



MANY MOUTHS TO FEED: A woman cooks food in a makeshift kitchen for a large family while the youngsters wait patiently on rooftop.

— Star photo by Amran Hossain

Mannan Bhuiyan urges Bangladeshi expatriates to help flood victims

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan urged the Bangladeshi expatriates in the United States to come forward in aid of the flood victims at home, reports UNB.

Exchanging views with the leaders of BNP New York committee at Hotel Crown Plaza on Wednesday, he said the country is now in deep crisis amid a severe flood that damaged crops, infrastructure and homes worth crores of taka.

Despite advance forecast and warning, Bhuiyan said the government did not give much importance to it, nor take any effective step to face the calamity.

The government also failed to unite the nation and stand beside the flood-stricken people, he said.

Referring to domestic politics, the BNP secretary general criticised the Sheikh Hasina's government for filing cases against Begum Khaleda Zia and other party leaders.

On the other hand, he alleged, competent officials in the administration are being harassed on political grounds.

Bhuiyan mentioned social unrest, deterioration of law and order, and slump in economy, saying the government has completely failed in every sector.

"Since such a situation cannot go for long, we demanded mid-term election," he said, adding that the government must resign to clear the way for early voting.

Otherwise, this incompetent government would be unseated through street agitation, he warned, said a party press release in the city yesterday.

Govt unconcerned despite severe flooding, Saifur alleges

Former Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday said whenever Awami League comes to power, the country faces either flood or famine, reports UNB.

"Bangladesh is on the crossroads of a great danger," he told a meeting at Madhya Badda marking the joining of about 200 workers of Gulshan thana Awami League to BNP.

A member of the BNP Standing Committee, Saifur Rahman alleged that despite severe flooding in the country, the government appears to be unconcerned.

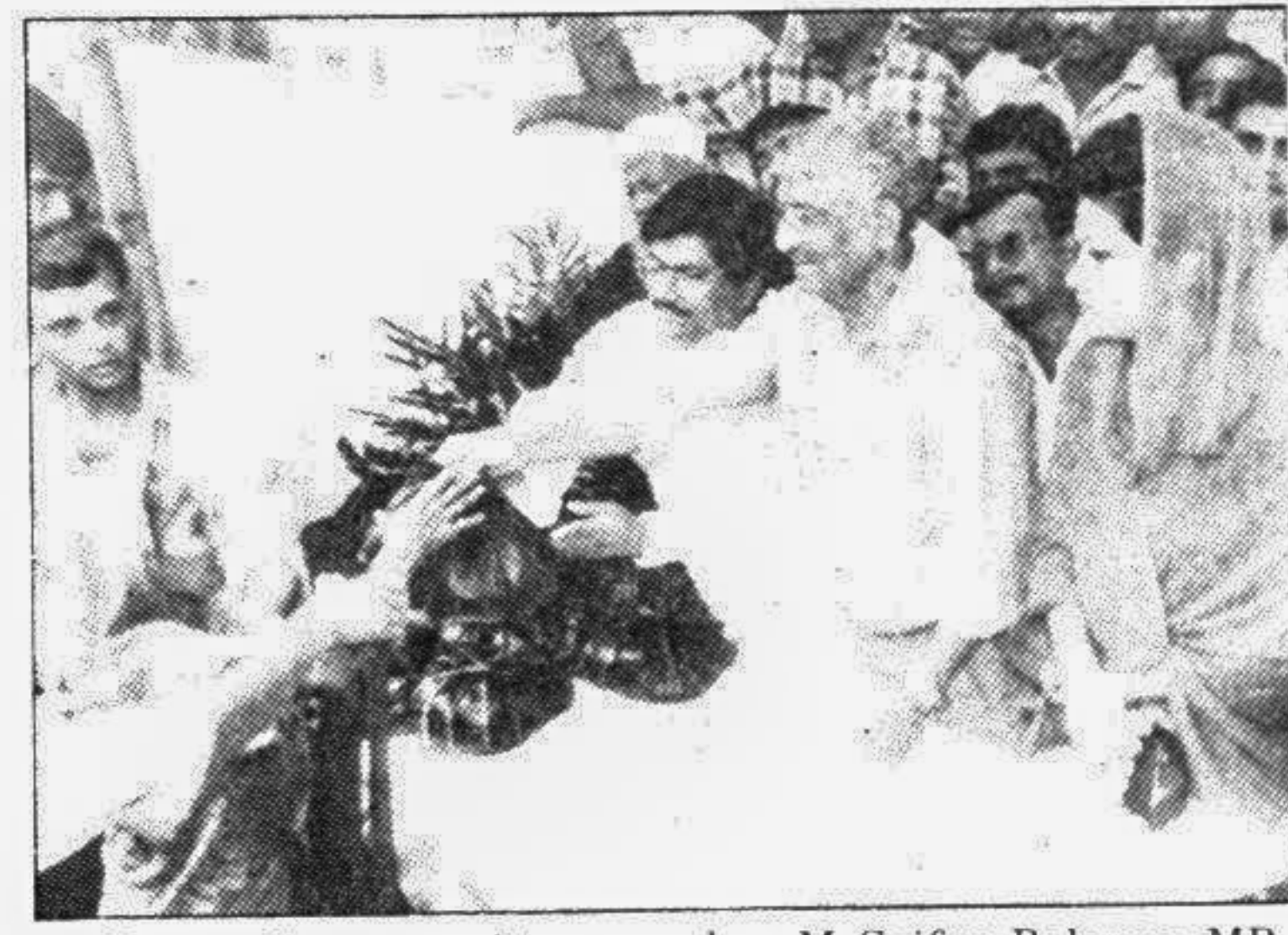
The BNP leader urged the people irrespective of party affiliation to stand by the flood victims.

City BNP convenor Sadeq Hossain Khoka, MP, Major (Rtd) Qamrul Islam, Abdus Salam and Shaheda Obaid also addressed the meeting, presided over by Gulshan thana BNP convenor and city corporation commissioner M A Qaiyum.

The BNP leaders later distributed relief in the area. A BNP press release said Sadeq Hossain Khoka also distributed relief among the victims at Ganderia Manija Rahman Girls' High School in the old city.

Khoka alleged that the government has failed to handle the relief operation and feared that this failure may cause famine in the country.

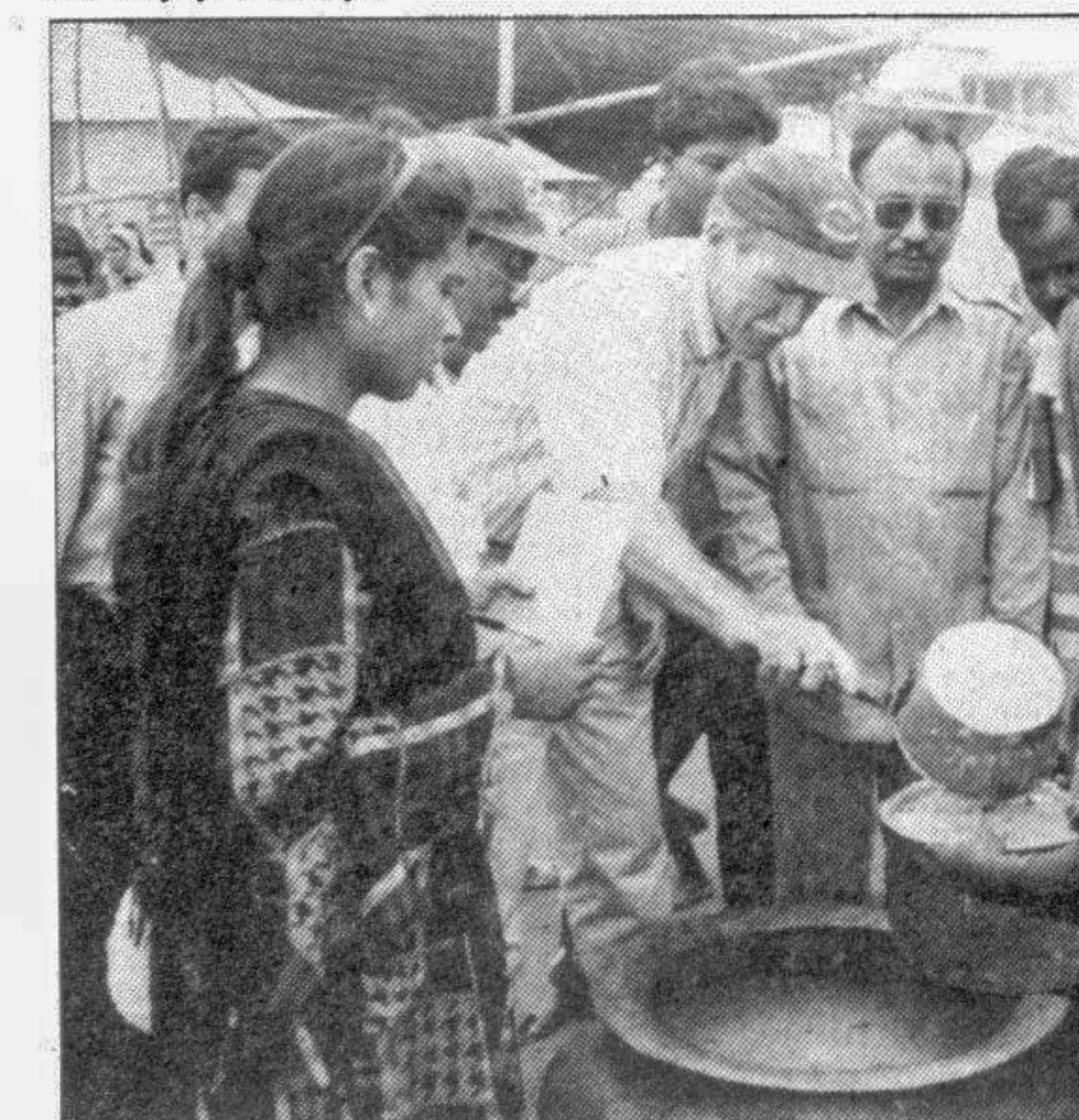
The BNP leader criticised the arguments of the ruling Awami League that they could not perceive such a severe flooding.



BNP standing committee member M Saifur Rahman MP distributing relief goods among the flood victims at Badda in the city yesterday.



Darland International School distributed relief materials, including dry foods and old clothes, among flood victims at the Mirpur Shah Ali Girls' School and College shelter in the city yesterday.



US Ambassador to Bangladesh John C Holzman distributing "khichuri" to flood-affected people at a relief camp run by CARE Bangladesh at Manik Nagar in the city yesterday. Several such camps are in operation around Bangladesh funded by USAID. To date, the total amount of United States flood relief assistance during the 1998 flood stands at over Tk 177.77 crore or \$ 33.57 million.

Clinton apologises for affair with Lewinsky

DUBLIN, Ireland, Sept 4: President Bill Clinton said on Friday he was sorry about his affair with Monica Lewinsky, apologising for the first time in the face of growing criticism among ever close Democratic allies who are pressing for a public reprimand of his conduct, reports AP.

The president has been under increasing pressure to apologise for his actions since his Aug 17 remarks where he did not do so.

"I made a bad mistake," Clinton said. "It's indefensible and I'm sorry about it."

Clearly uncomfortable addressing the matter on an international stage, Clinton spoke hours after Democratic Sen Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, in a stern speech on the Senate floor, called the president's actions immoral and harmful to the nation.

"The transgressions the president has admitted to are too consequential for us to walk away and leave the impression for our children and our posterity that what President Clinton acknowledges he did within the White House is acceptable behaviour for our nation's leader," said Lieberman, whose words drew praise from other Democrats.

Some sort of "public rebuke" is called for, he added, noting Congress at some point should express its disapproval through a resolution, censure or reprimand. But he said any such action is premature until Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr

reports on his assessment of whether Clinton had committed any impeachable offenses and the White House has a chance to respond to it.

Clinton, in an Aug 17 speech to the nation, said he regretted his relationship with Lewinsky, a former White House intern half his age, and the months that he misled his family and the American people. Lawmakers of both parties criticised Clinton for not directly apologising.

At a Moscow news conference Wednesday with Russian President Boris Yeltsin, Clinton for the first time said publicly that he had made a mistake by engaging in an affair with the former White House intern. He also was more direct than previously in admitting that he had sought forgiveness.

During a photo session with Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern, Clinton was asked day to respond to Sen Lieberman's remarks. "I can't disagree with anyone else who wants to be critical of what I've already acknowledged is inappropriate," he said.

"There's nothing that he (Lieberman) or anyone else could say in a personally critical way that I don't imagine I would disagree with since I have already said it myself, to myself, and I'm very sorry about it but there's nothing else I can say," Clinton said.

Asked about talk among some members of Congress that he should be formally censured, Clinton appeared to grow testy.

"I shouldn't be commenting on that while I'm here on this trip."

White House spokesman Mike McCurry, asked if Clinton had made a calculated decision to use the phrase "I'm sorry," insisted that's what the president has been trying to convey since his Aug 17 address to the nation when he said he deeply regretted his actions.

"He believes that's what he has been saying all along, and that I'm sorry means I'm sorry," McCurry said.

On Friday, Clinton used the plain language of apology twice.

"Basically, I agree with what he said," Clinton said of Lieberman. "I've already said that I made a bad mistake. It's indefensible, and I'm sorry about it."

On the Senate floor Thursday, two other prominent Democratic senators — New York's Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Nebraska's Bob Kerrey — joined Lieberman in sternly denouncing Clinton's relationship with Lewinsky and his handling of the affair's aftermath.

Lieberman said Clinton had "compromised his moral authority" and complicated the efforts of parents seeking to instill "values of honesty" in their own children.

"It is hard to ignore the impact of the misconduct the president has admitted to on our children, our culture and our national character," Lieberman said.



Monica Mannan, a housewife, living in Dhanmondi (House-5, Road-3) had been waiting for the last five years to see her Night Queen bloom. Her dream came true yesterday evening.

— Star photo by Amran Hossain



Mother Teresa's first death anniversary today

CALCUTTA, Sept 4: Rare photographs of Mother Teresa as a young girl in Albania were included in a book released Friday, the eve of the first anniversary of her death, reports AP.

"Mother Teresa of Calcutta," a pictorial book on the life and achievements of the Roman Catholic nun, was edited by Sunita Kumar, a close friend for many years, and released by Mother Teresa's successor as head of the Missionaries of Charity, Sister Nirmala.

"May this coming in contact with the Mother rekindle the fire of love in each heart, for God and his children, especially the poorest of the poor," Sister Nirmala said.

On Monday, a week-long exhibition of 27 oil paintings depicting Mother Teresa's work was opened in an art gallery in Calcutta, which was home to her for nearly five decades.

Mother Teresa died last Sept 5 at the age of 87. She had lived in Calcutta's slums, caring for the destitute and dying.

The commemoration of the death anniversary will be simple, starting with a special mass early Saturday at the Missionaries of Charity where she is buried. This would be followed by hourly prayers throughout the day, Sister Nirmala said.

The order will feed the poor in various parts of Calcutta.

Assam flood death toll 200

GUWAHATI (India), Sept 4: Flooding from the rain-swollen Brahmaputra river in India's tea-and oil-rich state of Assam has killed hundreds of people and caused damage worth millions of dollars, officials said today, reports Reuters.

State police and hospital authorities say at least 200 people have died from floods and landslides in the last four months.

"Assam has been hit by floods this year because the rainfall was higher compared to last year," said Pramod Gogoi, Flood Control Minister of the northeastern state.

"An amount of 2.0 billion rupees (47.1 million dollar) would be required to restore the flood control measures damaged by floods. Assam has 4,448-km (2,780 miles) of embankment, 629 protection works and 406 miles of drainage channels to protect it from monsoon rains.

Fatal case of mistaken identity

NEW DELHI, Sept 4: An Indian policeman was beaten to death by a group of villagers after they mistook him for a bandit, the United News of India (UNI) said today, reports AFP.

The news agency said the incident took place in the northern state of Punjab when three plainclothed policemen, patrolling a village, were chased by villagers thinking they were bandits.

Two policemen managed to escape while the third was caught and his hands and legs tied before he was beaten to death, UNI said.

Sonia tells Congress to prepare for government

PANCHAMARHI, India, Sept 4: Opposition leader Sonia Gandhi branded India's ruling coalition an abject failure, as she told a key strategy meeting of her Congress Party here today to prepare for government, reports AFP.

In a keynote address to some 250 national and regional party leaders gathered in this isolated hill resort in central India, the widow of former premier Rajiv Gandhi sought to erase any doubts over the willingness of Congress to take over should the current government fall.

"I wish to make it clear that if and when the need arises, our party will fulfill its constitutional obligation without hesitation and provide stability and progress," she said in a 40-minute speech made in Hindi and English.

Branding the Hindu nationalist-led coalition an "all-round failure," Sonia Gandhi said its six-month record in office had produced a stagnant economy, rising inflation, record-low investment and a shameful foreign policy.

Described by officials as the most important party gathering in decades — is aimed at drawing up a blueprint for future Congress policy and assessing a possible challenge to oust the government.

The meeting is being seen as a potential watershed for the Italian-born Sonia in cementing her position as Congress president, following her election in April.

In her speech, she highlighted the internal divisions within the ruling coalition and the inability of its dominant member, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to keep its partners in line.

At the same time, however, she warned her own party leaders to guard against internal bickering and concentrate their efforts on restoring Congress to its former glory.

Public support for Congress has fallen in the past 10 years, with its share of the vote plummeting to an all-time low of barely 30 per cent in the February-March general elections.

It has also lost control of most of India's 25 states — a far cry from its dominant position just a decade ago.

"We must ensure full and equal participation of all sections of the people," she said, pressing for a return to the

Congress tradition of working for "social amity irrespective of caste, creed and religion."

Security was tight around the hill resort, with some 4,000 policemen guarding the venue and checkpoints turning away any vehicles or people without special passes.

The route to the meeting venue was lined with party workers, waving Congress flags and signing songs praising Sonia.

Congress has come under intense pressure from other opposition parties to string together an alternative administration to challenge the BJP-led coalition.

However, many Congress officials are wary of ending up with the same sort of multiparty coalition the BJP now finds itself steering from crisis to crisis amid internal disputes over regional issues.

Some opposition leaders are also concerned at the inexperience of Sonia, who remained out of active politics until late last year when she stunned India by deciding to campaign for the Congress in the 1998 elections.

Although talk about her "foreign" origin has almost subsided, not everyone in the Congress, including veterans, seem to be at ease with her style of leadership.

111-yr sentence for stealing necklaces!

MUMBAI, Sept 4: A Mumbai taxi driver was sentenced to 111 years in prison by a judge for stealing necklaces traditionally worn by married women, a newspaper said Friday, reports AP.

A magistrate said Mohammad Yakub Shah should serve three years for each of the 37 gold-and-black-bead Hindu marriage necklaces he stole.

Shah was also ordered to pay a fine of 37,000 rupees or face an extra month in his sentence, the Indian Express newspaper reported.

Shah can appeal. It is likely his sentence will be reduced, as magistrates are generally restricted in the severity of the sentences they can impose.

Shah was arrested in November, 1997 for snatching chains from his passengers.

India to test advanced version of Agni soon

NEW DELHI, Sept 4: India will begin test-firing a new and more powerful version of its current intermediate-range ballistic missile in the near future, Defence Minister George Fernandes said today, reports AFP.

Test firing of the Agni (fire) II is inevitable. It will be done soon but no date has yet been finalised," Fernandes was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India (PTI).

The minister declined to provide any details of the new missile's dimensions or parameters, although experts say its range could be up to twice that of the Agni I, which can carry a nuclear or conventional warhead up to 1,500-km.

Fernandes said the new version would use "state-of-the-art technologies developed indigenously."

The Agni, launched three times since 1993, has been successfully tested but not deployed by the military.

Countries such as the United States have voiced fears over the Agni project, saying it would pose a threat to regional security especially since India and Pakistan conducted tit-for-tat nuclear tests in May.

Fernandes also dismissed any concerns over US requests to Russia to halt military cooperation with India, specifically the sale of a Russian anti-missile system.

"We are working on different systems. We are very much on the job working on our own anti-missile defence systems. It is our responsibility," Fernandes said.

Questioned by PTI over relations with China, which Fernandes recently described as

India's enemy number one, the minister insisted there was no reason the two countries could not build amicable ties.

"Threat perception per se does not mean ceasing to be friends," Fernandes said.

"I have been consistently pleading for friendship and not enmity with China."

DPRK planning fresh missile test: Russia

MOSCOW, Sept 4: North Korea is planning a fresh ballistic missile test at the weekend, Interfax news agency reported today citing Russian military intelligence sources, reports AFP.

An unnamed official said air defence formations and Russia's Pacific fleet reconnaissance ships had been put on alert for the test which the official said was scheduled for Saturday.

However, there was no official confirmation of the report from the Russian defence ministry or intelligence service.

If confirmed, the test would be the second in the week, coming hard on the heels of a missile launch Monday whose warhead landed inside the economic zone in Russia's far east.

Senior Russian officials said they believed the first test was an accident.

But observers believe Saturday's test could be designed to coincide with the election of the isolated North Korean state's leader Kim Jong-il as president. The Stalinist leader is expected to be voted president on Saturday, with a formal inauguration on Wednesday.



Search for the body of the younger of two brothers, who drowned in flood-affected North Mugda area of the city Thursday, continued yesterday.

— Star photo

More relief for flood victims

The Ramkrishna Mission yesterday distributed relief materials in city's Demra area, mission sources said.

The mission authorities gave relief goods to 190 flood-hit families who have taken shelter at Abu Haji Government Primary School in Mir Hazaribagh. The goods included 475-kg of rice, 95-kg of lentils and 590 packets of oral saline.

Besides, mobile medical teams of the mission treated 410 people in the city.

The mission earlier distributed 8.79 tonnes of rice, 1.5 tonnes of lentils 7,000 packets

of saline, 1476 bars of soap and treated 900 patients in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Manikganj and Feni districts.

BSD

Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) distributed relief goods among the flood victims in the city's Mirpur area yesterday, says a press release.

BSD units of Tejgaon, Mohammadpur and Sutrapur thanas carried out the programmes.

CODES

Committed Organisation

For Development Extension Service (CODES) also distributed relief materials among four hundred flood-affected families at Duttapara Rehabilitation Centre in Tongi on August 27, says a press release.

Each of the families were given 5-kg of rice, one kg of lentils and one kg of salt.

The relief operations were led by CODES executive director Mantu Daniel and assistant general secretary Mamtazuddin. The relief operations were conducted in association with CARITAS, the release said.