Free polls

FROM PAGE 20 during the polls," he said.

The commission has drafted proposals for electoral reforms and those will be sent to the government next week, sources in the EC Secretariat said.

The proposals say since the dissolution of parliament and until the formation of a new one, the government will not take any decision without consulting the EC on issues relating to parliamentary elections, particularly the conduct of business of the cabinet division and ministries of home, public administration and LGRD.

In June last year, the provision of a caretaker government was scrapped through a constitutional amendment. And the existing provisions say the incumbent government will remain in office during the next national

But the opposition now threatens to boycott elections, if not overseen by a non-party caretaker administration. Many fear the polls would not be neutral under the partisan government.

Against this backdrop, the outgoing CEC yesterday said everybody will have to abide by the electoral laws and cooperate with the EC. "It will be difficult to hold impartial polls if these conditions are not fulfilled." Shamsul Huda assumed

the CEC's office on February 5, 2007 during the then caretaker administration. His five-year tenure will expire tomorrow. He also spoke about some

other issues, including introduction of electronic voting machines in the next parliamentary polls and the BNP's criticism of the EC. The BNP's criticism made

him "great". After his retirement, he said, he would speak about the party's "splitting up" during the past caretaker government's

Asked if he would accept any proposal for his reappointment, the CEC said nobody had communicated with him on the matter. He would not comment about it now because, he said, "I don't like any speculation."

Earlier on the day, Muhammed Sohul Hussein, another election commissioner who will also retire tomorrow, spoke about different aspects of the commission's activities over the past live years.

The EC-led by Shamsul Huda held 402 meetings and took 1,017 decisions of which 994 have resulted in action and 23 others are in the process of implementation.

500 structures FROM PAGE 20

the railway bulldozer during

the drive. The railway authorities have carried out similar

eviction drives many times, even in the said stretch, but the illegal occupants soon returned each time.

Ashraf

FROM PAGE 1

Fazlul Azim's allegation that nepotism and corruption had plagued the administrations, even the LGRD ministry, Ashraf said the media spoke of so many things that were not correct.

Ashraf, also general secretary of the Awami League, said the media described road deaths as killings, which were merely some accidents. "Accident is acci-

the LGRD minister's com-

Ashraf, she told the House

dismissed as mere acci-

Referring to Paloma, a

class-II student killed while

crossing a road on

Wednesday, Tarana said a

road accident should not be

taken lightly. Rather, there

should be measures to avert

such incidents which claim

A campaigner of the road

safety movement, the law-

maker in her brief but capti-

vating speech quoted a

provision of the law and said

it would be considered a

punishable offence when a

road accident occurred due

to the negligence of a driver.

many lives every year.

civil society representatives. After maghrib prayers, Tarana Halim, elected from a seat reserved for women, took the floor on a point of order and sharply reacted to

rent political context. Without mentioning that road deaths must not be

countries have weakened considerably since Dhaka ignored the US government's concerns over the removal of Nobel Laureate Prof Yunus from his post as managing

The Bureau of South and

Another investor

FROM PAGE 1 killed himself in Dhaka over the same reason.

The two bourses of the country -- Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) and Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) -- have been in the red for several months, the climax being reached on Wednesday when the general index of DSE fell below 4,000 points, the lowest in 27 months. The continued plunge in share prices left many small investors ruined financially.

Yesterday's victim, Dildar Ahmed, had been talking about committing suicide over the last few days due to huge losses, relatives told The Daily Star.

The 55-year-old hanged himself from the ceiling of his bedroom around 8:30am at his Askar Dighir Par residence, said Zakir Hossain, subinspector of Kotwali Police Station.

Dildar initially invested Th 26 lakh in the share market, his son Faisal said, adding that his father took out loans amounting to Tk 12 lakh from a broker house to buy more shares.

"As share prices continued

how he would repay his debts," said Faisal, a private university student. He added his father was deeply worried about meet-

ing the costs of his and his

sister's education and other

to fall, he grew anxious as to

family expenses. "We often told him not to be worried about al these...Yesterday when my mother went to call him for breakfast she found him hanging from the ceiling," he

said, breaking down in tears. On January 30, Kazi Liakat Ali Juboraj, 40, hanged himself after losing a huge amount of money in the stock market, his family members said.

match ... Give me back my

Egypt's military ruler, Field

Marshal Hussein Tantawi who

took power when the

Mubarak was ousted on

February 11 last year, sent two

military planes to fly out the

players and the injured from

Sepp Blatter said he was

football. Such a catastrophic

situation is unimaginable and

The Confederation o

should not happen," he said.

African Football, which orga-

nizes the African Cup, said a

minute's silence would be

held before all quarterfinals

this weekend as a mark of

football fans clashed with

police in a Cairo stadium,

injuring nearly 80 people, as

they chanted slogans against

Mubarak and his interior

minister -- both now on trial

for the killing of protesters

Dhirendranath

ignoring the language of the

majority population of the

country could only lead to a

complex situation

Intriguingly, Prime Minister

Liaquat Ali Khan, who owed

his seat in the assembly to the

quota for East Bengal, rejected

Dutta's suggestion out of

hand. Among those who

sided with the prime minister

was Khwaja Nazimuddin, the

Urdu-speaking chief minister

of East Bengal. Nazimuddin

even went to the extent of

informing the House, falsely

as it were, that most people of

East Bengal thought Urdu

ought to be the state language

Dhirendranath Dutta's pro-

posal raised howls of protest

predictably, in East Bengal.

Students of Dhaka University

called a strike at the univer-

sity and at all educational

institutions for February 26.

For their part, the media

came down heavily on the

Nazimuddin ministry over

the language issue. The Azad

newspaper was unflattering

in its view that Nazimuddin

had made a blunder. One of

the more important ramifi-

cations of the language issue

was the formation of a State

Language Action Committee

comprising representatives

from a large number of politi-

cal parties at a meeting a

Dhaka University. The meet

ing resolved to observe a

general strike across the

province on March 11 as a

protest against the constitu-

ent assembly's rejection of

the proposal for Bangla as

one of its languages of busi-

under way on March 11

police went into action pick-

ing up a number of student

and youth leaders. Among

those taken into custody

were Oli Ahad, Abdul Wadud

Bhuiyan, Shamsul Haq,

Shawkat Ali, K.G. Mahbub

and Sheikh Mujibur

Rahman. The next day, Sher-

e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq

roundly condemned the

Ahmed was credited with

Ittehad. The error is regretted.

Correction: In the write-

police action.

As the general strike got

The rejection of

of Pakistan.

In September Egyptian

respect for the dead.

during the uprising.

FROM PAGE 1

In Geneva FIFA President

"This is a black day for

Port Said late Wednesday.

shocked by the incident.

State television said

Egypt mourns OJI

FROM PAGE 1

State television ran footage of riot police standing rigidly in rows as pandemonium erupted around them. Interior Minister

Mohammed Ibrahim has said most of the deaths were caused by the crush but medics said some people were stabbed. The health ministry said 74

people were killed, including a policeman. More than 1,000 people were also reported wounded. Police said 47 people had been arrested. The ruling military

announced three days of national mourning and Ibrahim fired city security chief Essam Samak because of the violence. Politicians, fans and play-

ers took to social media to express their fury over the clashes, which cap a year of political upheaval and unrest after the uprising that unseated Mubarak. "There are dead people

lying on the ground! There are dead people in the changing room," Al-Ahly striker Emad Meteab told the team's satellite channel.

"I won't play football anymore until these people get justice," a furious Meteab

Young men blocked roads near the state television building and the capital's landmark Tahrir Square, and a crowd gathered at Cairo's main rail station hoping to see relatives returning from the game in Port Said.

As covered bodies from Egypt's worst soccer disaster were unloaded from trains, thousands chanted "Down with military rule".

"Where is my son?" screamed Fatma Kamal, whose frantic phone calls seeking news of her 18-yearold had gone unanswered. "To hell with the football

Blake due

FROM PAGE 20 Earlier, in March 2011, Blake came to Dhaka to hold a meeting with top US diplomats from the South and Central Asian region.

During his three-day visit, which will likely be on February 14-16, Blake is expected to meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Commerce Minister GM Quader and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

He will also meet Prof Muhammad Yunus and other

Although it is a routine visit, government officials and diplomatic circles in Dhaka consider it crucial in the cur-

Blake's visit may even help roll back the recent decline in US-Bangladesh bilateral relations.

The ties between the two director of Grameen Bank.

Central Asian Affairs deals with US foreign policy and US relations with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Blake is also expected to visit some of those countries, besides Bangladesh.

Step taken 2 years FROM PAGE 1

asked the police and the district administration across the country to implement the decisions within three months. Divisional commissioners will coordinate the implementation process.

The issue of stopping the use of fake driving licences also came up in the council meeting. But the council refrained from deciding on the matter in the face of strong opposition from transport leaders. Plying of human haulers,

and setting up of illegal structures and markets along the highways have been causing road accidents. The decision to remove illegal structures and slow vehicles from highways came at a council meeting nearly two years ago. Cabinet committee on law

and order also took similar decisions in the past to ensure road safety, but they have not been implemented. Some government officials

at the meeting blamed political intervention, opposition from transport leaders and police's negligence for this. Communications Minister

Obaidul Quader expressed disappointment at the long list of agenda for the meeting. When he asked whether any of the previous decisions had been implemented, none gave any reply.

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan and State Minister for Home Shamsul Hoque Tuku were also present there.

"We hold discussions and make 30 to 35 decisions in a council meeting, but most of them remain unimplemented. Therefore, today [yesterday] we have made only five to six decisions," Bangladesh Road Transport Authority Chairman Ayubur Rahman Khan told reporters after the meeting.

The council decided to implement the decisions on a priority basis.

Nearly a year ago, the council decided to outsource the task of checking vehicle fitness amid allegations that certificates were issued to unfit vehicles in exchange for money. But the decision has not been implemented yet.

The council yesterday decided to outsource the task within six months.

The issue of phasing out about 5 lakh fake driving licences were also discussed at the meeting. When Tuku proposed that drivers carrying fake licences should be prevented from driving vehicles, transport owners vehemently protested it.

"Just think what will happen if five lakh vehicles are taken off the road," said Khandaker Enayetullah, general secretary of Dhaka Road Transport Owners Association.

Shajahan Khan, also executive president of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation, backed Enayet.

Later, the council moved away from the issue, and decided to set up more training centres for drivers.

Overtaking

FROM PAGE 1 Witness Idris Ali, also cousin to the victim, told reporters that he and Mollick got on to the bus for Gulistan from Nabisco area around 1:15pm. While Idris managed to push himself in, Mollick remained hanging on the footboard with almost his whole body outside the vehicle.

"Just a little after the bus had started, another bus speeding from behind overtook our bus from the wrong side," Idris said, adding that while doing so the bus sandwiched the victim.

"We heard a scream," he said, "Then our bus stopped and we found my cousin lying on the road."

The driver of Mollick's bus fled the scene instantly while police had to chase the speeding bus up to Moghbazar railway crossing until they caught its driver, Md Shakil Hossain.

The victim was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where the doctors declared him dead. Hospital sources said Mollick's head was fatally damaged.

Omer Faruque, officerin-charge of Tejgaon Industrial Area Police up, Bangla or Urdu? on Station, said they had seized February 1, Abul Mansur both the buses. No case has been lodged with the police editing the weekly Millat. In fact, he edited the weekly station in this connection till filing of the report at 7:00pm.

Padma Bridge project

FROM PAGE 1

Bank gives more specific documents and evidence, we'll reopen the inquiry,' the ACC chief added.

On September 21 last year, WB's Integrity Vicepresident Leonard F McCarthy handed over a letter and an investigation report to Finance Minister AMA Muhith and to the commission over the alleged graft in the 2.97-billion project. The WB promised to give 1.2 billion in loan for the The construction was

initially planned to start this year and be completed by the end of 2014 to connect southern Bangladesh with the capital. But the work could not start as the WB temporarily suspended the fund over the allegation. The WB report alleged the then communications min-

his family-owned company SAHCO sought to coerce multiple companies into using SAHCO as a paid "silent agent" for getting permission to bid for the contract of the main bridge. Abul had all along denied any wrongdoing, saying on one occasion that he was a

ister Syed Abul Hossain and

from various quarters, Abul was removed from the communications ministry in December last year. Following the allegation, the ACC assigned its Deputy Director Jainul Abedin Shibli in October the same year to

investigate the matter, a

month after Prime Minister

"proven honest man". In the

face of widespread criticism

authorities concerned to probe the claim.

Sheikh Hasina ordered the

city

Headed by former Brac University vice-chancellor Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, the ACC inquiry team talked with officials of five foreign companies that pre-qualified for the construction of the main bridge.

All of them replied in the negative when asked if SAHCO had intervened in the selection process, said the ACC chairman. The five companies are

Samsung C&T Corporation (South Korea), China Zhongtie Major Bridge Engineering Group Co Ltd (China), Daelim Industrial Company Ltd (South Korea), Vinci-HCC Joint Venture (India-France) and China Communications Construction Company Ltd (China). Officials of these compa-

nies unequivocally said that no representative of SAHCO had ever visited their offices to talk about the Padma Bridge project and that no one on Abul Hossain's behalf had demanded a percentage on the contract price, the ACC chief said. Moreover, no company

has any allegation against the pre-qualification selection procedure, said Ghulam Rahman. Talking to The Daily Star, members of the committee

enced by any quarter and that the entire bidding process followed due rules. In his testimony before

the inquiry team, Abul

said they were not influ-

refuted the allegation against him and his family company.

Officials of the Chinabased China Railway 15 Bureau Group Corporation, whose Bangladesh office raised the allegation against SAHCO, have denied receiving any letter from SAHCO offering to work as a "silent agent", said Ghulam Rahman.

The ACC carried out the inquiry by dividing the allegation into two -- allegation of corruption over the construction of the main bridge and allegation of corruption in the appointment of the supervising consultant.

The commission yesterday disclosed the findings of its inquiry into the first issue. The Padma Bridge at

Mawa-Jajira point was to be co-financed by the Asian Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica). The government signed agreements with the WB for \$1.2 billion loan, ADB for \$615 million, Jica for \$415 million and IDB for \$140 million. Last week, Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina said the government would not accept WB's assistance in the project should it fail to prove the allegation of corruption it had raised.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian government on Monday formally offered funding for the project. The Bangladesh government is yet to decide on the matter.

in front of educational insti-

tutions are another reason

why school-goers and their

parents are so at risk of

becoming casualties of rash

mother and daughter sit tight

keeping their fingers crossed

for a safe ride. "From Mirpur-

10 intersection to Mirpur-14

there are at least a dozen

schools and colleges. But

vou'd see few traffic men on

duty there as a crazy mix of

buses, cars and rickshaws

fight their way onwards

paying scant attention to the

pedestrians," Tawhida

Suman, vice-president of

BCL, its former international

affairs secretary Sohel Rana

Mithu, organising secretary

Shawkat-ul Islam, and

Dhaka University's hall unit

leaders Jewel Rana, Tanvir,

Imran, Parish, Merun, Laju

different hospitals including

Dhaka Medical College

Hospital and Central

of DU's Zahurul Haque Hall

Mithu, Suman and a few

others "permitted" a trader

to set up a food stall outside

the Bangla Academy pre-

Meanwhile, BCL activists

The Mithu-Suman group

Sohagh and its DU uni

General Secretary Omar

Sharif about the matter

Sohagh and Sharif permit-

ted the Mithu-Suman group

to build the stall, and

accordingly they set it up,

annoying the Ekushey Hall

Hall then swooped on the

Mithu-Suman group at the

men of Zahurul Haque Hall

counter attacked the

Ekushey Hall activists, leav-

Contacted, the BCL presi-

ing several of them injured.

On information, BCL

BCL activists of Ekushev

group, the sources added.

Suhrawardi Udyan gate.

mises in the afternoon.

the same place.

Sources said BCL leaders

They were admitted to

Rahman and Shuvo.

Hospital, police said.

BCL intight

Tawhida Akhter, mother of

driving.

school.

added.

FROM PAGE 20

School-goers at grave risk

a prominent cause of the

accidents, many pedestrians

FROM PAGE 1

estimate that accidental deaths hover around the figure of four to five thousand annually and the number of those injured is six to seven thousand.

Accident Research Institute of Buet portrays a more dismal picture. It notes that road accidents in Bangladesh claim on an average 12,000 lives annually and lead to about 35,000 injuries.

According to Dhaka Metropolitan Police statistics, 198 people were killed in 259 crashes in the city in the first half of 2010. Around 72 percent of fatal accidents are caused by vehicles hitting pedestrians. Dr Shamsul Hoque, for-

mer director of Accident Research Institute of Buet, notes that school-going children and garment workers are particularly vulnerable to accidents caused by reckless motorists as they make up the largest group among pedestrians during rush hours.

In the morning hours, he noted, commuters get desperate to reach their work on time while buses compete for passengers, making the roads anything but pedes-

trian-friendly. Bus drivers tend to overtake other vehicles so that they can reach the next stop earlier to take more passengers aboard and make some extra bucks, he continued. "As long as the drivers keep their eyes focused on the passengers instead of on the road, the poor pedestrians will continue losing their lives. To ensure safety, the drivers must give undivided attention to the roads.

Quoting police records, Dr Shamsul Hoque said that 10 accidents on average occur every day across the country and one fourth of the total road crashes happen in Dhaka. Until a comprehensively

planned public transportation system is in place, this messy situation on the roads will prevail, he added. "No country in the world has so many public bus services. In our country, fragmented ownerships are on the rise. Small operators get their drivers to go on and on as many trips as possible in order to maximise profits."

He said the only solution was to fix one or two companies under which all the buses would operate and the drivers would get salaries, not wages.

investment to make this

empty phensidyl bottles and "Besides, if the buses are human excreta were found run under one or two compaduring a visit to the bridge nies, their management will and another near Asad Gate. become easier," he said Lack of an adequate numstressing the need for more ber of traffic personnel and

Although recklessness and callousness in drivers are

prefer to cross roads by clearly flouting traffic rules and risking not only their own lives but also the lives of motorists and other pedestri-Incidents of people crossing a busy thoroughfare

instead of using a foot overbridge nearby have become a common picture in the city. Benozir Hassan, a merchandiser in an apparel company, was spotted trying

to do the same while crossing

a road, ignoring a foot over-

bridge hardly 100 metres

away at Azampur bus stand in Uttara recently. Vehicles screeched to a halt. Imprecations poured upon the man, a private service holder dressed in smart attire. He was not crushed under the wheels but did get bruises on his

The only thing Hassan told this correspondent, who happened to be on the spot, was, "I was in a rush to get to my office.'

The 52 foot overbridges in the city built by Dhaka City Corporation and Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha and four underpasses now remain poorly utilised because of random jaywalking as pedestrians find most of the footbridges and subways unsafe and filthy.

They allege many footbridges are located in such a place that they are of no use, while vendors, sex workers and beggars capture a major portion of these bridges. The poor condition of these old structures discourages people from using them.

They allege they are forced to walk along the streets due to illegal occupation of pavements by parked cars, shops, vendors and construction materials.

But the authorities concerned seem to be turning a blind eye to these problems.

A housewife in Lalmatia, Mithila Khanam, found it too difficult to use the footbridge near Dhanmondi Govt Boys School to take her children to school as the place is literally filled with obnoxious objects. "It was a shock to me when

I used the bridge one day. I just ran off the bridge holding my son's hand tightly and have never used it since then," she said. Used contraceptives,

safety measures on the roads

dent told The Daily Star he was not fully aware of the clashes.

However, its DU unit President Mehadi Hasan said they would take "appropriate action" against their members who were involved

in the incident.

President

FROM PAGE 1

sincerely thank the patriotic army," he said. Zillur Rahman was

addressing the Annual Commander Conference-2011 of the Army Medical Corps, investiture of the 6th Colonel Commandant, and National Flag Award Ceremony-2012 at Ghatail Cantonment in Tangail. The president said "You

will have to keep in mind that full-fledged democracy has been established after lots of sacrifices... the country is now being governed through a proper democratic process." "Any evil attempt to

frustrate the democratic process is not expected by any of us, and such evil move will not be tolerated, he told the audience. Zillur Rahman, who holds the supreme com-

vices, said an effective command channel plays an active role in resolving any task of the army. It is possible to accomplish any task with efficiency and discipline if there is respect and loyalty

to all levels of command-

mand of the defence ser-

ers, he said. All Combined Military Hospitals (CMHs) of the country have been able to gain people's confidence by providing advanced medical services, the president said adding: "The government is keen to modernise the CMHs and field medical units.'

Rahman addressed a parade on the occasion of awarding national flag to Army Medical Corps Centre and School at the cantonment. He lauded the members of the armed forces for their immense contribu-

Earlier in the day, Zillur

tion to world peace, saying their professionalism has earned them respect from other compatriot peacekeepers in various parts of the world. Chief of Army Staff General M Abdul Mubeen

a KG student at a school in Mirpur 13, said that a rush of fear fills her each time she senior armed forces offisteps out of her house for the cers, ministers, local lawmakers, among others, As rush-hour buses whizz attended the function. past their rickshaw, the

Magistrate

FROM PAGE 20

The BNP men had been gathering there to bring out

a procession. On the same day, the law enforcers claimed that they fired shots acting in selfdefence according to the order of the magistrate.

Fatema Begum, the widow of Abul, sued the magistrate and 195 policemen on Wednesday for the murder of her husband.

In another development, a two-member police probe committee yesterday started an enquiry into the incident.

The committee led by Biswas Afzal Hossain, deputy inspector general (DIG-Chittagong) of police, visited the school ground in the morning and talked with witnesses, local journalists, teachers, students of the school and their

of DU's Ekushey Hall "We will take legal action announced to set up a stall at against police members or any other people, if found guilty," mentioned the DIG. informed the organisation's President HM Badiuzzaman

guardians.

KHALEDATO VISIT CHANDPUR FEB 13 BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will visit Chandpur on February 13 to express her sympathy to the bereaved

family members of the two

This was announced on

Wednesday at a press conference hosted by BNP in tne town. Earlier on the day, a BNP delegation led by its two

victims.

Joint Secretaries General Mohammad Shahjahan and Barkat Ullah Bulu reached here from the capital. Shahjahan termed the

deaths of the two BNP activists "a turning point" in the movement to topple the government. The home minister and

the foreign minister cannot evade their responsibilities over the deaths, he maintained.

Abul Hossain Mridha and Limon Saival -- died on Sunday when police fired live rounds on some BNP activists during a clash with them on the ground of Chandpur Hasan Ali Govt High School in the town.