

# Asian floods: A warning for better water resources management

**MURHALA, India, Sept 19:** To Indian farmer Shiv Prasad Paasi, the Rapti River is a god — a wayward, capricious, awe-some powerful being wandering across the fertile Gangetic plains, reports AP.

Paasi was among the millions of Indians, Bangladeshis, Chinese, Nepalese and South Koreans driven to high ground this summer when the Rapti and other rivers roared across Asia in the region's worst flooding in decades. Nearly 6,700 people were killed in the rising waters.

"Floods are the will of the gods. They are destiny," said Paasi, his submerged fields stretching behind him in a village in India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh.

Others question what part man played in the disaster.

The indiscriminate cutting of trees for fuel or to make way for farms reduces the ability of the earth to hold groundwater and take away the sting of advancing floodwaters as they hurtle down plains. In addition, global warming — caused by carbon dioxide, and other greenhouse gases — can cause a rise in sea level, coastal flooding and climate changes, though scientists are hesitant to attribute any one event to the phenomena at this stage.

"I think that these naturally occurring disasters, though not necessarily related, are useful in reminding us there may be more to come," said Dick Goldman, director in New Delhi of a US Agency for International Development project on environment, energy and business.

In India alone this summer, flooding killed over 2,500 people, submerged tens of thousands of villages in low-lying areas and destroyed over 10 million acres of crops in a huge northern expanse said to be the most flood-prone plain in the world.

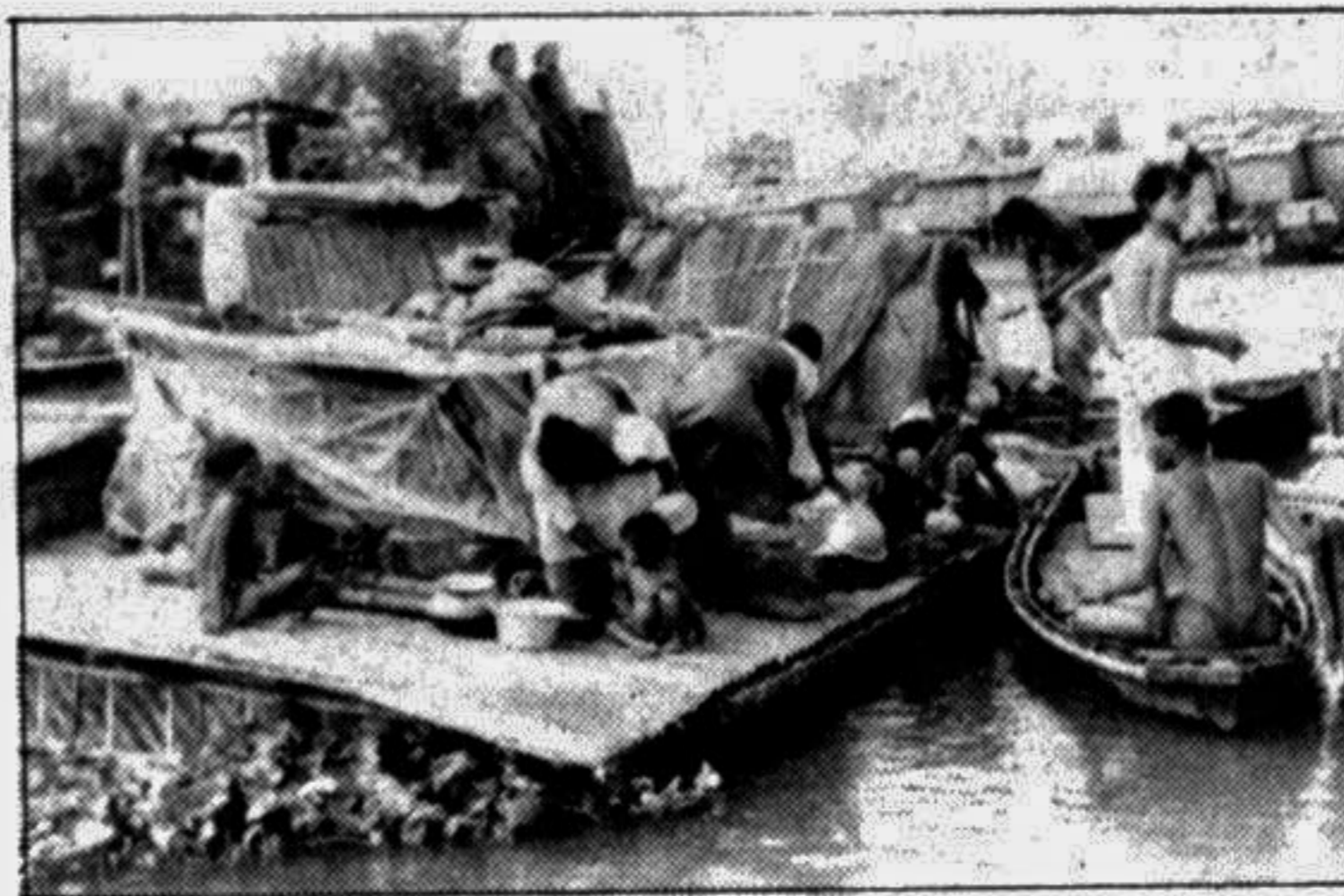
Villagers waded through deep water carrying their children and pulling along their cattle and bundles of belongings. Flood waters washed away tens of thousands of mud hatched houses, submerged telephone exchanges and power stations and ripped through highways.

In China, more than 3,000 people were killed nationwide when the Yangtze River, the country's longest, was hit by the heaviest flooding since 1954. Tens of thousands of people remain camped on dikes or in temporary shelters, which officials say will be inadequate come winter.

Over 900 people died in floods in Bangladesh, where this year's extraordinary flooding is blamed on unusually heavy rain that fell non-stop for nearly a month and a higher-than-normal tide in the Bay of Bengal, probably triggered by a series of undersea earthquakes last month.

More than 270 South Koreans were killed in three weeks of downpours that began in early August. In the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal, 246 people were killed due to floods and landslides, the heaviest toll in five years.

"One common thread between the flooding in Asia is that the average annual rainfall has shot up."



The devastating floods in many countries of Asia have caused a huge loss in life and property.

# Iran yet to respond to US overtures for talks

**WASHINGTON, Sept 19:** Iran's Muslim fundamentalist government has failed to respond to overtures from the Clinton administration for improving relations, but US interest in a dialogue was reaffirmed by the US State Department, reports AP.

And while the United States is looking for changes in Iran's policies, "we have never made a change in their behaviour a prerequisite for a meeting, and we're not changing that view," spokesman James P. Rubin said Friday.

One of those hoped-for changes would be a halt in sponsorship of terrorism, which is annually attributed to Iran in State Department reports to Congress on terrorism. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will sit down next Monday in New York with Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi as part of an eight-nation conference sponsored by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on tensions between Iran and Afghanistan.

Registering sympathy with Tehran over the deaths, Rubin said, "We would certainly expect the Iranian government to make clear its concerns about what's transpired there. And we share their outrage over the killing of diplomats."

He stressed the meeting Monday was not strictly a conversation between Albright and Kharazi, but that a speech the foreign minister is due to make on Friday to the Asia Society in New York will get careful attention.

## BRIEFLY

**Bomb blast claims 29 in Algiers:** A bomb exploded inside a market on the edge of the city of Tiaret Friday, killing 29 and injuring 110, hospital sources said, AP reports from Algiers.

The attack was announced in a brief statement from Algerian security forces. The statement said seven of the injured were in serious condition. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

**Kabila arrives in Tripoli:** The president of the Democratic Republic of Congo Laurent Kabila arrived in Tripoli Friday on a Congolese airplane, state television reported, amid increasing concern about violations of the UN embargo on Libya, AP reports from Tripoli.

"My visit to Tripoli comes in the framework of support for Libya brought by all Africans," Kabila said referring to the Organization of African Unity decision to stop respecting the embargo September 1. The UN Security Council expressed "concern" Friday about reports of the growing number of violations of the embargo.

**Political columnist held in Iran:** The political columnist for the banned Iranian newspaper, Toss, has been arrested, the daily's managing director said yesterday, AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Seyed Ebrahim Nabavi had been spared Wednesday when an editor and publishing director were arrested and the paper was shut down by officers of the Islamic Revolution Court.

**Storm floods more Philippine towns:** More towns were flooded as a tropical storm drenched much of the northern Philippines yesterday, forcing thousands of people to flee rising floodwaters, AP says from Philippines.

The storm also whipped up large waves that sank a ferryboat carrying 443 people south of Manila before dawn yesterday. By mid afternoon, the navy reported 221 people had been rescued and two were confirmed dead.

**2 US aircraft collide mid-air:** Two US customs aircraft collided in mid-air off the coast of Puerto Rico on Friday and one pilot was killed when one of the planes crashed at sea, the treasury department announced on Friday, Reuters says from Washington.

The Nomad marine surveillance aircraft were part of a group of eight planes, each carrying a pilot and a co-pilot, that had left Puerto Rico en route for Curacao to wait out approaching Hurricane Georges.



Lewinsky 'concerned for her country'

**ATHENS, Sept 19:** Monica Lewinsky is "concerned for her country" but is also relieved for the immunity provided her, a lawyer for the former White House intern said in an interview broadcast in Greece on Friday, reports AP.

"She is not eager to be going through all these procedures," Plato Cacheris told Greece's private Antenna television channel.

"She is, of course, gratified that she herself is not involved in any criminal sense. I think she's relieved for herself. She's also concerned for the country," Cacheris, who is of Greek ancestry, said in Washington.

Cacheris' interview aired hours after the House Judiciary Committee voted to release the videotape of US President Bill Clinton's grand jury testimony and an additional 2,800 pages of material, including sexually explicit details of Clinton's relationship with Lewinsky.

# Resumption of bilateral dialogue India, Pakistan set to finalise modalities

**NEW DELHI, Sept 19:** India and Pakistan are all set to finalise modalities for resumption of the stalled bilateral dialogue on all outstanding issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, when Premier Atal Bihari Vajpayee meets his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif on September 23 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session, reports PTI.

Vajpayee, who leaves for New York on September 22 heading a high-level delegation, will have a luncheon meeting with Sharif in which they are expected to firm up dates for restarting the official-level parleys which had broken down last year following Islamabad's insistence on first discussing the core Kashmir issue, official sources said.

Though Pakistan Foreign Minister Sartaz Aziz has expressed doubts about India's seriousness in resuming the dialogue process, officials from both sides have indicated that a major breakthrough is on the cards unless there are last minute hiccups.

**global pressure, an official spokesman in Islamabad struck a different note saying Pakistan is hopeful of a positive result.**

Vajpayee and Sharif will be staying in the posh New York palace hotel, with one floor separating them. Officials said chances of an unexpected meeting are remote as their hectic schedules do not coincide.

Sharif, who arrives in New York Sunday night, is slated to leave on Thursday or Friday, while Vajpayee will stay on till September 28.

With both sides agreeing in principle that any future dialogue between the two countries should cover the entire gamut of bilateral issues, it has been left to Vajpayee and Sharif to decide on the future course of bilateral parleys.

Official sources said the prime ministers were expected to broadly endorse the proposals of the foreign secretaries listing the schedule for discussing eight outstanding issues identified by the two sides in Islamabad in June, 1997.

**Groundwork for the Vajpayee-Sharif meeting was done by foreign secretaries K Raghunath and Shamsah Ahmad when they met on the fringes of the NAM summit in Durban earlier this month. Their proposals will be placed for consideration before the two prime ministers.**

The six other issues are Siachen, Tulbul Navigation Project, Sir Creek Boundary dispute, terrorism and drug trafficking, economic and commercial cooperation and provision of friendly exchanges in various fields.

While the Pakistani Foreign Minister has raised doubts over New Delhi's intentions to resume the stalled dialogue saying it might be aimed at a temporary reprieve toward off

# DPRK denies building nuclear facility

**TOKYO, Sept 19:** North Korea today denied it was building a secret underground nuclear facility and threatened to retaliate if the United States persisted with allegations that it was constructing such a plant, reports Reuters.

The United States has called for an outside inspection of the site, citing deep suspicions that North Korea is building a clandestine facility.

"The underground structure near Nyongbon is not a 'secret underground nuclear facility' but a civilian structure," the North Korea's official newspaper, Rodong Sinmun, said.

Modalities for discussing two of these issues — Jammu and Kashmir, and peace and security — at the foreign secretaries' levels is expected to be worked out by the two leaders, the sources said.

# Release of videotape House panel decision raises stakes of Clinton's survival

**WASHINGTON, Sept 19:** A decision to release more sexually explicit evidence in the White House sex scandal raised the stakes Friday in President Bill Clinton's battle for political survival, reports AP.

Some 2,800 pages of documents from independent counsel Kenneth Starr and the videotape of Clinton's August 17 testimony about the Monica Lewinsky affair will be released at 9 am (1300 GMT) Monday.

The testimony reportedly includes shots of an angry and evasive Clinton and the accompanying material contains a transcript of a sworn statement from Lewinsky concerning the affair with the president.

The impact of the tape which television stations are already preparing to run could be even more damaging for Clinton who denied the affair with Lewinsky for seven months before making a dramatic televised confession on the same day he testified.

The White House and congressional Democrats angrily blasted the partisan house Judiciary Committee's decision to release the tape.

The president's White House damage control team want the tape destroyed and Democrats charge that Republicans want to use it to increase the pressure on Clinton to resign.

During a two-day debate filled with what one official called "partisan rancour," the panel voted along party lines, with Democrats vainly resisting the republican majority's bid to release new material.

"There was a general view among the Democrats not to reveal anything, and there was a general view among republicans to reveal as much as possible," said committee chairman Henry Hyde.

John Conyers, the top democrat on the panel contrasted the committee's haste to the restraint, he said characterised the impeachment process that followed the Watergate scandal 24 years ago.

"If they then tried to move out from there, they would get bogged down like the Russians," he said. "They would be stuck trying to defend themselves in Herat. It's not possible."

Another option is to arm and supply Shi'ite Afghans who have sought refuge in Iran and send them home to fight the Taliban, whose soldiers are mostly Sunni Muslims.

Some people say Iran may settle for punitive air strikes, but they fear that would cause

intention of conducting the investigation under the bipartisan principles that the Watergate investigation followed."

Hyde fired back saying some charge to shift attention away from the president by attacking the work of Congress but the reality is that the process is working just as our founding fathers intended and no amount of partisan sniping will keep us from doing our job in a responsible manner."

And the widely respected lawmaker blamed Clinton for the release of the explicit material.

"The president insistence that he testified truthfully in both his deposition and grand jury testimony has made it necessary to make certain sexual language a part of the public record," he said.

Republicans say the public needs to view the tape to decide whether Clinton is guilty of perjury in his attempts to cover up the Lewinsky affair.



A woman kisses the hands of Pope John Paul II during the Pontiff's visit to the town of Chiavari on the Italian Riviera, Friday.

# 'War between Iran, Taliban will be a disaster'

**UNITED NATIONS, Sept 19:** War between Shia Muslim Iran and the Sunnite Taliban of Afghanistan would be a "disaster" that would split the Muslim world, the Pakistani Information Minister said Friday, reports AP.

Information Minister Mushahid Hussain Sayed, speaking at a luncheon with reporters said that his country was concerned about a conflict between the two branches of the Islamic faith because "this would have a serious fallout."

"That would be a disaster, he said. It would be divisive for the Muslim world, and the fallout would be in several countries."

"That is why war should be prevented," said Sayed.

He added that there was "optimism" that an armed conflict could be avoided between Iran, following the murder of eight Iranian diplomats and a journalist in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif last month.

The murders heightened tensions between Shi'ite Iran and the rival Sunni Muslim Taliban with Tehran threatening to exact revenge and sending tens of thousands of troops to the border with Afghanistan.

Sayed reiterated that was not meddling in Afghanistan and denied charges that Pakistani commanders were actively helping the Taliban forces.

"We want to be an honest broker between Iran and the Taliban," he added.

Sayed said that his government was "looking forward" to a ministerial-level meeting Monday at the United Nations

on Afghanistan to be attended by six of Afghanistan's neighbours, China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan plus Russia and the United States.

UN spokesman Fred Eckhardt told reporters Friday that following the meeting, convened by UN chief Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General's special representative for Afghanistan Lakhadar Brahimi would return to the region "shortly thereafter" for consultations.

Brahimi, an Algerian diplomat regularly used by Annan as a trouble shooter on sensitive issues, is expected to visit Iran and Pakistan, but details of his itinerary are expected to be firm up during Monday's talks here.

Sayed also urged the United Nations to be more active in searching for a solution on Afghanistan.

**Associate of Bin Laden held in Germany**

**WASHINGTON, Sept 19:** German police have arrested a senior official in international terrorist Osama bin Laden's organisation and US officials have filed charges against the man in New York, the Washington Post reported Saturday, says AP.

The Post, quoting US government sources, identified the arrested man Mamud Mahmud Salim and described him as a major financial operative and weapons procurer for bin Laden.

# Iran and Taliban now in 'war of nerves' state

**ISLAMABAD, Sept 19:** These are menacing days along the border between Iran and Afghanistan, reports AP.

Dozens of Iranian tanks growl across the sand, while helicopter gunships chatter in the sky and some 200,000 soldiers hold maneuvers to hone their military skills.

They are cheered on from Iran's cities, where people mass daily to protest the killing of Iranian diplomats by the Taliban religious army that controls much of Afghanistan. Screams of "death to the Taliban" and calls for revenge fill the air.

Across the border, an estimated 10,000 Taliban militiamen have dug in. And their leaders vow to retaliate against any assault by attacking Iranian cities with Russian-made Scud missiles — the same weapon Iraq fired at Israeli and Saudi Arabian cities during the Gulf War.

The options are reduced to two: diplomacy or war.

While diplomatic initiatives have been slow in coming, the military option seems the least tenable. Iran only has to look to recent history to see the risks in invading Afghanistan. The Soviet Union's Red Army marched in to bolster a tottering Marxist regime, only to sink back out

in 1989 after losing a 10-year war with Islamic militants.

Despite its saber rattling, Iran's government can't be eager to see its troops mired in a guerrilla war with Taliban soldiers hardened by four years of fighting that have put them in control of most of Afghanistan.

The Iranians could not expect much help from their Shi'ite Muslim allies inside Afghanistan, who are hemmed in by Taliban forces in Bamian province hundreds of kilometers away in the centre of the country.

"Even if Iran could take Herat (in eastern Afghanistan) then what?" asked Pakistan's former interior minister, Nasrullah Babbar — the man Iran and many Western governments believe fathered the Taliban movement.

"If they then tried to move out from there, they would get bogged down like the Russians," he said. "They would be stuck trying to defend themselves in Herat. It's not possible."

Another option is to arm and supply Shi'ite Afghans who have sought refuge in Iran and send them home to fight the Taliban, whose soldiers are mostly Sunni Muslims.

Some people say Iran may settle for punitive air strikes, but they fear that would cause

home and an appearance of triumph that would allow it to pull back its troops.

Taliban leaders don't seem ready to concede one.

The movement's reclusive leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, said he would not apologise for the killings of eight Iranian diplomats and a journalist, something that would soothe the Iranian tempers.

He also refuses to hand over 50 or so Iranians that Taliban troops are holding, unless Iran turns over former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani and Uzbek warlord Abdul Malik — the man Mullah Omar believes ordered the massacre of 2,000 captured Taliban soldiers last year.

For many, including the chief UN negotiator in the region, Lakshmi Brahimi, the key to peace is ending the flow of arms into Afghanistan — from Pakistan to the Taliban and from Iran to the Taliban's opponents.

Otherwise, even averting a war between Iran and Afghanistan will not stop the bloodletting inside Afghanistan.

But both countries deny they are aiding Afghan factions, and UN diplomats have been unable to slow the flood of weapons.

# Aggressions build between uneasy neighbors

Tensions between Iran and Afghanistan's ruling Taliban regime have increased since the Taliban admitted its soldiers killed nine Iranians in a battle for the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif. Here's a background look.

**IRAN**  
Leader: Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

- Considers Afghanistan's civil war a source of instability on its border and the Taliban's interpretation of Islam as putting the faith in a bad light.
- The bodies of six Iranian diplomats and a journalist killed last month have been returned and the Taliban pledged to search for two others.
- Accuses Taliban of massacring members of the Hazara ethnic minority in Afghanistan, who, like most Iranians, are Shi'ite Muslims.

**TALIBAN AFGHANISTAN**  
Leader: Mullah Mohammed Omar

- Feels Iran's alliance with opposition forces refuse Tehran's efforts to negotiate a truce and power-sharing agreement.
- Taliban's unusually strict interpretation of the Islamic holy book, the Koran, bans music and bars girls from school and women from work. In Iran, women can vote, work and serve in Parliament.
- The Taliban are Sunni Muslims. Their movement emerged in 1994 in southern Afghanistan and emphasizes the infallibility of the Koran.



# 267 rescued, 2 dead Ferry with 443 aboard sinks in Philippines

**MANILA, Sept 19:** Rescuers lowered ropes from helicopters Saturday to save passengers who survived more than 12 hours in storm-buffed seas after a Philippine ferryboat sank with 443 people aboard, reports AP.

The coast guard said at least 267 people, many covered with black fuel oil and grease, were rescued from the Princess of the Orient by naval ships, helicopters, and a passing fishing boat which picked up 14 people.

Two bodies were recovered — one washed ashore at a beach resort and another retrieved at sea, they said.

The ship sank in rough seas several hours after it left Manila for the central city of Cebu. Dozens of relatives waited, some crying, outside the ship company's office in Cebu for word of survivors.

No foreign names were on the ship's manifest, coast guard spokesman Joel Garcia said. A crew member told The Associated Press that the ship's cargo appeared to have suddenly shifted to the left in the heavy seas.

"We did not have any warning," he said. "The passengers were unaware of what was hap-

# 'Pro-democracy party in Myanmar can't convene parliament'

**YANGON, Sept 19:** The pro-democracy party that swept Myanmar's last general elections cannot convene Parliament and its recent declarations are in blatant violation of the law, the state-run press said Saturday, reports AP.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) headed by Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, said last week a 10-member committee representing those elected in the 1990 balloting would act as a Parliament.

The NLD also announced it would regard all laws and regulations enacted by the military-run regime after Sept. 18 as illegal.

But government newspapers described both moves as "blatant violations of the law" and said such a Parliament would not be allowed to function.

The committee, which includes Suu Kyi, was formed Wednesday and claims to have the mandate of 195 arrested members of parliament to govern in their name.

"It remains unclear which responsibilities of government this new committee intends to take over," a statement from the government said Friday. "Under what constitution will it govern? Will it defend Myanmar's sovereignty? Will it send envoys to other countries?"

Myanmar, also known as Burma, has been ruled by the military since 1962. Although the NLD won 82 per cent of the seats in Parliament in the 1990 election, the military has never allowed the assembly to meet.

The NLD said Friday the military had arrested another 10 of its members. That brings the total to 853, including 196 members of Parliament detained by the military to prevent the opposition from convening the assembly.

The military is wary, however, of arresting top NLD leaders, particularly Suu Kyi, because of the international backlash that this would provoke.

When they realised what was going on, it was too late." The crew member did not provide his name.

Thomas Banzon, 25, a survivor picked up by the fishing boat, said he was sleeping in the ship's economy section on the top deck at about 10 pm when he heard shouting and felt his bed tilting.

He put on a life jacket, rushed outside and jumped into the water, swimming quickly away to escape the ship's suction as it sank, he said.

Sulpicio Lines, which owns the ship, said it left Manila about 8 pm Friday for Cebu. A few hours later it reported it was listing near Fortune island off Batangas province, about 60 kilometers south of Manila, and lost radio contact with its office in Manila around 12:30 am Saturday, the company told naval authorities.

In another contact from the ship, a military colonel on board called his aide in Manila by cellular telephone late Friday and desperately asked for help, his aide said.

The storm Vicki, with 75 kilometres per hour winds, was located about 320 kilometres northwest of Manila late Friday, weather reports said.