

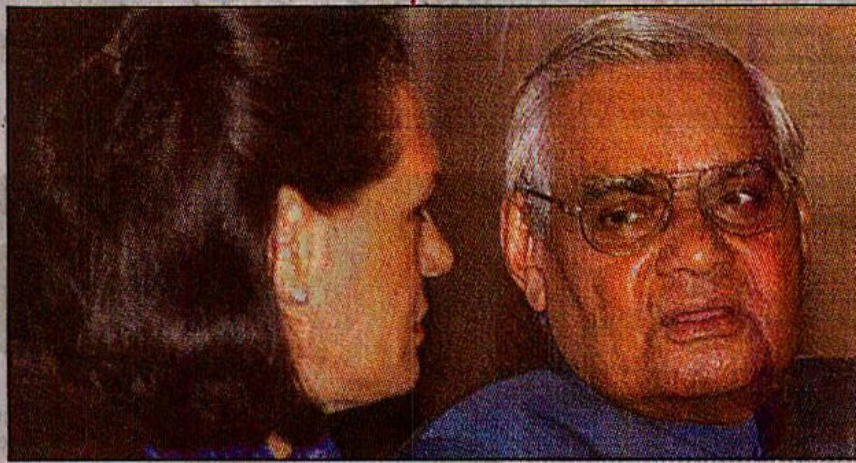
Congress triumphs in India polls

Vajpayee resigns; Sonia Gandhi set to become next premier

ELECTION RESULTS SO FAR

BJP and allies: 188
Congress and allies: 219
Others: 132
Seats counted: 539/539
Needed for majority: 272

This picture taken on November 19 last year shows Indian opposition leader Sonia Gandhi, left, talking to Atal Behari Vajpayee, now caretaker prime minister, as they meet at the presentation of the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development 2002 at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi.



Politicians hail Congress win as a boost for secularism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Politicians in Bangladesh have hailed Congress Party's stunning electoral sweep in neighbouring India yesterday as a boost for secularism and a rejection of fundamentalism and communalism in India and the region, as well.

"The Indians have proved again in this election their respect for secularism and the richness of their democratic values," said Abdul Jalil, general secretary of main opposition Awami League.

"This is a progressive development in a limited scope for the Indian people and also for the region," said Mujahidul Islam Selim, general secretary of the Communist

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

AGENCIES, New Delhi

The Gandhi political dynasty in India is all set to storm into power with the help of resurgent communists and its poll allies after it was handed a stunning victory on a wave of anger among millions of the rural poor against ruling Hindu nationalists.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee resigned to President Abdul Kalam, who asked him to remain as caretaker premier until a new government is formed.

"We accept the people's mandate with all politeness," said Venkaiah Naidu, president of Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which had been confident of securing a new term in the early election.

With 539 of the 543 seats declared by the Election Commission, Congress and its allies won 219 seats compared with 188 for BJP and its partners.

The Congress, led by Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born heir to India's most famous political dynasty, said it will ask Kalam, the ceremonial head of state, to let it

form a new government.

Buoyed by the results, Gandhi, the 57-year-old widow of slain former premier Rajiv Gandhi, and other Congress leaders have gone into a huddle to discuss the contours of a future government.

Congress, which left power in 1996 after ruling India for 45 years, was to meet late yesterday to decide on its choice for prime minister with many pushing for Gandhi.

Some promised that Gandhi, the party leader, would be the next prime minister. But there was still no official decision.

More stories on Page 8

The Hindu nationalists systematically denounced Gandhi during the campaign, saying she was still a foreigner even if she only ever appears in Indian dress and speaks fluent, if accented, Hindi.

India's oldest party, the Congress, virtually written off by political pundits and rivals, made the stunning comeback, as resentment that the benefit of economic reforms fostered by the BJP did not

reach ordinary Indians revived the party.

The BJP, which has led coalitions since 1998 as the first avowedly Hindu party to rule secular India, called the election five months ahead of schedule to capitalise on 79-year-old Vajpayee's popularity and booming economic growth.

But Congress turned the BJP's "India Shining" re-election slogan on its head, portraying the BJP's slick campaign which included mobile telephone messages to voters as out of touch with millions of rural poor who lack proper electricity and water.

"The economic policies of BJP, which did achieve many things they had set out to achieve, alienated much of the electorate which are much too poor and marginalised to benefit from them," said political analyst Pran Chopra.

"It has cost it the support of a very large section of the population. The sympathy and concern for the hardships of the poor were not reflected in the BJP's policies," he said.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Khaleda greets Sonia

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday congratulated Congress President Sonia Gandhi on her party's emergence as the single-largest party in the Lok Sabha elections.

"It is indeed a clear testimony to your dynamic and wise leadership and the trust and confidence the people of India repose on you and your party," she said in message of felicitation to Sonia.

Khaleda, also ruling BNP chairperson, expressed her confidence that the BNP and Congress, which are deeply committed to democratic belief, principles and practices, can work in close cooperation to further strengthen the existing excellent, neighbourly bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India.

"I also believe that we can work together to build a politically and economically stronger South Asia by strengthening our regional cooperation through the SAARC process," she said shortly after the Indian poll results were published.

Khaleda wished Sonia long life, good health and prosperity.

Spectacular win for Congress

KULDIP NAYAR

It is a complete turnaround. The ruling National Democratic Alliance, led by Atal Behari Vajpayee, has been defeated convincingly.

The BJP, the main partner of the alliance, is way down from its earlier strength of 182.

The Congress, which has emerged as the

largest single party, has staked its claim for the formation of the government. Mrs Sonia Gandhi had been assured of support by the Left which number around 55. The Congress and the Left do not reach by themselves the magic figure of 272 in the 545-member House. Pre-election allies of the Congress,

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Cut defence budget to perk up police

Economists suggest at pre-budget consultation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leading economists of the country at a pre-budget consultation meeting yesterday suggested Finance Minister Saifur Rahman to cut defence spending and invest the money to strengthen law-enforcing agencies in order to improve the country's law and order.

The measure, they believe, would result in an immense harvest of multifarious economic benefits.

The economists also recommended the finance minister for budget allocations next year for setting up small townships in rural areas to bridge the gap between cities and villages and stop the unhealthy city-ward migration.

They also urged Saifur to avoid undertaking a development

programme which entertained the demands of lobbying ministers and lawmakers from political considerations. Instead, they think, the government should adopt a development plan formulated in line with the national priorities.

"For that, the Planning Commission should be restructured into a Policy Commission entrusted with determining the priority projects," said Dr Atiur Rahman.

The finance minister agreed with the suggestion and said, "I've told the prime minister that I'm the finance minister of the country, not that of the MPs."

The 20 top economists, who participated in the consultation arranged at the finance ministry, said huge economic gaps were there between the cities and the villages.

To reduce that, the government should set up small townships in rural areas by putting in place various infrastructures.

Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud said, "The townships will stop migration to urban areas, create job opportunities for the missing middle-men and stop waste of land in the villages."

The proposed townships, equipped with banks, power supply, other utility services and infrastructure facilities will act as the growth centres for clusters of villages, the economic planners said. This will eliminate the villagers' need for travelling to the capital.

Professor Rehman Sobhan said, "The government should incorporate a statement in the budget

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

JS probe accuses 24 firms of gas theft

SHAKHAWAT LITON

A parliamentary probe body yesterday accused at least 24 industries of gas theft. They are: RK Textiles, Umpire Dyeing, Meghna Limes, Khajia Limes, Rahman Limes, Azmiri Salt Industry, Shah Fatehullah Salt Industry, Utasol Salt, Amirabad Salt, Feather Touch Foam and Leather, RK Textiles, RK Fashion, Umpire Dyeing and Hosiery Mills, Hazrat Shah Jalal Re-Rolling Mills, Shahjalal Re-Rolling Mills, Fauzi Salt Industry, Karnaphuli Textile Mills, Rainbow Dyeing and Finishing Mills.

The three industries in Narshingdi are Abed Textile Processing Mills Ltd., Shilpi Textile Dyeing and Processing Mills Ltd. and Kalyanduti Textile Mills Ltd.

Two industries in Brahmanbaria are Jharna Chemical Industry and Arman Chemical and Soap Industry. One company in Savar accused of the pilferage is Savar Textiles.

The 17 officials accused of systems loss in the probe report are AKM Anwarul Islam, Harun or Rashid, Abbas Uddin, Habibur Rahman, Saifullah, Sirajul Islam Mridha, Muslim Uddin, Arfan Ali

and systems loss.

The probe report alleged 18 industries in Narayanganj of gas theft. They are: RK Textiles, Umpire Dyeing, Meghna Limes, Khajia Limes, Rahman Limes, Azmiri Salt Industry, Shah Fatehullah Salt Industry, Utasol Salt, Amirabad Salt, Feather Touch Foam and Leather, RK Textiles, RK Fashion, Umpire Dyeing and Hosiery Mills, Hazrat Shah Jalal Re-Rolling Mills, Shahjalal Re-Rolling Mills, Fauzi Salt Industry, Karnaphuli Textile Mills, Rainbow Dyeing and Finishing Mills.

The three industries in Narshingdi are Abed Textile Processing Mills Ltd., Shilpi Textile Dyeing and Processing Mills Ltd. and Kalyanduti Textile Mills Ltd.

Two industries in Brahmanbaria are Jharna Chemical Industry and Arman Chemical and Soap Industry. One company in Savar accused of the pilferage is Savar Textiles.

The 17 officials accused of systems loss in the probe report are AKM Anwarul Islam, Harun or Rashid, Abbas Uddin, Habibur Rahman, Saifullah, Sirajul Islam Mridha, Muslim Uddin, Arfan Ali

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Another shrine pond poisoned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Unknown miscreants poisoned yet another pond at a shrine on the edge of the port city on Wednesday night, less than 36 hours after the pond of Hazrat Bayezed Bostami shrine was poisoned, in the third such incident in a week.

The miscreants poured poison onto the pond of Shah Pir Aulia Mazar in Darbeshat in Lohagara upazila, putting its several hundred years old aquatic lives under threat. Local Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mohammed Monzur confirmed the incident.

Local administration and shrine sources said the caretaker of the shrine found some Gajar fish, aged 728 years according to one claim, and spots of stinky liquid surfacing on the water yesterday morning.

He informed the shrine committee and district administration, who recovered some 62 fishes till afternoon.

However, the shrine committee is yet to identify the culprits. HIRED GOONS SUSPECTED Police and shrine authorities

meanwhile said yesterday they believe hired goons are responsible for Tuesday night's poisoning of the pond that left all the fishes of about 39 species killed and 400 rare turtles sick at Hazrat Bayezed Bostami shrine.

Bayezed Bostami police in the early hours of yesterday arrested two listed criminals in Dhanipar near the shrine for their suspected links to the incident.

Mohammad Younus, 35, who stands accused in two robbery cases, and Akhtar Hossain, 30, have been remanded for five days.

"There may be a link between the arrestees and the poisoning incident which we believe was an act of some hired criminals," said Sub-Inspector Nilu Kanti Barua, also the investigating officer (IO) of the case, yesterday.

About 165 sick turtles were shifted to another pond in Kulgaon area till yesterday afternoon and the authorities said conditions of those were improving.

Officials of the fisheries department released some fresh fishes in the pond to examine whether the water was safe or not.

No progress in Ahsanullah murder probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The probe into the killing of opposition lawmaker Ahsanullah Master has made little headway with no one of the killers tracked down even in seven days.

A four-member investigation team of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police was interrogating four youths arrested from Tongi on Tuesday night. But it failed to extract any information from the arrestees - Nasiruddin, Sumon, Oli Mian and Qaiyum - that could lead to nabbing of the killers.

The CID team headed by Assistant Superintendent Khalequzzaman is just concentrating on the statements of Mahfuzur Rahman Mahal, who was injured in the May 7 Tongi mayhem, and two Tongi youths - Sumon and Jabbar.

Mahal disclosed to a magistrate that he identified seven people - Nurul Islam Dipu, Shahidul Islam Shipu, Ohidul Islam Tipu, Kana Hafiz, Ratan, Sohag and Jahangir - while they were shooting at the rally that left the legislator and a schoolboy killed and at least five others injured.

Sumon gave a statement alleging involvement of four people in the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

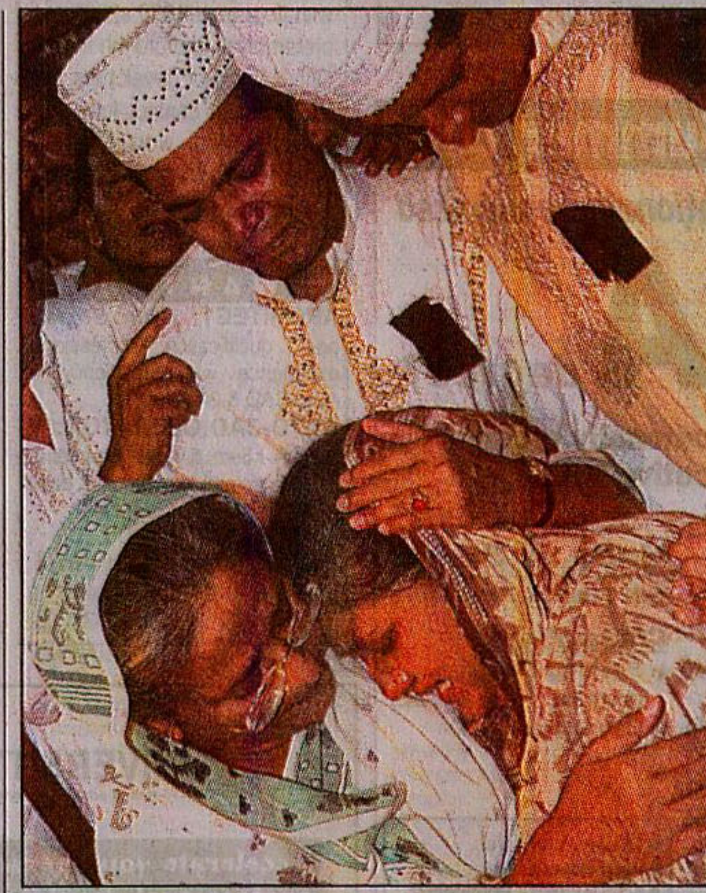


PHOTO: STAR

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina consoles the family of slain lawmaker Ahsanullah Master in Tongi yesterday after her return from the United States earlier in the day.

Hasina demands impartial probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday categorically blamed Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for the killing of her party lawmaker Ahsanullah Master.

Addressing a public rally at Hyderabad in Gazipur, village home of the assassinated lawmaker, Hasina alleged Ahsanullah was killed as part of a blueprint to eliminate prospective Awami League leaders across the country.

Without arresting the killers, the prime minister herself has brought upon herself the responsibility for the killing of Ahsanullah, she said.

Earlier in the morning, Hasina returned home cutting short her US trip in the wake of assassination of the legislator.

Talking to newsmen at Zia International Airport, the AL chief demanded impartial investigation and punishment of the killers.

Paying rich tributes to the late lawmaker, Hasina said he was a symbol of truth, honesty and dedication to the cause of the common man.

In the afternoon, Hasina visited the lawmaker's bereaved family members at his Tongi residence. His wife, two sons, only daughter and

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Tigers start with win



RABEED IMAM, From St Vincent

The Bangladesh cricket team caught the imagination of the locals here after a fighting three-wicket win against the West Indies Cricket Board XI in their tour opener at the Arnos Vale ground on Wednesday.

Having shot out the formidable Board XI for 135 in 45.3 overs thanks to an outstanding spell from left-arm spinner Manjural Islam Rana, the tourists were going pretty at 81 for four after 23 overs before two wickets in consecutive overs threat

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Woman's body in 9 parts found in Shyamoli

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The body of a young woman in nine pieces, believed to have been killed a few days ago, was found at Shyamoli in Mohammodpur in the early hours of yesterday.

Police believe criminals brought the body parts in a CNG-autorickshaw and dumped those, stashed in two plastic bags, near house 12/Ka/A on Road No. 2 at Shyamoli at about 3:00am.

The identity of the fair complex

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Biman pilots stick to strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Most domestic and international flights of Biman Bangladesh Airlines were either suspended or delayed yesterday for the second consecutive day as the pilots continued a strike to press for their demands.

Officials at Zia International Airport (ZIA) said out of six domestic flights, five were cancelled and only one left for Jessore.

Of the six international flights, two left Dhaka - one for Kolkata and

the other for Delhi in India. One regional flight to Nepal was also cancelled, causing sufferings to passengers stranded at the airport.

Earlier on Wednesday, half of the domestic flights and three out of 11 international flights were cancelled.

The pilots of Biman have been pressing the airlines for meeting their three-point demand, including rise in facilities through implementation of a pact signed earlier with the government, removal of a Biman

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

A Planned city for sound life

MODHUMOTI MODEL TOWN

The most modern city of the country

Baishakhi Offer !!

From Baishak 1 to 31 April 14 to May 14.

To day is the Last Day

At a time :
Tk. 1,50,500 - 1,92,500 Discount

Installment :
Tk. 49,000 - 61,000 Discount

Lowest Minimum Per Head Monthly Installment Tk. 2,035/- for 7 Yrs For At A Time Basis Tk. 99,000/-

- In few blocks, per katha Price is @ Tk. 1,98,000
- Ready Plot - First come, first served.
- Plot Handover Block A, F, G June 2004, B, C, D, E, I, December 2004

Booking time : Head office: 9am to 9 pm. Site Office: 9 am to 5 pm.

Project Location : 1 km. West of Amin Bazar Bridge, Beside Dhaka - Savar Highway, adjacent to 300 Feet Dhaka-Savar Highway.

Site visit facility availables everyday. Both offices open on holidays.

Booking Tk. 20,000 only

Free Dinner set - for every booking. TV, Frig, Multimedia Computer at A time/Part Payment. Raffle Draw and Attractive Prize

METRO MAKERS & DEVELOPERS LTD.

An Enterprise of Nabisco-Bhaiya Group of Industries

Head Office: 25/2 Green Road, Dhanmondi, (In the middle of Road 6 & 7, Dhanmondi - east of Green Road) Dhaka - 1205, Bangladesh. Site Office : Modhumoti Model Town 1 km. West of Amin Bazar Bridge, Beside Dhaka - Savar Highway. Phone : 8624607-8, 8620455, 8620466, 9671044, 9671175, Mobile : 0189-287727, 0189-287726, 0171-617934, 0171-671474, 0171-365974, 0189-269800, 011-350758, 0173-017368, 011-824642, 0189-411099, 011-824644, Fax : 880-2-8629141, E-mail: info@metromakers.com, Web site: www.metromakers.com