



PHOTO: AFP  
A Pakistani cart driver moves his vehicle through floodwaters which have engulfed a street in Lahore Wednesday. Monsoon rains have flooded much of the eastern Pakistani city due to the failure of the drainage system.

# Rains pound Karnataka

AFP, Mumbai

Rains which pummelled western India for a week have changed course and are now causing havoc in the southern state of Karnataka where 90 people have died and vast tracts are under water, officials said Thursday.

Some of the flooding in Karnataka is being caused by the release of waters from dams in adjoining Maharashtra state.

Maharashtra bore the brunt of the

monsoon downpours that relentlessly lashed western India for a full week, bringing the financial hub Mumbai to a standstill and claiming at least 1,020 lives in the state.

"A huge amount of water is being let out from these dams, flooding the low-lying areas. We have evacuated 100,000 villagers from these areas to safer places," said Krishna Vatsa, head of the Maharashtra disaster management cell.

Vatsa said more than 10,000 rescue personnel had been

deployed across the region to deal with flood relief, with troops and navy personnel helping local officials and volunteers.

B.S. Prakash, chief of the disaster unit in Karnataka, said many border areas were inundated when the water was released from the dams.

"Over the past couple of days ... 35 people have died in the downstream border areas of Karnataka," Prakash told AFP. "During the last week 90 people have died in the state."

## India, Nepal to upgrade border posts at cost of \$71.8 million

AFP, Kathmandu

India and Nepal agreed Wednesday to upgrade four border crossing points at a cost of 5.59 billion rupees (71.86 million dollars), the Indian embassy said.

A memorandum of understanding was signed to upgrade the posts at Raxaul-Birgunj, Sunauli-Bhairahawa, Jogbani-Biratnagar and Nepalgunj – all situated in the southern tropical region known as Terai, the embassy said in a statement.

## 7 killed in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Seven people were killed in fresh fighting between soldiers and separatist militants in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said yesterday.

An Indian army soldier and three Islamic militants were killed in two fierce clashes late Wednesday in the southern district of Poonch and in Kupwara district in the north, a police spokesman said.

"Both the clashes erupted when troops launched counter-insurgency operations in the two areas," the spokesman said.

Also late Wednesday, suspected rebels abducted a policeman and an Indian army soldier in southern Doda and Rajouri districts and later killed them, police said.

# India, Pakistan likely to clinch missile test deal

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

India and Pakistan are likely to formalise an agreement on advance notification of missile tests and cement understanding on other confidence building measures (CBMs) to deal with nuclear emergencies when the two sides meet for two-day talks beginning today in the capital city.

The draft agreement on pre-flight testing of missiles is ready and was discussed extensively at the last round of bilateral talks on nuclear CBMs in Islamabad last year. New Delhi had sought more time to reflect on the text proposed by Pakistan on the agreement of

providing prior notification of missile tests.

The bilateral talks would deal with proposals for the establishment of a hotline between the two foreign secretaries, upgradation of the existing hotline between the Pakistani and Indian directors general of military operations (DGMOs) and exchange of nuclear doctrines between the two nuclear-armed neighbours.

The two sides will also explore the proposal of a nuclear restraint regime and the setting up of nuclear risk reduction centres during discussions that are aimed at reducing the risk of accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons. Difficult questions such as the deployment, mating, targeting and de-alerting of

nuclear weapons are also likely to figure in the talks.

Meera Shankar, Additional Secretary (UN) in the external affairs ministry, will lead the Indian side, whereas Additional Secretary Tariq Osman Hyder will head the Pakistani delegation.

Despite the ups and downs in their bilateral relations, both the countries adhere to an agreement on non-attack of each other's nuclear installations and exchange a list of nuclear installations on January 1 every year. The two sides also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on nuclear CBMs during the visit of then Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's 1999 visit to Lahore.

This time around, the focus will

be on practical and substantive steps to establish nuclear confidence in the subcontinent. "We should formalise an agreement on advance notification on missile testing. We should also exchange information on nuclear doctrines. Islamabad has so far maintained an ambiguous stand on its nuclear doctrine," veteran diplomat G Parthasarathy said.

He said Islamabad is becoming more realistic as Kashmir is no longer seen internationally as a flash point. He, however, didn't see the proposal of a minimum nuclear deterrence as being either practical

# 'India, US not ganging up against China'

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Wednesday asserted that India's close ties with the United States were not aimed at "ganging up" against China or any other country.

Replying to a four-hour debate in Lok Sabha on his recent visit to the US where he clinched a deal with President George W Bush on bilateral civilian nuclear cooperation, Singh said India would remain

engaged with China as "we see new horizons in our relations with China."

"What we have done with the US is not at the cost of China or any other country", he said, seeking to dispel apprehensions voiced by Left parties and BJP-led opposition on the fall-out of Indo-US civilian nuclear deal.

"I want to dispel illusions. We are not ganging up against any country, last of all China", the Prime Minister said and added "this is not a military alliance or an alliance against any

country".

Rebutting the opposition criticism that India has compromised on its strategic autonomy in nuclear weapons programme, Singh said, "there is nothing in the (Indo-US) Joint Statement, which should convey that we compromised our autonomy in managing our nuclear assets".

Making a point-by-point response to his predecessor Atal Bihari Vajpayee's criticism of the Indo-US civilian nuclear deal, Singh said the deal was signed only after

clearance from the Indian Atomic Energy Commission Chairman who was part of his delegation that had gone to the US.

In a pointed reference to Vajpayee's criticism of India's commitment in the joint statement to separate its civilian and military nuclear facilities, Singh said the Indian Atomic Energy establishment had agreed that such separation was feasible.

## PAKISTANI COURT SAYS Provincial Taliban-style law is unconstitutional

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Supreme Court on Thursday declared unconstitutional a bill passed by a staunchly Islamic province to introduce what critics describe as a Taliban-style moral policing system.

"The governor of the province of North West Frontier Province may not assent to the Hasba (accountability) bill in its present form," the Supreme Court said in its order.

A provincial bill must be approved by the provincial governor, who is appointed by Islamabad, before it can become law.

The nine-member bench noted that many of the provisions in the bill violate the country's 1973 constitution.

The court had sat for four days to hear a challenge by the federal government against the legislation.

The issue was referred to the Supreme Court by President Pervez Musharraf, a key Western ally who has vowed to rid society of extremism.

The NWFP government said it had accepted the ruling by the country's highest court.

"We will bring the law again to (provincial legislative) assembly with certain amendments in the light of the Supreme Court verdict," senior minister in NWFP government, Sirajul Haq, told AFP.

"Our journey towards Islamic system in the province will continue," the minister said.

The bill authorised the provincial government to appoint a cleric called a "mohtasib (accountability officer)" to enforce a strict adherence to Islamic or Sharia laws.



PHOTO: AFP  
Lower caste Muslim women from the All India United Muslim Front shout slogans during a demonstration in New Delhi yesterday. The protesters demanded that the Congress-led UPA government take a cabinet decision for the removal of religious restriction from constitution to include Muslim and Christian communities in Scheduled Caste reservations.

## Top UN official meets Myanmar opposition

AFP, Yangon

The head of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) met senior members of Myanmar's opposition National League for Democracy Thursday and discussed humanitarian operations but avoided political issues, NLD members said.

WFP executive director James Morris spent an hour with NLD officials at the United Nations' offices in Yangon ahead of a meeting later Thursday with Prime Minister General Soe Win before he leaves for Thailand.

"We haven't discussed anything concerning politics," NLD spokesman U Lwin told AFP, adding the sole topic of the meeting during Morris' first Myanmar visit was the humanitarian situation in the country, which has been run by the military since 1962.

Myanmar's largest opposition group, which operates from its dilapidated Yangon headquarters, won a landslide election victory in 1990 but was never allowed to form a government.

Its offices elsewhere have been shut down and its leader, the Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, remains under house arrest despite international demands for her release.

Morris's four-day trip was aimed at discussing the agency's operations in the impoverished country, WFP officials have said.

Morris had been expected to travel to Shan state in Myanmar's northeast, where the vast majority of the country's illicit opium is cultivated, but WFP officials could not confirm the trip.

## Lankan survivors to curse tsunami aid swindlers

AFP, Colombo

Exasperated tsunami survivors in Sri Lanka have formed an association to "curse" officials and organisations siphoning off local and international aid, a press report said yesterday.

The mass-circulation Sinhalese-language Lankadeepa daily said local architect Bathiya Rajapakse formed the association in the southern town of Balapitiya after failing to obtain relief for the neediest survivors.

Just over 31,000 people were killed and a million left homeless in the December 26 tsunami, which also triggered a huge outpouring of international sympathy and aid.

However, most of the survivors say they have yet to receive the transitional shelter promised by the authorities despite government claims that nearly 50,000 shelters had been put up within six months of the disaster.

## SC confirms one death sentence in Indian parliament attack

AFP, New Delhi

The Supreme Court confirmed yesterday that a Muslim man convicted on charges of conspiring the 2001 attack on India's parliament would receive the death penalty.

Upholding a 2003 high court verdict awarding the death sentence to Mohammed Afzal, the court ruled that there was not even a shred of doubt about his complicity in hatching the plot to commit the "most diabolical attack on parliament", the Press Trust of India news agency said.

The court commuted the death sentence of another accused, Shaukat Afsan Guru, to 10 years in prison while upholding the high court acquittal of two others, Shaukat's wife Afsan Guru and a professor of Arabic studies in a Delhi college,

S.A.R. Geelani.

"All evidence unerringly points to Afzal who was a key conspirator and played an active role," Justice P.V. Reddi and Justice P.P. Naolekar said in a 271-page judgement.

"He is definitely involved in the conspiracy to attack parliament with the use of explosive substances," they said, observing the attack had no parallel in the history of Indian democracy.

Executions, a rare occurrence in India, are conducted by hanging. Afzal can now only appeal to the president for clemency.

Five gunmen stormed into the sprawling parliament complex on December 13, 2001 but before they could enter the building and session houses they were killed by the security forces.