The import scandal

FROM PAGE 1 price checking on commodities in consultation with the overseas banks of the suppliers," former NBR chief and Tax Ombudsman

Khairuzzaman Chowdhury told The Daily Star. Had the L/C opening banks strictly followed the Bangladesh Bank's guidelines for foreign exchange transactions properly, the practices of under-invoicing to dodge customs duty and over-

Muhammad Abdul Mazid told The would have gone down dramatically, Daily Star, "We're taking disciplinary actions almost every day. NBR will Related officials of all banks not tolerate any irregularities, not should check pricing on commodianymore." ties including the credit rating of Business observers and antioverseas suppliers, but the abuncorruption campaigners meanwhile dance of irregularities only shows feel the government must recruit banks are not strictly following the efficient manpower sufficiently,

Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled, also a former deputy governor of the Bangladesh Bank, thinks banks are supposed not to be a partner in money laundering. But he said, " Banks are responsible to compare commodity prices on L/C with those in the market. If there is significant difference between declared prices and market prices, then responsibili-

ties lie with banks concerned."

and syndicated lobbying, some crucial provisions in the PSI rules were allegedly relaxed or made tough on several occasions in an effort to

The Internal Resources Division is responsible for the PSI rules, secretary of which is also chairman of

backdrop of widespread corruption by a strong band of customs staff.

"Corruption has assumed an institutional shape in the Chittagong Port Authority and the Customs The rule of law and accountability have been almost non-existent here," laments a recent follow-up study by Transparency International Bangladesh on Chittagong port, through which 80 percent of the

Instances of open bribery and PSI irregularities have declined to some extent and the speed at which containers are handled has increased sharply following the taskforce clampdown last year on Chittagong port. However business people still claim bribes have to be paid in at least 30 spots for releasing a consignment from the customs and the port.

continuing through agents outside the port and customs offices," states the TIB report, adding that "The credibility and performance of the PSI organisation have been put in question due to detection of large numbers of false declarations from among the on-the-spot checks carried out on only 5-6 percent of items."

The customs wing of NBR randomly checks only 10 percent of the PSI-inspected consignments. This is done manually and without any help from modern equipment, let alone sophisticated scanners being used at amajority of ports in the world.

"You can easily guess what a corruption network can do manipulating just a portion of the remaining 90 percent unchecked consignments, bribing people in right places," said a taskforce member involved with a mission to get the Ctg port back on track.

sector is deep-rooted and enjoys the blessings of influential people in government and politics, a reality that discourages even the most honest and efficient NBR officials from acting against the syndicate or their corrupt colleagues. Despite years of abuse, the most of punishments handed out so far to a corrupt NBR staff are transfers or suspen-

Some PSI companies know well FROM PAGE 16 how to play this game in Bangladesh. record \$3.807 a gallon, according to On a certain day of every month, the a survey of stations by AAA and the corrupt officials in NBR and customs Oil Price Information Service. used to receive envelopes from Prices are 60 cents higher than a employees of some PSI companies year ago, and many forecasters filled with takas usually amounting to between 50,000 and one lakh, confided PSI bigwigs, wishing not to month. Prices are already that high be named. The envelopes ensured in many parts of the country, and the smooth passage of wrongly

declared or invoiced imports. able as ones still in service, and some PSI companies waste no time hiring them as high-salaried consultants to used to transport most consumer hold clouts in government machin-

The Anti-Corruption goodshigher.

Hearing starts Chaklader and Justice Md Emdadul Haque Azad felt embarrassed to hear Commission placed former NBR top-shot ATM Sarwar Hossain, himself in the thick of PSI things for being the all- powerful member of

customs, on its list of high profile

year and for 13 years over illegal

wealth on May 15 this year by special

by his staff, NBR Chairman

address weaknesses in screening

system and make sure a transparent

PSI arrangement is established to

level work manually without com-

puters or internet facilities. How can

they crosscheck valuation of differ-

ent imported goods on the net and

cope with the demanding job of

policing?" said a top customs official,

who is critical of the slow-paced

staunch campaigner against corrup-

tion Professor Muzaffer Ahmad said

the guardian of country's revenue is

equipped with poor logistics to

customs intelligence has to be really

strong", he said, adding that, "If there

is intelligence work, they will have

the pre-history of exporter and

importer. It will help them do the

Despite all these constraints,

there have been occasions when

NBR has attempted to punish

offenders, but such moves have as

often as not been always shot down

by litigation. The number of writ

petitions in the High Court and

appeal cases in the Appellate

Division has spiralled due to the

detection of false declarations aris-

ing from non-transparent and weak

out valid grounds when the customs

raises any objection against the

release of any consignment. "Most of

the cases are lodged by debating the

certified prices fixed by the pre-

shipment company," stated TIB

research, adding that, the number of

such cases climbed to 10,033 till

February lastyear, blocking revenues

to be non-transparent in their activi-

ties due to the lack of a PSI audit. Two

attempts to set up such a body failed

because of litigation and poor

PSI companies could avoid monthly

screening by an audit organisation.

NBR however has taken a fresh

Chowdhury, meanwhile, said NBR is

just not equipped technologically

and financially to fight corruption of

he suggests a major strengthening of

the valuation department, which is

responsible for crosschecking under

should be given enough authority

and funds to carry out intelligence

the world," said Khairuzzaman. "If

that can be done, then price manipu-

ening the valuation department.

"We've subscribed to an online wire

service package on commodity

prices. Automation of the depart-

ment is also going on smoothly. So,

we will be in a better position to man

leaders refuse to subscribe to the idea

that corruption in imports will be laid

to rest if PSI system manipulation is

checked. Rather, they feel the struc-

tured corruption in customs has to

be broken down first in order to

contain grafts by PSI companies and

leadership to uproot graft in the

institution. "Corruption can filter

through every system. But leader-

ship has to act to ensure a system full

proof. There should be effective

practice of reward and punishment.

On the idea of higher salary keep-

ing taxmen out of graft, he observed

attractive wage is not a solution to

contain corruption in customs. "The

authorities can review the perfor-

mance incentive for customs people

and consider hiking it to a realistic

believe they'll hit \$4 on a national

basis at some point over the next

the number of stations charging \$4

own record price of \$4.558 a gallon

Wednesday. Rising prices of diesel,

and industrial goods, are sending

Diesel fuel rose 1.9 cents to its

or more rises each day.

Prof Muzaffer put the onus on the

But many observers and business

NBR Chairman Abdul Mazid said

lation will go down remarkably."

"The valuation department

Computerisation of NBR apart,

this level.

and over invoicing.

Tax Ombudsman Khairuzzaman

initiative for a third try at PSI audit.

The PSI companies could afford

of nearly Tk 1,233 crore.

Importers file cases with or with-

gate-keepingwell."

PSI arrangements.

combat corruption. "The area of

Renowned economist and

automation process in NBR.

"Customs people at appraiser

rein back the train of corruption.

While directly not denying grafts

anti-graft courts.

the petition. Counsel for the petitioner Advocate Khondker Mahbub Uddin Ahmed told the bench that Khaleda Zia did not commit any corruption in her dealings graft suspects last year. Now on the with Niko regarding gas exploration run, Sarwar was jailed for 8 years in and extraction. "The government made an agreetax evasion case on September 20 last

ment with Niko for making the abandoned gas-fields of Chhatak, Feni and Kamta commercially viable. The then prime minister Khaleda Zia approved the deal after completion of all the processes by committees and persons concerned, but she did not sign the deal," hesaid.

Quotingthefirstinformationreport (FIR) of the case, the court said that former law minister barrister Moudud Ahmed was a legal adviser to Niko and that's why the former prime minister had approved the deal prioritising barrister Moudud's opinion.

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 companyNiko.

On May 5, the ACC pressed charges against Khaleda and 10 others in the

Ahmed and former state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain are among the other charge-sheeted accused.

On May 18, Khaleda Zia filed the petition with the HC.

Women

FROM PAGE 16

planning to recruit a few from amidst the prisoners when they leave the

Shushila herself had no idea that she could avail such an opportunity while behind the bars. She was among the first to sign up when the training was announced two weeks

Papiya quoted Sushila as saying that though she is serving time for breaking the law, she now thinks of leaving the jail with dignity when the time comes.

Jail officials say that Shushila, Morjina and a few others are offering their services to fellow inmates at present.

Deputy Inspector General of Prisons Maj Shamsul Haider Siddiqui told The Daily Star that these courses are part of the reforms introduced recently in the jail.

"We want to turn the jail into a correction centre by gradually changing the idea about punishment," he said. There are over 10,000 inmates

Dhaka Central Jail, out of which 550 are women. The prison authorities are engaging them in different skills as repairing television, radios and fans. Many train as carpenters too.

"The step to engage prisoners in different jobs, helps to correct them," he said, adding that when these prisoners eventually get out of jail they will no not longer consider response to tenders. As a result, the themselves criminals. Also at present, the DIG said,

> prisoners earn a good amount of money with their work, which they save or send home. The success of the beauty training

has encouraged the jail authorities to plan introducing the training in other prisons of the country.

The country's 69 jails, including the two special jails set on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises for Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, at present accommodates 90,000 prisoners.

Deployment FROM PAGE 16

Once the rules are made, members of the army, police and other regular law enforcement agencies engaged in election duties would be empowered to arrest anybody without warrant to ensure peace and law and order in polling stations or within 400 yards of polling stations on the polling day.

Besides, members of law enforcement agency will be empowered to compel contesting candidates to abide by the code of conduct in carrying out election campaigns.

Officials at the EC Secretariat said the same provisions on deployment of armed forces would be incorporated in the rules for conducting polls to zila, upazila and union parishads.

At present, the EC can ask the government to engage the armed forces only in parliamentary election duties.

The armed forces engaged in parliamentary election duties are authorised to arrest anybody without warrant for violation of electoral laws and for illegal activities.

The defence forces were provided with powers, like that of the police force, by including them in the definition of the law enforcement agency in 2001.

In the absence of specific laws, the EC cannot insist on deployment of the armed forces in local government elections. In 2003, the EC asked the gov-

ernment to deploy army in union parishad elections to help maintain law and order, but the government refused to do so, triggering an unpleasant situation. The government defended its

stance saying the EC could not ask for army deployment in union parishad elections since there was no law to this effect. The EC would now be in a posi-

tion to ask the government, if it feels necessary, to deploy armed forces in elections to any tiers of local government, EC sources explained.

Earlier, the government deployed army only in elections to city corporations in 2002 to help the civil administration maintain law and order. But the army personnel did not have powers to prices of food and many other arrest anyone without warrant on grounds of illegal activities.

Barapukuria graft

of Barapukuria Coal Mining

Company Ltd (BCMCL) Sirajul

Islam and Hosaf Group Chairman

were members of the cabinet pur-

offence took place between June 2,

2003 and June 4, 2005 at the energy

and mineral resources depart-

Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque

ordered to send Rashid Uddin to

jail rejecting his bail prayer after

Rashid along with his lawyers

appeared before the court and

sought bail in the Gatco corruption

BNP leaders Saifur Rahman,

Shamsul Islam and Amir Khasru

Mahmud Chowdhury and Jamaat

Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami and

six others in the Gatco corruption

authorities to produce before it

today Khaleda, her son Koko and 14

absconding since the case was

against Khaleda, Koko and 22

others in the Gatco corruption case

on May 13. It filed the case against

Khaleda, Koko and 11 others with

Tejgaon police on September 2 last

year in connection with corruption

in awarding Gatco the container

handling job at depots in Dhaka

Niko corruption

the authorities concerned to pub-

lish an advertisement in two

national Bangla dailies asking the

six absconding accused to appear

before the court by yesterday. But

The same court on May 14

directed the jail authorities to

produce Sheikh Hasina and two

other detained accused before it

yesterday in connection with the

case. But, only detained former

state minister for energy Prof

Rafigul Islam was produced before

The Anti-Corruption

Commission (ACC) pressed

charges against Hasina and eight

others on May 7 for awarding a gas

Canadian company Niko

Resources through corruption and

The six absconding accused are

former principal secretary to the

Prime Minister's Office Dr SM

Samad, former energy secretary M

Petrobangla chairman Mosharraf

Hossain, and Vice-President

(South Asia) of Niko Resources

Bangladesh Ltd Kashem Sharif,

former secretary of External

Resources Division Dr AKM

Moshiur Rahman and former

director of Petrobangla (mines and

mineral and operation) Sayed

Tejgaon Police Station against

seven people including Hasina on

when asked how the election

would be fair if the state of emer-

gency prevails during the election.

(lifting emergency) and hopefully

as soon as possible," added Barks-

Ruggles, who was accompanied by

tary said the entire election process

should be free, fair, transparent

and credible that includes having

active free media and active free

cussed the electoral preparations,

processes of voter registration and

crosschecking of the draft list and

election observations that all lead

to holding a transparent election.

"We're happy that all the process

and preparations are going on and

distinct from the nearly 800

superdelegates, party leaders and

elected officials who are free to vote

for any candidate and hold the

balance of power at the

Democratic national convention

in the two states and Obama won at

least 39, according to an analysis of

election returns by the Associated

Press. All the Kentucky delegates

were awarded, but there were still

10 to be allocated in Oregon.

in state after state.

Hillary won at least 54 delegates

going well," she said.

)bama

this August in Denver.

FROM PAGE 16

Barks-Ruggles said she dis-

civil society.

The US deputy assistant secre-

US ambassador James F Moriarty.

"We look forward to the process

The ACC filed the case with the

exploration and extraction deal to

the six accused did not turn them-

selves in to the court.

the court yesterday.

abuse of power.

Anwarul Haque.

December 9 last year.

Emergency

and Chittagong.

others who are now in jail.

The court also directed the jail

Of the accused, eight have been

The ACC pressed charges

Of the former ministers, nine

The complainant said the

Moazzem Hossain.

chase committee.

RASHIDSENTTOJAIL

division in jail.

perlaw.

FROM PAGE 1 Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Golam Rabbani passed the order in favour of the ACC after ACC Deputy Director Monirul Haque submitted a petition for showing Bhuiyan, Shamsul and Nizami arrested in the coalmine corruption case and interrogating

them at the jail gate. On May 13, detained former premier Khaleda Zia, former commerce minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, former health minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain and former state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain were shown arrested in the same case and the ACC was given permission to interrogate them at the gates of their respective jails.

Bhuiyan and Shamsul were sent to jail Sunday after they appeared before the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka in connection with the Gatco corruption

Nizami was arrested at his Moghbazar home the same day and sent to jail after being produced before the Court of Chief Former law minister Moudud | Metropolitan Magistrate the fol- Mannan Bhuiyan, MK Anwar,

> On February 26, ACC Assistant Director Shamsul Alam filed the coalmine corruption case against Khaleda Zia and 15 others including 10 former ministers of BNP and Jamaat in connection with illegally awarding Barapukuria coalmine operation contract to a Chinese

In the case filed with Shahbagh Police Station, the 16 have been filed. accused of causing a loss of over Tk 158.71 crore to the public exchequer by awarding the contract for production, management and maintenance to the company abusing their power.

The accused former ministers of BNP are M Saifur Rahman, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, M Shamsul Islam, MK Anwar, barrister Aminul Haque, Altaf Hossain Choudhury, and AKM Mosharraf Hossain.

Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid and Nizami are the accused exministers of Jamaat.

The others charged with the offence are former acting secretary to energy and mineral resources Nazrul Islam, former Petrobangla chairman SR Osmani, former Petrobangla director Mainul Ahsan, former managing director

War crimes

FROM PAGE 16 country if war criminals are not

SCF chairman and deputy chief of Liberation War Air Vice-Marshall (retd) AK Khandaker, sector commanders Maj Gen (retd) KM Shafiullah, Maj Gen (retd) CR Dutta, Maj Gen (retd) Rafiqul Islam, Lt Col (retd) Abu Osman Chowdhury, former Army Chief and chief coordinator of SCF Lt Gen (retd) Harun-ar-Rashid, among others, were present on behalf of SCF.

Maulana Abdur Rahim, Akmal Hossain, former Maulana Mizanur Rahman, Principal of Baridhara Madrasa Maulana Abdul Alim Faridi, Khatib of Rajbari Mosque Mufti Ainul Islam, among others, represented Islamic leaders.

Probe finds

FROM PAGE 16 factor contributing to the situation.

MV Chandpur was carrying over 100 passengers against its allowed load of 50 passengers without

But the main reason behind the incident was its untrained master's lack of experience to handle the boat, the report said. An earlier probe also cited the same reasons behind the accident.

Following the earlier report, a case was filed with Nikli police station against the untrained master Humayun, who remains absconding.

Menawhile yesterday's report has recommended deployment of police at launch terminals and frequent monitoring to check launch capsizes in the area. It also recommended that small launches be kept off water for at least three months -- from the 15th of the Chaitra to the end of Jaisth.

While contacted, senior DD Mohammad Hassan of BIWTA said at present only one inspector of the shipping department is assigned to monitor water vehicles in vast areas including large haors consisting of parts of five districts --Kishoreganj, Sylhet, Netrokona, Hobiganj and Sunamganj. Narayanganj, Mymensingh and Aricha ghat are also under jurisdic-

tion of this lone inspector. To strengthen monitoring the authority was advised to set up another station of the shipping department at Bhairab river port.

The rescue operation for MV Chandpur was called off on May 13 but relatives and locals recovered five more dead bodies after that. The sunken launch was not salvaged and relatives of passengers still missing in the incident say that more dead bodies could be trapped inside the launch.

The relatives said it was cruelly unjust by the authorities to abandon the search while passengers remained missing.

Polls in 5 cities

FROM PAGE 1

work on voter registration and national identity cards as chief guest in sadar upazila of the district.

Presided over by Deputy Commissioner Syed Mizanur Rahman, the function was attended by Police Superintendent Abdul Baten and deputy commander of local army camp Maj Zayed.

In reply to a question, the CEC mentioned that the government has requested the EC to hold local-body polls before the national elections. "And we'll hold the elections accordingly," he said.

He said the EC had declared in its roadmap that local-body elections and Union Parishad elections would be held before and after the general elections respectively. "I don't know why so much controversies then."

The lawyers submitted two petitions--one for Rashid's bail and Asked if the re-demarcation of the other for providing him with constituencies could further delay the stalled general elections, the CEC The prosecution opposed the said, "There's no reason for it, bail petition and said the accused because the Election Commission would be provided status in jail as has received complaints about only five re-demarcated constituencies On May 15, the same court out of 133 ones, and complaints issued arrest warrants against top about four have been accepted."

About the EC's invitation letter to BNP leader Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Huda said the government and the EC are separate organisations. "We didn't issue the letter after consultation with the government, he added.

US envoy

FROM PAGE 1 the caretaker government's reform initiatives.

The caretaker government should not prolong its stay because it does not have the popular mandate and the country must return to democracy to fulfil its economic potential, Moriarty said.

The US would not want to see Bangladesh replicate Pakistan's time under President General Pervez Musharraf, who had initially accomplished a number of projects and enjoyed popularity but eventually fell out with the people and was forced out, he said.

"We do not want to see that sort of development in Bangladesh," he

Foreign direct investment or local investment would not be available without democracy and political stability, Moriarty said, identifying corruption as the biggest and main "enemy of democ-

Emphasising the need for a national consensus to stamp out corruption, he said, "Corruption misplaces the benefits of development efforts, benefiting those who are least in need. When terrorists lose the support of the population, corruption allows them to purchase additional support. Corruption is a cancer eating away at the vital organs of the nation."

Moriarty cited a study that found that corruption accounts for a loss of two-three percent of GDP or \$2 billion to Bangladesh each

He advised ensuring independence of all public institutions in order to stop the loss of public

"The government and businesses colluded in capturing pub lic procurement projects and the money went to the pockets of politicians and businessmen instead of developing railroads, Moriarty said.

Detaulted

FROM PAGE 1

Echoing Ibrahim Khaled's views chief executive officer of a private commercial bank told The Daily Star that commercial banks rescheduled large amounts of classified loans in December last year in a relaxed manner. Those loans have become defaulted again in the first three months of this year, he added.

Of the government-run banks increase in defaulted loans was Tk 293 crore in Sonali Bank, Tk 7 crore in Janata Bank, Tk 109 crore in Agrani Bank and Tk 12 crore in Rupali Bank.

"We are facing a lot of legal complexities in recovering the loans," said a top official of Sonali

Defaulted loans in most of the private commercial banks also increased in the first quarter of this "We are taking measures to

reduce the volume of our bank's

classified loans, and hope the total

figure will reduce in June," said a senior official of a private bank. Of the Tk 1,81,234 crore outstanding bank loans, the volume of classified loans was Tk 23,838 crore or 13.13 percent on March 30 this

year, compared to Tk 22,624 crore

or 13.23 percent on December 31, 2007, the sources said. Classified loans in state-owned banks stood at Tk 14,212 crore or 30.09 percent of outstanding loans on March 30, which was Tk 13,791 crore or 29.27 percent on

December 31 last year. Defaulted loans in private banks rose to Tk 5,746 crore or 5.42 percent of outstanding loans on March 30, compared to Tk 4,921 crore or

He had 1,956 delegates overall, 5.01 percent in December last year. out of 2,026 needed for the nomi-The amount of defaulted loans nation to face off against in foreign commercial banks was Republican John McCain in the Tk 227 crore or 1.54 percent of November election. Hillary had outstanding loans in March this 1,776 in their marathon race that year against Tk 194 crore or 1.43 hasshattered voter turnout records percent in December last year.

Govt talks with parties

FROM PAGE 1 the release of the chiefs of BNP and

Jamaat. The talks are starting amid growing uncertainty with the two major political parties--Awami League (AL) and BNP--still sceptical about taking part in the dialogue without their party chiefs now in jails.

The two parties are yet to submit the lists of their delegates although their participation is important for the success of the dialogue where Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed will lead a panel of advisers.

Workers' Party of Bangladesh and Bikalpadhara Bangladesh are the two invited parties on the first day of the much-awaited event.

The talks will commence at 10:00am with Workers' Party while Bikalpadhara will sit in the dialogue at 4:00pm. Each session will last for two hours.

Bikalpadhara chief Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon will lead their sides to the talks. The dialogue with Jatiya

Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) was also scheduled for today but the Chief Adviser's Office shifted it to 3:00pm Sunday due to "unavoidable" circumstances, said party President Hasanul Haq Inu.

The talks with the Communist Party of Bangladesh and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) are scheduled for May 26. The government has, mean-

while, expressed optimism about the success of the dialogue. "I believe the dialogue will bring a good result for all," the chief adviser told journalists at his office

yesterday, adding that if all try together, the pre-election dialogue will be successful. Talking to The Daily Star last night, Menon said they would place an 11-point proposal, including ensuring Hasina's presence in the

dialogue and complete lifting of

emergency and the conditions on indoor politics. Workers' Party will oppose the idea of formulating the national charter. "We do not need the charter as the country's constitution is the guideline to run the country,

Menon said. discuss the issues of trying the war criminals and barring them from taking part in the election, soaring prices of commodities, growing unemployment and some other

crises facing the country. A free, fair and credible election will be the main agenda of

Bikalpadhara at the dialogue. The party's Secretary General Mai (retd) MA Mannan said they would also propose complete withdrawal of the state of emergency and all restrictions on indoor poli-

About the proposed national charter, he said the matter is not clear to them. "We will not do anything contrary to our national interests," he said.

Leaders of the two parties have meanwhile emphasised the need for participation of all the political parties in the dialogue to make it

The chief adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim told The Daily Star last night that there would be separate briefings after the talks with each party.

Today's briefings will be held at 12:00 noon and 6:00pm. "One representative from each party will be

present at the briefing," Fahim said. He said 17 out of 19 political parties have so far submitted their lists of participants in the dialogue, which, he said, would continue until the end of next month.

Following the chief adviser's address to the nation, the government last week invited the 19 political parties to the dialogue.

The other parties invited are Jatiya Party (JP), Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), Unity for Political Reforms, Islami Shashantantra Andolon, Khelafat Andolon (Hafezzihujur), Khelafat Majlish of Shaikhul Hadith, Bangladesh Kalyan Party, Progressive Democratic Party, Gono Forum, Samyabadi Dal, and Krishak Sramik Janata League. The government also invited the dissident faction of the BNP.

The invitation letters had said the chief adviser's address would give directives about the agenda of the dialogue, but many parties considered this as a "pre-condition' set by the government.

"It is essential to formulate a national charter through consensus among the government, political parties and representatives of people from all walks of life. A proper and sustainable election infrastructure will be put in place through this charter," Fakhruddin said in his

FROM PAGE 16

It said Satkhira is a smuggling prone area. A section of people use to foment such incident when the border guards intensify antismuggling operation. The BDR press release however less.

assured of investigation into the incident and taking action against the persons responsible.

Pakistan

FROM PAGE 16 activities. They will not attack securityforces," he said.

The militants had also agreed not to target girls schools, music shops and barbers, all targets of the hardline militants who follow an interpretation of Islam echoing the 1996-2001 Taliban regime in Afghanistan, he said.

"We have agreed to enforce the Sharia laws in the area," Khan added. Officials said there was no agree-

ment on the fate of Fazlullah, for whom the militants were demanding a general amnesty. The army has been hunting for him in the region's forests and mountains for months.

He stressed the need for an agreement among the organisations to shun negative and destructive politics. "Hartal, blockade and violent demonstrations must come to an end once and for all," he said.

Fakhruddin said a consensus should be reached before the election also on making parliament effective and added that a proposal to that end has already been discussed. "It must be ensured that no one rejects the election results and boycotts parliament," he said, expressing hope that the dialogue would attach due importance to the

He also said a qualitative change in politics is a must: "We will have to understand these significant issues and work out solutions through the dialogue.

Earlier last month, a panel of five

advisers held pre-dialogue talks with political parties, members of civil society and business community, and representatives from union parishads to create the ground for the official dialogue. The panel submitted a report on the outcome of the pre-dialogue

talks to the chief adviser with recommendations made by the participants of the talks. Meanwhile, the BNP, AL and Jamaat have been pressing for the release of their party chiefs so that

they could take part in the dialogue under their leadership. While talking to reporters at his Gulshan residence, AL acting President Zillur Rahman termed the

current political situation of the country "serious" "In this situation, we have not yet decided whether to join the talks or not," he said after a meeting with ISD leaders.

JSD President Inu said, "We will take part in the dialogue with a feeling of disbelief, no-confidence and confusion because the chief adviser's address to the nation disappointed us. There is also the uncertainty about the dialogue's success if all parties do not participateinit.

"Still we are participating in the talks to ensure that the caretaker government hand over power to an elected government by December He said his party would also this year and no situation like 1/11 repeat," Inusaid.

Both the leaders expressed doubts over the success of the dia-

CBA don Bakir

FROM PAGE 1

Hossain to three years imprisonment for abetting her husband in amassing wealth worth about Tk 1.52 crore illegally. The court also fined Bakir Tk 10 lakh, in default of which he will have

while his wife was fined Tk 1 lakh, in default of which she will have to spend six more months in jail. The special court directed the authorities to confiscate the entire

to serve an additional year in jail,-

volume of Bakir's illegal wealth. The verdict was pronounced after examining statements of 40 wit-

ACC Assistant Director Jahangir Alam filed the case with Motifheel police station on May 30 last year,

and the court framed charges against the couple on December 17 of the same year. BAKIR'S PROFILE Bakir raked in the illegal wealth during the rule of the immediate past

BNP-Jamaat-led four-party alliance government, using his trade union clout backed by BNP. The man, whose name was on ACC's first list of corrupt persons,

had joined Sonali Bank as a clerk in 1977. At the time of his arrest he was a deputy accountant with a salary of Tk 7,500 amonth. Through his wholesale corrup-

tion he and his wife became millionaires enjoying a large number of properties including a six-storey building in Malibagh of the capital, and of a market in his home village in

His wife owns the stylish building in Malibagh Bakir came to limelight during the

BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government's regime as he was often seen on TV screens and newspaper photos, sitting or standing beside influential BNP leaders including immediate past prime minister Khaleda

He managed to grab three vital

posts in three renowned workers'

organisations simultaneously. Until his arrest he was the president of Sonali Bank Employees Union, and of Bangladesh Bank Employees Federation, and the joint secretary of Jatiytabadi Sramik Dal. Getting all the legal and illegal perks of a CBA leader, Bakir became an owner of houses, flats, and cars. He caught everybody's attention in 2005

when he spent Tk 15 lakh and used 150 microbuses and cars during his election campaign for a post in the parents' association of Vigarunnisa Noon School in the capital. He had not been sitting in his chair in Sonali Bank for quite a while even before his arrest, while enjoying all

benefits of his employment nonethe-He allegedly used a car worth Tk 40 lakh of the bank, which otherwise

used to be reserved for the bank's chairman or managing director. Bakir as the Sonali Bank CBA president recruited around 200 employees since 2001, allegedly in

exchange for Tk 50,000 to Tk 1 lakh in bribe from each of them. Bakir, who was born in Jugania village under Kalia upazila of Narail on November 28, 1957, earned his secondary school certificate from Bagudanga High School in 1973, and the higher secondary certificate from Gopalganj Government College in

He joined Sonali Bank as a clerk in 1977, and earned his bachelor's degree (pass course) from Jagannath University College in 1979 while working.

during his college days.

1975. He got involved in politics

Bakir joined Sonali Bank Trade Union as a general member in 1984.

invoicing to do money laundering he said.

guidelines of the central bank, he observed. Chairman of Krishi Bank

But the ultimate responsibility to turn all these resources into strength against irregularities boils down to NBR, which is also blamed for not ensuring strict PSI rules for qualification of companies. Thanks to political interference

influence qualification of some companies with poor records.

However, some NBR top shots stopped short of accepting their failure in having effective measures to combat the corruption flourished around imports. They watched how devils in NBR and customs join hands with the corruption network to plunder the economy by manoeuvring the PSI system, which was introduced in 2000 against a

country's import-export takes place.

"Transaction of bribery are still

works on commodity prices across the NBR is in the process of strength

The age-old corruption in the

The blatant display of grafts put NBR and customs in a very embarrassing situation, with a few corrupt officials dominating the PSI matters under different regional banners like Barisal, Comilla, North Bengal and Sylhet groups. Tasked with managing crucial taxmen, some PSI officials used their home district connections to engineer groupings in NBR.

Retired NBR bigwigs are as valu-