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## Mass arrests stopped

### Govt believes 'conspiracy' foiled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday apparently stopped mass arrests and asked the police not to harass the innocent after more than 15,000 people were arrested in an eight-day dragnet.

According to a home ministry decision, additional forces were withdrawn from bus, launch and rail stations where most people were arrested in the run-up to the April 30 deadline of the main opposition Awami League (AL) for unseating the coalition government.

Despite the instruction to halt the arrest spree, police on the last

day of sweeps detained 162 people in the capital yesterday, far down from 2,000 on average a day immediately after the launch of the raids.

A police headquarters source told The Daily Star that the home ministry instruction was relayed to police officials early yesterday.

The drive to arrest opposition leaders and activists and workers of a non-governmental organisation (NGO), Proshika, began on April 18, as the government believed the NGO had a role in AL's demonstration to dislodge the BNP-led coalition two and a half years ahead of the expiry of its five-year term.

Intelligence sources told The

Daily Star that the government issued the directive to put a brake on mass arrests after intelligence agencies 'confirmed' the Proshika network collapsed and one of its key officials admitted to his role in the alleged ploy.

An intelligence official quoted a remanded deputy director of Proshika as telling the joint interrogation cell that the NGO planned to aid the main opposition in toppling the government.

The government is gathering evidence to bring sedition charges against Proshika Chairman Kazi Faruq Ahmed, he said.

Police had information that

Proshika could be instrumental in making AL's antigovernment demonstration in the capital on April 24, 25 and 26 a success.

The government mounted a sharp watch on AL adherents after the main opposition party made its 22km human shield in Dhaka on March 30 successful.

"The government, fearing large-scale protest ahead, tightened its anti-AL surveillance," another intelligence official said, asking not to be named.

"The purpose of mass arrests was served and AL and NGO workers could not reorganise themselves,"

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## Cabinet okays 14th constitution change

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet yesterday approved a bill for the 14th amendment to the constitution proposing nine changes including 45 reserved seats for women in parliament.

The changes also include display of the portraits of the president and the prime minister at government offices and enhancement of the retirement age of Supreme Court judges, chairman and members of the Public Service Commission and the comptroller and auditor general.

If the bill is passed by parliament, the retirement age of the Supreme Court judges will rise to 67 from 65, PSC chairman's and members' to 65 from 62 and auditor general's to 65 from 60.

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## MPs default on Tk 8.61 cr in phone bills

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A staggering Tk 8.61 crore in outstanding phone bills have piled up over the years as a large number of former and present lawmakers including several sitting ministers and frontline leaders of different political parties have defaulted on their payments.

Posts and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Haque yesterday informed the Jatiya Sangsad about the unpaid bills while responding to a question from a lawmaker.

Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid and 159 sitting parliament members are on this list of defaulters while some defaulting members of the 7th

parliament are now members of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's cabinet.

These 159 defaulters in the present parliament include 30 lawmakers from the main opposition party Awami League (AL), 10 from Jamaat-e-Islami and eight from Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) while the rest are from the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Twenty of these 159 defaulters are chairmen of various parliamentary standing committees including a former chairman.

They are advocate Mahbubur Rahman, committee on land ministry (Tk 39,978), Nazim Uddin Alam, committee on environment and

forest ministry (Tk 1,25,118), Sardar Shakhawat Hossain Bakul, committee on establishment ministry (Tk 23,346), Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman, committee on defence ministry (Tk 7,265), Nurul Islam Moni, committee on science, information and communication ministry (Tk 20,696), Mozammel Haque, committee on fisheries and livestock ministry (Tk 22,942), Justice Mozammel Haque, committee on private members bill and resolution (Tk 33,234), GM Fazlul Haque, committee on posts and telecommunication ministry (Tk 6,133), Mosharrar Hossain, committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts ministry

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## NO-CONFIDENCE PROGRAMME Police juggernaut throws AL men out of action

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A heavy police presence throughout the capital yesterday marked the subdued third and final day of the "mass no-confidence" programme of the main opposition party Awami League (AL).

With only four days left for the AL's April 30 deadline for the government's resignation, opposition leaders said the oust-government movement will only gather speed if Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's administration does not step down by the month-end.

Like the first two days of the programme, police prevented AL leaders and workers from gathering at four key spots -- the Zero Point, Shapla Chattar, Dhanmondi Road no. 27 and Tejgaon.

Although some top-line AL leaders were allowed to stage sit-ins at those places, an aggressive police presence kept mid-level leaders and workers at a distance.

However, there was a lull

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PHOTO: STAR

CRINGING AT THE KHAKI SIGHT ... Maria and her daughter Urmee wait helplessly in front of Dhaka Central Jail to receive Mahub, Urmee's father, who they learnt gained bail after passing three tormenting days behind bars. Police picked up Mahub in Gulshan on April 24 in the current spate of mass arrests.

## Most distant planet found

AFP, Wellington

Astronomers working in New Zealand said yesterday they had located the most distant planet so far discovered, a Jupiter-sized object 17,000 light-years away.

Astronomers from Canterbury, Auckland and Victoria Universities in New Zealand and Japan's Nagoya University said the planet orbits a red dwarf star in the middle of the Milky Way galaxy.

The far-off object was discovered

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## Commentary

### QUESTION TO THE PRIME MINISTER

## Do you really believe what you said?

BY MAHFUZ ANAM

We are dumbfounded, to say the least, to read about your speech at the BNP Parliamentary Party meeting the day before yesterday where you reportedly said that there has

not been any harassment of the innocent people in the last several days of mass arrest. Do you really believe that?

Almost all the newspapers, over the last several days, have daily reported on the innocent people

being picked up from bus terminals, railway stations and launch terminals. We have published reports of arrested individuals with their names, where they came from and sometimes with their age and occupation.

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## BDR-BSF confce in city from April 29

BSS, Dhaka

A five-day director general (DG)-level border conference between Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Border Security Force (BSF) of India begins at the conference room of BDR headquarters in the city on April 29.

The conference, which concludes on May 3, will discuss the bilateral border issues, BDR sources said yesterday.

The Indian delegation is due to arrive on April 28, the BDR sources added.

## One of the separated twins dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One of the twins separated in an operation Sunday died, surgeons at the Islamic Bank Hospital (IBH) said yesterday.

Doctors separated the girls, Maria and Halima, who were joined at the navel, 11 days after they were born but Maria died at midnight Sunday, about nine hours after the complicated surgery at IBH.

"We tried our best to save Maria but she was clinically dead just before midnight after she suffered several cardiac arrests in the process," said Dr Ruhul Amin, the surgeon who performed the one-hour surgery, his second such attempt.

"We took off the artificial life support system obtaining verbal consent from her father Shahed Ali," he said.

Two previous operations in Bangladesh to separate conjoined twins have resulted in the death of one or both of the children.

The other twin Halima continues to do well but is still not out of danger. She has been kept isolated under observation on the 4th floor of the hospital.

If Halima survives, she will face extensive reconstructive surgery in six months as the twins shared all organs below the waist, doctors said.

Maria was stable until 6pm Sunday. She suffered first heart

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## EFFECT OF POST-MFA REGIME IMF to give loans to offset trade loss

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh will get loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to cover its trade losses incurred in the post-Multi-fibre Agreement (MFA) regime from next year.

In exchange, the government will have to continue trade liberalisation.

Earlier this month, the IMF board approved a Trade Integration Mechanism (TIM), which will allow the Fund to stand ready to provide

resources, as necessary, to assist member countries in meeting balance of payments shortfalls that might result from multilateral trade liberalisation.

This loan will be issued against Bangladesh's quota with the IMF. As much as 10 percent of the quota can be drawn as loan. But in special cases, this can be higher.

"The IMF predicts that in the post-MFA regime, countries like Bangladesh may incur trade losses

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## Violence mars third leg of Indian polls

AGENCIES, New Delhi

Six people were killed and at least 15 injured in violence which marred voting in five of the 11 Indian states where balloting took place yesterday in the third phase of marathon general elections.

In scorching heat, voters trickled into polling booths in 136 seats from the financial hub of Bombay to the bellwether northern state of Uttar Pradesh and the Kashmir Valley, the heart of Jammu and Kashmir.

Four of the deaths occurred in the northeastern state of Manipur, where separatist rebels exploded bombs and imposed a shutdown to keep away voters, police said.

Another took place in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh where a group of men who said they were supporters of the main opposition Congress party hacked to death a worker of the regional Telegu Desam Party (TDP) which rules the province, said Ravi Shankar, a senior

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