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## South Asian journalists' confce opens

# Press enjoys full freedom: Khaleda

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has said the press in Bangladesh now enjoys hundred per cent freedom.

She was speaking at the inaugural function of the Second South Asian Conference of Working Journalists at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka Saturday, reports BSS.

Begum Zia said that all black laws enacted by the autocratic regimes had already been replaced and all hindrances and barriers in the way of freedom of the press had been removed.

She said there were about 1200 newspapers and periodicals in the country which was an all-time record.

Begum Zia said papers were also published even from the remotest corners of the country.

The Prime Minister urged the journalists of South Asia to help promote people-to-people contact in the countries of the region for making SAARC a meaningful regional forum.

She expressed the hope that the three-day conference would "explore the possibilities of institutional framework for free flow of information in the region attaching priority to regional development and fre-

quent exchange of journalists."

"People-to-people rapport comprises the fundamental philosophy of success of any meaningful regional cooperation worth the name. Free flow of information is a pre-requisite for this kind of linkage and journalists can play a predominant role for its efficacy," she said.

Begum Zia said that SAARC had generated new momentum and optimism in our collective effort for a breakthrough in our development efforts.

"Journalists from this region can expedite this process of

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## Keeping deposits by investment houses illegal, says Saifur

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman has said that keeping deposits by the investment houses like, BCI and NCL is 'illegal', reports BSS.

Expressing surprise at the fact that people deposited money with such organisations despite the existence of branches of scheduled banks all over the country, the minister said that the Bangladesh Bank would have to look into the operations of these non-banking financial institutions and the liquidity crisis being faced by them.

Referring to the suspension of the operation of the Bangladesh Commerce and Investment (BCI) Limited by the government and the reported liquidity crisis being faced by the National Credit

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## NCL to be made scheduled bank

By Inam Ahmed and Sohel Manzur

The government has in principle agreed to allow restructuring of the National Credit Limited (NCL) into a scheduled bank, authoritative sources said.

The decision of the government would take effect provided the NCL authorities fulfil the conditions laid down in the existing law. The law provides for depositing with the Bangladesh Bank 10 per cent of the authorised capital as paid up capital.

The government decision was reached yesterday at a high level meeting held in the Finance Ministry with Finance Minister Saifur Rahman in the chair.

The meeting 'sympathetically considered' the appli-

cation of the NCL for its restructuring.

Meanwhile, the government is yet to trace the whereabouts of Mustafizur Rahman, Managing Director of Bangladesh Commerce and Investment (BCI) Ltd. Authoritative sources told The Daily Star that no sponsors of the BCI had contacted the government nor were they planning a move to salvage the worried depositors.

The government, sources said, plans to bring some amendments in the banking laws to tackle irregularities of non banking institutions like the NCL and the BCI. The Finance Minister told the emergency meeting that the Ministry of Law is to take nec-

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## PM set to visit India

By Taufique Imrose Khalidi

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will be paying a four-day official visit to India sometime in the last week of this month and a probable date of departure for New Delhi could be May 25, sources said.

According to the sources, after weeks of consultations between the officials of the two countries, the trip, up in the air for a few months, has taken shape.

Last week, Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao told a group of Bangladeshi journalists in New Delhi that he was eager to meet his Bangladeshi counterpart to discuss all the bilateral issues with a view to finding their solution.

Officials say that her talks with the Indian Prime Minister will chiefly focus on

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## Bangladesh Army starts mine clearing in Kuwait

The mine clearance operation in the sector allotted to Bangladesh Army contingent in Kuwait was formally inaugurated recently at a point beside Abdaly Road 15 km from Jahra by M Ruhul Amin, ambassador designate of Bangladesh in Kuwait, according to an ISPR press release in Dhaka Saturday, reports BSS.

The sector encompasses an area of some 3200 sq km in the north-west of Kuwait which was undertaken under an agreement between Kuwait and Bangladesh signed on November 10, 1991.

Bangladesh ambassador in his speech said that co-operation in such a field of defence was a new dimension in relations between the two countries and hoped that this phase would provide a solid foundation for wider and longer term co-operation in the day to come.

Deputy Chief of Staff, Operation and Training, Kuwait Armed Forces Brigadier Faleh Abdullah Salem al-

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## Govt ignored advice for BCI, NCL takeover

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh Bank (BB) had advised the Government to take over the management of the two deposit-taking investment companies, now in crisis, under the Company's Act two years ago, but nothing came out of its request, a well-placed source at the central bank disclosed yesterday.

The two companies are the Bangladesh Commerce and Investment Ltd (BCI) whose activities are now completely suspended under orders of BB and the National Credit Limited (NCL) which reportedly hit by a severe liquidity crisis.

The advice of BB for the takeover of the two institutions was based on the central bank's own monitoring exercise, which had revealed 'serious anomalies' in the working of both BCI and NCL.

The source declined to speculate on the refusal of the government to act on the central bank's advice, but hinted that it was probably based on political considera-

tions, backed by a section of influential officials.

In this context, the source confirmed what had been earlier indicated by an official of the Ministry of Finance that even some autonomous public sector corporations had deposited part of their funds with BCI, probably also with NCL, 'thus taking enormous risks with public money.'

'Some of these deposits may be now almost as good as lost,' the source said.

The BB sources claimed that central bank lacked the authority to take over the management of a deposit-taking institution, which could be done by the government only under the Company's Act. However, it had the power to 'suspend' the operation of BCI. But it declined to say whether the same move might be made in the case of NCL.

In this context, a BB official confirmed that the central bank had been asking for 'enhanced authority' to enable

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## Depression in Bay likely late this month

By Staff Correspondent

A depression may form in the Bay of Bengal at the end of this month while the parts of the country may be hit by a number of nor'westers and flash floods, Meteorological Office source said Saturday.

The depression would expedite the advent of rainy season in the country, a Met official said without giving details.

Dhaka and Rajshahi divisions and the regions of Jessore, Kushtia, Comilla and Sylhet may be hit by the nor'wester and parts of Sylhet may also be submerged by flash floods during the month.

Meanwhile, almost all parts of the country experienced rain early Saturday after nearly two months of drought-like situation which caused damage to Boro crops and made life unbearable.

Met Office sources said that rainfall was reported from 24 observatory centres out of 32 across the country on the day.

More than 400 millimetres of rain was recorded during the period.

This was the first such rain of the season that began in March, a Met official said adding that "available readings indicated that the rainfall would continue during the month."

Reports said that 30 per

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## 3 left parties merge tomorrow

Three left-wing political parties — Bangladesh Workers Party, United Communist League and Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal (M-L) — will merge in a single party on Monday, reports UNB.

They will hold an 'Oikya Congress' at the Engineers Institute at 10 am where the new party will be constituted.

A preparatory committee for the unity congress was formed with Rashed Khan Menon, Bimal Biswas and Khandaker Ali Abbas as joint convenors.

Committee sources told UNB they had proposed to name the united party as Workers Party.

## Dusk-to-dawn curfew in Los Angeles

# 44 killed in riots

LOS ANGELES, May 2: Heavily armed national guardsmen and police wrested back control of the streets of Los Angeles early today after three days of rioting that killed 44 people, reports Reuters.

A dusk-to-dawn curfew was enforced by more than 6,000 national guardsmen and police who perched on rooftops and marched through neighbourhoods to show they were in command.

Some scattered sniper fire was reported, but police said the city was now relatively calm.

"It's real quiet," said Marvin Kidd, a police officer assigned to Hollywood boulevard to enforce the curfew. "It is almost eerie."

About 1,900 people were injured and more than 3,700

buildings destroyed by fire in the rioting — the worst in the United States for quarter of a century.

Police said the majority of the dead were Black and Hispanic men, ranging in age from 18 to 50. Seven were killed in gun battles with police.

The death toll in Los Angeles was surpassed only by the 47 people killed in Detroit in 1967.

The violence diminished hours after President George Bush put 3,000 soldiers and 1,500 marines on alert to help local authorities.

"Let me assure you, I will use whatever force is necessary to restore order," Bush said in a televised address to the nation. "What is going on in L.A. must and will stop."

The rioting erupted on Wednesday after four White police officers were acquitted in the beating Black motorist Rodney King.

King made a public plea on Friday for an end to the violence. "We can get along here. Let's try to work it out," he said.

Reports from Hollywood says the Los Angeles riots struck at the heart of Hollywood on Thursday as an arson fire gutted shops along the celebrated Walk of Fame on Hollywood boulevard.

Fire fighters were battling the blaze at dusk not far from the famous Chinese Theatre where the footprints and handprints of the film capital's greatest stars are preserved in concrete. Police had

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## Rampage after PM's speech

# Students clash with police in Gazipur : 30 hurt

From Our Correspondent

GAZIPUR, May 2: At least 30 people were injured when students of a local college clashed with police Friday immediately after the Prime Minister's May Day speech at a workers' rally here.

Three police officials, including the local Superintendent of Police were also injured in the incident.

Witnesses said that the students of Bhawal Badre Alam College ransacked the dais at the rally organised by the Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, soon after Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia left the venue in the local Chandana Bahumukhi High School premises.

Witnesses said that the students became furious and went on the rampage after the Prime Minister's speech in which she did not declare the

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## No retrenchment without alternative job: Hasina

Awami League chief and Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Sheikh Hasina Friday called upon the people to renew their pledge to implement at any cost the objectives for which the nation had fought the Liberation War and won it through supreme sacrifices, reports BSS.

Addressing a huge workers rally at Tejgaon industrial area on the occasion of 'May Day' she described as 'unfortunate' the move of the BNP government to retrench one lakh workers.

Sheikh Hasina warned the government against such a move and said no worker should be retrenched without an alternative job. Establishment of new industries could help solve such a situation, she added.

Organised by Jatiya Sramik League, the rally was presided over by Alhaj Rahmatullah Chowdhury and it was ad-

ressed by Awami League and Sramik League leaders Begum Sajeda Chowdhury MP, Fazlul Hoq Mantu, Amir Hossain Amu, Abdul Matin Master, Mozaffar Hossain Palto, Mahmudur Rahman Mannia, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya and Advocate Sahara Khatoun.

Sheikh Hasina said she failed to understand as to what welfare the BNP government would bring to the workers by retrenching one lakh of them when the people had been affected by rise in the prices of essentials.

She said the BNP government had earlier once retrenched 11,000 bank employees throwing their families to immense sufferings.

Sheikh Hasina paid tributes to those workers who had laid down their lives in Chicago in 1886 to assert their rights and said her party would always

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# Mojaddedi hints at pardon for Najibullah

KABUL, May 2: Afghanistan's interim President Sibghatullah Mojaddedi hinted at a pardon for ousted President Najibullah yesterday, reports AFP.

"Let us forget the past," Mojaddedi said in a speech before a Friday congregation at Kabul's Pule Kishiti mosque.

"There should be a general amnesty for everybody," he added.

It was the first time he had indicated Najibullah may not be excluded from the amnesty he announced Tuesday for members of the Soviet-installed regime which has bowed out of power.

At that time, Mojaddedi said Najibullah's fate would be decided by the people.

The ousted President has been hiding in a UN compound here since April 16 when he attempted to flee the country, was stopped at the airport and stripped of his powers by members of his own regime.

Moderate Mujahideen commander Abdul Haq was seen entering the UN com-

pound later Friday. But it was not clear if his visit was connected with Najibullah's fate.

AP adds: The Afghan President promised limited equality for women on Friday, the first holy day since the new Islamic government took power.

Muslims crowded into mosques across the war-ravaged country, three days after Sibghatullah Mojaddedi and a 50-member interim council replaced the remnants of the communist government they battled for 14 years.

Hundreds of bearded men, wearing long robes and kneeling toward Mecca, recited verses from the Quran under a soaring blue-domed ceiling at Kabul's central Pul-i-Khishti mosque. Hundreds of people crowded outside the mosque to get a glimpse of their new leader.

It was Mojaddedi's first public appearance in the capital since ending his 20-year exile on Monday. He revealed some of his views on

Islamic law and the fate of ousted President Najibullah, affirming a comparatively moderate course for the world's newest Islamic state.

"The weakest nations in the world are those that have a woman as a leader," said Mojaddedi, a theology professor. "It doesn't mean that Islam is against women, on the contrary it respects them and says they are equal to men. But (history shows) that weak nations are led by women."

"But I hope there will be no misunderstanding: men and women have the same rights," he said in the mosque.

Mojaddedi, an impish man with a white beard and brown, plastic-rimmed glasses, is to lead the council for two months, then hand power to Burhanuddin Rabbani, a leader of the Jamiat-e-Islami party. After six months, new council will take over until elections are held within two years.

Speaking earlier at a special government mosque, See Page 12 Col 7



Women in purdah purchasing naan bread Saturday on a street in the Afghan capital as life slowly returns to normal following fierce fighting between rival Mujahideen factions. — AFP photo