



Party president Sonia Gandhi is garlanded by Delhi Congress leader Prem Singh during a last-ditch campaign rally in New Delhi yesterday.

I am willing to die for India, says Sonia

AFP, Madras
Sonia Gandhi, the main opposition Congress party chief, Friday made a fervent appeal to voters two days ahead of the final round of balloting in India's staggered elections...

family I would only like to state that it is the greatest honour to belong to a family that has lived and died for this country," Sonia said.
"They cannot break my resolve to bring about a strong, resurgent, secular and just India."

Indian Election
CPI-M eyes victory in West Bengal

SAKYASEN MITTRA, Kolkata
The West Bengal is set to go to the polls tomorrow to decide the fate of 313 contestants who are vying for the 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

nemesis of the CPI-M. The constituencies of Kolkata North-East, Kolkata North-West, Kolkata South, Dum Dum, Barasat and Jadavpur had all voted for either the Trinamool Congress or the BJP during the 1998 and 1999 elections.

Indian Elections
Modi-Yadav sweat it out to win hearts of voters

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi
Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi and Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Laloo Prasad Yadav's battle to win votes turned to be a big draw in their campaign for BJP and Congress respectively in the Indian capital on the penultimate day of electioneering yesterday for the final phase of polls.

Taking a dig at Congress and Sonia, Modi said "earlier the slogan of Congress used to be 'Vande Mataram' (by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee) but now the party says 'Vande-Mata-Rome'."
On the other hand, Laloo Yadav, campaigning for Congress candidates in Delhi, regaled his audiences with his typical humor and mannerisms.

Megawati picks Hasyim as her running mate

THE STRAITS TIMES/ ANN, Jakarta
President Megawati Sukarnoputri announced her choice of Hasyim Muzadi as her running mate Friday, giving a boost to her chances of winning a second term in office, analysts said.

Rumsfeld apology fails to calm Arab anger

REUTERS, Dubai
His apology was late and the damage done, said Arab and European commentators yesterday, reacting to Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.
"While he (Rumsfeld) has been in charge, murder, torture and humiliation were heaped on Iraqi detainees almost as a matter of course," the Saudi daily Arab News commented.

enemies.
Arabic newspapers, from Egypt's opposition al-Wafd to Saudi Arabia's semi-official Okaz, fronted pictures of Rumsfeld looking troubled with his hands over his face.
The abuses by US forces recalled the brutality of Saddam Hussein's regime, said Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad al-Salem al-Sabah.



Nepalese demonstrators chant slogans during a demonstration in Kathmandu yesterday. Demonstrations continue in the Nepalese capital despite the resignation of Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa on Friday.



British soldiers take position yesterday during clashes with militiamen loyal to Shia Muslim radical leader Moqtada Sadr in the southern city of Basra. Gun battles erupted in both Basra and the town of Amara further north as members of Sadr's Army of Mehdi militia clashed repeatedly with British troops, losing at least five men.

New Iraq abuse, torture claims hit UK regiment

AFP, London
Two British newspapers published yesterday new allegations accusing British soldiers in the Queen's Lancashire Regiment of systematically beating and abusing Iraqi detainees.
For the third time in a week, the Daily Mirror tabloid published claims against British troops of the troubled regiment, this time saying its soldiers even made CDs of beatings to keep as souvenirs.

Rumsfeld.
The front page of Saturday's Daily Mirror -- one of Britain's most widely read tabloid newspapers -- carried a picture allegedly provided by a member of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment, currently based in Cyprus.
The picture allegedly shows a soldier photographing a bound captive with bloodied teeth in the back of an armoured personnel carrier.

US SOLDIER SAYS Making prison a 'hell' was her job

REUTERS, Washington
Her job was to "make it hell" for Iraqi prisoners so they would talk, one of the six US soldiers accused of prisoner abuse was quoted as saying Friday.
The Washington Post reported that Spec. Sabrina Harman told it in e-mail interviews that detainees were handed over to her military police unit at the Abu Ghraib prison by military intelligence officers, or by civilian contractors who conducted interrogations.

declined comment on the Post article, saying the matter was under investigation.
The spokeswoman also declined comment on whether military intelligence officers or civilian contractors delivered prisoners to the Abu Ghraib prison. The issue of who was in charge of the prison during the reported abuse was a prominent one in hearings on Capitol Hill on Friday.
A senior general, Air Force Lt. Gen. Lance Smith, said during one of the hearings that Abu Ghraib had been put under the control of military intelligence last November.

RED CROSS SAYS Abuse in Iraqi prisons amounted to 'torture'

AFP, Geneva
The International Committee of the Red Cross says the abuse it found in Iraq's US-run prisons was systematic and amounted to torture, adding that it first raised concerns with the United States more than a year ago.
At a quickly-arranged news conference, the International Committee of the Red Cross' director of operations, Pierre Kraehenbuehl, said US authorities had broken international laws and their transgressions had been documented in an ICRC report.

February, summarized the findings of ICRC officials who visited coalition-run detention centres in Iraq between March 31 and October 24 last year to observe and conduct private interviews with prisoners.
It said Iraqis deemed to be of intelligence value to the United States were at high risk of being subjected to "a variety of harsh treatments" ranging from insults, threats and humiliations to both physical and psychological coercion, "which in some cases was tantamount to torture," in order to force cooperation with their interrogators.
Iraqis confined to US-run detention centers were frequently subjected to hooding, which made their breathing difficult, and painful handcuffing, the report said.

several hours in humiliating or uncomfortable positions.
Prisoners were also stripped naked and held in solitary confinement for days in an empty and completely dark cell that included a latrine, according to the report.
"These methods of physical and psychological coercion were used by the military intelligence in a systematic way to gain confessions and extract information or other forms of cooperation from persons who had been arrested in connection with suspected security offenses or deemed to have an 'intelligence value,'" the document said.
Officials from the Geneva-based agency discussed their discoveries with US overseer in Iraq Paul Bremer and the head of US forces in the country Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez on February 26, Kraehenbuehl said.

Arroyo looks set to win presidential race

THE STRAITS TIMES/ ANN, Manila
Her performance in the past three years has been underwhelming, she suffers from charisma deficit and she has not quite dispelled corruption allegations against her husband.
For all her shortcomings, however, analysts reckon President Gloria Arroyo is likely to win next week's presidential race.
Although she initially trailed other aspirants in popularity surveys, the 57-year-old economist has been able to reverse her political fortunes by a combination of hard work, an extensive political machinery and the use of government resources.
"Her victory is likely, not because she is the best among the candidates, but mainly because her closest rival failed to articulate what he wants to do for the country," said Gladstone Cuarteros, an analyst at the Institute for Popular Democracy.



Supporters of former Philippines president Ferdinand Marcos attend the final campaign rally for opposition presidential candidate Fernando Poe Jr. yesterday in Manila's financial district of Makati. An opinion poll by the Independent Social Weather Station (SWS) organisation, the last survey before tomorrow's elections, gave Philippines President Gloria Arroyo 37 percent of the vote compared to 30 percent for Poe. The family of the late President Marcos have thrown their support behind the idolized actor Poe.