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"They want to remove govt unconstitutionally"

PM accuses AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

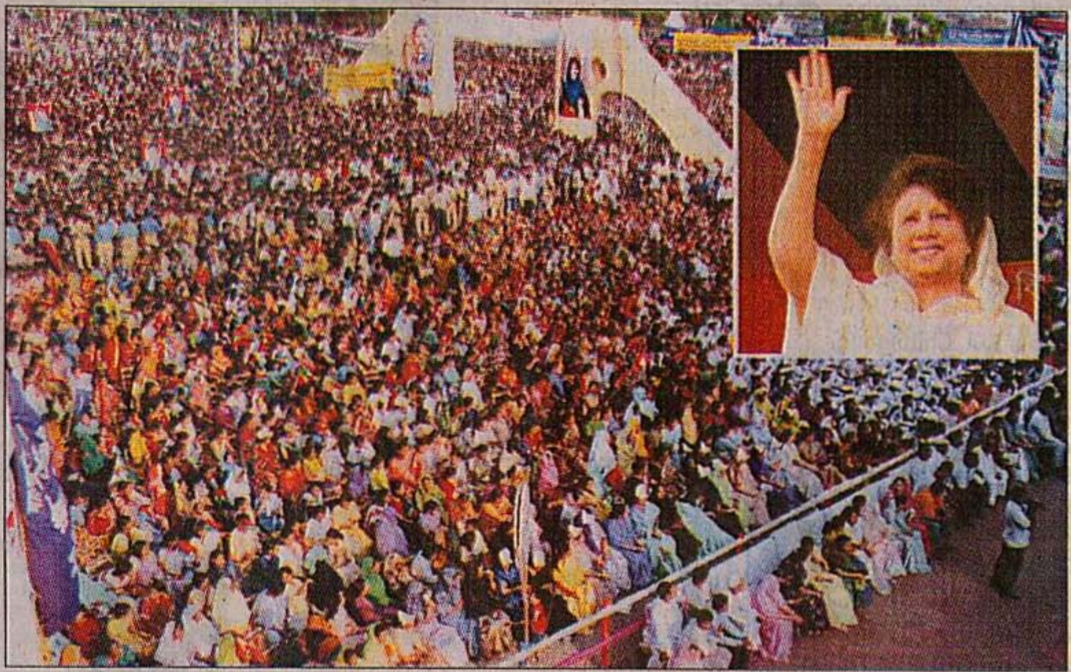
Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said some political parties and individuals were conspiring against Bangladesh with the intent of jeopardising democracy and warned them that the four-party alliance along with people would foil the schemes.

"The conspirators are not only bent on toppling the BNP-led alliance government, but also destroying democracy earned through a long struggle," added Khaleda, also the chairperson of the BNP.

"They want to remove the government unconstitutionally and undemocratically," she said.

There would be no more chances of saying, "I am not unhappy," the premier said quoting what she meant was a statement of Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina to BBC Radio after the military takeover in 1982.

Without naming the Awami
SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia waves at a crowd during her public rally near Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

BGMEA slates bomb attacks on Mannan's factories

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) has condemned the recent bomb attacks on the readymade garment industries owned by Sunman Group in Chittagong.

Without mentioning the name of Major (ret'd) Abdul Mannan, who owns the industries, the Board of Directors of the BGMEA in its first meeting in Chittagong yesterday sought government intervention to prevent recurrence of such "terrorist acts".

Mannan resigned from parliament and the ruling BNP on March 10 in protest at what he said was a serious failure of the coalition government. Later, he joined the alternative political stream of former President Badruddoza Chowdhury as its member secretary.

Held at the BGMEA office in the port city with its new President Anisul Haq in the chair, the meeting vented serious concern at the deteriorating law and order and "unstable political situation" of the country.

The apex body of the garment manufacturers and exporters is also
SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

DEFAULT LOAN RECOVERY Govt's share poses problem for NCBs

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The intense loan recovery drive the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) launched recently appears stumbling at the very beginning as the government alone holds about half the total outstanding loan lying with their top defaulters.

Different government bodies have 42 percent of the total of the four NCBs' top 20 default loans outstanding with them.

The top government loan defaulters include the food ministry (Tk 430 crore loan with two NCBs), Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation (Tk 345 crore with three NCBs), Adamjee Jute Mills (Tk 126 crore), Khulna Newsprint Mills (Tk 74 crore with one NCB) and Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (Tk 60 crore with a bank).

The remaining 58 percent of NCBs' top 20 default loans, lying with the private sector, is also almost beyond their reach as most defaulters have already obtained stay orders from the High Court on the banks' loan recovery attempts.

Defaulters at present hold up Tk 10,575 crore in outstanding loans

with the NCBs -- Sonali, Rupali, Janata and Agrani banks. Of them, the top 20 defaulters of the NCBs together have Tk 3,488 crore or 33 percent of the total.

The public sector borrowers that are on the top 20 lists have been holding up loans for a maximum of 13 years and minimum of four years.

Bankers allege recovery attempts by the NCBs appear to be overlooked by the government borrowers. "All we can do is repeatedly urge the government offices concerned to return our loans," says an official of Rupali Bank, with which the government has Tk 295 crore default loan. "If the government doesn't repay us, we've nothing to do," he added.

A finance ministry official noted, "There had been no discussion at our level on how or when these default loans will be repaid. We have sought assistance from the World Bank in this regard under its Banks Modernisation Project."

Some odd names appear among the top government defaulting bodies such as Bangladesh Autorickshaw Chalak Samabaya
SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Blair planning snap polls later this year

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair is considering a snap general election later this year, around 20 months earlier than the deadline for the poll, a newspaper report said yesterday.

Blair has warned senior officials in his ruling Labour Party to be ready for a possible election in October, said the generally Labour-supporting Daily Mirror newspaper.

The early election is being considered due a mood of increased optimism that the party could be returned to power for a third consecutive time, the paper said.

Labour lawmakers had been ordered to make sure that all their campaign literature is up to date by the summer, one told the Daily Mirror. "There is a growing sense that October is no longer out of the question," the unnamed parliamentarian said.

Blair must hold a general election by mid-2006 at the latest, but is able, like all British prime ministers, to pick his own date for maximum electoral advantage.

Although Blair's popularity has taken a battering over his support for the US-led war in Iraq, opposed by many Britons, opinion polls show that the main opposition Conservative Party remains unpopular.

FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF IRAQ INVASION Anti-war protesters swarm across globe

AFP, London

Anti-war activists were taking to the streets in cities around the world yesterday to mark the first anniversary of the US-led invasion of Iraq, but organizers were not counting on the massive turnout seen at pre-war rallies.

The biggest crowds in Europe were expected in Britain, Spain and Italy, whose governments backed US President George W. Bush's call to war to oust Saddam Hussein despite massive public opposition.

In London, two anti-war demonstrators climbed to the top of London's landmark Big Ben clock tower early Saturday, as opponents of the US-Anglo invasion of Iraq prepared to kick off a march from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square at noon (1200 GMT) to demand an end to the occupation of the oil-country.

The Stop the War Coalition, which helped bring more than one million people into the streets on London in February 2003 to denounce the Iraq war, said tens of thousands of people were expected

to join Saturday's march.

British news channel Sky showed pictures of two men, perched at the level of the clock more than 45 metres (150 feet) from the ground. They were roped together and appeared to have climbing equipment.

In Spain, thousands of people, with the horrors of last week's Madrid train bombings fresh in their minds, were expected to join anti-war marches.

The attacks by suspected Islamic
SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

B Chy sits on SC footpath, stages hunger strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and his supporters yesterday sat on the footpath in front of the Supreme Court to observe a mass hunger strike protesting attacks on his alternative political stream by the ruling BNP on March 11.

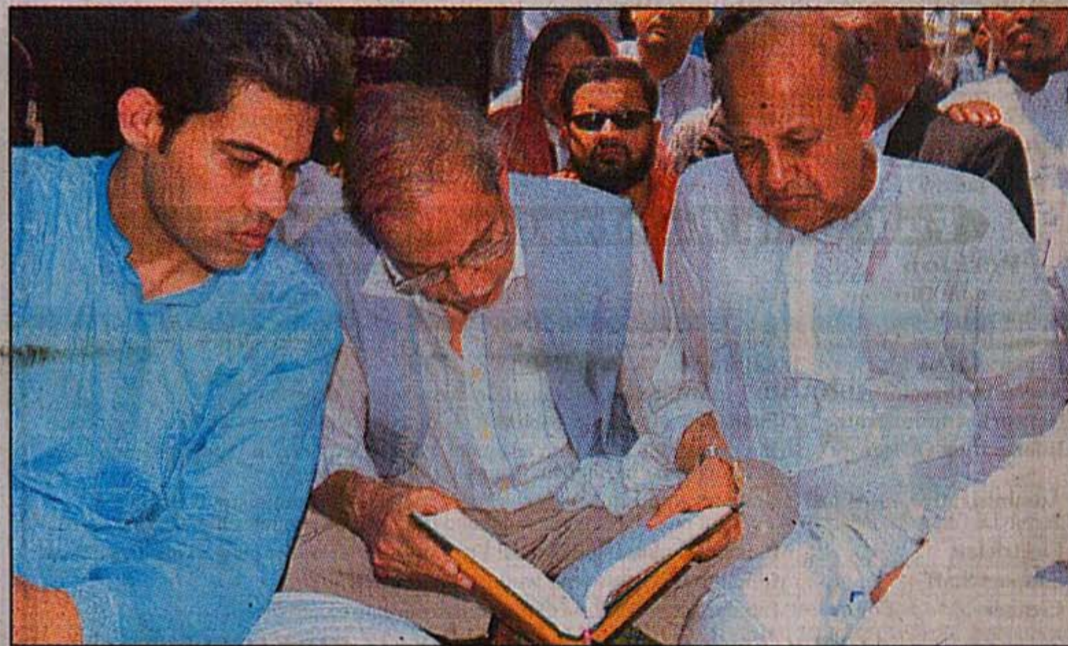
He however had to shift the venue of strike from the National Press Club to the main gate of the Supreme Court (SC) due to police obstruction.

At the end of the fasting,


Badruddoza in a short address to the crowd hit back at Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, saying that it's not his alternative stream that will become ineffective, instead her government will soon end up being so.

"After its total failure to run the state, the government is now violating the constitution by infringing people's rights to expression, free movement and staging rally," he alleged, asking people to force down the government.

"Although it came to power with people's mandate, the government
SEE PAGE 14 COL 5



Alternative political stream convenor AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury recites from the Quran as his platform leaders Mahi Chowdhury, left, and Abdul Mannan listen during their hunger strike in front of the Supreme Court yesterday.



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Cash-strapped DCC seeks anti-mosquito drive funds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has sought an allocation of Tk 25 crore from the finance ministry in the face of a fund crunch in carrying out a round-the-year mosquito eradication drive.

Recently the DCC has sent a Demand Order (DO) to the finance ministry, with a view to securing a fund for operating the anti-mosquito drives, a DCC official said.

Mosquito control was once a responsibility of the Department of Public Health. But later the DCC was assigned, without any additional monetary allocation, to do the job.

Though the city's civic service provider requires Tk 50 crore every year to achieve success in anti-mosquito drive, it manages to spend Tk 12 crore in this regard, only to continue the drive in a pretty limited scale, DCC source said.

DCC does not tax the city dwellers for its mosquito eradication programmes, rather it depends on its own source of revenue, the source added.

Under the mosquito eradication plan 2003-2004, DCC has purchased one lakh and 50,000 litres of adulticide, 21,000 litres of larvicide, and 50,000 litres of Malaria Oil-B to
SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

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IDLC congratulates the M. M. Ispahani Management Team and also recalls the contributions of Late Mirza Mehdy Ispahani (Sadri), the Chairman (1949-2004) of Ispahani Group of Companies.

committed to you

4th Indo-Pak ODI today

BBC ONLINE, undated

India coach John Wright wants his players to reproduce the gritty performance of their first one-dayer against Pakistan in today's clash.

Pakistan took a 2-1 lead in the

five-match series after a four-wicket win in Peshawar on Friday.

But Wright, whose side won in Karachi by five runs, insists all is not lost.

"Pakistan have won two in a row,
SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

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