# Hummer hums graft

FROM PAGE 1

country's customs department on the trail of about Tk 7.40 crore of alleged duty dodging by the

importer, Auto Museum Ltd. Like many other instances of glaring grafts involving imports, it took a cocktail of four elements. The greed of the importer, the endorsement of a pre-shipment inspection (PSI) company, the help of the exporter, and the convenient ignorance of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) and its customs

But when the scam was exposed, NBR came down hard on one element -- the PSI company in question. The board washed its hand of the corruption by canceling the license of Cotecna Inspection SA for numerous irregularities including the Hummer scam, letting related customs people off the hook and allowing

the importer to keep penalty at bay. The irregularities were detected along with many others once the military-backed government came into power last year, with its National Coordination Committee (NCC) against Grievous Offences launching a crackdown on highprofile corruption suspects in

February. Owned mostly by politicial families and purchased largely through illigal income, a fleet of exotic SUVs turned a lot of heads on the Dhaka streets during the last few months of the BNP-led alliance rule. But all those exclusive vehicles suddenly disappeared from streets, and owners openly disowned their once proud possessions amid anti-graft drive by taskforces under NCC.

Joint forces picked up the lead from an abandoned Hummer H3 SUV, the smallest of the three models introduced by the US automaker General Motors in 2006, inside an under-construction Kakrail house. NBR was asked to probe the matter as startling finds started to come out after initial investigation.

NBR noticed a gulf of difference between purchase and sale prices after carrying out some intelligence works on Auto Museum, whose import of 6 Hummer vehicles also included a H2 model that offered something a bit more practical than the designed-formilitary-use H1.

Auto Museum stated the new SUVs were imported from Thailand, declaring value of Hummer H3 \$18,500 and Hummer H2 \$31,000. Formed on July 19 last year, the five-member NBR probe committee, led by a first secretary, Dr Md Khairuzzaman Majumder, went through all documents certified duly by Cotencna, realising that it was a plain case of gross under-invoicing of Hummer to evade customs duty.

Under-invoicing or overinvoicing of products is a common fraudulent practise to dodge customs charges or siphon off money abroad. Exporters see no harm to entertain importers as they get actual payment or refund excess prices through money-laundering

The probe got a new twist when the Square Toiletries Limited submitted import documents of a new Hummer H2 from the UK, stating its price four times higher at \$1,20,987 (GBP 60,586) than Auto Musuem's. The PSI company this time was Bureau Veritas Bangladesh Ltd, and the import was initially considered as a case of over-invoicing to siphon off money abroad.

Puzzled, NBR finally tried to know about the actual price by asking two other PSI companies--Intertek Testing Service (ITS) International Limited and Societe General de Surveillance (SGS) -- for counter price and by doing the simplest job of checking the website of General Motors.

Having analysed the information on prices, the probe body concluded that the approximate unit price, including costs of freight and conversion from right-to-lefthand drive, of Hummer H3 should be \$35,215 and H2 \$62,895.

Cotecna, which was warned several times in the past for widespread irregularities, stuck to its pricing, certification and inspection. But sensing NBR determination this time, it changed its story, claiming it was unaware of the fact that vehicles were 'new but damaged.' But its bid to clutch at a straw in defence of low pricing was rejected by NBR.

"As per import policy 2003-2006, used or damaged cars are only importable from the country of origin (US) and not from any other country (Thailand)," stated NBR in its reply, slapping Cotenca with a fine of Tk 7.40 crore after

canceling its license. But Dermot A. Jennings, general manager of Cotecna, told The Daily Star. "Those six Hummer vehicles were the first of their kind to have chase. Meanwhile, a blackbeen imported in the country. We coloured Hummer vehicle that as the PSI agent, accepted the declared price under the transaction value system. That is the rule. The NBR or anybody else has not from Joypurhat. Police said Alim said anything to the contrary."

The cars were new as per definition but were damaged and repaired and consequently the valuation had to reflect that fact, he argued, adding that NBR remained silent to their offer to facilitate its verifying the truth by visiting the countries concerned, at Cotecna's

Cotecna, however, challenged

the hefty fine in the court. but to accept the apparent overpricing by the Square Toiletries, which claimed that it bought the from the UK as there was a restricthe claim. NBR eventually settled government coffer.

the matter accepting arguments of Square and Bureau Veritas. Curiously though, four out of five-member probe committee were from customs. And the committee found no reason to hold responsible the customs authorities, which allowed Auto Museum to get away with grossly manipulated under-invoiced Hummer

vehicles. PSI companies concerned are to provide Clean Reports of Findings (CRF) certifying prices, quantity, description, HS (harmonised system) Code and importability of goods, pointed out the probe body in its report, adding that customs authorities only can investigate CRF-certified prices if instance of higher price is there or if valuation appears suspicious.

"As the vehicles were absolutely new in Bangladesh, there was no idea about prices.. there was no chance to suspect," the probe report stated in support of related customs people.

As logistics required for investigation (e.g. internet based search) in such cases are not available at appraiser/principal appraiser level, it would not be logical to hold anyone responsible, it added.

But many in the sector found this excuse hard to accept. Customs people should have been cautious or suspicious about prices as the vehicles were very new to Bangladesh, they argued. "The price information was just a few clicks away on the website of General Motors for all the people in the world," quipped a PSI specialist from the rival camp of Cotecna.

Corruption by customs is no new issue and the PSI system has been introduced to curb grafts by customs. A recent follow-up study of the Transparency International Bangladesh stated "corruption has assumed an institutional shape in Chittagong Port Authority and the Customs.... The rules of law and accountability have been almost non-existent here."

Business people still claim bribes have to be paid at least 30 spots for releasing a consignment from the customs and the port. ") am not surprised at all why customs has never got rid of corruption as departmental inquiries have always found corrupt staff innocent," says a leading importer, wishing not to be named.

The probe committee, meanwhile, asked the Customs House (Import), Chittagong to take legal steps for realising evaded duty from Auto Museum and for penalising the company over false declaration. Customs sources in Chittagong said the importer, who in its August 29 letter last year insisted that the declared price was true, is skipping customs hearing under different excuses, let alone paying the penalty.

But when contacted, Auto Museum refuted the customs version, claiming that it submitted its version in written and its officials also attended hearings in

"We did nothing to violate the import policy of the government, Auto Museum authorities told The Daily Star. "So, we requested the customs to drop charges against us." The matter is however yet to besettled

The Auto Museum authorities also binned the NBR claim of about Tk 7.4cr duty-dodging, saying it would not exceed Tk 2 crore even as per the customs assessment.

As per the investigation, it could be known that at least 15 Hummer vehicles were imported so far, of which at least seven vehicles were duty paid.

According to sources, Auto Musem already sold five out of six Hummers SUVs to Bashundhara Group, Sagufta NM Housing Ltd, Narayanganj-based industry Knii Concern, STS (pvt) Ltd (as confirmed by Ascent Group MD Syed Maher Murshed) and a Chittagong businessman.

Rest of the vehicles were imported through duty-free privillege of lawmakers and industries at Export Processing Zones.

According to investigators, the government lost around Tk 211 crore in taxes as at least 303 cars were imported by the lawmakers of the eighth parliament under the duty-free privillege. And around 200 lawmakers did not even import cars but sold their permits to car importers as soon as they got those, prompting the caretaker government to cancel the privilege in April

Taskforce and police sources said three Hummer vehicles were seized during anti-graft drive. Vehicles of ex-BNP lawmaker Harunur Rashid and businessman Shoaib Akhter Nizam was seized over illegal sale after import. But Shoaib later got back his Hummer, which was seized under the suspicion that it was duty-free purwas left abadoned in Kakrail was learned to imported by Abdul Alim, another former BNP MP sold the vehicle to a businessman

Mohammad Ali. Former lawmaker and Islami Oikya Jote leader Mufti Shahidul Islam and ex-BNP MP from Savar Dewan Mohammad Salahuddin are among others who imported duty-free Hummer vehicle. Most of the privilleged purchases are learnt

to have ben sold to others. Hummer is just one case of under-valuation to dodge customs NBR, meanwhile, found no way duty. There are thousand other mind-blowing instances of corruption. Rolls Royce, Mercedes Benz, sophisticated photocopier, contranew Hummer H2 at a higher price band cigarettes, electronic goods, duty-free industrial machinery and tion then in the US on the sale of whatnot landed in Bangladesh new vehicles. Besides, the price under false declaration or through also involved extra fittings and price-manipulation. And each accessories, the importer argued in story of grafts turned few people an NBR hearing. Unable to verify filthy rich overnight, depriving the

# Mig-29 case

FROM PAGE 1 Forwarding the time petition, Gen (retd) Mustafiz's lawyers' prayed for adjourning the hearing for four weeks as they said their client was seriously ill.

"We prayed for adjournment of the hearing as Mustafizur Rahman is seriously ill. But, the judge rejected our prayer and even cancelled his bail. It is inhumane and against the law," the ex-army chief's lawyer Advocate Shahara Khatun told reporters.

Prosecutor Syed Shamim Ahsan Habib, however, said Mustafiz's lawyers stood in the way of chargeframing hearing by filing time petitions one after another.

"The trial proceedings will now continue as the court has rejected the time petition today ...if Mustafizur Rahman is not arrested by May 28, he'll be treated as a fugitive," he said.

The five other accused who were present in the court are former air force chief Jamaluddin Ahmed, former defence secretary Syed Yusuf Hossain, Air Commodore (retd) Mirza Akhter Maruf, former joint secretary Mohammad Hossain Serniabat and Nur Ali, managing director of Unique Group.

### SC clears way

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against former state minister for power Iqbal Hassan Mahmood

Endorsing a government appeal against the HC verdict, a sevenmember full bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Md Ruhul Amin, delivered the verdict, clearing the way for continuing trial proceedings of the case.

"Following the judgment, the NBR can now file case against anybody on charge of tax dodging without any notice," Advocate Mamun Chowdhury, a lawyer for Tuku said. The NBR filed the case, accusing

the former state minister of evading over Tk 3.80 crore in income tax from 1999 through 2007. Upon a writ petition filed by

Tuku on December 5 last year, the High Court declared null and void the tax evasion case against him.

After completing hearing from both sides, the Appellate Division yesterday passed the judgment. Attorney General Barrister Fida

M Kamal appeared for the state, while Barrister Ajmalul Hossain and Advocate Mamun Chowdhury for Tuku.

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of the truck, Abu Bakker Siddque, told journalists that the helper driver was driving the rice-loaded truck at the time of the accident.

Among the injured, 23 were admitted to the hospital and others released after first aid.

Five of the dead were identified as bus helper Ali Reza, 35, passengers Badsha, 35, Rezaul, 30, from Gaibanda, Polash, 18, and Shujan 5, from Pirganj Upazila in Rangpur district. The others, including three women, could not be identified.

A case has been filed with Sherpur Thana in this regard.

Meanwhile the sub-inspector (SI) of Sherpur police station Abad said that some locals who were trying to loot goods, including 4 mobile phone sets, from the injured and dead passengers were caught and the goods confiscated.

#### Govt relaxes

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our last year's experience is that we did not even get response from traders after floating tenders, Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam

"That is why, we have initiated the process to import fertiliser under the state-to-state arrangement," he told reporters after a meeting of the advisory committee on economic affairs.

Following the advisory committee's consent, the industries ministry will begin the process to import 5 lakh tonnes of fertiliser from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia and Qatar without floating international tenders.

The Qatar Fertiliser Company has already informed Bangladesh that it can export 2 lakh tonnes of urea as per the proposal of the industries ministry. Qatar has also expressed interest to export more urea, if necessary. The UAE has also agreed in

principle to export 80,000 to 1 lakh tonnes of urea while Saudi Arabia has consented to export 1 lakh tonne. Industries ministry officials said | hearit. the government would set an

import target of 5 lakh tonnes of urea while signing the final agree-An inter-ministerial meeting last month set the urea demand for

the next fiscal year at 28.5 lakh tonnes. Industries Corporation (BCIC) will others in the case. produce 17 lakh tonnes while the government will purchase 5 lakh tonnes from the Karnaphuli

lakh tonnes.

# MK Anwar surrenders

FROM PAGE 1 report (FIR) and it was included in the charge sheet as part of a con-

spiracy to harass him. They also prayed for providing their client with division and proper treatment in jail, as he was an ex-minister and has been suffering from various diseases.

Opposing the bail petition, Public Prosecutor Mosharraf Hossain Kajol said the court could only order to give MK Anwar division and treatment in jail as per the After hearing both the sides,

Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque rejected the bail petition and ordered the former minister to prison. The court also directed the jail authorities to grant MK Anwar

division and access to treatment in

jail custody. On May 15, the same court issued arrest warrants against top BNP leaders M Saifur Rahman, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, MK Anwar, M Shamsul Islam and Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury and Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami and six others in

the Gatco graft case. Following the order, MK Anwar, M Shamsul Islam and Nizami on Sunday appeared before the High Court (HC) seeking anticipatory bail, but the HC rejected their petitions.

The same day in the afternoon, Bhuiyan and Shamsul Islam separately surrendered to the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court and was sent to jail.

Nizami's lawyers that day submitted a leave to appeal with Supreme Court (SC) against the HC order and MK Anwar went into hiding to avoid arrest.

Police arrested Nizami at his Moghbazar residence that night. On May 13, Anti-Corruption

Commission (ACC) pressed charges against Khaleda Zia, her son Arafat Rahman Koko and 22 others in the graft case. The ACC filed the case against

Khaleda, Koko and 11 others with Tejgaon police on September 2 last year, for corruption in awarding Gatco the container handling work at depots in Dhaka and Chittagong. NIKO GRAFT CASE The same court yesterday trans-

ferred the Niko graft case to the Special Court-9 set up at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar MP hostel for trial.

The jail authorities in a letter told the court that they could not produce detained former prime minister Khaleda Zia before the court yesterday, the scheduled date

grounds. Detained former law minister Moudud Ahmed, former acting energy secretary Khandaker Shahidul Islam and three others were produced before the court.

for hearing of the case, on security

On May 5, the ACC pressed charges against Khaleda Zia and 10 others for abuse of power and graft in awarding a gas exploration and extraction deal to Canadian company Niko.

The commission filed the case against Khaleda, Moudud, Mosharraf, Shahidul and Kashem with Tejgaon Police Station on December 9 last year.

CASE AGAINST TARIQUE, BABAR The court of Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque yesterday also sent the Tk 21 crore bribery case against detained BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman, former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar, Basundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan Shah Alam and five others to the Special Court-3 at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar MP hostel.

The case was filed on October 4 last year against Babar, Shah Alam and four others for exchanging Tk 21 crore bribe for saving Shah Alam's son Shafiat Sobhan Sanvir from a murder charge in July, 2006.

Tarique's name was included in the charge sheet later, as his involvement was found during the investigation.

Other accused in the case include former BNP lawmaker Qazi Saleemul Haque and Shah Alam's sons Sanvir and Sadaat Sobhan.

On May 6, ACC pressed charges against Tarique, Babar, Saleemul Shah Alam, his sons, director of East West Property Development Pvt Ltd Abu Sufian and Tarique's personal secretary Mia Nur Uddin

The anti-graft body said the eight were involved in receiving and giving the bribe to ensure that Sanvir did not have to face charges of killing Humayun Kabir Sabbir, a director of Bashundhara Group.

Sabbir's body was found outside a building in Bashundhara residential area on July 5, 2006.

Yuanjiang, who had spent an amaz-

ing 179 hours buried, the state-run

Workers spent more than 30

hours trying to dig the 31-year-old

power plant executive out of the

rubble of a destroyed building,

during which they fed him sugary

have inspired many Chinese, who

on Monday came to an unprece-

dented three-minute standstill to

honour the victims of the earth-

rescuers, but it took three days to

open up its borders to them and

declined some offers of help --

decisions that are starting to attract

sion-making. It would have been

better if the decision was quicker,'

Masahiko Komura said in Tokyo.

Japanese Foreign Minister

official foreign team on the scene,

were due to head home without

finding any survivors, although

another Japanese unit was due later

round-the-clock to treat the more

than 245,000 people who were

work, I'll naturally stop weeping,

said Huang Qiong, a surgeon who

has completed 100 operations at a

hospital in the badly hit town of

down on my bed, I just cannot help

shedding tears," she said, quoted by

Supreme Judicial

counsel for the writ petitioner

contended that it was not the law

but operation of the Supreme

Judicial Commission that was

the commission is supposed to be

made up of eight members includ-

ing two lawmakers. But it is already

inoperative as there is no parlia-

promulgated the ordinance in

March this year to set up the

Supreme Judicial Commission as

part of the government measures

to put an end to the practices of

Idrisur Rahman, a SC lawyer, on

political manoeuvrings in appoint-

April 28 filed the writ petition with

the HC. The same day an HC bench

comprising Justice Syed Mahmud

Hossain and Justice Farid Ahmed

stayed for three months function-

ernment and the SC registrar to

explain within three weeks why the

ordinance shall not be declared

government appealed the apex

court to stay the HC order,

MA Matin referred the matter to full

Later on May 12, when the

It also issued a rule on the gov-

ment of SC and HC judges.

ing of the commission.

unconstitutional.

bench of the SC.

President Iajuddin Ahmed

He said, "As per the ordinance,

the state-run China Daily.

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stayed by the HC.

ment in effect now."

"But when I go back home and lie

Chinese doctors were working

"Whenever I'm caught up in my

Tuesday to provide medical relief.

The Japanese team, the first

"There was a delay in the deci-

international criticism.

China also allowed in foreign

quake.

Such improbable survival stories

water through a straw, Xinhua said.

# Aftershock fears

Xinhua news agency said.

'I don't know who made such a forecast, but personally I don't believeit," he told AFP.

Nevertheless, China has been hit by more than 150 aftershocks measuring 4.0 or higher on the Richter scale since the initial tremor, including one overnight that measured

That tremor appeared to cause further damage in the quake zone, which spans across 100,000 square kilometres (40,000 square miles) of mountainous Sichuan, an area roughly three times the size of Belgium.

In Beichuan county, one of the worst-hit areas, cranes that were being used for rescue work the previous day were tipped on their side, according to an AFP reporter

The warning of the powerful aftershock set off nerves on China's stock markets, contributing to a nearly 4.5 percent drop in share prices, dealers said.

State media has said that the May 12 earthquake was likely to trim 0.2 percentage points off China's booming economic growth.

The official death toll on Tuesday was 34,074, with more than 32,000 others still listed as missing, cabinet spokesman Hua Oing told a press

Fuelling fears among the superstitious, residents of the southern city of Zunyi reported a massive migration of frogs and toads, which also covered Sichuan towns days before the May 12 earthquake, according to state media.

On the relief front, China's Red Cross Society on Tuesday sent its first team of psychologists into the quake zone to treat people suffering from trauma.

And despite the overwhelming odds against finding any more survivors under rubble, rescue workers Tuesday saved a man, Ma

### Niko case

FROM PAGE 1

filed the petition with the HC on The Anti-Corruption

Commission (ACC) filed the case.

Khaleda's counsels -- Barrister Nowshad Zamir and Barrister Nasiruddin Ahmed Asim -- yesterday placed the petition before the HC bench comprising Justice Sharif Uddin Chaklader and Justice Md Emdadul Haque Azad for hearing, but the bench felt embarrassed to

On December 9 last year, the ACC filed the case with Tejgaon Police Station against the BNP chairperson and several others on charge of abuse of power in awarding a gas exploration and extraction deal to Canadian company Niko.

On May 5, the ACC pressed Of this, Bangladesh Chemical | charges against Khaleda and 10

Former law minister Moudud Ahmed and former state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain Fertiliser Company and import 6.5 | are among the other chargesheeted accused.

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October this year. Jamaat also announced a 15day long series of programmes to realise these demands.

The party announced its agenda through a press conference held at the party's central office at Maghbazar yesterday. Addressing the press, Jamaat

Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed said confusion over holding of the polls has deepened following the different initiatives of the government. He demanded that the govern-

ment holds the general polls in

October this year and the local-

government elections should be left to the next elected government. The other demands made by Jamaat are the withdrawal of all 'false' and 'politically motivated' charges against politicians including Gatco and Barapukuria cases, bringing the prices of essentials within people's purchasing power and lifting of all remaining restric-

When asked about their participation in political dialogues, Mojaheed said the party would take a decision on the matter after consulting with the 4-party alliance.

tions on indoor politics immedi-

According to the programme announced, Jamaat will place a memorandum to the government on May 26 through administration in all metropolitan cities, districts on May 27 and upazilas on May 28, a prayer day (Doa Dibash) across the country after Juma prayers on May 30, and a mass-signature campaign across the country from June 1-10. POLICE SHOULD EXERCISE CAUTION'

Meanwhile, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court (SC) yesterday warned police to be careful about arrests while bail petitions remain pending with the highest court.

The full bench of the Appellate Division, presided by Chief Justice Md Ruhul Amin, made the observation while hearing an appeal against the High Court (HC) order which rejected anticipatory bail for the now detained Motiur Rahman Nizami, an accused in the Gatco graft case.

The SC bench made the observation that in future situations like this, police should exercise caution.

Nizami's lawyer Abdur Razzak in his submission said, "The police should have shown respect to the highest court and refrained from arresting Nizami until disposal of the matter."

"The civilised government has failed to act in a civilised manner.

Earlier on May 18, the HC rejected a bail prayer of Nizami in the Gatco case. Later Nizami filed a petition with the Supreme Court to stay the HC order. At the time, Chamber Judge of the Appellate Division Justice MA Matin referred the matter to the chief justice for a decision on it.

Police, however, arrested Nizami the same day.

## Desa engineer

FROM PAGE 1 materials were much lower at the time, he said.

"In my statement, I've mentioned the 400 decimals of land in my village. But I don't own the land alone as my brothers, uncles and aunts are also owners of these lands", he said.

#### Amınul

FROM PAGE 16

Ahmed filed the case against the former minister with Ramna Police Station on December 12 last year.

In the case statement, the complainant said that Aminul Haque built two houses in Dhaka and Rajshahi while he was a minister. In his wealth statement to the ACC Aminul said that Tk 54 lakh had been spent for constructing the houses, but the ACC investigation found that the expenditure was Tk 1.08 crore and Tk 66 lakh of the

money was illegal. A court in Rajshahi last year sentenced Aminul to 31 years and six months, along with 24 others, for aiding and abetting militants.

## Land graft

FROM PAGE 16

ministers Shahjahan Siraj and M Shamsul Islam, former deputy commissioner

(DC) of Gazipur M Shahbullah former ADC M Rafiqul Islam retired secretary Azad Ruhul Amin, Managing Director (MD) of Orion Mushroom Ltd Obaidul Karim, MD of One Spinning and Denim Ltd Giasuddin Al Mamun, its Director Rajib Siraj Apu and MD of Green House Organic Farm Ltd M Mujibul

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Assistant Director M Khairul Huda filed the cases with Joydevpur police station. The first case was filed against

eight people out of the nine, except Mujibul Haq, as 13 acres of government land at Araishataprasad Mouja in Gazipur was given and taken on permanent settlement at Tk 65.73 lakh in violation of rules during the tenure of four-party coalition government.

The second case was filed against eight of the nine people, except Obaidul Karim, for giving and taking on permanent settle-Chamber Judge of the SC Justice ment 10 acres of government

> land in the same mouja the same way.

### AL, BNP sitting Jamaat demands

While the education adviser skirted around questions on participation of the two major parties, Ghulam Quader said the government would do everything necessary to make the dialogue successful.

"They [BNP and AL] have not yet announced they will boycott the talks. So, let's see what happens," he added.

The communications adviser said they are optimistic that all parties invited would show up and the event would turn out well.

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed will lead a panel of advisers to talk to the parties. His office has already wrapped up preparations for the event that would take place for over a month. Earlier in the day, Hossain

Zillur said discussions with political parties would focus on how to bring about a qualitative change in politics. People expect the dialogue to be a catalyst for change in politics,

he told reporters, adding that he hopes parties irrespective of their size would extend all-out cooperation to help the talks produce the desired outcome. Asked how they would respond

if AL and BNP refuse to join the discussions without party chiefs, he said, "We will let you know in case of any development in this In a major development, the

government on Monday night sent a "corrected" invitation letter to Khandaker Delwar Hossain, addressing him as secretary general of BNP. The move came two days after

Delwar rejected the invitation citing it was not addressed prop-So far, seven out of 19 parties and Joynal Abedin Khan, among

their delegates. But the two major parties -- AL and BNP-- have yet to decide whether or not to participate in FROM PAGE 16 the parley.

invited have submitted lists of

AL is pressing for release of its injured is Jahangir Alam. President Sheikh Hasina and complete withdrawal of the state of emergency before the dialogue. On the other hand, chairperson-appointed Secretary General

of BNP Khandaker Delwar keeps

on maintaining a tough stance on

the dialogue. Addressing Cox's Bazar district BNP leaders and workers at his city residence yesterday, he said they would neither participate in the dialogue nor the election

without Khaleda Zia. Major (retd) Hafizuddin Ahmed, leader of the pro-reform faction of BNP, has already accepted the invitation.

At a meeting yesterday, the group agreed in principle to go to the dialogue together with Delwar

Asked whether they would still join the talks if the reconciliation move fails, he said decision on the matter would be taken at party

### Nat'l flag

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to mourn the deaths in the cyclone and earthquake disasters in Myanmar and China.

"The government has taken the decision today to pay respect to the people who died in the recent cyclone and earthquake in Myanmar and China respectively," a release from the Press Information Department said vesterday.

UND adds that some 78,000 people were officially reportedly killed as cyclone Nargis ravaged the coast of Myanmar on May 3 while the death toll has crossed 40,000 in China after the devastating earthquake on May 12.

## VCs of 3 public

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(PSTU) -- were removed yesterday in connection with their alleged involvement in corruption and administrative irregularities.

Chancellor Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday signed the letters remov ing Prof Mosharaf Hossain Miah of BAU, Prof Abul Khayer of NSTU and Prof Abdul Latif of PSTU in the public interest, a government handout said.

Earlier on May 15, the Rajshahi University vice-chancellor was removed.

of acting VC at the universities. Prof M Aktar Hossain, dean of veterinary faculty of BAU, was made acting VC of that university. Sonjoy Kumar Adhikari, professor of Khulna University agrotechnology discipline, was

made acting VC at NSTU and M

Haroon-ur-Rashid, dean of agri-

culture faculty of PSTU, was given the charge of VC in that university. The University Grants Commission (UGC) conducted investigations against top officials of a number of public universities and discovered financial and administrative irregularities, especially in recruiting teachers, at BAU, NSTU, PSTU and RU, sources in the education ministry said.

The vice-chancellors were removed following recommendations of the UGC, the sources added.

Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid yesterday said they would decide on the dialogue after consultation with allies in the

four-party alliance that includes "We haven't seen any positive initiative on the part of the government yet to make the talks successful and meaningful," he

added. Meanwhile, Khaleda's lawyers yesterday said the detained former premier wants her party colleagues to take every decision

in consultation with Delwar. They were talking to the press after meeting the BNP chief at the special jail on Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex.

WORKERS' PARTY, JSD AND BDB Workers' Party and JSD would place a set of common demands including the ones for lifting of the state of emergency and right to organise [tradeunion].

They took the decision at a meeting attended by Rashed Khan Menon, Bimal Biswas, Haider Ali Khan Rono and Fazle Hossain Badsha of Workers' Party and Hasanul Haq Inu, Syed Zafar Sazzad, Moinuddin Khan Badal, Sharif Nurul Ambia and Shirin Akhter of JSD. The same day Bikalpa Dhara

President Badruddoza Chowdhury said participating in the talks would mean no loss even if it fails to bring benefits. Addressing a group of people joining his party, he said he would

ask the government to ensure the parliamentary election is held between December 26 and 29. BDB leaders Brig Gen (retd) Giasuddin Ahmed Chowdhury

#### others, were present. Two shot dead

the other as Abdul Halim. The

Sentu's brother Masum said a gang led by Rubel and Chanchal sprayed Sentu with bullets when he was standing at a shop near their house at Shamsabad [Nayabazar] in Kotwali at around 9:00pm.

A trader of plain sheets, the

victim received four bullets in the chest, abdomen and hands. He was declared dead when taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). "Hearing gunshots, I rushed to the spot to find my brother lying in

Rubel and Chanchal had shot him down," Masum told reporters at the hospital. He however could not say any-

a pool of blood. All he could say was

thing about the motive behind the murder. Meanwhile, Sub-inspector Nazmul Hossain of Sutrapur Police Station said they recovered Halim's body shortly after he was gunned

down in Goalghat area at around 8:00pm. Police could not arrest anyone or find any clue to the murder as of

filing this report at 12:10am. Halim, who hailed from Lalbagh area, was a tannery trader. His father Akhter Hossain said he had been missing since his friends called him out of the house in the afternoon.

In another incident, muggers

at around 8:30pm and snatched Tk 1,300 and a mobile phone set from With a gunshot wound in the abdomen, Jahangir was undergo-

ing treatment at the DMCH. His

shot and wounded book vendor

Jahangir under Babu Bazar Bridge

#### condition was stated critical. Politicians

So, political leaders who will be elected to six city corporations with around 300 wards and 309 municipalities with over 3,000 wards will have to resign from their party posts.

The caretaker government has

come up with the new laws in an

effort to free local government bodies from partisan politics. But political parties strongly oppose this Similar provisions are likely to be incorporated also in upazila

parishad ordinance, sources in the

Talking to reporters yesterday, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hussain said the The handout also said the gov- EC has received copies of the two ernment has temporarily given ordinances on city corporations and

LGRD ministry said.

three others the additional charge municipalities. "We will now try to make election rules on city corporations and municipalities in a week," he said.

Meanwhile, the plans to hold

elections to four city corporations and some municipalities in the third week of July, and elections to Dhaka City Corporation by the end of August or September. The EC also plans to hold the long due polls to upazila parishads before the ninth parliamentary election

scheduled to be held in the third week of December this year. As per the new ordinances, elected representatives will have to submit their wealth statements to officials nominated by the govern-

ment before their swearing-in.

The new laws also contain a set of stringent provisions on qualifications and disqualifications of candidates in elections to city corporations and municipalities.

Under these laws, convicted war criminals are barred from contesting polls.