

### Dwelling in the Deluge



Flood water engulf new area (Mohammadpur) — Star photo by A KM Mohsin



Flood shelter at high railway land (Chandpur) — Star photo by Shirin Akhtar



Whole township under knee-deep water (Fenchuganj, Sylhet) — Star photo by Iqbal Siddique



No house to live in (Harindhara, Sherpur) — Star photo by Ratan Chowdhury

## Cyberspace to be Made a Global Tariff-free Zone

EFFORTS are in the United States to evolve a tax code for Internet-based commerce with the objective of making cyberspace a global tariff-free zone.

According to reports, Clinton administration officials and American Congressmen are cooperating with private enterprise to develop such a code. Online consumer sales are projected to reach \$20 billion by year 2000, more than triple this year's six billion dollars estimated by the Gartner Group researchers. The U.S. Commerce Department says \$300 billion worth of company-to-company commerce alone will be conducted online by 2002.

At the end of 1997, more than 100 million people worldwide were connected to the Internet and some estimates suggest there would soon be a billion users worldwide. But Internet merchants and consumers are not the only ones pleading for protection. At present, most goods purchased via the Internet and mail order catalogues escape state and local sales tax, putting traditional businesses at a disadvantage and eroding state and local tax bases.

Republican Congressman Christopher Cox, sponsor of the Internet Tax Freedom Act, says his legislation instructs "the

Clinton administration to take an aggressive stand internationally to keep foreign taxes and tariffs off electronic commerce."

"If we put in place a policy that within the United States discourages predatory taxation of the Internet, it will be all the easier for the President to demand that foreign nations also keep taxes and tariffs off the Net," Cox recently said in testimony before the Senate Finance Committee.

Slightly different bills have been introduced into the House of Representatives and the Senate. A unified bill must be passed by both the houses and signed by the President for it to become law. President Clinton calls the Internet "the most promising new economic opportunity in decades." He has ordered his envoys to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the Free Trade Area of the Americas to oppose trade barriers on the Internet.

But before meaningful steps can be taken globally, the United States must first sort out its domestic tax collection nightmare resulting from soar-

ing commerce on the Internet. Congressman Cox's Internet Tax Freedom Act calls for a three-year moratorium on new federal, state and local U.S. Internet taxes to buy time for political and business leaders to develop a tax code suited for the economic revolution brought on by the new technology.

Senator Ron Wyden illustrated the complexity of the issue in his testimony at the same Finance Committee hearing. If a businessman from Connecticut travels to Texas and dials up Internet access from his Houston hotel room, Wyden said, he will be taxed twice. Connecticut taxes Internet access service at the billing address and Texas collects fees whenever the Internet is accessed. With 30,000 state and local tax authorities in the United States, there seems to be no clear solution.

The Senator said the situation becomes murkier when a businessman crosses the water's edge. If Germany succeeds in implementing a global Internet tax, "what would happen if a French executive travels to Texas and goes online through his Belgian Internet service provider to order a product from a German company that has a web page on a server in Connecticut? Who is liable for

paying which tax, where and to whom?" Wyden asked.

"Many tax administrators in state and local taxing jurisdictions have been busy reinterpreting existing statutes that apply to old media to find new sources of revenue in the Internet," said Jill Lesser, director of law and public policy of America Online, the largest Internet service provider in the United States. According to a U.S. government publication, she said, "these activities have created inconsistent and discriminatory tax policies around the country."

Lesser said she became aware of the marketing power of the Internet early this year when she needed a high chair and a stroller for her infant daughter. "I went online at 10 p.m. one night," she told the Finance Committee. "I compared prices and products and a couple of clicks of the mouse later, I had bought exactly what I needed. And of course I never left my living room." Lesser is among the growing millions shopping on the Internet, which often offers greater selection, better information and lower prices than goods sold in traditional stores.

—India Abroad News Service

## Flood – July '98: A Hydrological Review

SO the flood has started receding. On 1st August all the rivers flowing above danger level were falling except Tongi Khal at Tongi. On this day 9 rivers at 10 points were flowing at .17 to .88 meter above danger level.

Interesting feature of the flood this year is that the Brahmaputra at two upstream stations of Chilmari and Noonkhawa did not cross danger level. Also the Ganges at upstream stations of Hardinge bridge and Rajshahi did not cross danger level and rather had been flowing about half a meter below danger level. So it may be inferred that the Ganges at Bhagyakul was really affected by the flow of the Brahmaputra and back water effect of the Meghna system.

How big was the flood this year? Peak flood level is a common measure of flood but does not reflect all the stress caused by the flood. The other relevant parameters are: days above danger level, timing of the peak and the number of rivers simultaneously flowing above danger level. The peak flood level and the estimated return period for some of the rivers are furnished below:

River	Station	Peak/July 98	Estimated RP yrs.
Brahmaputra	Bahadurabad	20.05	5.1
Ganges	Bhagyakul	6.83	4.9
Meghna	Bhairab bazar	7.07	6.9
Buriganga	Dhaka	6.26	5.3

It may therefore be concluded that the flood this year had a return period of about 5 years. Return Period of 5 yrs. means flood of this magnitude or higher may occur every 5 years. August and September, the two flood months, are still ahead of us and this picture of flood may be completely changed in the coming months.

During July this year 15 rivers crossed danger level at 18 points. During the month Brahmaputra at Bahadurabad, Ganges at Bhagyakul and Meghna at Bhairab Bazar had been flowing for 23, 21 and 11 days above danger level respectively. Brahmaputra at Bahadurabad was flowing highest number of days above danger level. Buriganga at Dhaka was flowing for 6 days above danger level. These 18 stations of 15 rivers had duration of flood above danger level ranging from 23 days to 1 day.

There could be slight error due to non-availability of data in the internet web page. Duration above danger level is not the

only parameter that causes flood stress. How much it is above the danger level is also a determining factor. So we may introduce another parameter "meter-days-above-DL" to define a new flood stress indicator. Thus if a river is flowing .5 meter above DL for 3 days then meter-days-above DL is  $(.5 \times 3) = 1.5$  meter-days.

It is observed that meter-days-above-DL for the 18 stations of 15 rivers ranged from 10.31 to .59. We may now repeat the table-1 along with this new parameter meter-days-above-DL.

River	Station	Peak/July 98	Estimated RP yrs.	Estimated meter-days
Brahmaputra	Bahadurabad	20.05	5.1	6.51
Ganges	Bhagyakul	6.83	4.9	10.31
Meghna	Bhairab bazar	7.07	6.9	6.85
Buriganga	Dhaka	6.26	5.3	.95

From the above analysis it is observed that in comparison to flood level, return period and days above danger level, there had been more news of flood distress in newspapers. This is due to rapid influx of rural people in Dhaka city and around and more people are taking shelter in flood plain areas and are being affected by flood.

Lastly, about the timing of flood. How many annual HWL has occurred in the past in the months of June, July, August, September and October? The data for a limited number of stations in % is furnished below.

River	Station	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Brahmaputra	Bahadurabad	8.5	44.7	31.9	12.8	2.1
Ganges	Bhagyakul	17.4	52.2	30.4		
Meghna	Bhairab bazar	17.2	62.1	20.7		
Buriganga	Dhaka	11.4	57.0	29.1	2.5	

This is a fair picture of time of occurring annual flood peak in the different months for the different rivers and stations. In the Brahmaputra most of the annual flood peaks occur in July while at Bhagyakul, Bhairab bazar and Dhaka it occurs in August. Thus another flood in August or so may not be ruled out. This year flood in these rivers other than Brahmaputra is an early occurrence.

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## by Jim Davis

