

USAID provides \$1.7m in aid

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided over 1.7 million dollars in humanitarian assistance to Bangladesh in response to the prevailing flood situation in the country, reports UNB.

USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance responded immediately by providing 25,000 dollars to its Dhaka office to meet the most critical needs of flood victims after US Ambassador to John C Holzman declared disaster on August 27.

It is also arranging an airlift of relief supplies including two water purification units, 250 rolls of plastic sheeting for shelter, 1,625 blankets and 16,300 five-gallon water containers at a total estimated cost of 2.5 lakh dollars, including transport.

The Agency has also provided 1.57 million in disaster relief assistance through the monetisation of foodgrains provided through PL-480, said a press release of USAID issued on Thursday in Washington DC.

The assistance is supporting the relief programmes of CARE/Bangladesh and the ICDDR,B. Under the 1998 Food Aid initiative, an additional 4 lakh metric tons of wheat is being made available to the government of Bangladesh and the World Food Programme for use in national feeding programmes underway as a result of extensive crop damage caused by recent flooding.

The United States is committing approximately US dollar 80 million in project and food aid to Bangladesh's ongoing needs in the current fiscal year ending September 30. This assistance will support a broad range of family planning and health services, rural roads and infrastructure and agricultural development and community-level activities.

President, PM greet Ethiopian counterparts

President Shahabuddin Ahmed has greeted the President of Ethiopia Dr Negasso Gidada on the occasion of National Day of his country today, reports UNB.

In a message sent to Dr Gidada, the President wished for the good health and happiness of the President and continued progress and prosperity of Ethiopian people.

In another message, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina felicitated the Prime Minister of Ethiopia Ato Meles Zenawi on the same occasion.

Hasina expressed the hope that the friendly ties between the two countries will be increased further in the years to come.

She wished for good health and happiness of the Prime Minister and well being and prosperity of the people of Ethiopia.

Bangla-Japan Parliamentary League V-P arrives today

Vice-president of Bangladesh-Japan Parliamentary League Shin Sakurai MP arrives in Dhaka today to see the flood situation in Bangladesh and gain first hand knowledge of the extent of devastation, reports UNB.

He would discuss with government leaders all aspects of floods including Bangladesh's proposal for dredging of rivers, a faxed message from Bangladesh Mission in Tokyo said.

Shin Sakurai will also hold discussion on entire gamut of bilateral relations, particularly, economic co-operation and Japanese investment in Bangladesh.

He is to return the Japanese MP in likely to submit a report to his government.

One-arm doctor sued for malpractice

ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico, Sept 11: A vasectomy patient has sued a one-arm physician and the health group he works for, alleging the doctor botched the procedure, reports AP.

Carlos L Herreras, 42, filed a malpractice lawsuit Wednesday in state district court alleging that Dr Bret L LaPointe removed only one seminal duct, took four times longer than he anticipated, and inflicted "extreme physical and emotional pain and suffering."

Messages left for LaPointe went unreturned. Anne Monson, a spokeswoman for the health group Lovelace, said Thursday its policy not to comment on lawsuits.

The lawsuit alleged that during the June 29 procedure "it became clear that Dr LaPointe was having difficulty performing the surgery with one arm." And while LaPointe had assured Herreras the procedure would last 45 minutes, it ended up taking three hours, the lawsuit said.

Lab results show LaPointe had successfully removed Herreras's right duct, but what was thought to be the left was blood vessel and some connective tissue, the lawsuit alleges.

The operation involves cutting the connective ducts, said Herreras's attorney, Bruce Pasternack. Surgeons take out a part of tissue to send to the lab to make sure the duct was cut, he said.



BRAVING ALL ODDS: People waiting in a queue to collect relief materials at the Kamalapur Buddhist temple in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Various organisations continue relief work

Different organisations and individuals continued their relief operations yesterday in the city as elsewhere across the country, report agencies.

Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Mohammad Hanif distributed cooked food, medicines, saline, rice, *chitra* and lentils at RK Chowdhury Degree College, Mahanagar Mohila College, Kabi Nazrul College, Shaheed Suhrawardy College, Bipin Roy Government School and Fazlul Huq College flood shelters in the city.

Vice-Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University Prof Alauddin Ahmed distributed relief materials among the distressed at the shelter on the campus.

A team of Sammilita Sangskritik Jote distributed relief materials at Ruhitpur, Kalatia and Shakta union under Keraniganj thana. Another team led by Asaduzzaman Noor left for Nilphamari carrying relief materials including *chira*, *gur*, *muri*, saline, garments and medicines, a press release said.

Bangabandhu Parishad distributed 3200 pieces of *ruti*, *halua* and oral saline packets at Uttar Badda Primary School flood shelter and adjoining areas.

Three mobile medical team of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) provided treatment and medicines at different shelters of Lalbagh and Sabujbagh and Kamrangirchar, said a press release.

Different socio-cultural organisations yesterday distributed relief materials among the flood affected people at shelter camps in the city, reports BSS.

Dhaka-based Monirampur Thana Samity distributed *khichuri* and pure drinking water to 520 families at Mastul, Dumni, Gudara Ghat, Patir,

Langlartek and Ashkona areas under Golsuhan thana.

Managing Director of Chittagong-based Coca Industries Limited, Pradip Barua, and a social worker from Mayakanon, Promoth Barua, distributed relief among 150 families at Kamalapur Dhamorajik Boudha Mahabihar. The relief materials included one kg rice and one kg potato per family. They also prepared food to nearly 800 students residing at the Boudha Mandir hostels.

Sri Sri Madhob Gourio Math, Narinda, distributed relief materials among nearly 5000 flood affected people sheltered at Narinda Shishu Kalyan Primary School, Narinda Government High School, AK Hamid Government Primary School, Narinda Government Primary School and Salimullah College.

Ramkrishna Mission distributed relief goods in different parts of the city. A group of volunteers of the mission led by Minto Moharaj distributed emergency relief goods among 210 families in Begunbari, Dakhkhingao, Rajarbagh and Nandipara.

A mobile medical team of the mission is also working in the worst-affected areas in and around the capital.

Bangladesh Ceramic Society distributed relief goods including *chira*, *gur* and oral saline among the flood-affected people who have taken shelter at New Model High School, Sukrabad.

Enviro Protection and Human Development (EPHD), an NGO, distributed *khichuri* among hundreds of flood victims at Noapara in Ruppaganj of Narayanjan district, according to a press release.

A 12-member team of the EPHD along with its chief coordinator and general secretary conducted the relief operation.

US embassy bombings Tanzania expels 5 Iraqis, 1 Libyan questioned by FBI

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania, Sept 11: Tanzania expelled five Iraqis and a Libyan who were questioned by the FBI and police in connection of the bombing of two US embassies in East Africa last month, a newspaper reported Friday, says AP.

Immigration officials escorted the Libyan, Atif Issa Enahmed, to the airport and put him on a flight to an undisclosed Middle East destination, said Uhuru, or Freedom, a Swahili newspaper owned by the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi party.

Five Iraqis, whose names were not disclosed, also were deported, the newspaper said.

It gave no reason for the expulsions and Tanzania's criminal investigation and immigration departments could not be reached for comment.

Nearly simultaneous bombings at US embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya, on Aug 7 killed 258 people, including 12 Americans, and injured more than 5,500 people. Of those killed, 11 were killed in Tanzania.

Two key suspects in the Kenya bombing have been handed over to the United States for trial. American authorities allege the attacks were plotted by Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden.

On Sunday, Tanzanian police and FBI agents said they had made "extraordinary discoveries," having determined what the Dar es Salaam bomb was made of and who carried it to the embassy. They refused to provide details.

Media reports in Tanzania have said the ingredients for the bombs had originated in the Middle East and were transferred by sea via the Comoro Islands to Tanzania.

Reports in Kenya said the components of the bomb that exploded in Nairobi were transported by road from Tanzania to Kenya.

The East African nations share a long and mostly unguarded border.

Congress against president's rule in Bihar

NEW DELHI, Sept 11: Congress today came out against imposition of president's rule in Bihar and described as "improper" the reported statement of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the issue, reports PTI.

"We do not feel there are sufficient grounds for imposition of president's rule in the state. We do not feel that a situation has arisen wherein it is not possible to govern the state," party spokesman Ajit Jogi told reporters.

Answering another question, he said it was wrong on the prime minister's part to speak about the possibility of central rule in Bihar "before any such decision being taken by the president."

Shariah bill to enhance Sharif's power

ISLAMABAD, Sept 11: Whatever benefits the proposed Shariah Bill to impose Quranic laws may confer on Pakistan, it is sure to enhance Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's own power greatly.

At issue is a constitutional amendment bill introduced by the government recently, which would make Islamic law the country's supreme law and in the words of one of Sharif's officials, help make Pakistan an "Islamic welfare state".

Debate is underway between supporters of the Nawaz Sharif government and those who fear it could push the country toward a more radical brand of Islam.

But political analysts say that in the end, the Prime Minister's standing in current difficult times is the main beneficiary of the Shariah bill.

The Fifteenth Amendment, when passed, will create a supra-constitutional authority through a clause which allows the federal government to issue directives for the implementation of an Islamic legal system, and take necessary action against any state functionary for non-compliance.

An iron-clad guarantee sought against any resistance to any government directive issued in the name of Shariah enforcement is pelted out in another clause, which allows supersession of the Constitution, law or court judgement.

According to legal experts, in effect, the judiciary could end up being drastically curtailed. For example, if the government decides to suspend fundamental rights to enforce Shariah, there can be no appeal to the courts.

In June, the Supreme Court ruled against the suspension of all fundamental rights through the imposition of a national

emergency following the nuclear tests in May.

The Shariah Bill also seeks to reduce the existing two-thirds majority required for any constitutional amendment to a simple majority.

Already, Sharif has drawn criticism for not seeking Cabinet consensus on major decisions. So far, he has shocked his colleagues with his choice of President, the decision to go ahead with the nuclear tests and now to enforce Shariah.

Now his critics say that in reading the Shariah Bill, the word 'government' should be replaced by 'prime minister' for a better and more accurate understanding of Sharif's predicament.

The introduction of the Shariah Bill at the present juncture was obviously guided by allegations by fundamentalists that Sharif facilitated the missile attack by the US on Afghanistan in August without seeking Cabinet consensus.

Sharif obviously calculated that the Shariah Bill would not only help dissipate pressure from religious parties, but also arm himself with more powers to thwart any move to change the government.

Such fears are not unfounded. There is no drawing room in Islamabad where change scenarios are not being whispered and adding to Sharif's insecurity in spite of his ample majority in government.

Sharif, who genuinely wished to implement reforms, appears to have run into serious administrative bottlenecks and would need that extra power if he is to deliver on this many promises. In fact, that was the reason he himself cited when he presented the bill.

But Sharif's acts of omission and commission since return-

ing to the prime ministership 18 months ago do not inspire confidence.

His open courts and people's committees and his non-performing E t e s a b (accountability) Cell and public appointment for loan defaulters have not earned him any points.

In fact, the only thing he seems to have done right so far is the nuclear tests and launching of the *Ghauri* missile aimed at India.

Meanwhile, at a personal level, there is the lingering question of his own probity. He has come under fire for supposedly defaulting on loans and evading taxes while expanding his assets.

This certainly opens Sharif to accusations that he cannot claim to be leading by example when he urged his countrymen to austerity and make sacrifices in the wake of a difficult economic situation created partly by the US-led sanctions.

But whatever the apprehensions regarding the Shariah law, it could forge a consensus between Pakistan's bitterly divided political parties who are all calling for supra-constitutional moves to pull the country out of its present crisis.

There is at least a broad acknowledgment by all the parties that the deepening economic crisis cannot be dealt with through the existing power framework.

Sharif's main political rival, Benazir Bhutto has openly advocated the setting up of a "new government of politicians, technocrats, military leaders and intelligence agencies" as the route out of the current economic and political crisis.

Prominent leaders such as Nawabzada Nasrullah, General Aslam Beg and others advocate

the setting up of a 'national government' comprising politicians and other figures.

Retired Air Marshal Asghar Khan argued in a newspaper column that a two-year technocrat government with a reform agenda was the 'only way out'.

The latest addition to the chorus comes from former cricket star Imran Khan, who called for the setting up of an interim government based on a reform agenda. But he opposed a national government because "it would only protect the system and corruption."

Sharif has been busy convincing newspaper editors that the Shariah Bill was essential since, in the current judicial set-up it was difficult to rein in any loan defaulter as the court provided them with avenues for escape.

Addressing the National Assembly, Sharif maintained: "The main purpose of the Constitutional Amendment was to ensure that the state performs its duties and roots out all social and legal ills."

Corruption and maladministration have become such a cancer on society that normal legal procedures were not enough, he said.

Sharif also promised the country that the Shariah Bill would change the colour of Pakistan's society in the same way that the nuclear tests had changed the colour of the Chagai mountains.

But this may be too far-fetched a promise, because the Shariah has failed Sharif's predecessors as a tool for political survival. It did not help Zulfikar Ali Bhutto stay in power in 1975, and barely 90 days after bringing in the Shariah Ordinance, General Zia-ul-Haq was assassinated. — IPS/APB.

Poaching poses new threat to tigers in India

NEW DELHI, Sept 11: Twenty-eight years after Project Tiger was launched, the striped feline no longer faces the threat of extinction, but in some areas the situation is alarming due to rampant poaching and steady loss of habitat, reports PTI.

Despite the Wildlife (protection) Act 1972, which extended total legal protection to tigers in India, poaching poses a new threat to the big cats as tigers are killed for skin, bones and other body parts, say conservationists.

The last decade has seen a rise in commercial demand for tiger parts for use in traditional Chinese medicine in South Asia, says Manoj Mishra of Traffic India, which monitors wildlife trade.

"Although available trade data does not indicate India as a supplier, by virtue of the number of tigers here and the extent to which hunting appears to be taking place, it could be a major country of supply", says Mishra.

A report by Environmental Investigation Agency, a London-based international conservation organisation says poaching for Chinese medicine which has a lucrative market in the west, is responsible for the death of at least one tiger in India every day.

"The figures are exaggerated," says environmentalist Dr Iqbal Malik, according to her the figure could be one tiger a week.

The tiger population was less than 2000 when the first census was undertaken in 1972. The figure in 1993 was 3,750.

"The species would have been closer to extinction in this country had it not been for Project Tiger", she says.

However, according to a World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) report, after an initial rising trend there has been a decline in tiger numbers, which is now of major concern.

The report says the 1993 figure shows an alarming dip in the tiger population at 3,750 compared to 1989 when they numbered 4,334.

Citing specific examples, it says their number fell drastically from 94 in 1989 to 34 in 1995 at Nagarjunasagar Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh, and from 28 to 15 at Indravati in Madhya Pradesh.

At Palamu in Bihar, their figure came down to 47 from 55, by six at Ranthambore in Rajasthan, while at Periyar in Kerala the decline was from 45 to 39 during the same period.

The scene is equally alarming in Buxa in West Bengal where the tiger population is down from 38 to 31 or at Pench

Sanctuary in MP, where there were 27 tigers in 1995 compared to 39 two years earlier.

Approximately 1.15 million hectares of forests were lost in development projects in India from 1952 to 1980. Even the Forest Conservation Act in 1980, which regulates the transfer of forest land for non-forest purposes, failed to check its transfer for other purposes, says Brigadier Ranjit Talwar of WWF. This has impacted their population immensely, he notes.

Realising that poaching has endangered the tiger, its habitat and foodchain, the Project Tiger directorate has recommended setting up of a participative fund to contain the threat, government officials say.

But tigers cannot be saved unless the ecosystem as a whole is protected, says Malik calling for greater coordination between agencies working for tiger conservation.

Strict measures need to be enforced to ensure resources allocated for tiger conservation are not siphoned off for other activities, she says.

Tiger conservation has been rarely supported by the local communities living in and around the protected areas.

With the declaration of protected areas, restrictions were imposed on access and use of resources like fuelwood, fodder, small timber, grazing areas and non-timber forest produce bringing the humans in direct conflict with the animals, she notes.

"Support structures like training of forest department staff for management of protected areas and the material support required by them for effective protection and management should be provided on a priority basis", says Malik.

To enable public participation in saving tigers, people are now being educated on human-animal coexistence and of the need to save then by implementing various measures, including habitat protection, officials say.

The government also needs to gear up its machinery and ensure that compensation to villagers, who fell victim to tiger attacks is paid at the earliest, says Talwar.

Suggesting establishment of an agency to counter illegal trade, Mishra says only such a measure can put a check on reckless killing of the striped feline.

Things need to be mobilised, and fast, before we lose the big cats for good.

Rafsanjani vows revenge

Killing of Iranian diplomats heightens tensions with Taliban

ISLAMABAD, Sept 11: Already tense relations between Afghanistan and its powerful neighbour Iran have been strained further by the Taliban religious militia admitting that its troops killed a group of missing Iranian diplomats, reports AP.

For weeks, Iran has been pressing the Taliban, which controls 90 per cent of Afghanistan, through diplomatic channels and with shows of military force over the fate of the 11 Iranians. The group vanished during an Aug. 8 battle in which the Taliban seized the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

On Thursday, the Taliban army said the bodies of nine of the missing Iranians were found this week, and admitted that they had been killed by the religious army's own troops.

The Taliban made the disclosure in a letter from their supreme leader, Mullah Omar, to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The UN condemned the killings.

Tehran called the killings "a shocking and horrifying atrocity which is contrary to international codes and norms." Iran has also said it plans new, massive military exercises on the Afghan border in what outside experts fear could be a prelude to military retaliation.

Iran said it also held Pakistan, a Taliban ally, responsible for the deaths.

Pakistan's foreign ministry on Friday responded by saying it "noted with regret that the government of Iran blamed Pakistan for this tragic incident." The statement also urged Iran and Afghanistan to show restraint and solve their disputes peacefully.

The nine Iranians "either intentionally or unintentionally, have been killed by unidentified soldiers" of the Taliban, Mullah Omar's letter said. He stressed that the soldiers acted on their own. There was no word on the fate of the two other missing Iranians.

The United Nations has denied any knowledge of the missing diplomats, suggesting that they fled or were with the

troops of a northern alliance that is fighting the Taliban.

Hours before Mullah Omar admitted the killings, a top Taliban official told the Associated Press in Islamabad that the envoys had been killed by opponents wanting to sour relations between Iran and the Taliban.

Iran's state-controlled television claimed to have evidence that Mullah Omar personally ordered the storming of the Iranian consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif, but did not present any proof.

However, Mullah Omar has said the battle for Mazar-i-Sharif was so fierce that the Taliban had no time to consider the Iranian diplomats.

Another report from Tehran adds: Hundreds of demonstrators called for holy war against the Taliban militia here Friday because of the killing of Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan, the official Iranian news agency reported.

"Death to the Taliban! Shame on Pakistan!" the protesters shouted, according to

the Islamic Republic News Agency.

The demonstration was staged by people who just attended Friday prayers at Tehran University where former President Hashemi Rafsanjani said that Iran would avenge Taliban's killing of nine diplomats in northern Afghanistan.

"I condole the martyrs' families and promise them that we will get revenge for their blood," said Rafsanjani, who heads a government policy-making body.

Another report from UN says: The United Nations is considering participating in a mission to investigate an announcement Thursday that Iranian diplomats who were abducted in northern Afghanistan have been killed, a spokesman said.

The United Nations was planning to look into the kidnappings in any case and "today's news, if confirmed, would not change that," said spokesman Fred Eckhard.

Loyalist forces recapture key town in Congo

KINSHASA, Congo, Sept 11: Forces loyal to Congolese President Laurent Kabila have recaptured a town today on a key route between two rebels strongholds in eastern Congo, killing 49 people, state radio reported, reports AP.

The capture of Lobutu came as Kabila left the capital Friday to spend time in his southwestern base of Lubumbashi before flying to a summit in Mauritius that is likely to address Congo's month-long war, government-controlled Voice of the People radio said.

The reports could not be independently confirmed.

The Southern African Development Community summit opens Monday on Mauritius, an Indian Ocean island. Representatives of the group's 14 member states are expected to discuss the war, which poses the region's biggest security threat in years.

Loyalist forces recaptured Lobutu after "intense bombardments" on the town by loyalist warplanes, state radio said. The town is about 300 kilometres northwest of Goma, on Congo's eastern border with Rwanda.



A supply of 68 tons of high protein biscuits from UNICEF was handed over to the Ministry of Disaster, Relief and Rehabilitation. The supply arrived in the city on a special charter plane yesterday.



Prayers at the submerged Kamalapur Buddhist temple on Thursday seeking divine blessing to save the country from the devastating flood. — Star photo