



(L to R) Indian people wait in line to cast their vote during the first phase of polling in Varanasi yesterday; election officials check the identity card of a woman voter as others wait in line inside a centre in Mirzapur; women show their voter identity cards to photographers; paramilitary soldiers stand guard as displaced villagers queue outside a centre at Tikabali relief camps in the Kandhamal district of Orissa state and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, daughter of Congress party leader Sonia Gandhi, waves to supporters during an election campaign rally in Jagdishpur.

Indian voters brave militants, Maoists to cast their votes

AFP, Ranchi

For many Indian voters, casting their ballots yesterday was a gesture of defiance against militants, tribal guerrillas and Maoist rebels intent on disrupting the world's largest democratic exercise.

Among the regions taking part in the first phase of the country's month-long general elections were some that have suffered decades of unrest, from insurgency-wracked Kashmir to the tribal badlands of the northeast.

India's sheer size makes organising elections an immense logistical challenge, but the scale of the task is made all the greater by the constant threat of violence.

No sooner had voting begun Thursday than Maoist

gunmen in the eastern state of Jharkhand used a landmine to ambush a bus carrying paramilitary personnel to a polling booth.

Seven soldiers and two civilians died in the attack, police spokesman SN Pradhan told AFP from Latehar district, 140km from the state capital Ranchi.

In neighbouring Bihar state, two security personnel were shot dead and another wounded by the rebels in Gaya district, the official Press Trust of India news agency reported.

And in Chattisgarh state, gunbattles were reported in Bijapur and Dantewada districts, part of a densely forested region that serves as the main base of the left-wing guerrillas.

The Maoists, who say they are fighting for the rights of neglected tribal people and landless farmers, have been described by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as the biggest overall threat to India's security.

In Muslim-majority Kashmir, where an insurgency against Indian rule has claimed 47,000 lives in the past 20 years, polling was clouded by a militant warning that anyone taking part would be branded a "traitor."

Army troops, backed by tens of thousands of police and paramilitary troops, were deployed in the streets of the Kashmiri winter capital Jammu and outside polling booths in Rajouri and Poonch, two districts bordering Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

Fourth Front will help BJP by splitting secular votes: Pranab

PTI, Jangipur, Murshidabad

Ridiculing its allies RJD, LJP and SP, which have formed the 'Fourth Front', Congress has said these parties would act as spoilers and help BJP by dividing the secular votes.

Senior Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee said his party was making efforts to muster majority along with parties with which it has pre-poll alliances like NCP, Trinamool Congress, DMK and JMM.

The External Affairs Minister, however, did not rule out Congress taking support of RJD, LJP and SP after the polls if the need arose.

"Who are the 'Fourth

Front'?" Mukherjee asked when queried by PTI in an interview about how the combination of UPA allies RJD, LJP and SP would affect the Congress' prospects.

Asked whether these three parties would split secular votes and help BJP, he responded, "Of course. They will surely waste votes. That is their main objective. They will cause harm where they are the main contestants."

Mukherjee was speaking in the midst of hectic campaigning in this constituency of West Bengal, which is attempting to retain after being elected to Lok Sabha from here for the first time in 2004.

Manmohan keeps option open for alliance with Left parties after polls

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

With all opinion polls pointing to a hung parliament, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh seems to be keeping the ruling Congress party's option open for an alliance with Left parties after the Lok Sabha elections.

However, the Left parties promptly spurned Singh's overtures with CPI-M general secretary Prakash Karat saying "there is no question of supporting a Congress-led government at the Centre".

Interacting with the Editors Guild of India here on

Thursday, the Prime Minister, when asked if Congress would take the support of Left parties in forming the next government, said "we will cross the bridge when we come to it. I am confident that the Congress would be able to form the government (with allies). I have dealt with Left parties, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lalu Prasad, Ram Vilas Paswan and Sharad Pawar".

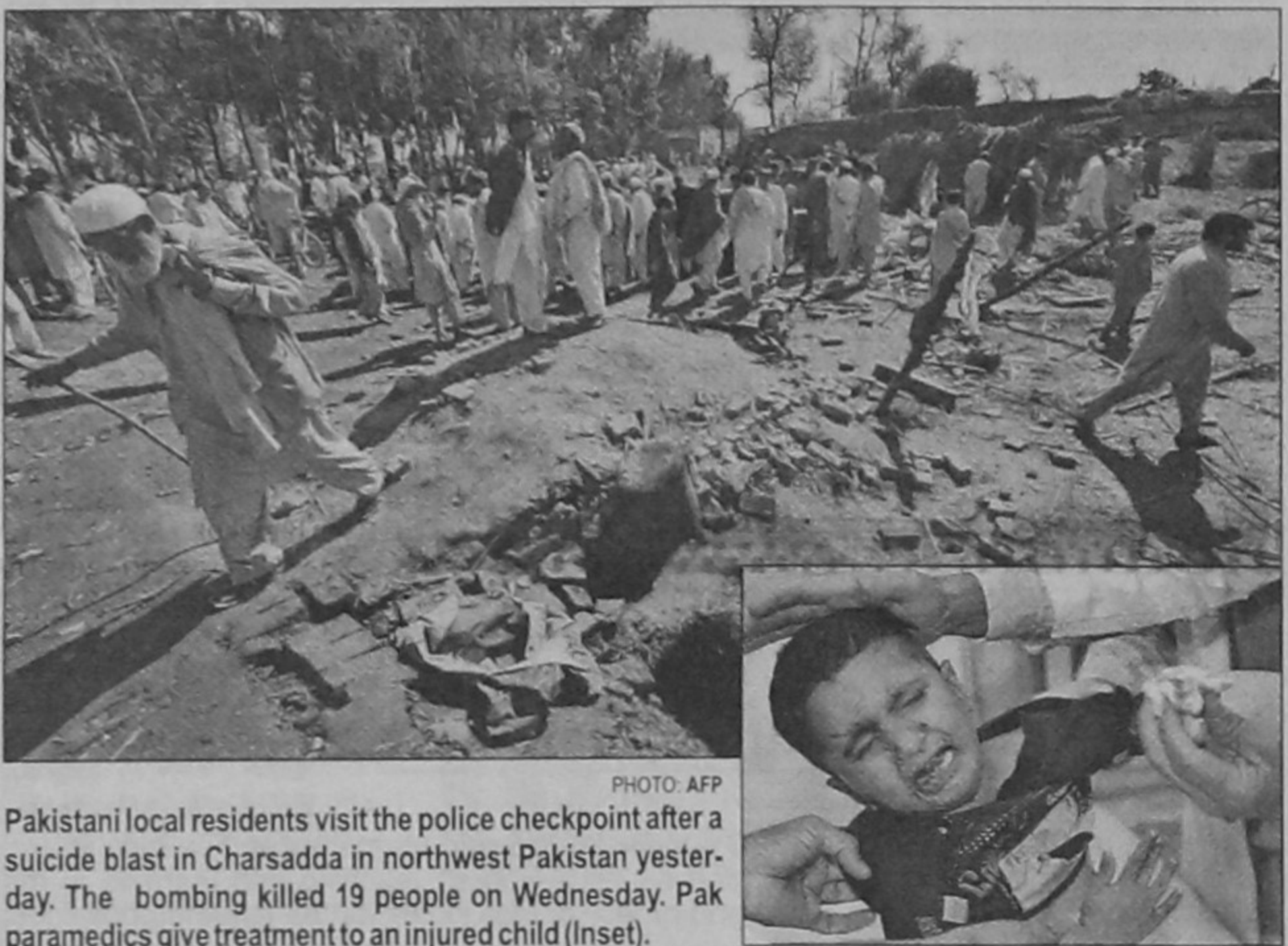
"I have enough experience of dealing with diverse forces", he added.

To a question whether he would like to do business with the Left, Singh replied "well, I think circumstances will

decide. But I was quite happy when as government we were dealing with the Left".

After propping up the Manmohan Singh government for four and half years, Left parties withdrew support in July last year protesting a landmark nuclear deal between India and the US.

A few days back, Singh, addressing an election meeting in Kerala, had said that Left parties had often been on the "wrong" side of history and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi has been unsparing in her criticism of Left parties during election meetings.



Pakistani local residents visit the police checkpoint after a suicide blast in Charsadda in northwest Pakistan yesterday. The bombing killed 19 people on Wednesday. Pak paramedics give treatment to an injured child (inset).

Lunchtime bombing kills 16 soldiers at Iraqi army base

AFP, Habbaniyah

A suicide bomber disguised in army uniform blew himself up at an Iraqi military base as soldiers queued for lunch yesterday, killing at least 16 troops and wounding 50, officials said.

The attack at the base in Habbaniyah, about 60 kilometres (37 miles) west of Baghdad, was the latest in a series of deadly bombings in recent weeks in Iraq, which have killed nearly 100 people

and injured three times as many.

"Sixteen soldiers were killed and 50 others were wounded, including officers, when a suicide bomber blew himself up among the soldiers, who were in a queue waiting to enter the cafeteria," a defence ministry official told AFP.

"The attacker was wearing an Iraqi army uniform," he said, adding that no civilians are allowed into the base.

Police confirmed the attack, saying the suicide bomber had

concealed his explosives under his uniform.

Habbaniyah is in Iraq's western Anbar province, the one-time epicentre of the country's Sunni insurgency that in recent years has seen vast overall improvements in security.

Iraq's armed forces have been hit by a rash of attacks in recent days, underscoring the fragility of the country's security gains less than three months before US soldiers are to withdraw from all cities and major towns.

Obama calls for 'signal' from Cuba ahead of Latin America visit

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama Thursday urged Cuba to show signs of change, as the United States and its communist neighbour work on warming up relations after a half-century of strained Cold War ties.

"I don't expect Cuba to beg. No one is asking for anyone to beg. What we're looking for is some signal that there are going to be changes in how Cuba operates," Obama told CNN television hours before his departure to Mexico his first visit to Latin America as

US president.

Obama said he hoped Havana would show signs of change to keep momentum building in improving relations. The neighbours do not have full diplomatic ties and the United States has had a full economic embargo on Cuba since 1962.

The US president called for Cuban political prisoners to be released and free speech to be allowed in the interest of "a further thawing of relations" between the US and the Americas' only communist country.

Indian court appoints new lawyer for Mumbai attacks suspect

AFP, Mumbai

An Indian court yesterday appointed a new lawyer to represent the only Islamist militant suspect captured during last year's attacks on Mumbai.

Advocate Abbas Kazmi was tasked with the defence of Pakistani national Mohammed Ajmal Kasab, a day after the high-profile trial

started in disarray with a previous lawyer dismissed by the trial judge because of a conflict of interest.

The 21-year-old Kasab, said to belong to the banned Pakistan-based Islamist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), faces a string of charges including "waging war" on India, murder, attempted murder and kidnapping.

Prachanda orders reinvestigation into 2001 royal massacre

PTI, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoist-led government is set to begin the reinvestigation into the controversial 2001 royal massacre of King Birendra and 10 members of his family after the coalition partners agreed to the constitution of a probe panel.

Prime Minister Prachanda had announced that the government would re-investigate the massacre while inaugurating the Narayanhi Museum in the complex of the former royal palace in central Kathmandu on February 26.

A meeting of the high-level mechanism of the ruling coalition partners that assists the government reached an agreement to form a "credible" commission on Tuesday, the Kantipur online said. According to report, the council of ministers will soon begin the work on the probe commission.

Deposed King Gyanendra's popular older brother Birendra was slaughtered in 2001 palace massacre along with most of the royal family by the then crown prince Dipendra, who was allegedly fuelled by a cocktail of drugs and alcohol.

Pak tribal areas too violent, ungovernable to benefit from US aid: Kerry

ANI, Washington

US Senator John Kerry is sceptical about the US aid being put to thwart the terror activities in the tribal areas of Pakistan as he considers the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) too violent and ungovernable to benefit from the financial assistance.

Kerry, who heads the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the security situation in the region must improve

before lending the financial help to the people there.

"You've got to build the police and the security capacity and then you can follow in to assist the citizens. You can't yet spend the money there. It is too dangerous there," The Dawn quoted Kerry, as saying.

Kerry pointed out that establishing peace in the region was very important as only then people would be able to stand against the extremists. "If you can begin to bring law

enforcement to the task, then the majority of people who don't want to live under those insurgents or under the Taliban will dare to stand up," he said.

The US financial aid bill, known as the Kerry-Lugar bill provides Pakistan development aid to build schools, roads, health clinics in the country, but the continuous militant activities in the tribal region has raised questions over the aid being ever utilised for the right purpose.



An Indian labourer pushes a cart through a gap between television outside broadcast vans on a road by the special bomb-proof court at Arthur Road jail in Mumbai yesterday. Indian Abbas Qasbi has been appointed as lawyer for Pakistani national Mohammed Ajmal Kasab. Kasab appeared before a special court at a maximum security prison in Mumbai on Wednesday at the start of a case that could see him handed the death penalty if convicted for taking part in November's deadly terrorist siege.



diakonia

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Vacancy Announcement

Diakonia, a Swedish development organisation, is looking to appoint a **Finance and Administration Officer** for its Dhaka Office as part of its country team. The selected candidate is expected to join from July 2009.

Major Responsibilities

- Operate day to day accounting activities including handling of monetary transactions and book keepings
- Prepare different periodic financial reports
- Assist in screening of partners' financial reports and budgets
- Assist in organising different capacity building events including budgeting and financial reporting
- Operate administrative activities including filing and archiving
- Liaison with different government and non-government organisations

Qualification and Experience

- MCom in Accounting
- Minimum 2 years relevant job experience. Priority will be given to the applicants with working knowledge in Tax (VAT/Income Tax)
- Good communication skills in English with proficiency in MS Excel, MS Word and Accounting software

Submissions of the CV along with one passport size photograph should reach us within 30 April 2009. In addition to that, we would expect statements not more than 500 words explaining the suitability for the post and expected salary.

The submissions should be in English by post or email to:

Diakonia Bangladesh
P.O. Box 5051, Dhaka 1205, Bangladesh
E-mail: sultana.begum@diakonia-bangladesh.org

Applicants will need to hold Bangladeshi citizenship. Inaccurate or false statement may cause disqualification or termination of employment. Only short listed candidates will be contacted for interview.

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Requirements:

- Bachelor degree in Engineering (Mechanical/Electrical) with about 10 years experience in methods, planning and inspection department in an integrated modern cement plant.
- The person should have in-depth knowledge and experience in maintenance of all types of equipment used in the cement plant.
- Must have good planning and organizing skill, people management, safety management and training.

MAINTENANCE CONSULTANT

Based at Chhatak, Sunamganj and will report to the Plant Manager. The incumbent will be responsible to conduct an audit of the maintenance organization, plan, system, methods, performance; recommend changes where necessary and train employees on the revised work methods. This will be a 3 to 4 months assignment.

Requirements:

- Bachelors or diploma in Engineering (Mechanical/ Electrical) with at least 15 years experience in a modern dry process integrated cement plant.
- The person should have in-depth knowledge and experience of maintenance of all cement manufacturing process equipment, management methods, predictive inspection tools, computer based maintenance systems, execution planning, people management, safety management and training.

If you meet the requirements, please send your application along with a recent passport size photo to the following address within 25 April 2009. Please mention on the envelope the position you are applying for. You can also email your application at recruitment@bd.lafarge.com.

Human Resources Department
Lafarge Surma Cement Ltd.,
Suvastu Imam Square
65 Gulshan Avenue, 3rd floor, Gulshan - 1, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh.
Only short-listed candidates will be called for an interview

