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Mild cold wave likely next week

By Special Correspondent

A mild cold wave is likely to make the winter more biting next week and in early January as it settles down late unlike in the past year. Meteorological Department said yesterday.

There is a possibility of another bite of cold, a little stronger in the second week of January.

So far the winter is yet to make any impact in the country excepting in the north, north-east and north-western parts where minimum temperature ranged between 13 degree Celsius to 10°C yesterday, it said.

The day's minimum temperature, 10°C was recorded at Srimangal. In Mymensingh it was 10.7°C, Dinajpur 11.7°C, Satkhira 11.8°C, Ishwardi 12.8°C, Dhaka 12.2°C, Tangail 12.5°C, Rangpur 13°C, Bogra 13.5°C and in Madaripur 13.5°C.

Met Office said the temperature is not falling at the level of last year's as the western jet stream is staying at 24,000 feet and above.

It came down slightly sometimes but is staying higher, leaving far less impact on the temperature.

There had been some variations as a result of which the northern part had lower temperature than the south and south-eastern parts of the country.

Cabinet okays proposed nat'l water policy

The cabinet yesterday approved the proposed national water policy, reports APB.

The approval came at a regular weekly meeting of the cabinet with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

The policy aims at development and proper use of the country's water resources — both surface and underground water — through efficient management as well as ensuring its availability for all, especially the poor and disadvantaged section of the society.

'Beware of strangers'

By Staff Correspondent
Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has urged people not to travel with unknown persons by rickshaws and autorickshaws.

In a press release, DMP said that a section of autorickshaw drivers and rickshawpullers, in connection with muggers, lure people to travel with co-passengers in their vehicles at a cheaper fare.

The rickshawpullers or the autorickshaw drivers take muggers as co-passengers in their vehicles who snatch everything from the passenger, the release added.

OMS of rice launched in city

The government yesterday launched Open Market Sale (OMS) of rice in the capital for keeping the price of foodgrains stable and removing the sufferings of the low-income groups, reports UNB.

Per kg rice is being sold at Tk 13.50 and each person will be allowed to purchase three kgs of rice, said an handout.

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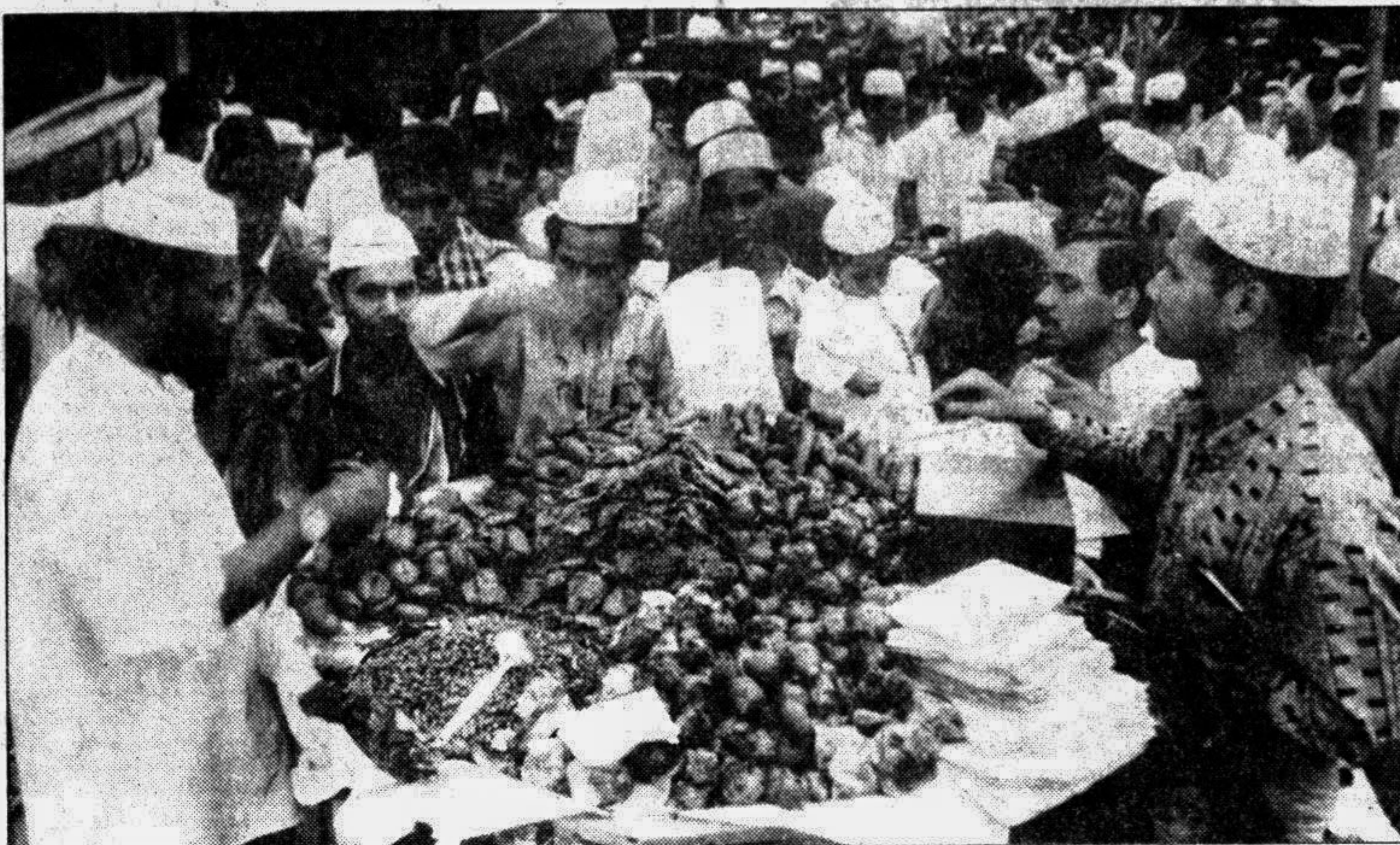
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Sehri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Dec	Sehri	Iftar
2	22	5-12	5-20
3	23	5-13	5-21
4	24	5-13	5-21



A wide variety of iftar items were on sale in the city yesterday, the first day of Ramadan. This photo was taken from Chawkbazar.

Land development work for Meghnaghat plant

Final negotiations with Chinese firm open ignoring protests

By Sharier Khan

The Power Development Board has started final negotiations to sign an agreement with a Chinese firm, CWHEC, for the 140 crore taka land development work for the 450 MW Meghnaghat Power Plant with authorities.

Sources said that the PDB "hurriedly" started the final negotiation with the Chinese firm by "vaguely announcing" it the lowest bidder late last week.

However, the consultant of the project said that more than one firm could be the lowest bidder. As a result, bidders are protesting the PDB decision.

Usually, such negotiations require prior 'green signal' from the Cabinet Purchase Committee or the ministry concerned.

The PDB is however saying that it was not a final negotia-

tion meeting but a "clarification meeting". Sources said, only the consultant of the project is supposed to hold such "clarification meeting" at this stage.

The bid was participated by four companies — China National Water Resources and Hydropower Engineering Corporation (CWHEC), China Harbour Engineering Company, Hyundai Engineering and Construction Co of South Korea and Kumpulan Medan Liris Berhad of Malaysia.

The consultant of the project, Mott MacDonald, itself did not determine the lowest bidder. An official said, "The consultant refrained from taking a clear stand on the lowest bidder issue. Instead, it confused PDB by saying that both CWHEC and Hyundai could be the lowest bidder and passed the buck on PDB to take the decision".

Earlier, one of the bidders had lodged a protest with PDB saying that the bidding procedure was not transparent and fair as the same company representing the consultant and the CWHEC here.

"There is no reason why the consultant should not give his decision while he had seen all bid documents and sat with bidders in clarification negotiations," said an official.

"Determining the lowest bidder in this project is a very complicated issue and it's the task of an independent consultant."

In August last, PDB invited tenders for the design and build-turn-key contract for land reclamation and embankment protection work at a 100-hectare site on the north bank of river Meghna.

The CWHEC proposed to develop 80 hectares of land at a

Iftar items dearer

By Staff Correspondent

Prices of most of the iftar items are slightly higher this year than last year's.

A wide variety of items including piyaju, beguni, chhola, pakura, ponir samucha, jilapi, halim, vegetable and potato chop, roasted hilsha, roasted chicken, chicken fry were on sale in the city on the first day of the holy Ramadan yesterday.

Piyaju, a preparation of pulses and onion fried in oil, the most popular iftar item, was found selling at Tk one and Tk two depending on the size.

"We are using less onion in piyaju to keep the price low", said Ashraf Ali, a seller at Chawkbazar.

"If you taste, you will find the difference in almost all common items because we are using less spices", another seller said.

Prices of all most all fruits including date, orange, banana, papaya and grapes also rose slightly.

Date, an imported item, was selling at between Tk 40 and Tk 100 per kg. A special variety of date, which is dried with sugar juice was selling at Tk 120 per kg.

Second Dhaka-Ctg highway planned

By M Anwarul Haq

A second Dhaka-Chittagong highway has been planned for catering to the increasing passenger and cargo traffic and opening a 'new frontier for development'.

Sources in the Ministry of Communications and the Roads and Highways Department said the 'additional road in this arterial route' could also serve as a transit route to and from the neighbouring countries and act as a vital linkage as part of the proposed Asian Highway.

The nearly 150-mile long proposed highway would be along the existing one. It would be a two-lane 'toll road' and the project is expected to be implemented with private sector financing.

"It would be built on a Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) basis and the government would provide the necessary land," an official concerned said.

Land for the second road is already available beside the existing highway. Between 100

and 140 feet of land exists on one or both sides of the present road.

The Communications Ministry and the Roads and Highways Department are doing the preliminary work in this regard and international tenders are expected to be floated by the first quarter of next year.

A BOT model for the proposed highway is learnt to have already been prepared and is now awaiting clearance of the Law Ministry. After clearance, it will be forwarded for approval by the Cabinet.

The private investor or consortium of investors building the road would operate the new road for a period of 15 to 20 years and collect toll determined mutually by the party concerned and the communications ministry. The exact time frame for operating the road this way would be fixed on the basis of rate of return on the investment made and realisation of toll.

A senior official noted that the second two-lane Dhaka-Chittagong road would open a new frontier for development and further strengthen the country's infra-structure. Experts say that there should be "several layers of road communication" between the capital and the port city of Chittagong.

Earlier a US firm, Amman & Whitney, had carried out a study on the feasibility of a second Dhaka-Chittagong highway. Although the study found the idea feasible, the process was shelved in 1985.

"The need for a second Dhaka-Chittagong highway is now being increasingly felt because of the international focus on Chittagong Port as a regional hub and the need for quick and more durable links with Dhaka and other neighbouring areas due to Bangladesh's emerging potential and strategic location," a diplomat observed.

Ford, Carter call for censure instead of Clinton's trial

WASHINGTON, Dec 21: Former Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter proposed today to end the impeachment proceedings against President Bill Clinton with a bipartisan censure resolution stating that he lied under oath, reports AP.

The linchpin would be language stating that Clinton accepted the findings in the resolution. But his admission that he did not tell the truth could not be used against him in a future trial.

"Somehow we must reach a conclusion that most Americans can embrace and that posterity will approve," Ford and Carter wrote in an op-ed column published in The New York Times.

"Make no mistake, the judgment of history does matter. It matters profoundly. And impeachment by the full House has already brought profound disgrace to President Clinton. Whatever happens now will do little to affect history's judge-

ment of him."

Both men said their suggestion rises out of the precedents they set while president. Ford, who assumed office after President Richard Nixon resigned following the Watergate scandal, later pardoned Nixon.

Carter, who beat Ford in the 1976 presidential race, later granted amnesty to those who had avoided the Vietnam draft.

"While our acts of pardon or clemency are not directly analogous to the decision pending in the Senate, how that body resolves the issue can have similar benefits of healing and finality," Ford and Carter wrote.

A fresh poll shows most Americans agree.

In interviews Saturday night and Sunday, 66 per cent said they would prefer that the Senate work out a compromise to instead censure or fine the president. Thirty per cent said the Senate should go ahead with a trial on charges that he com-

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Nepali PM Koirala resigns

KATHMANDU, Dec 24:

Nepal's Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala today tendered his resignation to King Birendra, the royal palace said in a statement, reports AP.

Koirala's resignation as prime minister of the minority government is just a technical requirement for Koirala's Nepali Congress and its new partner — the Communist Party of Nepal, United Marxist Leninist — to form a new coalition government.

Koirala will continue as the prime minister of the new coalition government. The king has also set Wednesday as the deadline for any other parties to come forward and stake their claim for a government as required by the constitution.

Nepal was an absolute monarchy until a pro-democracy movement forced constitutional reforms in 1990 that

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Delhi, Moscow sign 10-yr defence pact

NEW DELHI, Dec 21: India and Russia signed a 10-year defence cooperation accord here today, extending their existing military links to 2010, reports AFP.

The agreement, signed during a two-day official visit to India by Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, follows a similar accord which expires at the end of 2000.

The accord, which was signed in August this year, will extend existing partnerships in the fields of defence research, development and joint production of military hardware.

The document was signed by Russian trade minister G V Gubuniyev and Indian defence minister George Fernandes.

"The long-term defence accord is not merely meant for acquisition of defence products since it emphasises co-production and joint research projects," an Indian defence ministry spokesman told AFP.

Nevertheless, Moscow will be hoping that the agreement will help maintain Russia's quasi-monopoly on international arms sales to India, in the face of increasing competition.

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Tendons of Sujanager BNP leader severed

PABNA, Dec 21: Miscreants cut off the tendons of legs and hands of a local BNP leader at the gate of Sujanager Thana Health Complex here this evening, reports APB.

The victim was identified as Abdul Barik, 28, of Charvabangpur village and the publication secretary of Sujanager thana unit of BNP.

Local sources said assailants numbering about 10 swooped on Abdul Barik and cut his tendons when he was returning home from Sujanager bazar by rickshaw at about 6:30 pm.

He was shifted to Dhaka Pangu Hospital from Babna General Hospital with serious injuries.

Local BNP filed a case against 14 Awami League leaders and activists with Sujanager police in this connection.

Selim Reza Habib, defeated candidate of BNP in the recently held Pabna-2 by-election, blamed Awami League activists for what he termed as dastardly attack and demanded arrest of those responsible.

None, however, was arrested till the filing this reports at 8 pm.



FREEDOM, AT LAST: Artist Kalidas Karmakar yesterday snatched four 'guest birds' from a vendor at New Elephant Road in the city, brought them to The Daily Star office and set them free.

Sixth day of interns' strike

Patients leaving DMCH, hundreds discharged

By Ripon Baig

More than 150 serious patients left Dhaka Medical College Hospital signing 'risk bonds' and another 500 were discharged by the hospital authorities as intern doctors' in definite strike at government hospitals in the country passed the sixth day yesterday.

At least 64 patients died of various diseases at the hospital in the last six days. The hospital authorities, however, did not attribute the deaths to the strike.

No schedule operation could be performed due to the strike, sources at the DMCH said. "The hospital health services have virtually collapsed," said a hospital staff.

The intern doctors are on strike to press their six-point demand including enhancement of salary.

"I have come to the DMCH for the fourth time from Dhakhin Khan (in the city) for treatment of my seven-year-old daughter Kana who has been suffering from fever for the past 15 days," said Ambia Khatun standing at the hospital's Out Patient Department (OPD).

Helpless Ambia said she spent about six hours yesterday for a doctor. "I can not afford to seek treatment at a private clinic."

Mohammad Taher Miah, in his sixties, was seen leaving the Coronary Care Unit (CCU). "I am compelled to leave the hospital as doctors are not attend-

ing me since beginning of the strike."

Mosharraf Hossain, another serious patient failed to draw any doctor's attention at the OPD of Surgery Department.

"I have been waiting at the OPD for more than two hours but none attended me," he said.

Next to Mosharraf was Yasin, waiting for doctor with severe chest pain.

Only six out of 14 beds were

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Pabna by-polls Case against 2 ministers, AL leaders dismissed

PABNA, Dec 21: The case filed by the leader of the opposition in Parliament and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia against two ministers, some AL leaders and officials for violating electoral code of conduct in the recent Pabna-2 by-polls has been dismissed, reports APB.

S M Reza Noor, Sub-Judge and Abdul Hye, Senior Assistant Sub-Judge were members of the two-member committee constituted to investigate the matter.

Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim, State Minister for Information Prof. Abu Sayeed and 15 others in-

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Sonia sets Congress firmly on comeback trail

From Pallab Bhattacharya



Sonia Gandhi

NEW DELHI, Dec 21: Change is the buzzword in India's main opposition party, Congress.

After being vanquished in general elections in 1996 and 1998, the 116-year-old party, under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi who turned 52 last week, has been set firmly on course for a new look.

And nowhere did the process of change find a more telling expression than the All India Congress Committee (AICC) session at the weekend which ushered in sweeping revamp in the party, including some key amendments in the party's constitution.

The session, attended by

800-odd delegates bowed to Sonia Gandhi's wishes of providing 33 per cent reservation of seats for women at all levels of the party structure right from block level to the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the highest policy-making forum, and 20 per cent for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, other backward classes and minorities.

It also endorsed a three-year term for all party positions and gave Sonia a free hand to reconstitute all bodies. This means that Sonia, who took charge as Congress President in March this year would have an extended year.

Sonia Gandhi said the changes were in tune with "changing ground realities" especially after it became clear that voters belonging to backward castes, tribes and minorities backed the Congress in a big way contributing to the party's spectacular victory in last month's assembly elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi.

The fact that Sonia Gandhi succeeded in pushing the radical changes, particularly those relating to reservation of party posts for women, in spite of murmurs of disapproval from some senior leaders, shows that she has established complete

control over the Congress affairs.

Congress sources said it also displayed Sonia's insistence on the need for presenting a "new look" of the party as it pushes for power at the Centre.

In fact, right from the moment Sonia took charge of the party, she never hesitated to effect changes wherever she felt they were necessary.

During her stewardship, the Congress had a hard look at its policy of advocating unbridled economic reforms initiated under the reign of former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao in 1991 and decided to modify it with a shift back on social wel-

fare and concern for the poor.

It was under Sonia Gandhi's leadership that the Congress did a rethinking on firming up electoral alliances with other parties which many in the party felt had contributed to its decline in politically key states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Sonia made it clear that the Congress must stand on its own strength while not closing options for coalition politics with certain influential regional parties like AIADMK led by Jayalalitha.

Aware of the need for a changed Congress, Sonia Gandhi saw to it that a majority

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