NEWS

Govt action

ations, held the rally and cultural programme with the slogan "We want direct ballot to the reserved seats for women (in parliament) and stop all violence against women" at the Central Shaheed Minar in the afternoon.

Expressing solidarity with the slogan, prominent women's rights activists including Sultana Kamal, Salma Khan, Ayesha Khanam, Shirin Akhtar, Khushi Kabir and Salma Ali spoke on the occasion, said a press release. The International Women's Day

Celebration Committee, comprising 48 organisations, held a colourful rally at Panthakunjo early yes-terday themed "Evaluation of all work by women in all sectors."

Shahida Begum, of Nari Moitri and Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition, read out a statement at the rally demanding the recognition of household work by women in the national economy and the right of women to enter all sectors for employment, among other things.

Karmajibi Nari, a working women's initiative, held a meeting at Muktangon and brought out a procession to mark the day. The activists demanded a 16-week maternity leave with 20 percent pay, protection of women labourers in the labour laws, greater women's representation in trade unions and a stop to sexual harass-

ment in the workplace. The National Garment Workers

Defamation cases

The leaders granted anticipatory bail include Abdus Samad Azad MP, Abdul Jalil MP, Amir Hossain Amu, Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta MP, Shah AMS Kibria MP, ASHK Sadeq MP, Abdur Razzak MP, Sheikh Fazlul Karim MP, Motia Chowdhury, Abdus Shahid MP, Farooq Khan MP,

Obaidul Quader and Mukul Bose. The bench comprising Justice M Awlad Ali and Justice Abdul Awal also issued rule upon the government to explain why the accused should not

be granted regular bail. Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud, Barrister Ameer-ul-Islam, Advocate Manjil Morshed and Advocate Jahangir Hossain Selim appeared for the accused.

Federation held a 'black flag' rally women's and human rights associprotesting rape, sexual harassment and gender discrimination with

enthusiastic participation of male garments workers. Bangladesh Nari Mukti Sangsad also held a meeting echoing the SPC demand for direct polls to reserved seat for vomen in parliament.

Hills Women Federation, a women's organisation based in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, staged a rally at Chittagong yesterday and pressed for full autonomy in the hree hill districts in order to restore peace in the strife-torn highland.

Women's rights issues domi-nated colourful rallies and discusions organised by Bangladesh Sramajibi Nari Moitri, Jatiya Nari Sramik Trade Union Kendra, Vational Garment Workers and Employees Federation, Bangladesh Textile and Garment Workers eague, Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, Care, Jatiya Samaj-tantrik Dal, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Expor-ters

Association, Jubo Kormosangshan Society, Bangladesh Open Univer-sity and Community Development Library.

JS reserved seats FROM PAGE 1

2001. "We will not tolerate anything, but direct elections for women,

said Sammilito Nari Samaj in a written statement read out by Naila Khan at an emergency press con-ference at Narigrantha Prabartana. "The main hurdles to our strug

gle to achieve direct election for omen are the two leaders of the two male-dominated parties Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina."

"This is a war. We will not com romise our demand for direct polls to women seats in parlia-ment," said Farida Akhtar, executive director of Ubinig. "Proportionate distribution of

the seats is aimed at appeasing women in the two parties ----Akhtar said. Hajera Sultana of Sammilito

Nari Samaj also protested the government move at a press conerence.

"We have seen women being elected to Union Parishads. If they can do it there, they are sure to participate in national level polls." Khaleda Khatun, Shamsunnahar Josna and Johura Parvin were also present.

The signing reduced the risk of a

damaging confrontation between

Kurds and Shi'ites, and ensured

that U.S. plans for the sovereignty

born religious scholar, has increas-

ingly exerted his influence on

Sistani, a 73-year-old Iranian-

transfer remain on schedule.

politics in recent months.

Iraq leaders sign

FROM PAGE 1

year.

They announced on Sunday that Sistani still had deep reservations about the document but had given them the go-ahead to sign it rather than appear as spoilers. Some indicated they hoped to undo some clauses in a permanent constitution to be drawn up next

He had previously objected to "We will do our best to change the situation," said Hamid al-Bayati, a senior official of the the US timetable for handing back power, forcing the Americans to bring forward planned elections. Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Irag, a top Shia party. "We are committed to what we

t if we have th hance to Italy keen to help in police reforms UNB, Dhaka

> Italian Ambassador to Bangladesh Dr Pietro Ballero called on Home Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury at his secretariat office yesterday.

They discussed matters of mutual interest, including assistance from the European Union and the Italian government, for police reforms in Bangladesh and security cooperation between the two friendly countries in the context of global war on terrorism.

Besides, collaboration between the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and the elite security forces of Italy and intergovernmental coopera-tion in checking drug, gold and arms smuggling also came up for discussion

Terming Italy as an important development partner of Bangladesh, the home minister expressed satisfaction at the existing eco-nomic, social and political ties between the two countries and hoped that the bonds of friendship would be further strengthened in the days to come.

Father stabbed for protesting teasing of daughter

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Hoodlums stabbed an elderly father of a college-girl indiscriminately at about 10:30 on Sunday night as he protested at teasing his daughter.

Shukkur Ali, 50, of Laxmankhola in Bandar was admitted to Narayanganj General Hospital with several stabs.

Police arrested one Suman, 22, in this connection. A case was filed with Bandar

Police Station.

Rare Syria rights demo broken up

BBC ONLINE

arrested vesterday

reforms

Hamas vows vengeance for 14 Gaza deaths

stuck.

the strip if peace efforts remained

tioning itself to claim withdrawal as a victory -- Israel by pounding the

militants hard before a pullout, and

Sunday's raid of the Bureij camp appeared mainly aimed at drawing

out militants; troops found no weap

Alon Ben-David, military com-

mentator for Israel TV's Channel 10,

said the purpose of such raids is to

"kill as many armed Palestinians as

ducted the oath on October 9.

display of the portraits.

alter the constitution.

political stage.

parliament

unnecessary.

Golam Mohammad Kader, a lawmaker of Ershad-led Jatiya

Party, pegged the quick oath plan as

absurd and sharply criticised the government for proportionate

distribution of women's reserved seats among parliamentary parties.

"Hanging of portraits will bring no good to Bangladesh, but sharply

divide the nation and breed further

chaos and confrontation on the

of the Workers Party, criticised the

government for initiating a move to

consensus that the reserved women

seats will be raised to at least 60 and direct elections to the constituen-

cies will be held through an amend-ment to the constitution."

"With the proportionate seat distribution proposal," he said, "the

government treated women as a commodity that could be shared in

He termed the portrait plan 'funny' and the quick oath proposal

Local government expert Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar said the

mandatory dissolution of local government bodies was a 'small

tep' to strengthen the organisa

Rashed Khan Menon, president

"All political parties reached a

He also flayed the provision for

"It's a ritual in which everything is

ons and made no arrests.

Each side now seems to be posi-

REUTERS, Gaza City

Hamas threatened revenge yesterday, after 14 Palestinians were killed in the deadliest Israeli raid in Gaza in 17 months -- part of an upsurge in bloodshed linked to a proposed Israeli withdrawal from the coastal strip.

Among the dead were 11 mili-tants and three boys between the ages of 8 and 15, and 81 people were wounded. The fighting near the Bureij refugee camp Sunday pitted hundreds of Palestinians with assault rifles, anti-tank missiles and grenade launchers against Israeli snipers and troops firing from helicopters and tanks.

In new fighting yesterday, a 16year-old Palestinian was killed by army fire.

pre-planned. The army goes in, stations its snipers, then a convoy of armored vehicles moves in," Ben-The spike of violence in Gaza two recent Israeli air strikes and a David told Israel Army Radio. "The Palestinians don't see the snipers, they begin to fire on armored complex attack on an Israeli army post by militants -- came weeks after İsraeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon vehicles, and then they get hit.

Amendment move

FROM PAGE 1

betraying with the demands of women as well as people in gen-

The women community demanded raising reserved seats in parliament to 64 and direct election to the seats, he said.

About mandatory display of the president and the prime minister's portraits in government, semigovernment and autonomous offices, Jalil alleged 'ill political motives' were at the core of the move.

On the proposal for administering the oath of office to lawmakerselect in three days after the polls by the speaker or by the chief election commissioner in next three days in case of speaker's failure, former speaker Abdul Hamid said: " It's an absurd, meaningless provision. It's a farce

"The constitution clearly explains every details on the issue and nothing new needs to be added."

He said it would not be possible to conduct oath in three days after the polls as the Election Commission needs three to four days to publish the election results in gazettes.

"We will not tolerate anything, but direct elections for women. said Sammilito Nari Samaj in a Syrian police have broken up a rare written statement read out by Naila protest by human rights activists Khan at an emergency press conferdemanding political and civil ence at Narigrantha Prabartana.

for perfection of the amendment,

Law, Justice and Parliamentary

Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed

Moudud told journalists that

increasing women's reserved seats

was a vital poll pledge of the BNP-

parliament will have a woman

legislator, according to a proposal that changes Article 65 of the consti-

the elections to women's seats will

take place after the elections to 300

dates for the seats up for propor-

The government decided to intro-

duce the provision of reserved seats for the remaining period of the

eighth parliament, amending Article 23 of the Fourth Schedule of

The parties will nominate candi-

"The government is committed

WOMEN'S SEATS

A high official of the Election At least seven of a small group staging a peaceful sit-in in front of the parliament in Damascus were Commission termed the quick swearing-in proposal as 'funny', saying his office needed two or three days to publish election results in gazettes.

The protest was organised to mark the anniversary of the Baath After the last general elections on October 1, 2001, the Election Commission published the gazettes by October 6 and the speaker conparty's rise to power in 1963. Organisers have also been

said.

run 10

tution.

general seats.

tional distribution.

the constitution.

PORTRAITS

foreign missions.

INTERIM MEASURE

circulating a petition urging President Bashar al-Assad to release political prisoners and lift the state of emergency.

Constitution change The protest against the emergency laws in place for 41 years was organised by the Committees for Defence of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights in tions. Syria "We don't want to amend the constitution in 11 minutes as

Rangpur hospital interns agree to call off strike OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur said he would withdraw from most of

Intern doctors at Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH) agreed to pull out from the strike temporarily following a meeting among the leaders of Intern Doctors Assothe armed groups by stepping up attacks to create the impression they are chasing the Israelis out. ciation, BMA, DAB and the director of RMCHvesterdaymorning.

The Director of RMCH said that he had talked to the health secretary over telephone and apprised him of the problems for which the intern doctors went into an indefinite strike.

The secretary assured him of taking immediate steps to solve those problems, he added

Meanwhile, a press release issued by the Intern Doctors Association of RMCH stated that the strike was withdrawn till April 8,as the authority agreed to meet their demands.

The intern doctors joined their duty from yesterday noon, sources at the RMCH confirmed.

Earlier on March 6, the Intern Doctors Association of RMCH began an indefinite strike demanding regular payment of their monthly salary, security measures, and adequate seats in the hostels.

Benapole port strike rolls to fifth day

mandatory elections to local gov-ernment bodies in 90 days after their automatic dissolution on STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna of tenures and mandatory

> The government has incurred a loss of Tk 10 crore in revenue in the last four days as export-import between Bangladesh and India through Benapole land port remained suspended since Friday due to an indefinite strike enforced by the Indian Clearing and Forwarding (C&F) Agents Association

Similarly, the strike caused a loss of Tk 60 crore to the Indian government during the same period

The Indian C&F agents went on the strike to protest what they said were excesses by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) at Petrapole border, on the other side of Benapole.

On March 3, the BSF imposed restriction on the movement of C&F officials of both the countries without multiple visa.

Indian FS FROM PAGE 12

"There are a lot of problems including intervention of lawmakis due to take place in Bangladesh next year. Your leaders have

ers in union parishad affairs, scarexpressed their desire to work city of funds and resources. Resolution of the problems is key to strengthening the local government closely with India to make the

summit preparations successful." Shashank said: "India's longstanding desire to have close and friendly relations with Bangladesh is borne out by the broad political consensus that exists in India on the importance of further deepening the close and cordial relations

Trauma linked to coronary disease

sense'.

more sticky.

on the event.

Dr Jim Bolton, consultant psy-chiatrist at St Helier Hospital in

South London said the study 'makes

"We often tend to think these

Symptoms of PTSD include

intrusive memories, troubling nightmares, and constant dwelling

Sufferers also become 'hypervigilant', where they are constantly on the look out, or

Psychiatrists can treat people

BBC ONLINE

Post-traumatic stress disorder increases the risk of heart disease, a studyshows

things are all in the mind. What we think are psychological effects can Research from the New York Academy of Medicine found people have significant effects on the body," he told BBC News Online. with trauma were up to six times more likely to suffer a heart attack.

He said depression and anxiety Dr Joseph Boscarino looked at 12 studies involving 50,000 people exposed to urban disasters, war, are common in people with PTSD. "Anxiety and depression have an child abuse and sexual assault.

effect on heart rate, it may be that Rates were even higher for those they can make the heart more who also suffered anxiety and vulnerable to irregular beats. They can also increase the risk of blood depression clotting, by making the platelets

Dr Boscarino used a study nvolving veterans of the Vietnam var to highlight his findings.

In this study, 2,490 men were xamined 17 years after serving in combat.

It found 54 suffered post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while 30 showed signs of having become anxious when something acts as a reminder. experienced a heart attack.

They determined this by looking for Q-wave infarctions, a tell tale with the disorder by cognitive therapy, which helps the patient to sign of a heart attack, in electrocardiograms (ECGs).

502 species had populations less

world's countries and territories

But it said some regions held

particularly high densities of

ropical Andes, Atlantic forests of

threatened species such as the

Brazil, the eastern Himalayas,

eastern Madagascar and the archi-

BirdLife International, a world-

vide alliance of conservation

groups, released the report to

coincide with the start of an inter-

national conference, which began

on Sunday in the eastern South

farming had played havoc with

biodiversity and could ring the

death knell for many bird species.

The report said uncontrolled

"Brazil alone has over 20,000

quare kilometres (8,000 square

miles) of coffee plantation, most of

it having replaced primary rain-forest. In Indonesia, coffee plant-

FROM PAGE 1

African port city of Durban.

pelagos of south-eastern Asia.

hosted one or more globally threat-

FROM PAGE 12

ened bird species.

Dr Boscarino found that 7% of men with PTSD had suffered a heart attack, compared to 1% of those without PTSD. file the memories away and move on Dr Bolton said it was important to treat people early on, as the

He took into account factors condition can last for years. "Some of my patients are WW II veterans who are still suffering post such as lifestyle, smoking, substance abuse, age, race, economic status and personality. traumatic stress disorder," he said.

One in 8 of world

ing is responsible for massive forest oss, even in protected areas.

than 2,500. About 77 species had Of the 7,500 sites in nearly 170 populations lower than 50. countries identified as important The study said nearly all the

bird areas -- Africa fared badly. Birdlife said habitat clearance for agriculture threatened more than 50 percent of the important

bird areas in the world, with shifting agriculture adding pressure. Europe also fared badly on this

count with the report blaming agricultural expansion for threatening 32 percent of the estimated 4,000-odd important bird areas there

Other factors exacerbating the

problem were pollution, forest

ires, climate change and trading in

The study called for coordinat-

ing environmental actions across

nations, and setting up local

groups to protect bird species from

such local groups had been set up

in 10 countries, adding that "such

local involvement can lead to

significant conservation benefit.'

mended that Biman's old aircraft.

Boeing 737s by April-end as their

Civil Aviation Minister Mir

Nasiruddin could not be reached

for his comment o the purchase

plan despite repeated attempts.

lease agreement expires.

It said in Africa, more than 60

birds, Birdlife said.

dying out.

alter it in the future, we will do our best.

Under a US timetable, an Iraqi government is to take over sover eignty on June 30 and elections for a transitional assembly are to be held by the end of next January.

The main point at issue was a clause that could allow Iraq's minority Kurds to veto the perma nent constitution if it fails to enshrine their right to autonomy in three northern provinces.

"I'm very happy with the out come of the visit our brothers made to holy Najaf and their visit with the religious authorities," Governing Council member Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan told Reuters.

He said winning Sistani's approval for the signing was "a huge victory for the law, for the Iraqi people and their unity"

Back to the wall

rising tide of poor people are resorting to illegal logging and poaching.

"We live from hand to mouth catching fish fry, but the ban has put us out of work. So when our children cry for food, we have no choice but to pick up the axe and head for the forest. We are helpless and you people can not save the forest staying at the capital, unless the govern-

ment finds an alternative means of livelihood for us," said Abdul Latif of Joymuni village under Chandpai range

During a recent field trip to the village, this correspondent found conceded that people there cannot afford rice daily

"Today I cooked rice and kochu (a sort of arum). But we can't have rice every day and eat boiled potatoes with salt," said a jobless Momtaz Begum, who used to eke out a living from netting shrimp. Other poor families of the village have the same story to tell as do the people of neighbouring villages of Sundartala, Banshtala, Chila, Haldibuniya and Kaan Mari.

Even last year, these families harvested 10 to 12 maunds of aman paddy per bigha, but this year per bigha yield was only two to three maunds.

Lutfar Rahman Sana, a money created by its own people. lender of Joymuni, does not know how to get back his money from borrowers -- mostly shrimp fry catchers. "I know they do not have any source of income to pay me back," he said.

Open market to sell flour

UNB, Dhaka

In the wake of a sharp rise in market

rates, the government kicks off today open market sale of ata (wheat flour) from 50 select shops in the city for the consumers to

have the foodstuff at fair price. Each of the 2-kg packet will be sold at Tk 28, an official announce

ment said yesterday. The shops are at Karwan Bazar, Mohammadpur Town Hall market, New Market, Polashi Bazar, Mirpur-1 and 11 markets Aminbazar, Shantinagar Bazar, Fakirerpul bazar, Jatrabari Bazar, Goran Bazar and Bangladesh Secretariat Coope-rative.

"Unless the government can

at the Sundarbans, Environment

and Forest Minister Shajahan Siraj

acknowledged the gravity of the

chastity...Mimi, Simi, Mohima,

Fahima and thousands of names

could be mentioned who sacrificed

their lives following torture,

The AL chief also blamed the

prime minister for unabated cor-

ruption, politicisation of adminis-

tration, violation of human rights

Referring to price hike of pow-dered milk and other essential

commodities, she said mothers are

today worried as the government is "careless" about the price spirals

Chaired by Mohila AL President Ashrafunnesa Mosharraf, the

meeting was addressed, among

others, by Ivy Rahman, Fazilatunnesa Indira, Shaheen Laskar, Shaheda Tarek and Apu

and torture on journalists.

requesting anonymity.

Hasına

FROM PAGE 12

Hasina said.

Organisers had been summoned by state security for ques-tioning several times in recent

However they said on Sunday they would not be intimidated.

Monday saw riot police standing guard and the demonstrators were outnumbered intelligence officers in civilian clothes and black leather jackets.

One man raised a banner reading "Freedom for Prisoners of Opinion and Conscience" - but it was quickly torn up by agents, the led alliance voted into office in 2001. Associated Press reported.

About 20 minutes into the protest, the main organiser, Aktham Naisse, was detained along with several others. Protest symbol

FROM PAGE 12

tions yesterday to protest the attack on Azad, also a professor of Bangla at the Dhaka University (DU).

arrange for an alternative source of income for these desperately poor The academic stalemate at the DU entered its 10th day yesterday as people, it will be impossible to save teachers continued their strike to the forest," said a forest official protest the terror attack on their colleague Prof Azad and to press home a number of relevant At the inauguration ceremony of demands. the recently concluded tiger census

The demands include sending Azad abroad for treatment, immedi ate arrest of his 'real attackers' and resignation of the home minister.

situation saying alternative Bangladesh Chhatra League employment opportunities should have been created for local resi-(BCL), student wing of main opposition party Awami League, also brought out a procession and held a dents over the years after independence. "But the governments have failed to do that," the minister rally on the campus demanding immediate arrest of the 'real attackers' of Azad.

It threatened to lay siege to the vice-chancellor's office today if BCL leader Abu Abbas arrested in connection with the attack on Azad is not released by 12 noon.

Left-leaning Progotishil Chhatra Jote and Samajtantrik Chhatra Front also brought out separate proces-sions and held rallies on the campus demanding immediate release of their leaders and arrest of Azad's attackers.

Meanwhile, some 50 students under the banner of General Students Fourth Year (Old) brought out a procession and held a rally demanding completion of their honours finals by April 20 so that they could sit for the 25th BCS (Bangladesh Civil Service) examinations.

At a press conference at the DUCSU (Dhaka University Central Students' Union) building, they also demanded restoration of normal academic atmosphere on the campus.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The cabinet approved a proposal to frame a law on automatic dissolution of local government bodies to happened during the introduction clear way for regular elections every of one-party BKSAL (Bangladesh five years. Krishak-Sramik Awami League), We An administrator in government service will take over on the expiry of take time to go through the changes

local bodies' tenures in a provision that made their next polls mandatory in 90 days.

Moudud said the provision changing Article 59 of the constitution came after many elected local bodies staggered into two to three terms without elections because of egal roadblocks.

The provision of the 45 seats will Under the new provision, legal barriers and pending cases will not prevent dissolution of the organisayears from next general elections due in 2006. A party commanding at least eight lawmakers in tions

SWEARING-IN The government also approved an amendment to Article 123 of the

constitution, making it mandatory for the outgoing speaker to swear in lawmakers-elect in three days after elections.

In the event of the speaker's failure, the chief election commissioner will swear in the lawmakers in the following three days.

Moudud said the provision was designed to end repeat of the delay the outgoing speaker of the seventh parliament made in swearing in awmakers of the eighth parliament.

The sixth change in the set is the amendment to Article 82 of the constitution to correct its wrong translation

ELECTIONS

The minister said the government went back to indirect elections to the reserved seats after long discus-

He said direct polls have three to four formulas, but over two years of discussions in different forums in and outside the government and with civil society members and nongovernmental organisations made the direct elections for women look

The minister observed that women in Bangladesh are still not in mainstream politics and the government decided to create an atmosphere for direct elections in 10 years.

"We are introducing this consti-

between our two countries, for the mutual benefit of our peoples.'

He was received at the airport by Foreign Secretary Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury. Indian High Commi-ssioner in Dhaka Veena Shikri was present.

Three hurt

FROM PAGE 12 his wrists blown up and chest, head and face hit by splinters while Kamal received splinter injuries all over his body. Doctors said Liton's condition is critical.

All the injured are kept under police watch at the DMCH.

Doctors plan FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, Azad's wife Latifa Kohinoor said, "His condition is better than it was two days back, now he speaks clearer than before.

"According to doctors' suggestion, we are helping him walk a few steps and massaging his body when we see him," she said, adding their daughters and son, the writer's aunt and a uncle also visited him in the morning.

Author of over 50 books, the versatile writer, also professor of Bangla at Dhaka University, was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital after two youths stabbed him with machetes near Bangla Academy when he came out of Ekushey Book Fair to go to his Fuller Road residence on February 27 night.

To ensure better treatment, the government later shifted Azad to the CMH the same night where he has been kept at ICU since then.

The hospital authorities yesterday also allowed Inspector Kazi Abdul Malek of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to talk to him yesterday. Earlier, the authorities turned down his prayers four times.

"I just exchanged pleasantries and expressed my sympathy towards him today. I had to cut short as he is not totally OK," Malek told The Daily Star.

"Since all his laboured words can not be understood, I have decided to see him a few days later to learn about the incident," the CID inspector said.

However, hospital authorities are yet to allow visit of Azad's publisher Osman Gani whom the injured writer wanted to see several times

Group Ltd of Indonesia, the lone specially the age-old DC-10s, participant in the tender, which should be replaced immediately quoted \$ 2.97 million for two F-28s. with new generation aircraft to The proposal will be sent to the rescue the airline from further loss.

Biman plans

airline board soon for approval. Seeking anonymity, a high As if it is not enough to turn Biman official said the F28s will be Biman into an airline with an aging procured as an interim arrangefleet, the state-owned company is ment to fill the vacuum of two ATPs also planning to buy a 20-year-old that have been sold in January. The Boeing 747 of Kuwait Airways. airline will also be without its two

Two political pressure groups inside Biman, one headed by a minister and another backed by a flight engineer with strong connection, are influencing the purchase decisions, which insiders say would up the carrier's losses.

Biman, reeling under a debt-Bush, Blair equity ratio of 78:22 and a cumulative loss of Tk 856 crore, counts a FROM PAGE 12 large amount for maintenance of inspectors scouring the Iraqi counits 15-aircraft fleet, most of them tryside. built in the early 1980s.

"A number of intelligence services, including the French, were convinced that weapons of The addition of the F28s, manufactured in 1977, will further increase the maintenance cost, mass destruction remained in Iraq, sources said. A sound business but we had no evidence showing organisation must have a miniit," Blix wrote. mum 60:40 debt-equity ratio.

But he quoted French President The decision also goes against Jacques Chirac, staunchly opposed Biman's fleet modernisation plan, to war, as saying intelligence serwhich recommends procurement vices sometimes "intoxicate each other. of new generation planes to

Nearly a year after the invasion and overthrow of Saddam, the expand operation and earn profit. The Public Expenditure Review coalition has not found illegal Commission recently recomweapons in Iraq.

NCBs fail to rein

FROM PAGE 1

actually given Tk 3,021 crore in loan and their lending growth in that case stands at 7,93 percent," said a central bank official

The operating cost of these four banks grew Tk 51 crore to Tk 1,000 crore last year -- Sonali Bank's cost went up Tk 7 crore to Tk 368 crore, Janata Bank Tk 23 crore to Tk 298 crore, Agrani Tk 13 crore to Tk 219 crore, Rupali Tk 6 crore to Tk 113 crore.

Explaining the reasons for the cost hike, an Agrani Bank official said, "The government awarded 10 percent dearness allowance to the bank employees last year and increased power tariff significantly. These two factors alone accounted for a significant cost

rise. But central bank officials believe there were areas where the banks could have slashed operating cost. For instance, he said, the high transport cost forms a good portion of the operating expenses. A Janata Bank official admitted

that cutting transport cost could help. "We have decided to convert all our vehicles to run on CNG. This will stop fuel pilferage and save huge cost.

On the recovery front, the banks realised Tk 1,736 crore, Tk 1,026 crore less than 2002.

"This has happened because of the new loan rescheduling policy that has made loan rescheduling very difficult. Many borrowers who typically reschedule their loan by partially returning credit instal-ments (and later defaulted on repayment of the entire sum) did not turn up at the banks during this time," said a Sonali Bank official.

He said the banks have miserably failed to maintain their capital with capital shortfall widening Tk 308 crore to Tk 1,765 crore. The provision shortfall of the banks also grew Tk 631 crore to Tk 4,890 crore.

"This has happened because new loan defaulters surfaced last year," said a Sonali Bank official.

MOUDUD ON INDIRECT sions on the issue.

The cabinet also approved the proposal to hang the portraits of only president and the prime minister in offices of government, semigovernment and autonomous organisations in a new clause under unrealistic at the moment.

The president's portrait will be hung only in the offices of president, speaker and Bangladesh foreign missions abroad and the prime minister's in all offices, including those of president, speaker and

He said it is difficult for the candidates to seek votes from a huge pool of voters. "The numbers will be 13 to 15 lakh for each woman candiconstitutional provision for the date if we go for direct elections to the reserved seats ...

Article 4 of the constitution.

portraits as a step to end contro-versy over hanging portraits of leaders in the wake of political changeover.

tutional provision to end controversy.

The law minister hailed the

to ensure women's empowerment and will introduce reserved seats for them with the previous provision of indirect elections. The demand for direct polls to reserved seats is not realistic in current context,' Moudud said. The proposed bill allows no constituency for the reserved seats: