

Efforts on to launch T&T mobile phones Pre-bid confce May 31

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) has launched fresh endeavours to operate countrywide cellular telephone service soon.

BTTB officials told BSS yesterday that the new round of pre-bid conference would be held on May 31 at BTTB's head office and tender would be opened on June 31 to select qualified companies for commissioning two lakh mobile phones.

BTTB floated re-tender on May 9 inviting international manufacturers/suppliers for supply, installation, testing and commissioning of required equipment and accessories for public mobile telephone service of BTTB.

The officials said BTTB's mobile phone project would be implemented at a cost of Tk 900 crore under supplier's credit financing, which will cover the entire country.

BTTB's Deputy Director (Foreign Procurement) Joyanal Abedin said a complete set of bidding documents has been available since yesterday which can be purchased on submis-

sion of written application on cash payment of Tk 15,000.

The efforts are underway, he said, but could not specified approximate time for formal commissioning of the much-awaited T&T mobile phone service.

BTTB's mobile service would be the country's fourth GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) mobile operation after Grameen, Aktel and Sheba. Another company CityCell operates under CDMA system. CDMA system is popular in the USA and Japan while GSM operates in 50 countries around the world.

Officials said that there are around three lakh mobile phones and six lakh fixed phone line in the country.

Meanwhile, BTTB has received allegations that a vested quarter is collecting money from the public in the name of providing mobile phones and selling so-called application forms.

Officials said that BTTB has not started receiving any application to provide mobile phones as the bidding process is going on.

Mamata breaks silence

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wherever they visited. I still cannot fathom how such a disaster could happen."

Mamata, however, did not agree to the idea that the Trinamool lacked proper organisational set-up to tackle the might of the CPI (M). "If the people had been allowed to vote, then the results would have been different. The voters were kept away from the machines."

However, all along she was contradictory. At one point she even became a bit incoherent. One moment, she was saying that she had failed to understand the voters and the next moment she was saying that the electorate had been terrorised.

When asked as to whether in hindsight the decision to break alliance with the BJP had proved costly, Mamata said, "How can you say that. The BJP has not won a single seat in West Bengal. If they had won a seat, then one could have argued on the issue. However, that question should not arise at all."

She also did not agree that her image had suffered against Buddhadev Bhattacharya's. "He is a carbon copy of Hitler. The state will understand this in the next five years."

Meanwhile, along with Mamata, party spokesperson, Pankaj Bandyopadhyaya said that the Trinamool Congress had failed to protect the voters from the terroris-

ing tactics of the CPI (M). "We failed to provide a safe atmosphere for the voters and that is why we have lost. That has been our only failure."

He also said that Mamata's resignation letter has been rejected. "She expressed a desire to quit as the party head. However, keeping the critical situation in view, we have rejected the resignation."

At this point, Mamata offered a faint smile and said, "What have I done for the party?"

There was a flash of anger when one asked what her future plans would be.

"Do you think, I am finished?" she said. "I will always fight for the people of West Bengal. I will continue the crusade against the atrocities of the CPI (M)."

The question is whether she will have many with her. Efforts to bring back Ajit Panja to the party have already underway. A section of leaders are also of the opinion that Mamata should now divide work and supervise. Some Trinamool MPs are thinking about forming a separate forum and working in close association with the BJP.

Meanwhile, it is said that Trinamool may boycott the swearing-in ceremony on Friday. However, when asked, Mamata said that the party's policymaking body would make the final decision in this regard.

Jayalalitha to form govt

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sworn in as chief minister later yesterday.

However, whether Jayalalitha can actually take her place as the head of the state permanently is still unclear.

Jayalalitha filed her candidacy for the May 10 polls in four separate constituencies, all of which were rejected under regulations preventing people with criminal convictions contesting elections.

The former actress was convicted on corruption charges relating to her 1991-1996 tenure as Tamil Nadu chief minister. In February 2000, she was sentenced to one year's hard labour but only served two months in jail.

A defiant AIADMK, however,

continued its poll campaign with Jayalalitha as the party's chief ministerial candidate.

And as the results came in on Sunday Jayalalitha made no secret of her ambitions. She also lost no time in meeting the governor Biwi on Monday to stake her claim to form the government.

Jayaram Jayalalitha was sworn in late yesterday as chief minister of Tamil Nadu.

Political analysts said that even if Jayalalitha became the chief minister she would still have to be voted to a state constituency within six months.

No formal discussion

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Jatiya Party (Matin-Nazir) would start bargaining with BNP for 50 seats each to contest the parliamentary polls. But Islami Oikya Jote is yet to make any demand.

In the current context, the party needs to contest in at least 250 seats to ensure a single majority, said a top BNP leader adding that the BNP is capable of nominating more than one candidate in all the 300 parliamentary constituencies.

BNP sources said BNP would possibly start bargaining with its partners, offering 40 seats and finally settling for maximum 50 seats. Leaders said none of its alliance partners has made any 'ambitious demand' and hoped that

the issue of seat sharing would be resolved peacefully and BNP might satisfy its allies.

The BNP will also set aside a few seats for eminent personalities and politicians of the smaller parties, if they agree to contest the polls with BNP's election symbol "sheaf of paddy".

Referring to the publication of BNP candidates in 153 constituencies in some newspapers, a top BNP leader said the list is absolute rubbish. The leader also alleged that a section of the party, associated with the two leaders expelled from BNP, prepared such list to create confusion among the party leaders and misunderstanding among the allies.

BSF cordoned off

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villagers out of their houses," Md Zafar Ali of the same area said.

According to Mainul Haq, a Lalmonirhat-based journalist, the BSF stopped movement of all Bangladeshis living in the enclaves into mainland India.

"Due to the distance between the enclaves and nearest land of Bangladesh, people there usually depend on India for essential commodities," he said.

People, living in the enclaves, go to retail stores in India, their children study in Indian schools and for medication, they have little option but to go to nearby health centres inside the Indian territory.

"Since the Roumari incident, none are being allowed to step outside the demarcated pillars that separate the enclaves from India," Mainul said.

The worst affected of these enclaves are Jagatbar having 30.66 acres of land, Dhabalshuti-Mirzapur (173.88 acres), Chitanbari (108.59 acres), Kuchlibari (1.83 acres) and Falnapur (506.56 acres).

Some people fled their homes at the dead of night and took shelter in Dahgram, which has a corridor with Bangladesh.

Residents of the enclaves say that they have always been subjected to BSF highhandedness and its intensity only heightened after the Roumari clashes.

One senior official of the Lalmonirhat district administration said that the enclave people were in the middle of nowhere. "They are like orphans. Neither the Bangladesh government nor the BDR can do anything about their ordeal."

We are ready to resist any attack on our sovereignty PM tells expatriates in London

UNB, London

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said on Sunday that the Bengali nation has earned the independence at the cost of blood and it is always ready to resist any attack on its sovereignty and independence.

"We're always ready to face any attack on us, but we believe in peace and we want solution of any problem in peaceful manner," she said addressing a meeting of expatriate citizens at Camden Centre Town Hall in the afternoon.

UK Awami League organised the meeting on the occasion of the arrival of the Prime Minister, who is now on a five-day visit to attend the LDCs conference in Brussels.

Referring to the recent border dispute with India, the Prime Minister said that the timely steps of the government help solve the problem quickly and peacefully.

"We want peace, we want peaceful solution to all problems," she said.

But she regretted that even during such a national crisis, the opposition did not extend help, rather the opposition parties tried to gain some political interest from the crisis.

Criticising the opposition, Hasina said: "They don't believe in independence, they've no contribution towards our independence. They only like to satisfy their masters, the defeated forces. They want conflict and confrontation."

She said: "We want peaceful solution to all problems. We've restored democracy ... established the base for economic development."

Hasina recalled the contribution of the expatriate Bangladeshis living in London during the Liberation War and in every crisis of the nation.

She also recalled how she had

started her political career in London by staging a demonstration in 1980 against the killing of Bangabandhu.

The Prime Minister said she and her party has requested the Election Commission to consider the issue of enabling expatriate citizens to vote. She suggested that they become voters whenever they visit the country.

She said the government is trying to solve other problems of the expatriate citizens, including the restoration of Sonali Bank operations.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury, British MPs Baroness Paula Uddin, Frank Dobson and Karen Bach, member of the European Parliament Mary Hanibal, and UK Awami League general secretary Prof Abul Hasem also addressed the meeting.

LDCs: Dhaka's 4-pt proposal

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Bangladesh's proposals placed by the PM envisaged market access for LDC exports, protection of LDC interests from the impact of globalisation, higher aid flow of appropriate quality and regular monitoring of commitments made by all concerned with impoverished countries.

Hasina, who delivered the speech as a spokesperson for the LDCs, called for urgent steps for cancellation of all debts for the least developed countries saying that immediate debt moratorium alone can generate \$ 4.5 billion a year for investment in socioeconomic sectors of the poorer countries.

Seeking external assistance to attain self-sustaining growth, she said \$25 billion in additional resources could be made available for the development of LDCs by reaching the agreed target of 0.2 per cent of GNP as ODA to these nations.

The prime minister called for removing tariff and non-tariff barriers to LDC products on way to the world markets as she said trade opportunities for these countries are critical because of their present economic standing. She praised the decisions of the EU to provide market access to all items but arms from the least developed countries and asked other major countries to follow the suit.

Bangladesh sought effective partnership between the underdeveloped countries and their development partners, one that will involve the private sector, the civil society and other stakeholders.

Asking for private capital for development, she said, "We want our development partners to specifically encourage their private sectors to target our countries as destinations for FDI."

The prime minister attached importance to functioning and transparent democracy as crucial element for development and said basic points of good governance under democracy should include promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, ensuring gender equality and the rule of law.

She also suggested good governance at international level to ensure transparency in financial, economic and trading systems making them sensitive to the needs of economically poorer nations in particular.

The prime minister apprised the UN conference on the least developed countries that the LDCs are now in a struggle to combat poverty and marginalization, but poverty eradication and social and economic development remained as elusive as ever.

Drawing the attention to the house to new problems facing the underprivileged countries she said LDCs now face menacing problems like HIV or AIDS and arsenic poisoning of drinking water. Advanced science and technology must be used to combat these maladies to ensure a better life for all.

The prime minister said international crimes, terrorism and cross-border movement of drugs also posed challenges to the poor countries. In this context, she cited the

Tk 110cr bank loan for Beximco Pharma

UNB, Dhaka

A consortium of five banks will provide a loan amounting to Tk 110 crore to Beximco, a big business house of the country that has been facing running capital shortages in modernising.

Beximco Pharmaceuticals signed an agreement yesterday with the consortium of Janata Bank, Sonali Bank, Agrani Bank, Rupali Bank and the United Commercial Bank Limited for the credits to modernise their pharmaceutical industry for more value addition.

Addressing the signing ceremony at Hotel Purbani, Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed said the country experienced the highest ever growth of 14 per cent in industrial sector besides spectacular progress in agriculture for right policies of the government.

"Capital machinery captured lion's share of the recent imports to cater to the growth in industrial production," he said.

Import of industrial raw materials, petroleum and petroleum products, capital machinery and machinery for miscellaneous industries increased by 23.55 per cent during July-March period of 2000-2001 compared to same period in last fiscal, official statement said.

During the period, authorised dealer banks opened import LCs worth Tk 36,428 crore. Of that, machineries account for Tk 2,483 crore, textile fabrics and accessories for RMG inputs Tk 9,023 crore, raw cotton and synthetic fibre Tk 1,561 crore and yarn Tk 787 crore.

Tipu

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according to a message received at The Daily Star office yesterday.

The doctors said they are not sure whether 100 per cent normal functioning of both his hands could be restored.

Tipu left Dhaka for Bangkok on May 8. Earlier he was treated at the Hospital for the Disabled (Pongu Hospital) in Dhaka.

Batamul incident

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night of March 6, 1999 was the first such incident in the country. Ten persons were killed and more than 100 injured there.

Sources concerned pointed out that the number of incidents involving use of explosive devices has increased in the past two years. But the authorities concerned failed to find clues and take effective measures to stop recurrence of such incidents.

Twisting of bidding

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WASA, however, denied any sort of irregularity or corruption in the procurement process. Asked about the phraseology of the letter to BUET experts, Arif maintained that the clauses 'are confirmed to be of Class C type' and 'appear to be of Class C type' were essentially the same.

In addition to these major breaches of specifications, there are other minor discrepancies. For example, tender-related documents available with The Daily Star clearly show the lowest bidder quoted the price only in numbers whereas as per WASA's condition, the tender package would be cancelled if the price is not quoted both in numbers and words.

The WASA officials concerned however denied any such irregularities.

About the inconsistency between the error ranges of specimens found in the BUET report, WASA MD Khandakar Azharul Haq said "There is still scope for interpretation in this regard, that is why we have again sent the letter to confirm the class of the specimen".

He, however, said that WASA is yet to award the tender to the specific bidder. "It is still up to our board to decide whether the lowest bidder will get the work", he added.

NCTB policy for quality textbooks soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) will adopt a policy soon to ensure printing and distribution of quality textbooks in time, Education Secretary Dr. Saadat Hussain said yesterday.

"Multiplicity of objectives in the book printing process have disrupted the printing and distribution of textbooks in time," he said while addressing a workshop on 'the process of printing and distribution of textbooks of secondary and higher secondary levels'.

A high-level committee with the experts in the printing industry will be formed before awarding the textbook printing job, he said.

The Secretary said, "If needed, more staffs will be recruited and NCTB staffs will be trained to monitor the quality of books."

He said the NCTB would start work within two or three days for printing and distribution of textbooks for the year 2002.

NCTB organised the workshop against the backdrop of widespread media criticism over failure of printing and distribution of secondary level textbooks for the current academic session.

Pustaka, a Beximco concern,

was solely awarded for the job for printing and distribution of 2.51 crore secondary-level textbooks by November 30 last year. But the firm could not print and distribute the books till March this year.

The Education Secretary said that from now on, the NCTB would shortlist qualified printers for printing and distribution of books.

The Secretary pointed out that there was a crisis of textbooks in 1996 and the current year due to implementation of new curriculum.

Veteran publisher and owner of University Press Limited (UPL) Mohiuddin Ahmed, in his speech, underscored the need for privatisation of the NCTB to bring transparency in the textbook printing process.

"Privatisation of NCTB is a must, if we want to flourish the publishing industry in the country," Ahmed said.

NCTB Chairman Dr. Tapan Kanti Chowdhury, Dr. Ayesha Khatun, Director General of Secondary and Higher Education, Dr. Gazi M. Ahsanul Kabir, Secretary, NCTB, Osman Gani and Abu Taher, leaders of textbook printers and distributors association, also spoke on the occasion.

Ayub was called back

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Ayub was taken to police remand yesterday.

Ayub fled to India in 1999, police said. He used to maintain close contact with Fazlul Huq from Delhi. The UP chairman is one of his godfathers and financiers, police added. Fazlul Huq believes that for getting nomination from Sathkira-1 constituency will be easier after killing of three top AL leaders including the sitting MP and with this and Ayub was called to Tala, OC Sirajul Islam said.

Fazlul Huq sought nomination to contest by-election to Sathkira-1 seat that fell vacant after death of Syed Kamal Bakht Saki, Sathkira Awami League president. But failed later, he planned with some BPCP armed cadres loyal to Ayub to kill all the three AL nomination seekers for the next parliamentary elections, OC said quoting Ayub.

Police arrested on Sunday another BPCP armed cadre identified as Jalal, 30, from Khesra union. Jalal, an associate of Ayub, attended a secret meeting in the house of one Afaz Sarder of Lakkhighona village

under Paikgachha thana where final decision was taken to kill three AL leaders.

We are watching Fazlul Huq and other godfathers of Ayub. We shall go into action after checking and rechecking Ayub's judicial statement, a high official of Sathkira district police said.

Tala police ravaged houses of Ayub Ali during combing operation at Khesra union on Sunday night. None was found in the house. Khashra is a stronghold of Tala-based unit of Purbu Banglar Communist Party, OC Sirajul Islam said.

PP Quamrul

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He also alleged that the accused got bail from the CMM's Court, Dhaka on April 4 last year. Later he requested the PP Quamrul Islam to file a petition for cancellation of the bail of the accused. According Quamrul filed a petition. But did not appear at the court for hearing on the bail cancellation.

The PP also did not permit him (Reza) to give deposition despite he appeared before the court thrice for giving his statements, the complainant added.

The PP conducted the case on behalf of the accused, Reza alleged.

Moreover he (Reza) could not file a naraji petition against the charge sheet as the IO dropped two accused from the case. The PP showed a serious negligence in this connection.

The law ministry appointed three assistant public prosecutors replacing PP Quamrul Islam to conduct the case.

PSA: Hearing on writ

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a finance bill.

He said it had been sent to the President as a finance bill in violation of the Constitution and it undermined the post of President.

Besides, the Speaker had violated the Constitution by certifying it as a finance bill, the counsel said, adding the home secretary also certified it as a finance bill.

Razzak cited Aarticle 81 of the Constitution defining the finance bill and argued that the PSA bill could not be defined as a finance bill. But it was done not only violating the Constitution but also defrauding the people, he said.

The court asked the counsel to explain the difference between a finance bill and a bill relating to expenditure of money. Razzak would continue his submissions today.

After the first writ, the PSA came under further challenge by BNP leader M Murshed Khan MP who filed a writ on January 12 this year. He filed the writ following a case filed

against him under the PSA on charges of looting a sweetmeat shop in Chittagong city on December 25 last year.

Khan is repressed in the case by leading lawyers like Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, Dr Kamal Hossain, M A Malek, Khandaker Mahbubuddin Ahmed, Barrister Maudud Ahmed and Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud.

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Since then over 100 such writ petitions were filed.

In the hearing yesterday, Attorney General Mahmudul Islam and Additional Attorney General Mahbub-e-Alam represented the state.

Barrister Ishtiaq Ahmed, Barrister Rafiqul Huq, Barrister Maudud Ahmed and Murshed Khan were present during the hearing.

AL quest for benefit

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Agriculture Minister Matiya Choudhury, meanwhile, does not think that the ongoing move to free BNP from the influence of Islamic fundamentalists and anti-liberation elements would succeed. Because, she argued, recent expulsion of two fundamentalist leaders was not for upholding the spirit of the independence war.

"It was purely because of BNP's internal crisis. The two were expelled after they had made internecine conflicts public and spoke against the party chief," she noted.

"Having forged alliance with such anti-liberation parties as Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote and kept razzakars like Abdul Aleem in the party, the BNP can never pursue pro-liberation politics," the minister said reminding that the

party was born with notorious razzakar like Shah Azizur Rahman.

Ridiculing the BNP move to hold a conference of the freedom fighters, she said, "It's an attempt to fool the people."

Pro-independence people will always uphold the spirit of the war and never be misguided by such ill political tactic, she hoped.

Another ruling party leader said they were happy to see the changing scenario in BNP, which, he said, would ultimately benefit his party as far as pre-election politics was concerned.

Elaborating, he said growing disputes amongst groups within the party would not only weaken the BNP but also isolate it from other opposition parties.

Smugglers transact over Tk 100 cr

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official posted in Comilla.

The officials identified Akhaura in Brahmanbaria, Kasba, Bibirbazar, Shashital, Barazala, Choudhagram in Comilla, and Gitabari in Feni as smuggling points from where cross-border trading takes place. Besides, people in all the bordering villages illegally exchange goods between both countries.

Some local people who take cross-border trading as the only means of livelihood have been doing this business since their inheritance of it. The villagers of almost all the bordering areas have been engaged in such trading.

For this, they have come to an understanding dealing with the local administration, police, BDR and customs officials, said one source. "Without paying money to the local administration we cannot run our business," one Shefali Begum, a middle-aged woman, told the Daily Star while bringing a bag full of sugar from across the border.

Some poor people from Comilla and the adjoining areas, who settled in the hill areas of Tripura, used to do businesses between the then two neighbouring districts in the undivided India.

But, after the partition in 1947,

the then queen of Tripura forcibly evacuated a good number of settlers locally known as Ziratia from the areas, making some 70,000 people completely landless. These dislodged people later engaged themselves in illegal cross-border trading.

The Ziratia have since been engaged in this trading which has now become a profit-making business for a section of wealthy people who use the poor by paying them a little amount of money.

All but only five to six families at Barazala, a bordering village in Comilla, depend solely on the border trading. They deal in arms, drugs and many other commodities brought from across the border. One Bashar, a rickshaw-constructor turned millionaire, now leads the 110 families in the village.

Local politicians belonging to both the ruling and opposition parties have good understanding with one another as they control smuggling locally. In most cases, the local political leaders, chairmen of the bordering Union Parishad and influential people deal with the local administration to continue their business safely.

Bordering Mutinagar, Kutsisahar, Rachia, Bishnapur, Keraninagar,

Golabari, Bibirbazar, Bangla, Katakabazar, Shahapur, Noapara, Surjanagar, Bouara, Shobhanagar, Dalkhuya, Ekbalia, Dhalpur, Dhanpur, Murapara, Jashpur, Maharpur, Sipur, Dhanamura and Mathurapur areas are being used by the smugglers of Comilla Sadar thana alone, one source said.

Four 'syndicates' in Feni have been controlling the border trading through Chhagolnaya, Chandgazi, Champaknagar, Koyarabazar, Parshuram, Fulgazi, Gitabari, Jhangra, Latim border points.

With the help of local administration, the 'syndicates' safely manage to continue their business, an official said. He added that this is the reason why the number of confiscated smuggled goods is less than it should be.

Nowadays, the smugglers use the modern information technology to keep abreast of the incidents on the frontiers. They frequently use mobile phones both in the Bangladesh and Indian territories as cellular network is now covering the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway that crosses Comilla from across the border.

It's time for post-mortem

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Jayalalitha led her party AIADMK to a landslide victory over the ruling DMK, an ally of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's government.

The Left Front in West Bengal not only retained its traditional stronghold in south-western Bengal but also made deep inroads into the northern part as well as into urban areas, including Calcutta, which had been traditionally anti-Left. The Left wrested a number of seats from Trinamool and Congress in Calcutta, which had been deemed improbable after Trinamool's win in the election to Calcutta civic body less than a year ago.

In Tamil Nadu equally remarkable was the performance of AIADMK. Jayalalitha was debarred from contesting the elections for being convicted in corruption cases. However, it did not dampen the spirits of her party workers. On the contrary, as it now transpires, it kicked up a quiet sympathy wave, especially in the absence of a discernible anti-incumbency factor in the state.

But it remains to be seen whether Jayalalitha can become the chief minister. Under the Indian law, a person, who is not a member of the

assembly, can become a chief minister, but has to get elected within six months of assuming the office. The question is, can Jayalalitha contest elections after her conviction in corruption cases? And if she cannot, how will she become the chief minister.

The BJP did not have any major stake in the elections because the party was not at all a force to reckon with in these states. Yet, Vajpayee, Home Minister LK Advani and BJP President Jana Krishnamurthy joined electioneering.

The BJP's hopes of opening account in West Bengal and Kerala assemblies were dashed. As if that were not enough, its vote share also dwindled sharply in both the states. Besides, BJP's allies DMK and AGP were knocked out of power in Tamil Nadu and Assam respectively. The BJP leadership privately admitted that the Opposition would project it as a verdict against the Vajpayee government.

Sonia Gandhi, for instance, quickly reacted to the poll results in the five states saying they reflected on the functioning of Vajpayee government.

There was jubilation at the party headquarters in New Delhi as

results poured in. Besides the party's triumph in Kerala and Assam on its own strength and in Pondicherry with coalition partner, it ended up on the winning side in Tamil Nadu being a component of the alliance led by Jayalalitha.

But West Bengal brought gloom for the Congress where it got only 21 seats as against 81 in the previous polls five years back.

The outcome in Kerala and Assam was a big boost for Sonia whose leadership had come under cloud after the Congress had suffered its worst defeat in Indian parliamentary election history in 1999. The Congress went to elections in the five states under the leadership of Sonia for the first time since she was elected as party chief with a massive mandate last year.

The Congress now rules nine Indian states as against three for BJP. The Congress circles hope that this expansion in states may help the party regain its status as the premier national party and strengthen its claim to govern India. This is precisely the signal BJP is worried about.

What do the results in the five states mean for the Vajpayee government? The prime minister him-

self appeared not unduly anxious about them. He left yesterday morning for a visit to Malaysia and in pre-departure remarks said the results were "along expected lines". But Sonia and former West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu insisted that the results would have an impact on the Vajpayee government.

But there appears no immediate threat in terms of dramatic political realignment. The Congress has made it clear that it is not interested in pulling down the government and would prefer to wait for erosion of support base of the BJP and its allies.

A complete coming together of the opposition parties seems unlikely, given Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh's reluctance to back the Congress for an alternative to the BJP-led coalition. It is this antipathy of Mulayam Singh against the Congress that prevented emergence of a Congress-led alternative in April 1999 in spite of Sonia having taken an initiative after Vajpayee had lost parliamentary majority. The Congress, too, would not rush into any action that would burn its fingers once again, political observers say.