Blair's political troubles deepen

REUTERS, London

Speculation about the future of Tony Blair has intensified with an opinion poll showing waning support for the British prime minister and a newspaper saying top members of his cabinet have discussed his succession.

Mired in crisis over Iraq, Blair faces increasing calls to stand down, some from Labour party members worried that their leader and one-time best electoral asset, who has led them to two election victories, is now a liability.

An opinion survey found nearly half of voters thought he should go before the next election, expected around next May.

And support from key allies -- two senior ministers insisted on Sunday that Blair would stay put -- and his own vow to fight on have done little to quell speculation he may auit.

The Sunday Herald reported that Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott and Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown who is favourite to succeed Blair, discussed the succession at length in a car in Scotland last

The Scottish paper cited sources close to Prescott as saying the two talked about prospects for a "peaceful succession" and how the deputy prime minister could help to arrange a leadership contest that would unite rather than divide their party.

Prescott said in the Times on Saturday that senior ministers had discussed a future without Blair, but he later played down the significance of his comments, saying there had been leadership speculation, but there was no race for the prime minister's position

The Sunday Times, whose YouGov poll published on Sunday showed nearly half of voters think Blair should step down before the next election, reported that senior party figures were positioning themselves ahead of a possible leader-

It said Brown's allies had made detailed plans for a government led by him after a handover by Blair at Labour's party conference in the

Suffering the mid-term blues after seven years in power, Labour is braced for a trouncing in municipal council and European Parliament elections on June 10 -- hurt most by the crisis over Iraq.

Bridge on Padma

ship change.

FROM PAGE 12 lishing a direct road link through Jamuna Multi Purpose Bridge between Mongla Port and the capital. It now remains for bridging the last break, Rupsha River in Khulna, by building the Rupsha Bridge, to materialise that unbroken road link. Construction of Rupsha Bridge is reckoned to be completed

mated that around 2,500 vehicles, mostly lorries, would cross it every

While the party is still widely expected to win the next general election, commentators say the speculation swirling around Blair which would have been unthinkable even a few months ago, makes him weaker than ever.

The fragility of his support was highlighted on Friday when the government amended a bill to defuse a major rebellion by members of parliament over plans to protect

Some analysts say choosing a replacement with no end in sight to Iraq's difficulties could constitute a poisoned chalice for Blair's succesor and be no help to the party.

Others emphasise the prime minister's determination to resolve the difficulties of Britain's involvement in the US-led force in Iraq.

Top cabinet figures, including Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, said the prime minister would stay.

"He is determined to see this job through," Hoon told BBC television. "He doesn't seem to me to be a prime minister contemplating retirement, he's a man focused and engaged on the job determined to sort out Iraq "

Many voters are still unconvinced by the reasons Blair gave for war and the scandal that has erupted this month over abuse of Iraqi prisoners has given Labour parliamentarians ammunition to call on the government to distance itself from US

MK Alamgir

ministry Rabiul Alam Mohammad Obaidul Muktadir Chowdhury, former director of narcotics control department Sved Bazlul Karim. former deputy inspector general of police Prokriti Ranjan Chanda and former president of the Secretariat Karmachari Sanjukta Parishad Sved Mohiuddin

All the accused except PR Chanda were present in the court yesterday and pleaded not guilty after the charges were read out.

Mohammad Saifur Rahman, the then officer-in-charge (OC) of Ramna Police Station filed the sedition case with the Chief Metropo-litan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka on April 8, 2002 accusing Dr Alamgir and six others of sedition.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on December 26 2002 pressed charges against Dr Alamgir and seven others and included 15 people as witnesses for the prosecution

The name of PR Chanda was not in the FIR (First Information Report) but the investigation officer included him in the charge sheet citing his involvement found during the probe.

In the case, it was alleged that the accused had set up Janatar Mancha (people's dais) in front of the National Press Club in March 1996 and instigated the governmen officials and employees to join the agitation to dislodge the then BNP

Opposition parties

Frontline leaders of the Workers Party (WP), Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Gono Forum, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Rab) and JSD (Ínu), Samyabadi Dal, Jatiya Party (JP-Manju), Ganotantri Party, National Awami Party (NAP) and Gono Azadi League attended the meeting that staggered more than three hours.

The opposition parties rejected the bill, saying the law is contrary to the spirit of the constitution and wishes of women leaders, who demanded direct elections to the reserved women's seats in parlia-

chief of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh. talked to Jalil by telephone when the meeting was going on and agreed in

principle with meeting resolutions. The secretary general of the alternative political stream, Abdul Mannan, said his party did not attend the meeting only to avert controversy ahead of the upcoming by-polls,

which is boycotted by the AL

there was no alternative to ousting the BNP-Jamaat coalition, a disagreement surfaced over AL's proposal to initiate the oust-government demonstration from a common platform, a leftist leader said, asking

not to be named. The AL gained a great deal of sympathy and moral support from other opposition parties after the

rally in Tongi on May 7. CPB General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim alleged that a serious misrule gripped the country and the parties decided to get rid of it,

Private spaceship almost in space

BBC ONLINE

A privately built manned spacecraft has reached a record altitude of 211,000ft (64km) over California on one of its final tests before officially entering space.

SpaceShipOne was built by aerospace pioneer Burt Rutan who hopes to win the Ansari X-prize of \$10m (£5.7m) for the first private flight into space.

The craft has to reach an altitude of 329,000ft (100km) twice in three weeks to win - and is expected to do so next month.

Twenty-five other teams across the world are competing for the prize.

In an impressive demonstration over Mojave airport, SpaceShipOne and its carrier aircraft White Knight moved a step closer to claiming the X-prize when pilot Mike Melvill took the vehicle closer to space than any non-governmental craft has been

Its 211,000ft (64km) altitude was twice as high as SpaceShipOne had been piloted to previously, and is within striking distance of the height required to claim the X-prize.

To win, that altitude - 329,000ft (100km), the official boundary of space - has to be reached twice in twoveeks by a three-man spacecraft. SpaceShipOne's 13 shakedown tests have now put it into a position

from which observers expect an attempt to be made within weeks. Burt Rutan's company Scaled Composites has already become the first non-governmental body to be granted a launch licence when

gave it one on 1 April. The X-prize will mark a new era in manned spaceflight when private companies are able to make short sub-orbital hops for paying custom-

the US Federal Aviation Authority

It is hoped that a market for space tourism can be developed but in reality only a very few rich passengers will be able to be carried into space by one or two companies for the foreseeable future.

It's raining FROM PAGE 1

While there was no break in the dance and music in the stands with the Guiness Posse and Trini Posse sections in full flow, you could clearly see the nervousness in the crowd when the home team required those last 12 runs.

The television and radio commentators, local journalists and the fans were all up on their feet. The spectator who had loked in

the morning that they could have played two matches on the same day was biting his nails and every West Indies run was being greeted by huge roars of relief. When the last run was scored,

the outpouring of passion was amazing. They were ecstatic that the West Indies had won. But they were happy for the Bangladesh team which had surprised everybody present.

'We respect your team maan. You gave us a nard time," or "You guys are fighters. We love you," came ringing in from every corner. The elderly bartender at the Colours Entertainment Centre, a popular hangout just outside the ground, announced the arrival of the journalists from Bangladesh as he personally congratulated all three of us.

The owner of the Crystal Heights Guest House, from where you can touch the Caribbean Sea down below it seems, went to the ground after lunch and was overcome with emotion with what she saw "Your boys made me so proud,"

said Virginia Phillips.

It was time to be proud.

Biman probe

FROM PAGE 12 and tourism for suspension of its

licence as a follow-up action, according to a Biman statement issued yesterday.

The probe committee was formed after The Daily Star ran a report yesterday on the nexus between Biman officials and travel agencies that cheated about 1,000 Hajj pilgrims and the national airlines out of over Tk 2 crore during the last Haii season. Headed by Director (Customer

Service) of Biman Siddiqur Rahman, the three-member committee will submit its report by two weeks. Other members of the committee are SMA Wahab, general manager (administration), and Nurus Salam, deputy general manager (audit).

Biman Managing Director Akhtar Hossain Khan told The Daily Star yesterday that Biman's marketing and sales directorate had been doing an internal audit even before the newspaper report following similar allegations raised by different quarters.

"Now we have formed a committee for a comprehensive investigation with officials from other departments into allegations that a few officials of the directorate of marketing and sales are involved in the natter," he said.

The agencies charged a government-fixed rate of \$1,050 each as Dhaka-Jeddah return fare from these oilgrims under private management. But they deposited \$660 to Biman showing the tickets to be of Umrah group category, depriving the national flag carrier Tk 2.28 crore.

Meanwhile, Air Trip Interna-tional td. and Victory Travels Ltd. yesterday protested The Daily Star report on the cheating and said they were never involved in Haii ticket sales in the Umrah group category.

JP's U-turn rankles

protesting against the party's shift -which was decided at its parliamentary party meeting Saturday night --

Its 12 lawmakers vesterday voted for the bill amid allegations of ruling coalition's threat to arrest and put its Chairman HM Ershad behind

was embarrassed at the latest bickering that the move has kicked ment on the issue.

not changed that decision," JP presidium member Kader told The Daily Star vesterday. "I do not know of any new deci-

the (Sunday) morning that the decision has not been changed," the apparently angry JP lawmaker, also vounger brother of Ershad, added. "According to the party decision, the chairman on May 13 at a press

conference demanded withdrawal

(JPPP)leader Rawshan Ershad however, denied any pressure from the government to shift their position on the bill. "We decided to support the bill at a parliamentary party

Heatwave

FROM PAGE 1 country recorded was 38 degrees

Celsius in Chuadanga yesterday. Rajshahi office recorded 36 degrees Celsius yesterday, which

- Abeda Begum, 70, Manikjan,65, Karim Ali, 70 and Morium, 55 -- died of heatstroke in Gaibandha. Searing heat is also causing damage to standing crops, the report said.

Diarrhoea, heatstroke and vomiting are now the most common ailments with the elderly people and children. Cases of skin rash, eruption, blister, heat rash, headache, eye-ache and skin burn have marked a rise. Diseases like high blood pressure, asthma and fever have increased, doctors say.

it's our party decision and we also want reintroduction of reserved seats for women in parliament," the JP lawmaker, also wife of Ershad

The government on Saturday asked the JP to support the bill when it would be placed in the House for passage. But, if its lawmakers opposed the bill, cases against its chairman will be geared up and he might be thrown into jail, alleged a top JP leader, wishing anonymity.

Ershad has more than a dozen cases pending against him.

Ruling coalition leader BNP however, refuted the allegation of coercing the JP into voting for the bill. "The Jativa Party lawmakers have voted according to their parliamentary party decision. There is no question of pressure from the ruling coalition," Whip Rezaul Bari Deena told The Daily Star yesterday.

Sources said the Saturday night decision of JPPP was not disclosed. Some of the 12 JP lawmakers who voted in parliament submitted notices for eliciting public opinion and amendment proposals on the bill, but did not participate in discus-

Two senior ministers and the ruling BNP whips were visibly worried about the JP lawmakers' behaviour in the House and talked to them to make sure that things went as

Ten shops robbed

FROM PAGE 12

possibly of Half-Pant Bahini, an infamous gang of robbers, launched their operation at the Agrani Bank's Khairhaat Branch at 1:30am. They broke into the bank, tying its guard Shipon, 23, and tried to open the vault. Failed, the gang surrounded Daulat Khan area and locked the

people of a bazaar in a nearby house at gunpoint for one and a half They looted 74 tola gold, 240 tola silver, cash Tk 50,000 and other

valuables from three jewellers and seven shops of the bazaar. Locals suspect the infamous Siraj Bahini might be involved in the robbery, as its men also wear shorts

during act of robbery. Superintendent of Police Motium Rahman of Bhola visited the spot

Constitution changed

and women groups outside parlia-A total of 226 lawmakers -- 211

12 from the JP and three independents -- voted for the bill. Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar presided over the division vote that produced only one vote against

amid jubilant desk thumping by ruling coalition deputies. It was the second constitutional amendment in eight years after the 13th amendment that incorporated the caretaker government system

Leader of the House and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia led her deputies there in the wake of a brie meeting of the BNP parliamentary

party at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban. The second largest opposition, JP (Ershad), had been opposing the bill since its introduction on March 17 and its chairman HM Ershad

notices, asking the House to send the bill to select committees for further scrutiny and to elicit public opinion on it.

But the JP deputies did not move their motions in the wake of the parliamentary party decision on Saturday night not to protest the passage of the bill under what a presidium member said was the government threat to arrest the JP

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina told reporters yesterday that her party rejected the bill.

On a question of joining parliament to protest the bill, Hasina, also the president of the AL, said speaking inside and outside the Jatiya Sangsad was virtually similar as parliament was ineffective.

Some AL lawmakers submitted notices to the parliament secretariat to oppose the bill, but the notices went un-disposed as they

Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed took a swipe at the AL for boycotting the session yesterday. "They don't have any honesty

and moral courage to speak on the bill attending parliament. That is why they are boycotting," the law minister said. Stressing that every democracy enjoyed the active participation of

the main opposition, he said: "Their (AL's) policy is self-contradictory." In his hour-long speech. Mouduc defended the provisions of the bill.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid at a press briefing protested the passage of the bill.

"The government is increasing the retirement age of Supreme Court judges with the intent of making its favorable man the next caretaker government chief to rig

accept women seats to be distributed among parties with representation in parliament. Hamid said the AL would take a decision on the issue

Jatiya Sangsad on April 28 after adding some new provisions, also seeks to display the portraits of the president and prime minister in government offices, raise the retirement age of the chairman and members of the Public Service Commission and the comptroller and auditor general and fast swearin lawmakers-elect.

Bangladesh scores lowest

1,000,000 fixed telephone lines installed by the BTTB, Sheba Telecom and Bangladesh Rural Telecom Authority (BRTA). The number of cellular phones provided by four operators in foreign joint ventures stands at about 2,300,000

Bangladesh also holds the lowest position in terms of internet use, with only 0.34 per 100 people having access to the Web. The Maldives again tops the list with 7.12. Bhutan with 1.45 and Sri Lanka with 1.32. The figures for India stood at 0.72, Pakistan 0.42 and Nepal 0.37.

Absence of a competent implementation agency and proper deregulation of the sector has stymied Bangladesh's telecoms growth, industry sources said. Among 44 ministries and divi-

sions, which implement the Annual Development Programme (ADP), the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications was the worst performer in fiscal 2003-04 with only 14 percent implementation. The state telecoms monopoly, Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB), could not

tendering procedures and filing of

official said, asking for anonymity.

Bangladesh should take measures to foster telecoms growth, chairman of South Asia GSM Forum Mehboob Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday. "The start-up cost should be

reduced by lowering the taxes on mobile handsets and the government should reduce the infrastructure deployment cost, which is the highest among the South Asian countries," he said, adding steps should also be taken to encourage more local and foreign investment in the telecoms sector.

Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC), the telecoms watchdog, has proposed to the government to fix the handset tariff at Tk 1,000 instead of Tk 3,000 for handsets priced up to Tk 10,000 and Tk 4,000 for sets beyond Tk 10.000.

Govt orders arrest

FROM PAGE 1

"Police are ordered to take swift, effective steps to catch him," a home ministry press release said yesterday.

The release said the cabinet

implement projects due to improper committee categorically asserted that the government under no circumstances should allow such an cases by bidders, a senior BTTB illegal private troop to exist and

Girl abducted in Rangamati

BSS, Rangamati

A girl was allegedly abducted by an indigenous youth in Manikchhari under sadar upazila Friday night.

Maiema Khatun was kidnapped when she was going to a neighbour's house to watch television at around 8:00pm, police said.

Abul Hossain, the victim's father. vesterday filed an abduction case with Kotwali Police Station against Mintu Chakma, 25, son of Hiru Chakma, of the same area, police said.

The alleged abductor used to tease Maiema, the victim's father

Ahsanullah murder

Police (ASP-CID) Khalequzzaman, who is currently leading the fourmember CID team formed to probe the killing, said, "The accused have given us much information, but we don't want to act on that without verification.' He declined to disclose any details

extracted from the arrestees Meanwhile, police managed to secure photographs of only two of the 14 absconding accused in Ahsanullah Master murder case till vesterday, the

10th day since the killing of the opposition lawmaker. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) dispatched the photos of the prime accused Nurul Islam Dipu and Kana Hafiz to different

exits including the land ports and

Some intelligence sources, however, said Dipu had already fled to India on May 8, the next day of the killing of Ahsanullah Master and a schoolboy near the Awami League (AL) lawmaker's house at Noagaon in

Over the last week, the CID for several times raided houses of Dipu's brother Shahidul Islam Shipu and Ohidul Islam Tipu, Ratan Mia. Anowar Hossain Anu. Sohel Shohadh Jahangir, Al Amin, Faisal, Rony, Bulu Mia and Sved Ahmed Mainu - for their photographs, but to no avail.

Police got the photographs of Dipu and Kana Hafiz from a newspaper office, a source said.

Kabir Hossain, owner of the North

Badda house from where the FIRnamed accused Mahbub, Monir and Dulal were arrested on Friday, was placed on a five-day remand yester-The CID police produced him

Court in Gazipur yesterday with a fiveday remand petition. "He is responsible for harbouring the accused," said Assistant Superintendent of Police (CID)

Khaleguzzaman.

before the First Class Magistrate's

were involved in Ahsanullah's killing he sheltered them, supplied food and employed 13-year-old boy Shohag at their service "the CID official said "We need to interrogate him inten-

sively because he may have more

"Despite knowing that the three

information about the killers and the incident." said Khaleguzzaman. The investigators, meanwhile, are facing difficulty in quizzing Mahbub, Monir and Dulal, now placed on a 10day remand. They are hard core addicts (Phensedyl) and physical

torture might backfire, said sources. Govt asks banks

them, 47,679 cases involving Tk 7,512 crore were filed by the NCBs. So far, the courts could settle 35,412 cases, recovering Tk 1,398 crore.

PM assures

FROM PAGE 12

have declared the ICT a thrust sector and also have been implementing comprehensive programmes to ensure its highest level of utilisation in our national development," she added.

Khaleda hoped that being connected with Information Super Highway through submarine cable by 2005, the country would enter a new era in its ICT sector.

Three killed

Dhuptara union parishad, died on way to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, they added. The injured were admitted to

different hospitals in Dhaka,

Narayangani and Narsingdi. An angry mob blocked Dhaka-Shylhet highway for four hours and a half following the accident and damaged about 60 buses. Eight policemen were wounded during

clashes with the crowd, police said. Normal traffic on the highway resumed at 5:00pm

WorldTel cleared FROM PAGE 12

meeting with the board (WorldTel) to decide on co-exclusivity with the BTTB. "We would be able to reach a decision by next week," an officia said.

The BTRC awarded the first PSTN licence to Bashundhara Commu-nication & Networks Ltd. (BCNL) last week to operate in four zones, barring the central zone, in a bid to further open up the telecoms sector to private operators.

The immediate telecoms market for the new entrants in Bangladesh is about 1.2 million fixed lines, which can be fed by the private sector says a recent study by Infrastructure Investment Facilita-tion Centre (IIFC), a government-owned company that facilitates private investment in the country.

Bangla Bhai gang

FROM PAGE 1 brother Ataur Rahman Ibne Abdullah and 18 other militants.

A few days later, police released the militants and the higher authorities transferred several police officials involved in the Khetlal operation.

Rahman was born in Charshi village in Jamalpur Sadar Upazila. His father late Moulana Abdullah Ibne Fazal was a leader of an old Islamic organisation, Jamiatul Ahle Hadith Fazal was accused of collaborating with Pakistani occupation forces during the 1971 Liberation War.

During his student life, Rahman entered his political career by joining the Islami Chhatra Shibir and later its patron. Jamaat-e-Islami. In the early 1980s, he studied at Madina Islami University in Saudi Arabia and worked at the Saudi embassy in Dhaka for five vears from 1985.

He travelled to many countries. including India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Malaysia, with the latest visit to Pakistan last year.

Rahman said he set up a mosque and a madrasa with the financial help of well-known Islamic nongovernmental organisation (NGO) Rabeta-e-Islam and another Islamic organisation, Islami Oytijjho

Although he claimed the JMJB is headquartered in Dhaka, investigations show all activities of the organisation revolved around the mosque and madrasas in Jamalpur. At the local union parishad chair-

man's office at Kacharikoalipara in Bagmara upazila of Rajshahi, the militant leader told The Daily Star that the JMJB aimed at an Islamic revolution through jihad. In the face of questions on the source of JMJB's income and his

government opened an investigation n 1986-87. But it found nothing wrong with me. The other top leader of JMJB. Bangla Bhai, who gave his real name as Siddiqul Islam, was also involved in the politics of ruling alliance partner

foreign visits, Rahman said: "The

Jamaat-e-Islami Locals believe they are actually an 'action force" of Jamaat under a different banner, working secretly. But Rahman said: "We have no link with the Jamaat-e-Islami. Jamaat does not

have good impression about us." Asked about the members of JMJB's highest body, the Sura Board,

Rahman said, "What will you do with the names?' But minutes later, another JMJB member said: "Other members are

Ashikur Rahman, Hafez Mahmud, Tarek Moni and Khaled.' He declined to disclose their head

office address, adding: "If needed, vou can call us on the mobile phone." Rahman admits that his men had

misunderstanding' with the police in August last year. "About six months (read nine months) ago, our workers from Bogra Jaipurhat, Rajshahi, Rangpur and other adjacent areas gathered in Khetlal to attend a meeting. But conspirators misled the police saying

raided the place on wrong information. But they did not find any firearms." According to The Daily Star report on August 16 last year, Rahman's men injured six policemen in an hour-long gunfight and looted three shotguns with 60 bullets from police. The house that was used as the camp of the militants belongs to a Jamaat leader

militants have gathered there. Police

and most militants managed to flee. According to a cross-section of people interviewed, Rahman and his colleagues assume different names and identities in different places. If they face trouble, they use a new identity After the Khetlal incident that exposed JMB's militant activities, the group appeared in a new shell of JMJB with a mission to cleanse underground outlaws popularly known as

Rahman however claimed that his party under the name of JMJB has been into 'social activities' for the last six years and refused to call it a militant organisation. "Still, our workers have been attacked by the police in different times because of misleading informa-

Hersh is an award-winning US

journalist who broke the story of the

1968 Mv Lai massacre, when US

soldiers executed Vietnamese

Times reported that the mistreatment

of Iraqi inmates at Camp Cropper.

near Baghdad airport, predates

abuse of Abu Ghraib prisoners by US

Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

that he had been beaten by interroga-

tors, hooded, handcuffed, threatened

with torture and murder, urinated on

and kicked in the head, lower back

days and had a baseball tied into his

The ICRC lodged formal com-plaints with US officials in February,

He was also kept awake for four

and groin, the daily said.

mouth with a scarf, it added.

A prisoner told the International

Also Saturday The New York

civilians during the war in Vietnam.

official told Hersh.

Rumsfeld 'backed

people pulled off the streets," the former intelligence official told Hersh. The source said the CIA objected to the program's use inside Abu Ghraib, where a scandal involving the mistreatment of Iraqis has

sparked Democratic calls for

Rumsfeld's resignation. The CIA ended its SAP involvement in the iail. Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Colin Powell apologised yesterday to Iraqi prisoners abused by US soldiers, one day after he gave a speech in which he promised justice but left

many Arabs angry and distrustful.

"The president has expressed an

apology on behalf of the nation. (I will) reinforce that apology. We are devastated by what happened at Abu Ghraib. We apologise to those who were abused in such an awful manner," Powell told reporters. Leaked photos from Abu Ghraib

have shown US soldiers abusing Iragi inmates, forcing them into sexually humiliating positions. Hersh writes that Rumsfeld left the detailed planning to Pentagon intelligence chief Steve Cambone but that the program was ultimately approved by Rumsfeld and the

chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers. The Pentagon wanted to use tougher interrogation techniques as the US plan to occupy Iraq was hindered by a growing insurgency,

"As far as they're concerned, this

is a covert operation, and it's to be

kept within the Defence Department

channels," the former intelligence

the Times said, and eventually documented 50 cases of abuse Bikalpa Dhara

FROM PAGE 1

Committee Organiser Shahiduzzaman, who found refuge in a nearby market. The attackers later damaged the campaigners' vehicles and hit a

They also tried to shoot BDB Central

pick-up van driver Zakir Hossain with a pistol butt. The attackers identified themselves as Jubo Dal activists and

threatened the BDB men not to

which instead went mainly to the relatively small urban middle class.

When India's share markets went

into a tailspin last week after

Congress scored the upset win, the

party wheeled out its trump card to

soothe nervous investors: an

elderly, softly-spoken bureaucrat-

turned-politician admired at home

Manmohan Singh, hailed as the

man who set India on the path to

economic reform 13 years ago,

looks almost certain to be finance

calls in the Doctor," read a headline

in The Indian Express, after the

party called on Singh to assuage

investor fears that the rag-tag band

of communist, socialist and regiona

groups it needs to govern would stall

India's economy in the fast lane.

medicine in measured tones.

eforms seen as vital to keeping

The 'Doctor' administered the

"We'll pursue policies that pro-

mote rapid social and economic

development, growth of savings and

investments, create a favourable

climate for enterprise." the turbaned

Sikh told reporters, adding he was

"Market Left bruised, Congress

and abroad.

ECONOMIC DOCTOR

carry out election campaign

tunity to wield influence.

joining the national government, could push for an economic agenda that favours the poor, even if they stop short of calling for a complete end to the privatisation drive of outgoing prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Congress-led government without taking part in the messy business of government. The Hindustan Times newspaper reported that some communists believed joining the government

But Gandhi's Congress has secured enough support from its allies almost to guarantee she will be the next prime minister -- and India's first foreign-born leader.

She will also be the family's fourth prime minister after her slain husband, Rajiv, mother-in-law Indira and Indira's father Jawaharlal Congress, which first put India on

has pledged to continue Vaipavee's programme of economic modernisation, but with "a human face". Investors fear the leftists will block or slow reforms, especially the

Analysts also expect Gandhi's government to repackage the reforms after India's hundreds of FROM PAGE 12 The Petrobangla approval followed acceptance of Niko by Irish com-

Petrobangla

recently accepted Niko as its partner. Tullow also received the share of investment money from Niko for gas exploration in the block

Sonia likely to take

Hersh wrote.

General Secretary Harkishen Singh Surject are reported to view joining the government as a historic oppor-

They say the communists, by

But other communists say the bloc could wield greater influence by being crucial support for a

would erode their support base of farmers and workers

the path to reform by ditching its socialist economics a decade ago,

sale of bloated, monolithic state firms.

millions of poor punished Vajpayee and the BJP for failing to pass on the benefits of a booming economy

confident Congress could "overcome these 'small problems' of working with communists".

pany Tullow Oil plc, the block's operator having 30 percent share. Tullow had opposed the sale, but

by June 2005. "The government has fixed a very reasonable toll rate for motorised vehicles to use Lalon Shah Bridge." a Roads and Highways department source said. It is esti-

Other issues that took centre stage in the discussion included the 14th constitution amendment bill passed in parliament yesterday, law and order downslide, militant activities in the northwest, arms haul in Chittagong and price hike of essentials and closedown of mills and factories.

Sources said AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, former president and

The meeting came a day after a rally at Paltan Maidan where senior leaders of the AL, left parties and Bikalpa Dhara underscored a broadbased unity of like-minded parties against the government. Although the parties agreed that

killing of Ahsanullah at a roadside

intensifying their antigovernment The CPB leader, however, did not make it clear whether his party forged an alliance with the AL and only said

"We all agreed to intensify the oust-

press note that indicated the killing of

Questioning the promptness of a

. Ahsanullah was the result of AL's internal feud, the meeting demanded immediate withdrawal of the note and punishment to the killers through a

government movement."

neutral investigation

RALLYING AGAINST COALITION "We adopted a resolution calling upon people to unite against the government that allows such a barbaric murder of Ahsanullah Master," Hasina told the Shaheed Minar rally, organised by the Jatiya Sramik League (JSL), hours after the meeting with left parties in

"They (the government) allow

The CPB, WP and civil society

armed criminals like Bangla Bhai and

killers to roam around instead of

punishing them." Hasina said.

members also attended the rally to mourn Ahsanullah. The AL general secretary, addressing the rally, demanded release of arrestees who protested the killing of Ahsanullah and withdrawal of chargesheets against

Jabid Ahsan Sohel, son of

Ahsanullah, also addressed the rally

and said: "I have come to you to

demand justice for my father's death. He worked all his life for the rights of Rashed Khan Menon, WP president, doubted if justice would be delivered, saying: "The criminals are sheltered by the BNP-Jamaat alli-

"We have to fight not for the

change of power but for ideals and to

relieve people of sufferings," Hasanul

aq Inu, JSD president, said. Rokanuddin Mahmud, president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, condemned the government's failure to catch the killers and called for a united movement to form a government that will ensure the rule

reportedly under government

Ershad, also former president

up in the party and refused to com-"The lawmakers who voted in favour of the bill violated the party's decision on the issue as it decided earlier to oppose the bill and it has

sion overruling the previous one. The party chairman also told me in

JP Parliamentary Party

was 40.2 degrees the previous day. UNB reports: Four elderly people

from the BNP-led four party alliance, abstained Law. Justice and Parliamentary

into the constitution in 1996. The House sat on schedule after

demanded withdrawal of the law. JP lawmakers submitted several

polls." Hamid said. Asked whether his party will

The amendment, re-tabled in the