



PHOTO: AFP

Congress general secretary Rahul Gandhi (R), Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah (C) and Indian Minister for Water Resources Salfuddin Soz (L) are garlanded during an election campaign rally at Anantnag, south of Srinagar, on Monday. The rally was jointly organised by the ruling Congress party and National Conference (NC) in support of NC candidate Mehboob Beg from the Anantnag parliamentary constituency.

Scramble for Muslim votes in UP

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Lucknow

Three major political parties in Uttar Pradesh are locked in a race for the Muslim vote, seen to be floating in these Lok Sabha polls rather than being tethered to any political outfit as in the past.

The Congress and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) are trying their best to woo the Muslim voters away from the Samajwadi Party (SP).

Thanks to Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav's marriage of convenience with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rebel Kalyan Singh - better known as the Babri Masjid demolition man - a good chunk of Muslim voters who had remained closely wedded to Yadav are ready to look for other options.

That has led to a scramble for the crucial 19 percent Muslim vote in a state with a population of 170 million that sends 80 MPs to the Lok Sabha, the highest among all states. Yadav remains ahead of others in the race, but not without devoting a lot of his time and energy towards re-establishing his bona fides with a

community that was willing to swear by him until not very long ago.

Both the BSP and the Congress have left no stone unturned to woo the Muslim voter.

That has forced Yadav to rush to India's pre-eminent Muslim seminary - Darul-Uloom in Deoband - to seek support, after his party's general secretary Amar Singh was given the cold shoulder. Elsewhere too, Yadav has been busy knocking on almost every possible Islamic door to explain his handshake with Kalyan Singh.

While his clarification that Kalyan Singh - once a powerful BJP leader - had sworn to strengthen Yadav's own mission of crippling the saffron brigade has failed to jell with a large chunk of Muslim voters, there is a small section that appears to be getting convinced by the argument. And though many of Yadav's own Muslim leaders chose to part ways with him on this account, he was busy arguing with others that the alliance with Kalyan Singh would benefit the Samajwadi Party with the en bloc support of the Lodhi caste that has a dominant presence in several parts of central Uttar Pradesh.

Campaign for 3rd phase of Indian polls ends

PALIB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian politicians yesterday wound down their campaign for the third phase of parliamentary elections set for tomorrow.

In this phase the electoral fate of ruling Congress party President Sonia Gandhi, the leader of the opposition LK Advani, BJP's prime ministerial candidate and 1565 other candidates would be decided by an estimated 14.40 crore voters.

The third round of the five-phase polling will cover 107 constituencies across 11 states and federally-administered territories including Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Jammu and Kashmir.

Sonia Gandhi is in fray from Rae Bareli constituency, the pocket borough of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty since long, where her son Rahul and daughter Priyanka are busy electioneering for most of the time as the Congress chief

travels in other parts of the country to drum up support for her party and allies.

Like Sonia Gandhi, Advani, who is contesting from Gandhinagar in Gujarat, too has been busy criss-crossing the country for BJP's campaign and his daughter Pratibha is appealing to the people in the constituency to elect her father like they have done every time since 1991.

Other prominent candidates in the third phase include former prime minister HD Deve Gowda, chief of Janata Dal (Secular), Sharad Yadav, President of BJP ally Janata Dal (United) and federal ministers Jyotiraditya Scindia and Sril Prakash Jaiswal.

The first two phases of polling have covered 265 of the total of 543 seats in Lok Sabha and the results will be out on May 16 after two more rounds of voting.

Polling to elect a new 32-member legislature in the North eastern border state of Sikkim will also be held on Thursday.

Afghan unrest kills 6 cops, 12 militants

AFP, Kabul

Afghan police clashed with Taliban fighters outside the capital Kabul, leaving a dozen

diplomatic personnel preparing to head out in a convoy, a French military spokesman said.

One of the soldiers would be evacuated to France for treatment, Lieutenant Colonel Bertrand Fayet told AFP.

The French soldiers are among about 70,000 US-led and Nato-led troops deployed in Afghanistan to help the fragile nation fight extremism, which the West brands a direct threat.

In a suspected militant attack on the Afghan security forces, a roadside bomb blew up a police vehicle in the eastern province of Paktia on Monday and killed four policemen, the interior ministry said in a statement.

The vehicle was struck while taking part in an operation with the army and US-led troops in Zurnat district, it said.

A bomb ripped through another police vehicle on Tuesday in the eastern province of Nangarhar, killing a policeman and wounding two others, provincial government spokesman Ahmad Zia Ahmadzai said.

Up to 1m displaced in northwest Pakistan

AFP, Geneva

Up to one million people are displaced in northwestern Pakistan where militants are feeding on local discontent and strife, humanitarian and local officials from Pakistan warned yesterday.

Officials from Pakistan's North West Frontier Province appealed for international relief aid at an unprecedented meeting with relief agencies and donor countries in

Geneva.

"We are hearing a lot of pledges and promises made from the international community to Pakistan, and many of them are for security, for the police and the army, but the civilians are not getting what they are supposed to," said Sitara Ayaz, minister for social welfare and development in the province.

"In our province we need more support and help from the international commu-

nity," she said after the two-day meeting in Geneva.

The UN's World Food Programme is working on an estimate of about 600,000 people for food aid in the area, spokeswoman Emilia Casella told AFP.

Local officials put the figure at closer to one million, with about 80 percent of them housed with friends or relatives -- sometimes five or six families to a home.

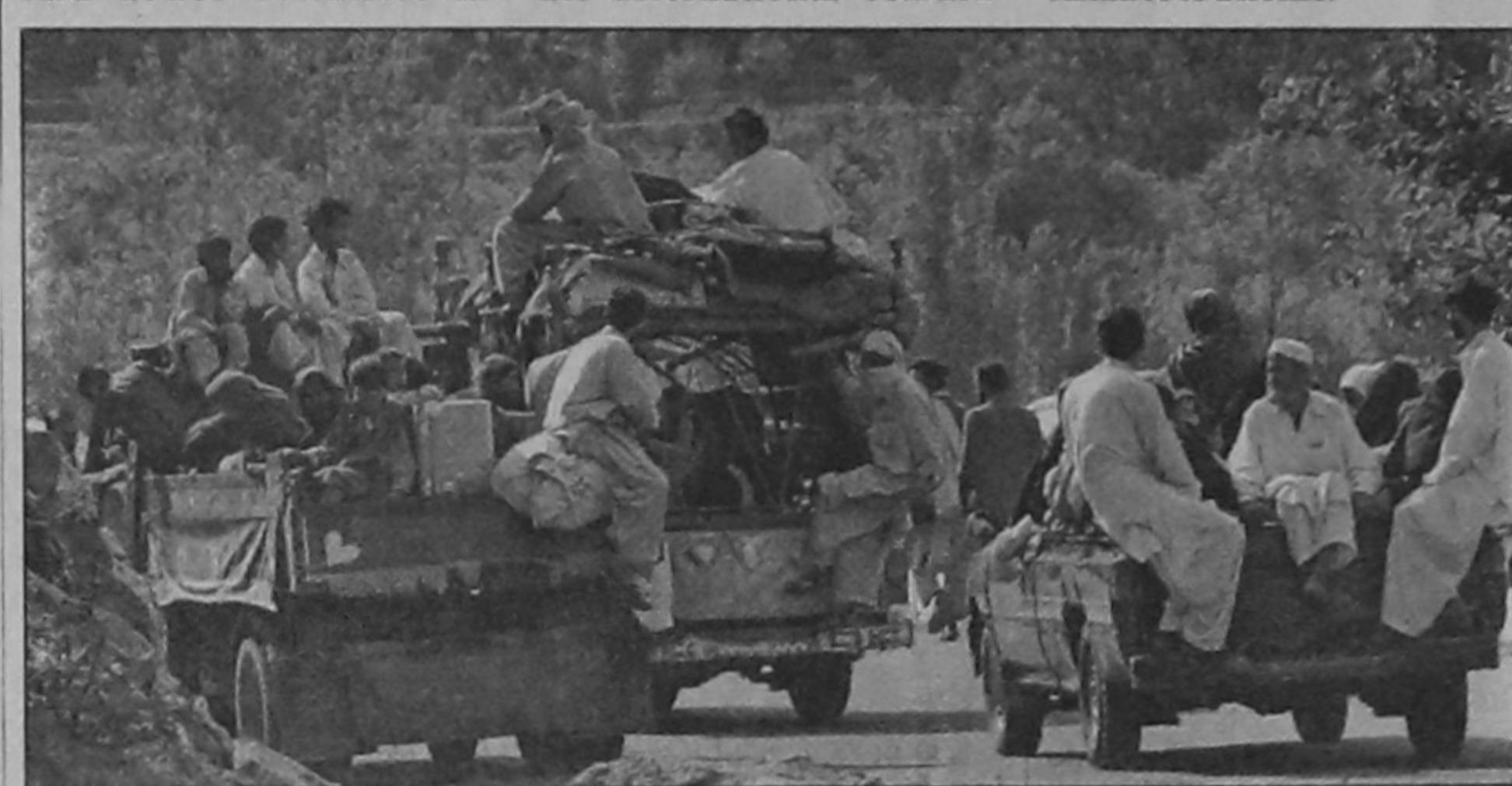


PHOTO: AFP

Local residents flee from a troubled area in Lower Dir on Monday where the Pakistani military launched an operation against the Taliban. Around 30,000 people in northwest Pakistan have been displaced by a military offensive to flush out Taliban militants, a provincial minister said.

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Admission in MPhil and MPH Courses in Public Health under University of Dhaka

The Division of Public Health of the Bangladesh Institute of Health Sciences (BIHS), through a collaborative program with the University of Oslo supported by a NOMA Grant, is announcing the admission of the 2nd Batch of students (Session 2009-10) in MPhil and MPH Courses in the following disciplines under the Faculty of Postgraduate Medical Sciences and Research, University of Dhaka.

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Interested candidates are requested to submit their Application and CV together with certified copies of all relevant documents and a recent passport size photograph. The course sought should be clearly marked on the envelop and sent to the above address. Application through e-mail: (dirbhs@biihs.edu.bd) will be accepted.

The last date for submission of application is 10 May 2009.



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