

The Buzz...

Abdul Sattar, Pakistan Foreign Minister: "We have sent a communication to Bangladesh expressing our view that the vents of 1971 were traumatic enough even without exaggeration and one-sided interpretations. We are surprised that the daughter appears to be ignoring the advice expressed by her father 25 years ago...The Chief Executive (Musharraf) looks forward to another opportunity when the atmosphere may be conducive for positive and forward looking discussion."

Abdus Samad Azad, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh: "Just wait and see. We'll do what needs to be done. We'll also move through diplomatic channels. The Pakistani people have already realised (about the wrongdoings of the Pakistan army Generals) and are now themselves speaking about the need for trial of war criminals and release of the Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report...Pakistan has missed the bus. Now they are explaining their lost position."

Anura Bandaranaike, brother of the President Chandrika Kumaratunga: "My office was smashed, cut-outs were destroyed, telephone lines were cut-off, they threatened the caretaker."

Khaleda Zia, Leader of the Opposition in Bangladesh: "We are determined to maintain the unity of the alliance at any cost. We will contest the next election and form the future government unitedly..."

Sri Lanka

Get Set for Sufficient Support?

By Ekram Kabir

THE October 10 parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka is a crucial one both for President Chandrika Kumaratunga and her main rival, the United National Party (UNP) leader and former prime minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe. The outcome is likely to put an impact on the solution to the island-state's ethnic issue. President Kumaratunga was elected for a second six-year term as Executive President in December last year seeking a working majority for the Peoples Alliance (PA) in parliament. She is almost staking her political future on this election by making the new constitutional reforms as the prime issue, which was abandoned by the opposition UNP.

Equally, for the former prime minister, this election is crucial, for defeat, say Sri Lanka observers, may mean an end to his leadership in the UNP, which held power for 17 long years until it was defeated by Chandrika



Election time

Kumaratunga's PA in 1994. The UNP led by Ranil Wickremesinghe has so far lost seven rounds of elections from 1994 at the local, provincial and presidential levels, and Wickremesinghe has a major challenge to face as his continued leadership of the party may be at stake.

However, more than at least 22 of Sri Lanka's 42 registered political parties are contesting in the elections. Nominations in all of the 22 districts in the country have been filed by only three parties - the main opposition UNP, the Sinhala Urumaya (Heritage of the Sinhalese, a recently formed Sinhalese extremist party) and the Puravasi Peramun (People's Front, which is a break-away from the UNP). The ruling PA led by Kumaratunga is directly contesting in 21 of the districts, while in the Northern Jaffna district it is running a slate of independents.

This would likely be one of the most keenly contested elections in Sri Lanka, over 11 million registered voters.

While the two individual rivals - Chandrika Kumaratunga and Ranil Wickremesinghe - have much stake for themselves in the elections, there is even much more at stake for the country. It is the continuing war being waged by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the possible end of the ethnic conflict that has been the main cause of this armed conflict. This 17-year war has claimed 60,000 lives of combatants on both sides, civilians, and even Indian troops who came as a Peace Keeping Force in 1987.

Although Kumaratunga's popularity has been reduced to some extent after six years in office, she goes to the polls with the pledge to enact the new constitution, which has not found support from sections of the majority Sinhalese, who voted for her in large numbers in the presidential elections in December last. The proposed new constitution is also being opposed by a section of the Buddhist clergy, who since the 53 years of independence, is opposing any concessions to the minorities.

Assessed in this backdrop, Kumaratunga has certainly made history as being the only Sinhalese leader to offer a solution to most of the problems of the Tamil minority. Tamils in Sri Lanka comprise nearly 15 per cent of the population. The constitution enshrines many aspects of human and fundamental rights, which would ensure all communities equal status both constitutionally and politically.

Flood

Let's Face it Regionally

By Mansoor Mamoon

RIVERS knows no boundaries. So also floods. The cataclysmic deluge that engulfed the Indian state of West Bengal rendering over 15 million people homeless with a death toll (according to unofficial estimate) of more than 1000 persons and many more missing, apart from the havoc it caused to dwelling houses, livestock, standing crops and infrastructure. It has also severely lashed upon the north-western adjoining parts of Bangladesh from greater Kushtia to greater Rajshahi districts. Over a million people in Bangladesh stand affected.

The magnitude of such a pervasive and devastating flooding, particularly at this time of the year, is a new phenomenon and has not been witnessed in recent memory.

Experts and analysts are now digging into the reasons of the 'surprise flood' as they have termed it. Noted Indian analyst B G Verghese writing about floods in his famous treatise Waters of Hope has aptly said: "A flood in one (country) backs up the waters of the other."

Bangladesh's flood control expert late B M Abbas succinctly noted that so far flood is concerned the control of upper catchment is not within our means. The Dhaka-based vernacular daily the Janakantha in an exclusive front page report published on September 26, 2000 claimed that the north-eastern region of Bangladesh was flooded as 65 sluice gates out of a total of 125 were opened for flushing out the upstream waters of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. This has caused the overflowing of the river waters in the Ganges (Padma) basin inside Bangladesh and the gushing out waters have caused widespread inundation in Chapainabwanj, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Bheramara, Kushtia, Chuadanga and Meherpur as they crossed over these areas to the Harding Bridge point. The entire area in the basin region has thus become submerged due to onrush of floodwater from the Farakka Barrage as well as from breaches in the embankments at several points in West Bengal. One million to 1.2 million cuses of water are now flowing through the Padma due to streaming of waters from the Farakka Barrage, according to Bangladesh Water

Development Board officials.

An Ittefaq report, also in the front-page with a top lead treatment, on September 16, 2000 under the caption 'The havoc caused by the Ganges can change the map of Bangladesh. Lower parts of Calcutta can go under 14-feet deep water. The disaster started after the commissioning of the Farakka Barrage' mentioned that 25 years after its formal opening the barrage has almost become ineffective and if the present trend continues unabated it will be totally inactivated within next two to three years. Parts of the Indian state of West Bengal and adjoining areas of Bangladesh will be worst affected. The report went to the extent of claiming that a few hundred thousand people might perish and some more million in the Ganges basin will remain traumatic throughout their life with the nightmare of the disaster.

However hard the government of India might try to contain the Ganges through the use of boulders worth about billions of rupees the Farakka Barrage can at best be saved for another decade at best. An expert, who was associated with the project, said the barrage has drastically altered the river morphology of the Ganges due to which its characteristics and features have been transformed into its present deadly state. Within a radius of 40 kilometers up and down streams of the Farakka Barrage at least 35 breaches and cracks have been observed and in its turn a large area of riverbanks has already been devoured. Embankments built at huge costs on the up and down streams have been washed away soon after they were built.

Leading Indian water expert Kalyan Rudra has given the ominous forecast that if the present trend of the Ganges continues might spell great disaster in West Bengal and the adjoining areas in Bangladesh. Other experts both in Bangladesh as well as in India now share his views. In 1947 the India government had taken up the plan for the construction of the Farakka Barrage over the river Ganges at a point of West Bengal-Bihar border 16 kilometers upstream of Rajshahi (in Bangladesh) with the professed objective of navigability of the

Calcutta port as well as to generate hydroelectricity. Both the objectives, however, could not be met. The construction of the barrage was completed in 1970 at a cost of 1600 million Indian rupees. In 1971 it was put under trial operation for four years. In 1975 it was formally commissioned. When the construction of the barrage was taken, it became a political issue between India and Pakistan. Bangladesh has all along been protesting against the commissioning of Farakka Barrage claiming that during the rainy season due to onrush of water it is causing flood in Bangladesh and during the dry season drought with withholding water.

But surveys conducted by Indian experts have now revealed that the barrage caused more harms to West Bengal than to Bangladesh. Experts further maintain that the barrage has the capacity of diverting not more than forty thousand cuses of water onto the Bhagirathi river through the feeder canal while during dry season the Ganges has a minimum flow of 70,000 cuses. Albeit the 1996 long-term water sharing treaty between Bangladesh and India, the Farakka Barrage has the optimum water reservoir capacity of 40,000 cuses of water. Hence the treaty or not, 30,000 cuses of water is to be released through the barrage, maintain the experts.

Because of the tug of war between the Centre (Delhi) and the Marxist government in West Bengal a number of schemes envisaging outlays of thousands of crores of Indian rupees for correcting the flaws and the after affect of the barrage could not be implemented with the result that the Ganges is continuously causing havoc. The situation will be precarious when the Ganges through unabated erosion will have confluence with the river Padma in Murshidabad. The Ganges and its two tributaries will then turn into one vast river. This year's flooding is a precursor of what is lying ahead for West Bengal and Bangladesh in the years ahead. It simply portends the impending danger of swallowing up a large chunk of territory in the basin. Immediately after the commissioning of the barrage

45,000 hectares of land in Malda-Murshidabad were lost for good and hundreds of thousands of people lost everything.

Verghese wrote: 'Rivers flood. No more so than in Asia. And none in Asia as much as the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Barak system which drains a more populous basin than the Yangtze and carries a larger flood discharge (1.50, 000 cuses and more) than any other river, barring the Amazon, and immeasurably more silt (2.5 billion tonnes) than China's notorious Huang-Ho. Hence the annual havoc as these rivers spill over their banks and ravage the countryside.'

The entire sub-continent is under a common river system. It is, therefore, not possible on the part of one particular country to solve the problem and control its magnitude. It will require regional approach. The SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in December 1987 decided on a joint study of natural disasters including flood and drought in South Asia. The work was taken in hand by the SAARC Secretariat and was to be completed in 1992. In the aftermath of devastating flood in Bangladesh in 1988, the then President Ershad met late Rajiv Gandhi on September 30, 1988 and it was agreed to set up a joint task force to report on short and long-term proposals for flood and water management in the Ganges-Brahmaputra basin. Bangladesh also held high level consultations with Nepal, Bhutan and China and appealed for international assistance through the United Nations, UNEP and the World Bank for tackling the flood control regionally.

It is indeed a coincidence that when flood is raging in Bangladesh and West Bengal Indian state Minister for Water Resources Bijoya Chakraborty was visiting Bangladesh. During her courtesy call, the Bangladesh Prime Minister stressed the need for regional approach for flood control and water management. Already much time has been lost. Rather than waiting for the worst to come all four countries in the basin - Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan should immediately take concrete measures. Otherwise still greater havoc and human disaster might hit the lower riparian parts like West Bengal and Bangladesh.

People

IT Raids on Bollywood Stars



The Income Tax sleuths today raided the premises of some top Bollywood stars including Aishwarya Rai, Rani Mukherjee, Urmila Matondkar, Salman Khan and Amrish Puri. Film Directors Yash Chopra, Yash Johar and Karan Johar also faced the IT raids and so did a manufacturer of raw films and a chartered accountant having many a star as his client. About 150 IT officers, backed by 60 policemen, searched the premises for hours and sealed 15 lockers and seized cash and documents which were being assessed and valued, said an official press note. They seized pairs on contracts for payment for performances abroad from the premises of Salman Khan.



To Attock with Love

Known till now for its oil fields, Attock in North West Frontier Province in Pakistan can now boast of a political romance. Kulsoom, wife of the deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif is said to have rented a house in Attock. Close to her husband's heart, right?



At a Glance

Rank by Exports 12 Months	Bhutan	Bangladesh	India	Maldives	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Nepal
Exports 12 months	\$0.1b	\$5.5b	\$39.2b	\$0.1b	\$8.3b	\$4.7b	\$0.5b
GDP growth	6.0%	4.4%	5.8%	6.8%	5.3%	4.2%	3.3%
Per-capita GDP (PPP)	\$1,570	\$1,640	\$1,760	\$3,395	\$1,570	\$2,625	\$1,100
Per-capita GNP (market)	\$450	\$299	\$436	\$1,167	\$492	\$827	\$225
Population (millions)	0.8	130.0	1,000.0	0.3	138.6	19.3	23.6
Population growth	2.3%	2.2%	1.9%	3.8%	2.6%	1.2%	2.3%
Inflation CPI	9.2%	3.8%	5.0%	-3.1%	3.8%	6.8%	1.8%
Curr. acc. balance	-\$6.1b	-\$0.3b	-\$1.8b	-\$0.02b	-\$1.8b	-\$0.3b	-\$0.1b
Reserves excl. gold	\$0.3b	\$1.4b	\$33.8b	\$0.1b	\$1.3b	\$1.6b	\$0.3b
GDP (PPP)	\$1.2b	\$132b	\$1,710b	\$0.9b	\$219b	\$49b	\$25b
People per sq. km	66.5	336.5	45.3	12.5	49.0	32.9	112.9
Life expectancy	61	60	62	67	63	73	57
Literacy rate	42.2%	38.1%	52.1%	92.6%	57.8%	69.3%	27.5%
Urban pop.	7%	20%	28%	32%	35%	23%	14%

Currency	US Dollar	Japan Yen	Hong Kong Dollar	China Renminbi	Saudi Riyal	British Pound	Swiss Franc	German Mark	Spanish Escudo
Bangladesh (Taka)	\$4.86	69.71	6.92	6.52	14.87	80.32	7.43	24.60	46.77
India (Rupee)	\$3.47	52.86	5.26	5.32	12.18	67.85	6.28	21.26	41.28
Pakistan (Rupee)	\$5.10	80.73	7.06	6.65	14.69	81.96	7.56	25.41	49.78
Sri Lanka (Rupee)	\$7.28	72.06	10.04	9.45	20.87	116.43	10.76	36.10	70.14
Nepal (Rupee)	\$7.94	55.31	5.10	5.57	13.91	108.53	6.71	22.72	43.94

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the value of all goods and services produced in one year. Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) based on World Bank ratios takes into account price differences between countries, for a more accurate measure of national wealth. Gross National Product (GNP) is GDP plus payments from abroad from investments and loans; minus similar payments to foreigners. Latest mortality is the number of deaths under age one per 1,000 live births.

Pakistan

Bomb, Blood and Gore...

By Harun ur Rashid

IN recent times Pakistan is being rocked by bombing incidents with casualties to innocent people. On 18th September a powerful bomb was exploded in a vegetable market in the outskirts of the capital, Islamabad. Several people were killed instantly and about 60 injured; besides, massive destruction to the businesses in the market was caused. Such a cowardly violence makes no sense and should be condemned.

The vegetable carrying-truck was reported to have arrived from Afghanistan and a bomb was hidden in a fruit (grape) basket. When it was opened in early hours of the morning, the bomb exploded with the disastrous result. The military government spokesman in Pakistan hinted to the media indirectly that India could be behind these incidents to destabilise Pakistan as a tit for tat to what Pakistan have allegedly been doing in the Indian part of Kashmir through the Muslim militants. The tit for tat seems to be based on the old maxim: As you sow so you reap.

When the military overthrew the democratically elected government of Nawaz Sharif in October last year, they promised, among other things, to restore law and order. Since then it is reported that 40 bombing incidents have occurred in various cities of Pakistan. The question is: who is behind this nefarious games and why?

The ordinary people in Pakistan must have believed that with the military in power, law and order would prevail in the country.

But that is not to be the case. The people appear disillusioned with the promises made by the military government. The initial euphoria of the common people seems to have disappeared. They now see that promise is one thing and governance is another. The society has become complex, it has wheels within the wheel and no one can govern a nation without accountability. If there is no transparency and democracy in the country, social tension rises leading to instability and violence. The truth seems to be that military government is no substitute for a democratically elected government, although it may appear to be chaotic.

There are two speculations for the bombing incidents. One is that anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan are behind it because of Pakistan's support to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. It may be recalled that war is still raging in Afghanistan between Taliban forces and the opposition led by Ahmed Shah Massoud. Although Taliban has control over 90 per cent of Afghanistan, it could not bring peace in the country, especially in the regions of the north and the west. Had Pakistan not supported Taliban, the anti-Taliban forces seem to believe, they could have won the civil war. All the supplies including weapons to Taliban regime are being transported through Pakistan. After all, Afghanistan is a land-locked country and its lifeline runs through Pakistan.

For its part, the government is spending Rs 6 billion to raise a paramilitary police force and deploy new weapons. It wants to wield a bigger stick before agreeing to sit down.

Off stage, factions within the Nepali Congress are busy with some serious backstabbing in the run-up to their party convention in January. A Deuba coming up with some peace breakthroughs could upset their plans. Neither Deuba nor his party chief, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, are good communicators at the best of times. These days, they only talk to each other through their media mouthpieces. All this confusion has worked well for the

do not approve the policies of the regime as it has shelved introduction of sharia law in Pakistan. No one talks about sharia law in the country. They believe that Pakistan even lags behind Nigeria, which has put into place sharia law in the northern regions of the country.

These Islamic fundamentalists, a product of Afghan-Soviet war, supported at the time by Pakistan and the CIA of the US against the communist regime in Afghanistan, have the muscle and power to carry out the bombing within Pakistan. They are able to send a clear message to the military government of their awesome presence in Pakistan. Who knows whether these forces are being funded by Osama Bin Laden, a refugee in Afghanistan?

Once law and order has broken down there is very little that foreign nations can do to restore it. Poverty and income inequality make a nation much more liable to strife whipped up by self-interested leaders. A view prevails that the basic cause of the incidents may rest on the lack of a democratic government in the country. Unless the military government hands over power to a democratically elected government, instability, fragmentation and violence could become an unwanted feature of life in Pakistan. In a democracy, one could discuss and debate the causes of the violence in the Parliament and under the military government the people's voice has been stifled. There is a view that is unrealistic to expect that the military government has all the answers for the ills of the country.

Although Pakistan military government is to abide by the Supreme Court's direction to hand over power after three years, democratisation runs at a slow pace. The local and district level elections would begin from this December and it would be completed by August next year. Thereafter the provincial polls are expected prior to the national elections.

Good governance means governance with people's will and mandate. Voters in a democratic country are interested in issues that centre on how they live their lives. These include education, employment, shelter, health, ethics and rule of law. What are the achievements of the military government in Pakistan which are directly beneficial to the people? The answer to the question would possibly be that each of their initiative is a policy dead-end, providing no direction whatsoever for the nation. With time demands of the public to its leaders have changed and leaders must change as well if they don't want to become irrelevant.

There is a view that violence in Pakistan is the product of its society. It is easy to blame external forces for the malaise in the society. A new consensus is emerging among political thinkers of all persuasions that democratic government can serve the people better than the military government. The sooner democracy is restored in Pakistan, the better it is for the welfare of her people and for the region.

The writer, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Nepal

Peace in Pieces

By Binod Bhattarai and Shiva Gaunle

THIS is how violently destructive civil wars begin: when hardliners call the shots, vested interests benefit from an escalation of violence, and those who call for a negotiated settlement are not taken seriously.

Peace is on everyone's lips; they're just not doing much about it. One politician more than any other has staked his political career on peace: Sher Bahadur Deuba. But he is caught in a web of intrigue within his own party, and can't make his move. The talks are now at a standstill. Deuba admitted to us in a candid interview.

It has been a year since then-PM Krishna Prasad Bhattarai gave his protégé the mandate to seek a negotiated solution, and put him in charge of a peace commission. There were a flurry of chits between him and Maoist leader Comrade Prachanda, then

for the past four months; nothing. The Maoists are really not in a big hurry to talk. They have already made their political point by stating their willingness to negotiate, even as they plan for their post-monsoon offensives.

For its part, the government is spending Rs 6 billion to raise a paramilitary police force and deploy new weapons. It wants to wield a bigger stick before agreeing to sit down.

Off stage, factions within the Nepali Congress are busy with some serious backstabbing in the run-up to their party convention in January. A Deuba coming up with some peace breakthroughs could upset their plans. Neither Deuba nor his party chief, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, are good communicators at the best of times. These days, they only talk to each other through their media mouthpieces. All this confusion has worked well for the

Maoists who have spent the past few weeks making their presence felt in the capital with some pipe bombs. Though the bangs were magnified many times over by the media, the rebels did succeed in sending a loud message: that they were capable of hitting even the Valley if they so wanted.

The government's response has been muddled. Ministers have even questioned Deuba's mandate, and threatened to disband the peace commission. Koirala himself needles Deuba at every opportunity for failing to resolve the crisis despite all necessary authorisation provided. Deuba says he still has access to Prachanda if needed, but it is evident that he has to start from square one even if the party gives him a real go-ahead.

All the Maoists had to do to score public relations points was appear serious about talks. Lately, they have taken the media

on a tour of the regions under their command and got wide coverage of an open public meeting in Korchabang, Rolpa, on 26 August.

Meanwhile in the ruling party there are increasing signs of disarray. The enemy is at the gates, but we don't seem to trust each other on how to deal with it," a source close to Deuba said. "By fighting each other, we have shown them our soft underbelly, and given them more confidence."

That is also the message the Congress party is giving to other opposition parties. Among them the UML has taken a vacillating love-you-hate-you position vis-à-vis the Maoists. The object apparently is to keep damages which have not been very high with UML compared to other parties at present levels. But the party is well aware of how the insurgency is being handled.

Courtesy: Nepal Times

The Region This Week

Snake charmers for Olympics

A campaign group in India is reported to be pushing for the inclusion of a new event in the 2004 Olympic Games. With almost three thousand members, the "Coalition for Inclusion of Reptilian Gymnastics in Olympic Competition" wants to see snake-charming introduced as a new Olympic sport.

Monks kidnapped

POLICE in Bangladesh say they have tightened security in the south-eastern hill regions, after two Buddhist novice monks were kidnapped in a raid on a monastery. The authorities say they suspect rivalry between tribal groups may lie behind the attack. A tribal student group opposed to a peace treaty between the government and tribal former rebels say the kidnapped monks were members of their organisation.

Rajkumar 'rescue'

THE veteran film star has been held since July. Police in the Indian city of Bangalore have arrested a former minister and 35 supporters who were attempting to rescue the kidnapped film star Rajkumar. S Ramesh and his supporters were attempting to enter the Talamali forest where Rajkumar is being held by the bandit Veerapan. On Friday last, Ramesh announced his intention to launch his attempt to free the veteran film actor, who has been held since July.

Fishing plan calms troubled waters

INDIA and Sri Lanka are to look at ways to stop their fishing fleets from trespassing into each other's territorial waters. Fishing in the Indian ocean has long been a crucial issue of discord among the neighbouring countries. Indian Agriculture Minister Nitish Kumar and Sri Lankan Cultural and Religious Affairs Minister, Lakshman Jayakody met on Saturday, and agreed that the two governments would work together to devise a monitoring mechanism for fishing boats.

Plea for flood aid

POLITICIANS in the Indian state of West Bengal have called on the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to launch immediate relief operations to help nearly 10 million people made homeless by floods. More than 200 people are reported to have been killed in the state over the past days, and water levels are still rising because of heavy rain. Officials have been forced to release huge volumes of water from dams to prevent damage to their structures.

Let's be friends

THE Indian junior minister for external affairs, Ajit Kumar Panja, who's visiting Baghdad at the head of a business delegation, has met the Iraqi trade minister, Muhammad Mahdi Salih. The two sides are said to be examining possible deals on oil, industry, transport, agriculture and electricity as part of the oil-for-food programme permitted under United Nations sanctions. The two-hundred-and-eighty-million dollars worth of contracts India has concluded previously with Iraq cover exports of Indian food, pharmaceuticals and electrical and oil equipment.

Religion no bar

A FORMER provincial minister in the Pakistani province of Balochistan has been arrested on corruption charges. Sardar Hafeez Looni is a member of the right wing Jamiat Ulema Islam Fazal party and is the second religious leader to be arrested in Balochistan. Since the military seized power nearly a year ago, saying it would get rid of the widespread corruption in Pakistan, eight provincial ministers have been arrested and three of them convicted.

Maoists kill police

AT least 12 policemen have been killed and 32 others wounded in an attack by Maoist rebels in the north-west of Nepal. The authorities say the rebels - armed with guns and grenades - attacked a police station in Duna, in the remote hill district of Dolpa. They were also said to have freed prisoners from a local jail and robbed a bank. It is the worst attack since the Maoist insurgency was launched more than four years ago.

- Compiled by Ekram Kabir