

Floods claim 200 in India, 140 in Pakistan

Thousands marooned in Indian cities

REUTERS, Ahmedabad

Swirling floodwaters inundated several towns and cities in western and southern India on Tuesday as the military deployed helicopters and boats to help hundreds of thousands of marooned people.

Nearly 200 people have been killed in flooding due to incessant rains over the past week in the western states of Gujarat and Maharashtra and the southern state of Andhra Pradesh.

Flash floods triggered by torrential rain have also killed more than 140 people in neighbouring Pakistan's northwestern region, submerging hundreds of villages and causing extensive damage to property.

Indian television pictures showed waist-high water in the streets of Surat, the main industrial town of Gujarat and the nerve-

centre of India's flourishing diamond polishing trade.

Roadside kiosks and temples were submerged and water lapped at the walls of multi-storey apartment blocks.

"I am not able to reach my house. It is completely submerged in water," Ajay Bania, a Surat resident, said by phone.

Over 200,000 people have been shifted to safer ground in the Surat region as water entered villages and low-lying areas.

Hundreds of industrial units have been shut down and schools and colleges closed in Surat. Rail and road traffic remained suspended.

In neighbouring Maharashtra, heavy rains over the last four days have killed 77 people, mostly in the state's east and north, and destroyed crops and homes.

"About 15,000 people are being evacuated and taken to safety by

army and air force personnel. We are sending them rations," DK Sankaran, Maharashtra's senior-most bureaucrat, said.

Television images of Nanded and Nasik towns in Maharashtra showed vast areas covered in sheets of water with only a few trees standing.

In Andhra Pradesh, the death toll due to torrential rain over the past five days climbed to 106 on Tuesday with 12 new deaths reported from across the state.

Officials said they were concerned about the threat of infectious diseases as water had stagnated at many places. Nearly 1,200 villages were marooned and 1.5 million people displaced in eight districts, they added.

More heavy rains were likely in the state due to a depression over the Bay of Bengal, and Sonia Gandhi, the head of the ruling

Congress party, was due to visit the area on Wednesday.

PAKISTAN
In Pakistani Kashmir, a woman and her four children were killed when a landslide triggered by heavy rains fell on their house near the earthquake-devastated town of Muzaffarabad.

In southwestern Baluchistan province, flash floods hit over 30 villages, washing away crops and houses and killing livestock.

"There are some villages where more than half of the population is badly hit and they have no shelter, food or livestock," provincial government spokesman Raziq Bugti said.

Around 12,000 people have been marooned and about 300 houses were washed away in Baluchistan's Sibi district. Many cases of snakebite have also been reported from the flood-hit areas.



PHOTO STAR
Bastra and Poshak Shilpa Samik League stages a demonstration at Muktangan in the city yesterday protesting the arrest of ZM Kamrul Anam.

Nepal drafts constitution to include Maoists in govt

REUTERS, Kathmandu

A panel in Nepal has finalised a draft for a temporary constitution, a key first step towards the formation of an interim government that will include Maoist rebels.

The draft was supposed to be submitted to the multi-party government and rebels on Wednesday, the head of the 15-member panel said.

"It is only a draft and both sides can debate it and make necessary

changes," Laxman Prasad Aryal, a retired Supreme Court judge, told Reuters.

The interim government will supervise elections to a special assembly meant to draw up a permanent constitution and decide the future of the monarchy.

Nepal's mainstream political parties agreed a ceasefire with Maoist rebels in May, shortly after

mass protests forced King Gyanendra to surrender power. In June, the two sides agreed to set an interim government, guided by an interim constitution.

"This is a temporary document that will be in force until a new constitution is prepared by the constituent assembly when it is elected," Aryal said.

Lebanon land of choice for proxy warriors

REUTERS, Beirut

Lebanon, engulfed in blood and destruction for the past four weeks, is once again caught up in a proxy war, this one pitting the United States and its ally Israel against Hezbollah's patrons Iran and Syria.

The tiny country has long been vulnerable to foreign meddling, with a power-sharing system for 17 Muslim and Christian communities that keeps the government weak and sometimes tempts rival groups to seek help from allies abroad.

The United States, France and other big powers are widely seen as part of this game, along with regional players like Israel, Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan.

"Israel's attack on Hezbollah was directed to a great extent at Iran," said Lebanese commentator Michael Young. "Hezbollah's actions have also been much influenced by Iranian interests."

Hezbollah, the only Lebanese faction to keep its guns after the 1975-90 civil war on the grounds it needed them to fight Israeli occupation, seized

two Israeli soldiers on July 12.

That set off a confrontation that taps into interlocking conflicts across the Middle East, from Israel's quarrels with the Palestinians to Iran's nuclear dispute with the West, Sunni-Shi'ite tensions in Iraq and the US "war on terror".

The US ambassador to Baghdad, Zalmay Khalilzad, said on Tuesday Iran could use the Lebanon war to foment more trouble in Iraq, accusing Tehran of already having "some forces" there.

"The region is very much interconnected. What happened in Lebanon affects things here," he said.

Some pro-Western Arab capitals, alarmed at rising Iranian influence since the US-led war in Iraq upset the regional power balance, initially criticised Hezbollah's "adventurism". But Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan have toned down their public hostility to the Shi'ite Islamist guerrillas and swung behind Lebanon, where more than 900 people have been killed.

NO CONSULTATION
Hezbollah, whose sway over Lebanon's big Shi'ite community rests on its voting power and welfare network as well as its guns, says it is fighting Israel in defence of the whole country — though it did not consult its Sunni, Druze and Christian compatriots before igniting the conflict.

Its leader, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, mocks Arab nations with big defence budgets but no stomach for a confrontation with Israel, in contrast to his fighters battling Israeli forces in southern Lebanon and firing rockets into the Jewish state.

Even Jordan's pro-Western King Abdullah has acknowledged that

Hezbollah fighters have become heroes for ordinary Arabs.

He said Israel, with which Jordan has a peace treaty, was perpetuating militancy by refusing to give up Arab lands it captured in the 1967 war in return for peace with all the Arabs.

"A fact America and Israel must understand is that as long as there is aggression and occupation there will be resistance and popular support for the resistance," he said last week.

But the United States has adopted Israel's view that Hezbollah and the Palestinian Islamist Hamas movement must be combated along with al Qaeda in the global "war on terror".

President George W Bush blames Hezbollah and its allies for the Lebanon war. "Syria and Iran sponsor and promote Hezbollah activities all aimed at creating chaos, all aimed at using terror to stop the advance of democracies," he said on Monday.

Washington, which has refused to call for an immediate ceasefire in Lebanon, saw Israel's offensive as a chance to destroy Hezbollah's armed power, loosen its influence in Lebanon and that of its allies in Iran and Syria, which also back Hamas.

After four weeks of conflict, in which up to 1,000 people in Lebanon and 100 Israelis have been killed, there is little sign that these far-reaching objectives are being achieved.

SO FAR UNSCATHED
Undeterred by events in Lebanon, Iran remains defiant over its nuclear programme, despite UN Security Council pressure to halt uranium enrichment or face possible sanctions. Iran and Syria have watched as

Hezbollah rockets they are accused of supplying rain down on the Jewish state, so far escaping the devastating Israeli retaliation visited on Lebanon.

No concerted attempt has been made to engage them in efforts to calm the Lebanon conflict. France has said Iran can play a stabilising part, but says there can be no role for Syria.

After working with the United States to force Syria to pull its troops from Lebanon after last year's killing of former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, France is determined not to let Damascus use Israel's offensive to reassert its grip there.

Last week's huge pro-Hezbollah rally by Shi'ites in Baghdad was another reminder of how the Lebanon war is rippling across the region and creating fresh hostility to the United States.

Woman mugged inside Midford Hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three unidentified muggers snatched away gold ornaments of a woman from inside the Midford Hospital in the city yesterday.

The victim, Farida Begum, 35, came to the hospital to have her husband's blood tested. He was admitted to the sugary unit of the hospital.

Her husband said she was going to the blood bank of the hospital yesterday morning. Suddenly three miscreants appeared in front of her and snatched away her earrings weighing about half tola at gunpoint.

People chased the muggers but they managed to flee, he added.



Agrani Bank Managing Director Syed Abu Naser Bukhtear hands over a cheque for Tk 20 lakh to Dhaka Ahsania Mission President Kazi Rafiqul Alam at the Agrani Bank head office in the city yesterday.

Students ransack RU hall provost's room

RU CORRESPONDENT

Residents of Mother Hall of Rajshahi University (RU) yesterday ransacked hall provost room demanding renovation of the hall.

It was the first boys' residential hall established in 1960. Hundreds of students staged a demonstration in front of the hall yesterday morning and chanted slogans, sources said.

They also requested the provost to come to the hall over phone to discuss the issue but he did not respond. At one stage agitating students ransacked his room and set fire to papers in the room.

Hearing the news, RU Proctor Enamul Haque and Student Advisor Prof Zahid Hassan rushed to the spot but the agitating students assaulted them. The students said that they informed Provost Prof Afrazzaman Khan and Vice Chancellor Prof Altaf Hossain about the matter earlier but their demands were ignored.

The student also threatened to enforce tougher movements against the hall provost and RU VC if their demands are not met within three days.

Agrani Bank gives Tk 20 lakh to Ahsania Cancer Hospital

BSS, Dhaka

Agrani Bank yesterday gave Tk 20 lakh to Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) for construction of its cancer hospital at Uttara in the city.

Chairman of Agrani Bank Mohammad Fazlur Rahman handed over a cheque for the amount to DAM President and Chief Executive Kazi Rafiqul Alam at a simple ceremony in the conference room of the bank.

"We will give another Tk 40 lakh to the cancer hospital in next two years. We hope this would inspire the private banks to come forward with greater contributions to the hospital," Fazlur Rahman told the ceremony.

Rafiqul Alam informed that DAM is constructing the cancer hospital with 500 beds at Uttara at a cost of Tk 200 crore. The construction of the hospital is expected to be completed by 2008.

The function was also addressed by Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Bank Syed Abu Naser Bakhtiar Ahmed and Deputy Managing Director F R M Hafiz Ul Islam, Director of Public Relations Division of DAM Prof Nurul Islam and Project Director Harun-ur-Rashid.

Correction

Margaret Goon, resident representative (a.i.), UNDP Bangladesh, signed a cooperation agreement with CRC-Bangladesh on August 2 in the city. But in a report on the agreement, published in The Daily Star the next day, the letters in parentheses after the words 'resident representative' have been omitted inadvertently.

Even Jordan's pro-Western King Abdullah has acknowledged that

Fighting rich-poor gap

FROM PAGE 16
about building a prosperous Bangladesh ahead of the general elections but the main challenge is how to make these commitments trustworthy to the people, Prof Mahmud said.

Creating mass awareness will put a sort of pressure on political leadership so that building a prosperous Bangladesh cannot remain merely a slogan, he said.

"We have to address corruption and make different public institutions credible," he said, adding, "It is very essential to make public bodies like Election Commission and Public Service Commission credible."

Citing the example of Vietnam, he said a right development strategy has to be identified to become a middle-income country.

There should not be any poverty in the country by 2021, Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairman of Centre for Policy Dialogue, said at the meeting.

Stressing the need for a structural transformation of Bangladesh economy, he said Bangladesh's asset is its population and there is an unlimited opportunity for labour-intensive industries here.

Bangladesh itself can be a big market for its products if there is no poverty, and after a certain period the labour-intensive industries can also start exporting in the global market, he said.

Mexico showed the benefit of sitting at the doorstep of a big economy like the US, Prof Sobhan said, adding, "We are also at the doorstep of China and we need to take the advantage of it."

Echoing the same voice, MCCI President Latifur Rahman said, "We are sitting at the doorstep of big economy China and even India cannot ignore us."

"The main strength of China is its huge domestic market. Lots of industries can be set up if there is a domestic market and later they can start exporting to other countries," he said.

The MCCI president strongly opposed the proposal of bringing black money into the market.

He stressed the importance of building necessary infrastructure including electricity and road for attracting investment.

Earlier, making a presentation on 'Vision 2021 for Bangladesh: Goal 3: To be a Poverty-mitigated Middle-income Country,' Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of CPD, said productivity will need to be increased through new research,

extension, mechanised cultivation and crop diversification.

Vision 2021 for Bangladesh greatly differs from the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper as the former has a long-term planning, includes recommendations from the grass-roots level and emphasises accountability of the political parties, he said.

Debapriya also emphasised accelerated growth in the industry and service sectors, an improved investment climate, increased global market access by Bangladeshi firms, diversified export base, effective urban planning, sound financial institutions, greater financial depth and a skilled workforce.

Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad, president of Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA), said, "We are doing well in remittance income but progress about export diversification has been very little."

It is very difficult to say whether readymade garment products can survive in the near future against the backdrop of downward trend of prices in the global market, he said.

He suggested solving the power crisis.

Dr Rushidan Islam Rahman of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) stressed the need for substantial improvement in education and health service and reducing inequality between the rich and the poor.

Dr Sazzad Zahir of BIDS underscored the need for developing knowledge-based industry and developing transparency in utilising resources.

BEA General Secretary Abul Barakat urged the meeting to think about whether it is possible to bring huge amount of black money in the country into productive sector.

KMH Shahidul Haque, director of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the chamber will be involved with the Nagorik Committee initiative.

Nagorik Committee 2006 is organising separate expert group consultation sessions for each of eight goals identified for Vision 2021 for Bangladesh. The eight goals are: i) To become a participatory democracy, ii) To have an efficient, publicly accountable and transparent government, iii) To become a poverty-mitigated middle-income country, iv) To have a skilled and a creative workforce, v) To become a health-endowed nation, vi) To be globally integrated and become a regional hub, vii) To be environmentally sustainable and viii) To have a more equitable society.