Govt refusal

it did not scrap the defence

forces' status as law

Many lauded the present

government's support for

municipal polls between

But its refusal to deploy

The main opposition

tional authority and its

independence, did other-

constitutionally bound to

fulfil whatever the EC needs

to conduct elections. But

the government did not do

so. Even the EC could not

exert its constitutional

authority to put pressure on

the government," BNP

Secretary General

Khandaker Delwar Hossain

said at a press conference

government that refused to

entertain the EC's request

for army deployment in

union parishad and munic-

ipal elections in 2003 and

the EC's decision to deploy

army in all polling centres

in the by-election to Dhaka-

refusal prompted the oppo-

sition candidate to take the

matter to the High Court

that asked the government

to meet the EC's request for

army deployment. But the

government deployed army

only at some strategic

points in the constituency.

Fire at DEPZ

The jerseys, however, are

unscathed, said Bangladesh

Cricket Board media and

communications chief Jalal

firefighter Hamidur Rahman,

factory's Store Superviser

Rony and two workers.

Hamidur was rushed to a local

Hasan claimed that goods

worth about Tk 50 crore were

completely damaged in the

ATM Shahidul Islam

chairman of Bangladesh

Export Processing Zones

Authority (BEPZA), said they

could not determine the

member committee to probe

Brigade from DEPZ, Savar,

Dhamrai, Dhaka, Tongi and

Kaliakoir managed to douse

the fire around 3:00pm after

nearly six hours of hectic

the burnt goods at the time of

Nayeeem Mohammad

Shahidullah, director general

of fire brigade, said it took

them this long as the

firefighters could not enter the

ing equipment but those were

of no use, as the fire was

Mohammad Tawhid Zong

and chairman of BEPZA Maj

Gen ATM Shaidul Islam vis-

The garment section of the

Anwar Hossain, a worker of

spreading fast, he said.

ited the factory.

The factory had fire fight-

Lawmaker Talukder

building due to heavy smoke.

filing this report at 8:30pm.

Fire fighters were clearing

Brigadier General Abu

the incident, Islam added.

BEPZA has formed a three-

Thirteen units of Fire

source of the fire.

Factory Manager Ashraful

hospital, said a worker.

Those who fell sick are

FROM PAGE 20

Yunus.

10 constituency in 2004.

It also did not respond to

The government's

But it was the BNP-led

yesterday.

"The government is

wise while in power.

enforcement agencies.

FROM PAGE 1 disregarded their plea for army deployment in the two constituencies.

Sohul said they might discuss the issue at their the EC in holding the next meeting.

At a meeting on January January 12 and 18. 10, the EC decided to deploy army in the by-elections to army in the by-elections has Habiganj-1 and brought into question its Brahmanbaria-3. The sincerity in strengthening Armed Forces Division the EC in line with its elechigh-ups present there also toral pledges. agreed on the need for army deployment, said a senior BNP, which is now vocal EC official. about the EC's constitu-

Accordingly, the EC sent a etter to the AFD, a division under the Prime Minister's Office, and asked it to arrange for troops deployment in the constituencies.

Later, the commission asked the government to deploy army also in five of the 12 municipalities that went to the polls on Thursday. But it did not get any

response from the government that had earlier deployed army in the election to 65 municipalities between January 12 and 18. The government's indif-

ference prompted the EC to convene another meeting on January 25, two days before the by-elections and municipal polls, to review the security measures in the polling areas. At that meeting, when

election commissioners Sohul Hussein and M Sakhawat Hossain enquired about the matter, an AFD official said it was still under consideration.

The EC again wrote to the government but got no esponse. Instead of deploying

troops, the government engaged regular law enforcers to maintain law and order in the polling areas.

Though the government did not meet the EC's equirement for army deployment, the elections were peaceful barring a few stray incidents.

In February 2009, parliament amended the Representation of the People Order to scrap the authority granted for the military men on election duty during the tenure of the caretaker government before the 2001 parliamentary polls.

In the 2001 and 2008 parliamentary elections, members of the armed forces had the power to arrest anyone without warrant within 400-yard radius of a polling station. But they had to be given the status of "law enforcement agencies" to exercise the authority.

Awami League demanded scrapping of the military men's authority after its debacle in the 2001 parliamentary elections. The party, however, accepted it during the last caretaker government's

AL got back to its previous stance against the military's authority after its victory in the 2008 parliamentary polls. But then again the AL-led government went for army deployment in local body elec-

While ratifying local government ordinances promulgated during the last caretaker government rule,

Cuet shut

into a scuffle.

Hospital.

FROM PAGE 1 Over the issue, students on both the sides were locked

The violence spread factory was closed yesterday through other departments for weekly holiday, and about and a clash broke out yester-600 workers were working in day between students with the knitting and dyeing units sticks and sharp weapons. when the fire broke out, fire The clash left Sazzad brigade sources said. Hossain, a student of mechanical engineering the factory, said they smelled

department, severely melting clothes around injured. 7:00am and noticed smoke at He was admitted to the warehouse on the ground Chittagong Medical College

The Cuet authorities held

The exams scheduled for

Male students were asked

to vacate their dormitories

by 5:00pm yesterday and

female students by 10:00am

programme for session

2011-2012 will, however,

"The situation is normal

the period will be held from

a meeting in the afternoon

close the university.

February 17.

today.

continue.

Workers tried to douse the fire but failed, he said, adding, they then called the fire briand took the decision to gade.

A general diary has been filed with Ashulia Police Station in this connection,

police said. Meanwhile, five garment

workers were injured last night as a fire broke out on the top floor of a 10-storey garment factory at Chhoydana in The admission Gazipur.

Firefighters doused the blaze around 12:00 midnight, four hours after it broke out.

Rafiqul Islam, deputy assistant director of fire brigade, said most of the top floor as well as the fabrics were gutted by the fire, the source of which could not be immediately known.

Vice-Chancellor of Cuet Prof Shyamol Kanti Biswas said misunderstanding among students led to the clash.

now," the VC said.

Hasina seeks FROM PAGE 1

wants IMO as a regulator to stop piracy. The premier said Bangladesh, if requested,

Hasina said Bangladesh

will join the taskforce to counter piracy in and around Somalia. The IMO secretary general has expressed interest to

help flourish ship building and recycling industries in Bangladesh. Efthimios said IMO wants

to train Bangladeshi marines.

The premier appreciated IMO's role in developing and maintaining a comprehensive regulatory framework for shipping, ensuring maritime safety, providing technical cooperation and enhancing efficiency. Charles Tannock, mem-

ber of European Parliament elected from London, also paid a courtesy call on Hasina at her hotel suit. Tannock expressed soli-

darity with Bangladesh's struggle against adverse impact of climate change and assured Hasina of providing all assistance in this regard. He also said under

Hasina's leadership, Bangladesh will be able to attain the long-cherished economic emancipation.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Ambassador-at-Large M Ziauddin, Bangladesh High Commissioner to UK Sayeedur Rahman Khan among others, were present.

By-polls FROM PAGE 20

came up with this opinion in their reports.

EWG reported law enforcement agencies appeared to be unbiased in discharging their duties "However, incidents of intimidation took place in some of the polling centres."

Law and order in the constituencies was satisfactory, noted Neoc in its report.

It commented that voter turnout was low compared to the last parliamentary elections in December 2008.

According Democracywatch, the byelections were held in a peaceful manner.

It, however, mentioned there was no polling agent of the BNP candidate at one or two polling stations in Brahmanbaria-3 and that with faulty electoral instruments disturbed the poll atmosphere to some extent.

BNP alleges

FROM PAGE 1 narrow margin.

It however said the byelection to Habiganj-1 constituency was free and fair where a BNP-nominated candidate won the polls.

"Ruling party men captured many polling stations in Brahmanbaria-3 constituency, drove out our agents and snatched ballot boxes. We reject the election result and demand fresh polls to the constituency," BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain told reporters at the party's Naya Paltan office in the capital.

"We demand resignation of the Election Commission since it is incapable of holding a free and fair election," he

said. Delwar came down hard on the election commissioners, especially M Sakhawat Hussain for his Thursday's

comment on the by-polls. Sakhawat on Thursday said the elections under the present government have been freer and fairer than those under the previous political governments.

The commissioner also said the Thursday's by election and the municipal polls without deployment of the army will be considered a 'model election".

Referring to Sakhawat's comment, Delwar said the commissioner's remark is "shameful" as the election commission failed to hold a free and fair election.

"If it is considered a model election, what is a rigged election," questioned Delwar. The BNP secretary general

said the last "illegal and unconstitutional" caretaker government constituted the present Election Commission.

"They [election commissioners] shamelessly talked in favour of the last caretaker government and are now acting like sycophants of the present government," he said.

BNP plans fiery

FROM PAGE 1

asked opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abdin Farroque on Wednesday to ensure that party lawmakers are prepared to strongly protest "failure" of the government to deliver. "We should return to the

House now to speak for the people. You [BNP lawmakers] make preparation to strongly speak on different crucial issues including share market, border killings and price hike of essentials," BNP lawmaker ABM Ashraf Uddin Nizan on Thursday quoted Khaleda as telling Farroque. Nizan, also chief of the

parliamentary standing committee on the fisheries and livestock ministry, was present when the BNP chairperson was talking the opposition chief whip. Contacted on Thursday,

Farroque said, "We are ready to join the House whenever madam will ask us to do so," Farroque said.

The Daily Star contacted a number of BNP lawmakers seeking to know their parliament. They said they have to join the House during its current session to save their membership. So, they prefer to return

to parliament without further delay to make better use of the time they will get to speak on the thanks giving motion on the president's address.

They said they have already submitted notices to the parliament secretariat demanding discussion on share market collapse, price hike of essentials, border killings, and law and order situation, suspending other scheduled business of the House. If the treasury bench

does not allow formal discussion on many issues, they will be able to raise all the crucial issues during discussion on the thanks giving motion, they mentioned. The BNP-led alliance

legislators risk losing membership of parliament if they continue to boycott the House that went into its new-year session on Tuesday, and is scheduled to have 43 more sittings. The opposition legisla-

tors already skipped 49 consecutive sittings since June last year. If they remain absent from 41 more sittings consecutively, they will lose membership as per MK Anwar, BNP's

constitutional provisions. national standing committee member, said they will have to return to parliament at least for saving their membership. Therefore, the party will take decision to this effect at the right time.

"We will sit to discuss our parliamentary affairs and other issues soon after the by-polls [which were held on Thursday]," Anwar told The Daily Star on Wednesday. Party lawmaker Nazrul

Islam Monzu said, "We are

interested in participating in parliament proceedings. We want to raise our voice strongly on capital market collapse, ruling party's defeat in the just concluded municipality polls and skyrocketing of prices of

essentials."

Earlier, 38 opposition lawmakers belonging to BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and Bangladesh Jatiya Party remained absent from the House proceedings for 64 consecutive days since June 2009 to February 11, 2010. Asked about the opposi-

tion plan, treasury bench Whip ASM Feroz yesterday said, "We know the opposition lawmakers were boosted by the just concluded municipal poll results. And they will launch attack on us on some issues including the share mar-He mentioned that they

ruling AL-led alliance lawmakers, particularly young ones, to take preparation to face the opposition. AL lawmaker Khalid thinking about return to Mahmud Chowdury, also an organising secretary of

have already asked the

the party, said they will welcome their (opposition) return and face them with arguments and logic. The parliament sitting will resume on February 1 kicking off a 40 hour discus-

Toxic industrial

sion on the thanks giving

motion on the president's

January 25 address.

and air.

FROM PAGE 1 required by the law," said Abdur Rahman, a veterinary

doctor and agriculturist. He said mostly dying and garment factories are causing damage to soil, water

Mangal Mridha of Kumkumari said the factory liquid used to empty into rivers after flowing several miles through some channels. But now all the channels have been filled up by realtors and the waste has nowhere to go but our agricultural land.

"I have lost all crops on my five bighas of land because of toxic waste. Like me there are hundreds of small farmers who have been ruined," said Mangal.

Locals say pollution is pushing well-off farmers into miseries.

"We have nothing left except for the barren land. If law and order prevailed we would have been compensated for such environmental crime done to us," said Ramjan Mia, a farmer from Khagan.

"We used to grow aman and boro rice and keep stock for the entire year and sell the surplus. But we are now totally out of business,' Ramjan said.

Despite strict provisions in the environmental law, many industries reportedly have remained defiant and kept polluting environment.

Health services

FROM PAGE 20

education. In addition, it is tasked with transfer and posting of junior consultants, medical officers, upazila health and family planning officers.

But the national health body is crippling due to lack of regular manpower in key

DGHS officials said they sent names of around 400 junior consultants to the health ministry in May last year for promotion. More than seven months later, the ministry last week sent back the list terming it incomplete, and in many cases incorrect.

They added that bureaucratic tangle is also impeding their activities.

"Since 1989, nobody could serve as director (administration) for more than two years. Most of them worked for five to six months," said Abul Hasnat, the director-in-charge (administration) of DGHS.

He has been serving in the post for 15 months and will go on leave prior to retirement (LPR) by end of this month.

Mumtazuddin Bhuiyan, director of hospital and clinic, said, many directors

does not work actually, as it takes someone at least two months to understand the overall activities.

"One cannot take any decision in such a short time," he told The Daily Star.

One hundred thirty-nine posts of assistant director or equivalent level under the DGHS were vacant for several months. The government early this month filled 45 posts through promotion.

Of the 47 posts of director, eight go vacant. They include the post of director HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Leprosy, Medical Education, Disease Control, Finance, Institute of Public Health (IPH) and Suhrawardi Hospital.

IPH has no director for more over months. Bazlul Haque, who recently took charge as acting director, said he is yet to grasp his job.

To improve the health sector, the government in the last two years created 16 posts of director, deputy director and assistant director. All but four of them are vacant.

Prof Rashid E Mahbub, president of Health Rights Movement National Committee, said the DGHS cannot ensure better health service if it cripples due to are appointed for even one month. He observed that it manpower shortage. holding of the event.

Wrong choice **FROM PAGE 20**

percent of the minority votes."

Talking to The Daily Star an AL-leaning union parishad chairman in Bahubal said AL's selection of candidate went wrong. "We could have won the

seat easily by holding memorial meetings only if Dewan Shahnewaz Gazi Milad, son of Dewan Farid Gazi or Reza Kibria, son of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria, were nominated," he mentioned, seeking anonymity. One of the two upazila parishad chairmen of

Nabiganj and Bahubal, who is an influential local AL leader, did not work for the party candidate, sources in Habiganj AL said. "Some of our leaders did not work for our candidate which proved suicidal,

Mujibur Rahman, president of Nabiganj upazila AL, told The Daily Star. "There were nine candidates including myself. Once Mushfiq Hussain got the

nomination I started working for him, but some of them remained inactive," noted Mujibur. According to him price hike had been one of the major issues and obtaining

populated areas was another reason for the setback. Results show BNP candi date did well in the tea gardens which are known as vote

banks of AL

lesser votes in the minority

BNP bagged more votes in one centre out of six in the tea gardens while Jatiya Party candidate won in another The rest, however, went to AL candidate. Compared to the previous election results this was a rarity. Locals said the tea garden

workers had some unfulfilled demands which led to the swing votes. In Thursday's by-election, Sujat secured 81,330 votes

while his rival Mushfiq

Hussain Chowdhury of AL

bagged 80,045 votes. Abdul Munim Chowdhury of Jatiya Party, a component of AL-led grand alliance, pulled 22,220 votes helping Sujat prevail on Mushfiq.

BGB rescues

FROM PAGE 20

Ali, 21, Obaidur Rahman ,20, Raisa 5, Alamgir Hossain, 25, Nikhil Das, 30, Proshanto Kumar, 30, Topon Biswas, 40, and Mollick Hossain, 18.

Acting on a tip-off, BGB personnel conducted a drive and rescued the victims. However, sensing presence of the border guards, the criminals managed to flee the scene.

The victims were later handed over to Benapole port police.

A gang of traffickers brought them from Faridpur, Barisal and Khulna districts promising them lucrative jobs in India, said Liaquat Hossain, camp incharge of BGB Benapole.

Biswa Ijtema

FROM PAGE 20 on Sunday.

For the first time this year, the Ijtema is being held in two phases. Traditionally, it used to be a three-day single-phase gathering held since 1967.

The first phase was held from January 21 to 23 on the same venue.

Devotees from 33 of the country's 64 districts joined the first phase while devotees from rest of the districts joined the second phase. The districts include

Dhaka, Munshiganj Manikganj, Narayanganj Netrakona, Tagail, Jamalpur, Madaripur, Gopalganj, Cox's Bazar, Noakhali, Laxmipur, Comilla, Barahmanbaria, Molvibazar, Sunamganj, Chapainababganj Noagaon, Pabna, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Kurigram, Nilphamari, Bogra, Satkhira, Jhenidah, Magura, Meherpur, Barisal, Pirojpur and Patuakhali.

Meanwhile, two devotees died of heart attack yesterday. They are Azim Uddin, of Narayanganj and Khokon Sardar, 70, of Khulna, reports UNB.

A three-tier security is in place to ensure peaceful

US cables show Egyptian leader unready for reform

AFP, Cairo

As clashes between police and protesters spread yesterday through Egypt, a series of leaked US diplomatic cables painted a gloomy picture of any willingness by President Hosni Mubarak to introduce meaningful reforms. Mubarak, who would

allow some changes uncon-

nected with security, "generally views broader reforms as an invitation to extremism," one cable said. The cables, dating from 2009 and 2010 and released by WikiLeaks, described Mubarak as a "classic

and interference in politics." They said he preferred a few individuals to suffer rather than risk chaos for society as a whole.

Egyptian secularist who

hates religious extremism

"We have heard him lament the results of earlier US efforts to encourage reform in the Islamic world," one cable said, adding that the US encouraged the shah of Iran to change "only to watch the country fall into the hands of revolutionary extremists. "Wherever he has seen

these US efforts, he can point to the chaos of loss of stability that ensued," pointing to Iraq, Palestinian elections which brought Hamas into power in 2006 and problems in Pakistan. The Egyptian leader has

supported some improvements in human rights and his wife, Suzanne Mubarak, has been given "a great deal of room to ... advance women's and children's rights. But "political reforms

ment has resorted to heavyhanded tactics against individuals and groups, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, whose influence continues to grow.' The cables described how the government began to

have stalled and the govern-

tighten the political environment in 2009 ahead of parliamentary elections in 2010 and presidential elections in 2011. They said Cairo sup-

pressed critical opinion by turning "to an array of investigative authorities and public and private actions.' It worked "to flood the courts with suits against

political enemies, using

tactics such as fabricating

assault charges against a

another acquaintance, said "At around 11:00pm heading for home."

wings had reached the crime scene to collect evidence.

(writers' forum) and earlier a librarian at the Cooperatives

with husband.

Nobel laureate ElBaradei returned to Egypt late Thursday, having said he would be prepared to lead a transitional authority if he were asked and should veteran President Hosni Mubarak, in power for over 30 years, step down.

seen being dragged away and pushed into police vans, as others defied a heavy police presence and made their way to the central Tahrir square, where tens of thousands had gath-

after a civilian had most of his hand blown away, allegedly by police. In the Delta city of Mansura, hundreds took to

the streets chanting "Down with Mubarak" as they emerged from Friday prayers, heavily outnumbered by security forces. Some imams had

an AFP correspondent reported. Meanwhile, authorities cut most mobile phone and Internet services in a bid to thwart the growing protests,

than 100 injured.

AFP around 1,000 people had been arrested since the protests began. Human Rights Watch

said eight demonstrators and a policeman had been killed in protests in Cairo, Suez, Alexandria and other

cities.

press political opposition through arrests, harassment and intimidation," they said. The cables showed that the United States repeatedly encouraged Egypt to introduce political reforms, abolish the decades-old emergency law, which restricts freedom of assembly, and

Cairo also used security

services to monitor and

infiltrate the opposition and

civil society, "and to sup-

respect human rights. Mubarak complained that any effort to open up the political arena would empower the Muslim Brotherhood and he warned that he "would not tolerate" the existence of political parties with a religious agenda, Muslim or Christian.

Egypt chafed at US support for civil society, saying it funds NGOs and human rights organisations dominated by "communists and extremists." Journalist

FROM PAGE 20

Police have no clue to the motive behind the double

Station, suspects somebody acquainted with the couple might have committed the crimes. Abdul Momen, assistant commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Ramna

murder. Shahidul Huq, officer-

in-charge of Paltan Police

house was ransacked. Samad said cash, gold ornaments and other valuables were looted from the almirah.

A family friend, Babul

Parvez said some in-laws of

Rahima went to the house following an invitation to lunch. They went back finding the door locked and enquired whereabouts of the couple over phone. Rajendra Chandra,

Thursday I saw Farhad Bhai near Fakirapool intersection

Farhad was the founder president of Lekhak Samity

department. Irin Khan, only daughter of the couple, lives in Italy

Rahima and Irin were once involved with Jatiya

Egypt's largest opposi-

tion group, the banned

Muslim Brothers have also

joined the biggest uprising

in decades despite the gov-

ernment warning that deci-

sive measures would be

Massive unrest

FROM PAGE 20

clashes between police and protesters. Several protesters also broke into the compound of a police station in another central district.

ered on Tuesday.

The crowd attacked police vans, torching one,

encouraged worshippers to "go out and seek change,'

but a founder of the April 6 movement spearheading demonstrations said it was too late to staunch the anger. "We've already

announced the meeting places," Israa Abd el Fatah told AFP. "So we've done it, we no longer need means of communication."

Zone), told The Daily Star that the steel almirah of the

Different intelligence

journalist and filing a profanity case against a novel-Party, said Babul Parvez.

as the building burned after

taken to crush the protests. At least 20 members of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested overnight vesterday, including five former members of parliament, the group's lawyer Abdelmoneim Abdel Maqsoud told AFP.

Protesters in Cairo were Cell phone text messaging was cut late Thursday while Internet services, which had been patchy during the night, were completely severed early yesterday, cutting off access to networking sites Facebook and Twitter -- key communications' tools

> "The desire for change must be respected," ElBaradei, a vocal critic of Mubarak, said late Thursday. "The regime must not use violence in the demonstrations." The nationwide demon-

protests.

used by organisers of the

strations, inspired by the

"Jasmine Revolution" in Tunisia, have swelled into the largest uprising in three decades, sending shockwaves across the region. Eight people have been killed -- five protesters and two policemen -- and more

A security official told