Thousands join 'final push' to oust Thaksin

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thousands of protesters marched through Bangkok's busy shopping district yesterday in a second day of a "final push" to oust Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra before April 2 elections

They chanted "Vote no vote" and handed out pink flags bearing the same slogan, urging people to mark the abstention box on ballot papers for the snap election Thaksin called three years early in hopes of ending a political crisis.

It was the first time the anti-Thaksin campaign, which intensified in January after his family sold their stake in the telecommunications empire he founded for a tax-

atically on people to cast their ballots

The march followed a 50,000strong rally on Saturday night by the People's Alliance for Democracy, an ad hoc alliance, to call on revered King Bhumibol Adulvadei to replace Thaksin with a neutral government which would implement political reforms.

The lower numbers at the rally compared to previous ones attended by 100,000, appeared to back up a poll last week showing that people in Bangkok, the centre of the anti-Thaksin campaign, were getting fed up after weeks of pro-

The palace has let it be known

the king is following events closely but it has shown no sign he is willing to act against Thaksin, the only elected prime minister in Thai his-

tory to complete a full term. He told Reuters on Friday he did not think the king -- who has intervened publicly twice in his 60-year reign, both times against military rulers -- would act.

Thaksin has turned the election into an effective referendum saying he would quit if his Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) party got less than 50 percent of the vote, hence the calls for people to cast absten-

Some 300 police kept watch as the protesters left the National SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

Cellphone sets worth Tk 1.66cr seized at ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials seized cellphones along with battery packs worth around Tk 1.66 crore at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) yester-

Acting on a tip-off that a huge quantity of cellphones will be smuggled under false declaration, the customs officials inquired about the goods came on flight MH-196 and seized a wooden box.

They found 12 paper cartons inside it containing 4,000 cellphones and battery packs. The declaration for the shipment was 'sewing machinery,' a customs press release said.

the customs warehouse

The seized goods were sent to Rice talks of conditional troops pullout from Iraq

AP, Washington

Echoing military commanders, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said yesterday the US could withdraw a significant number of troops from Iraq this year if Iraqi forces are able to assume greater control of the country's security.

"I think it's entirely probable that we will see a significant drawdown of American forces over the next year. ... It's all dependent on events on the ground," the chief American diplomat said.

Just this past week, Defence Secretary Donald H Rumsfeld declined to predict when US forces would be out of Irag. President Bush has said that decision would be up to a future US president and a future Iraqi government.

The level of the forces in Iraq will depend on conditions on the ground and the recommendations of the commanders," Rumsfeld

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3



INDIAN OFFICE OF PROFIT ROW

to stop resign spree

Congress asks partymen

President lajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia stand in silence to pay tribute to the Liberation War martyrs after placing wreaths at the National Memorial in Savar vesterday.

Scientists say sea rise could be catastrophic

BBC ONLINE

Earth could be headed for catastrophic sea level rise in the next few centuries if greenhouse gases continue to rise at present rates

A study in the US journal Science suggests a threshold triggering a rise in sea level of several metres could be reached before the end of

Scientists used an ancient period of warming to predict future

Greenland could be as warm by 2100 as it was 130,000 years ago, when melting ice raised sea levels by 3-4m.

SEE PAGE 15 COL

Clue to slow human bird flu jump

BBC ONLINE

Scientists believe they may have discovered a reason why the deadly H5N1 bird flu virus cannot yet jump easily between humans

Flu viruses which target man tend to attach to cells further up the airway - maximising their chances of being passed on by coughing or

Researchers found the bird flu SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Prayer Timing		
March 27		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-45	5-20
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-20	6-25
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation

US to query Russia on reports of help to Iraq

The United States takes "very seriously" reports Russia gave Saddam Hussein intelligence after the 2003 invasion of Iraq and will raise them with Moscow, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said

"We would take very seriously any suggestion that was done, maybe to the detriment of American forces." Rice said on NBC television's "Meet the Press" programme.

"Definitely we will raise it with the Russian government," the chief US diplomat said. "I would hope the Russian government would take it verv seriously.'

A Pentagon report released Friday said Russia gave Saddam intelligence from inside the US military command on US troop movements after the invasion that led to his ouster three years ago.

Russia's SVR foreign intelli-

AFP, Washington

the Pentagon report, which said the Russians collected information from sources in the US Central Command in Doha, Qatar, and then delivered it to Saddam. Rice withheld comment on the

substance of the document, saying it required further study. "I don't have any reason to doubt or confirm the report at this point." she told Fox News television. But she added, "I would not jump

gence service however has denied

to the conclusion that, if indeed the reports are true, that it had to be Moscow-directed. Rice, who was President George

Bush's national security adviser when the Iraq war was launched, said she had been unaware of any Russian intelligence-sharing with the Iragis.

"To my recollection, I knew nothing of these reports at the time SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

CTG GARMENT SAFETY

Move on to relocate units to industrial area

ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD, Ctg

The Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) has initiated a move against the use of residential or commercial buildings for industrial purposes to prevent frequent fire incidents in garment factories.

As per its recent decision, the CDA also requested owners of garment units to shift their factories to appropriate locations gradually, a move that was criticised by many leaders of the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

They fear the drastic relocation measure might leave an adverse effect on the readymade garment

The Building Construction Committee (BCC) of the CDA in a recent drive identified 59 garment factories set-up in residential or commercial buildings without following proper safety and security measures as prescribed in National

Building Code.

They issued show-cause notices to the owners of the factories and the buildings, sources said. The notices asked why they were using residential or commercial buildings for garment factories The BCC in a letter requested

BGMEA leaders to take further step so that the buildings used for garment factories have sufficient fire extinguishing system, fire exits along with main and specious staircases. Asked about the CDA measures

BGMEA first vice-president SM Abu Tayyab told The Daily Star, "Our effort is to make all garment factories compliant, which might take some time.

"Our demand for setting up a 'garment village' remained unheeded for years. Forcing the garment factories to shift into industrial buildings overnight SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

AGENCIES, New Delhi

soon take a "joint decision" regarding the partymen involved in the office of profit controversy and asked its MPs and MLAs not to resign unnecessarily. "The stand of the Congress is

Congress on Saturday said it would

very clear. For those whose names are part of this issue, a joint decision would be taken soon," Congress General Secretary Janardhan Dwivedi told reporters

He said whatever decision is taken would be applicable to all.

On MPs and MLAs submitting their resignations as a show of support to party president Sonia Gandhi, Dwivedi said people should not resign "in a fit of emotion."

"As far as MLAs and MPs are concerned there is no need for them to resign and give any statements in a fit of emotion since they have nothing to do with this issue," he

The party General Secretary rubbished BJP's charge that Gandhi's resignation was an act of desperation, saying "there is no

"People who claim to take high

moral ground should welcome the

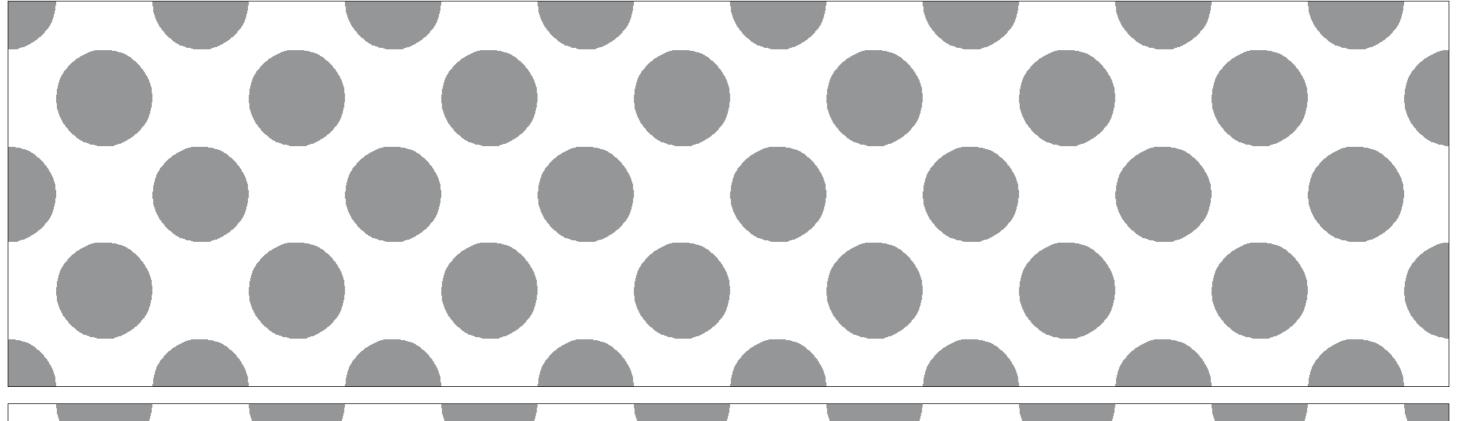
hasis in such allegations."

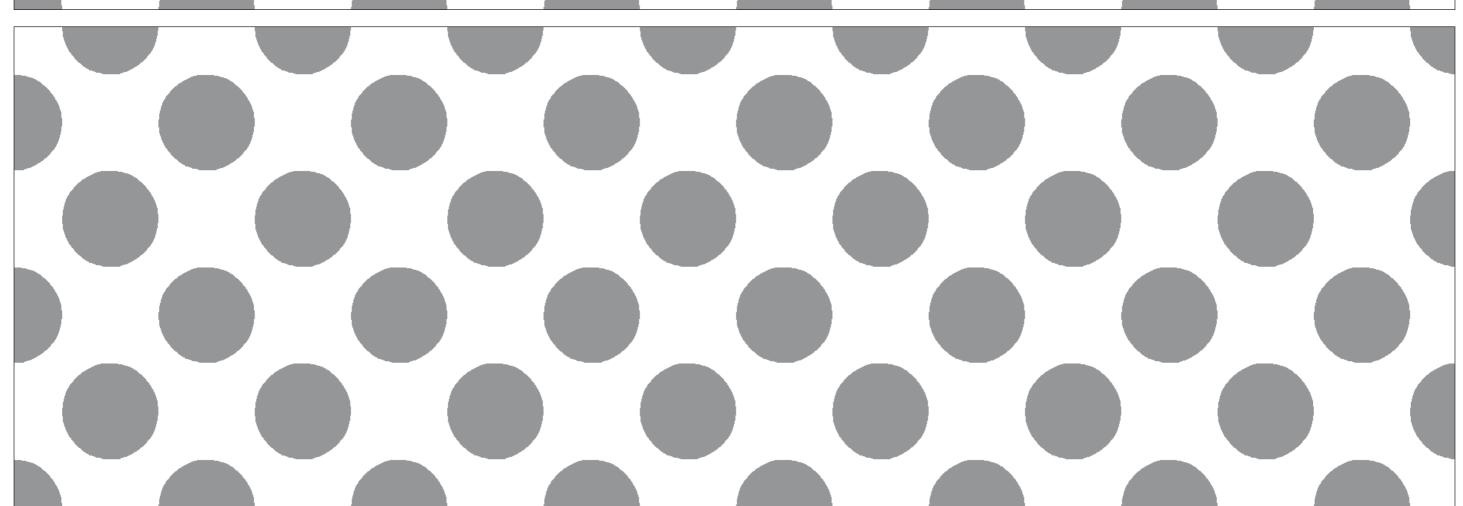
step taken by Sonia Gandhi and if they have the courage, they should accept their mistake," he added. On the issue of 'office of profit'. Dwivedi said "it is no more a matter

concerning merely the Congress, but an issue facing the entire political spectrum on which all parties have to sit together and discuss.'

Meanwhile, Indian industrialist Anil Ambani resigned Saturday from parliament over the same conflictof-interest issue that saw Congress Party leader Sonia Gandhi quit her seat two days ago, a report said.

Ambani, who heads the telecom and power companies of the **SEE PAGE 15 COL 8**





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