uttam said how much the price of rice would decrease depends on whether the farmers would be able to gather the crop safely in the next few days.

About the food ministry estimates, he said there should be measures to have actual data regarding production and demand for food grains.

He said the demand should be calculated on the basis of an updated population census.

Thai PM harasses reporters

Allege media group

AP, Bangkok, Thailand Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej routinely harasses reporters and attempts to intimidate the media with his foul mouth, a coalition of Thai journalism groups charged yesterday.

The Organizations of Media

Occupations, which represents three

Thai journalism groups, said the tactics are aimed at giving the public the impression that the media is the source of all the country's problems. "This is the new method of intimidation," the group said in a statement coinciding with World Press Freedom Day. "Samak has been using the state media, the state

television to scolded the media with

rude and dirty words with his inten-

tion to intimidate the media from reporting the news in a straightforward way. It also accused the government of using criminal defamation laws to stifle the media, and the prime minister of using state-owned media outlets to counter stories that run in

This behavior reflects his intolerance toward different views, which entirely contradicts (the) culture ofdemocracy," the group said of

the privately owned media.

Wichianchote Sukchotrat, refused to comment on the allegations. Samak, who became prime minister in January after leading his People's Power Party to victory in the December general election, said Wednesday he would stop holding twice-a-week news conferences

blunt and sometimes crude language he uses. Samak said that a prominent figure in Thai society, whom he refused to name, told him to tone down his language. He said he was also asked to tone down the language

television and radio talk shows. The prime minister's long standing bent for speaking blunth has won him popularity with working-class and some middle-class voters during his four decades in Thai politics, but he is also disliked by many who find his style too provoca-

Musharraf ready

FROM PAGE 16 While the PPP has been saying that it is willing to forge a "working relationship" with Musharraf, its coalition

he dismissed if the new government amends the constitution instead of simply passing a parliamentary resolution, a spokesman for his political party said Saturday. Musharraf purged the judiciary of some 60 judges including Supreme

accept the reinstatement of judges

lenges to his re-election as president. But the action angered many Pakistanis, who rejected Musharraf's allies in the Feb. 18 elections, paving tion government, which on Friday set May 12 as the date to restore judges. The government's decision further threatened the US-backed

Although the presidency has avoided comment on the latest move, Tariq Azim, the spokesman for Musharraf's Pakistan Muslim League-Q party, said the president "may accept the restoration of judges if the government amends the constitution.

courts by the parliament's simply approving a resolution. He provided no further details, and said the president was still consulting experts His comments came a day after

that the ruling party chief, Asif Ali Zardari, had agreed to restore the judges.

Restoring the judges has been a

top priority for the two main parties

in Pakistan's month-old govern-

ment, but disputes over how to bring

the judges back has threatened to

break up the ruling coalition.

After marathon talks in Dubai this week, coalition officials finally came to a deal. "I want to inform the entire nation that on Monday, May 12 all the sacked judges will be restored,' Nawaz Sharif, head of the second-

Friday news conference in Lahore. Farahnaz Ispahani, a spokeswoman for Zardari's Pakistan People's Party, the largest party in the coalition, confirmed the plan. Bringing the justices back bodes

ill for the unpopular president, who

Even if they don't, some argue the

Zardari, who has been leading the

biggest party in the coalition, said at a

seized power from Sharif in a 1999 military coup. The judges could revisit Musharraf's disputed re-election.

humiliation of the judges returning would prompt Musharraf to resign. Musharraf would have to be "absolutely shameless" to continue as president if the judges came back, said Khawaja Asif, a key Sharif aide. He said Musharraf also risks

party of his wife Benazir Bhutto since she was assassinated on Dec. 27, told Pakistani Aaj news channel late Friday that he was maintaining a distance from Musharraf. However, Zardari would not confirm the May 12 date for the judges' restoration as announced by

Sharif, saying the question should be

put to a committee of experts set up by Sharif to draft the resolution. "Ask this question of that committee," he said, adding, "God will-

ing, as soon as possible this will be

The government's spokesman, following strong criticism about the

he uses during his one-man Sunday

37,000 lives. tive and crude.

partner PML-N has been insisting that the President should quit. PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif made a fresh demand for Musharraf to step down yesterday while unveiling plans to restore the deposed judges on May Meanwhile, Musharraf may

Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry when he imposed a state of emergency in November to avoid any legal chal-

the way for the formation of a coali president's already diminished grip

However, Azim insisted that the judges could not be sent back to

former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif whose party is a main partner in the coalition government told reporters done.

impeachment.