SOUTH ASIA

into a one-party communist state,

would lay down their arms under UN

or other international supervision

while a new constitution was drafted.

must be worked out.

Various details of the deal still

New Bihar CM promises to make state crime-free INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Patna

New Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday promised to usher in a crime-free Bihar.

Soon after taking oath of office and secrecy, the Janata Dal-United leader said his priorities would be to restore the rule of law, provide good governance and put the state on the path of development at the earliest.

The soft-spoken Nitish Kumar was all smiles as he spoke to reporters after the oath taking ceremony at the Gandhi Maidan ground.

He said the most important thing for him was to restore the rule of law, which he said was missing, and provide infrastructure, which he said were in shambles.

"We will restore the law and order and bring back people's confidence in governance," he said, wearing his usual kurta pyjama and a bandgala.

"Our priorities are not impossible. Let's wait for some time, things will show improvement. It is only good governance and a crime-free state that will bring development."

Nitish Kumar said it was unfortunate that Bihar's image was so poor because of lawlessness, kidnappings, poor roads and lack of development over the last decade.

PHOTO: AFF Nitish Kumar, (R) waves at his swearing-in ceremony in Patna as new chief minister of Bihar yesterday. Kumar led an alliance of the right-leaning regional Janata Dal-United party and Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to end regional strongman Laloo Prasad Yadav's 15-year rule over Bihar

Lanka floods hit thousands

REUTERS, Colombo

Floods triggered by heavy rains in Sri Lanka have affected some 40,000 people, the government said on Wednesday, including many living in makeshift shelters since last year's tsunami

Water levels had begun to fall in most parts of the country after the rains eased, but officials were still assessing the damage in the north and east.

"At this moment we are still collecting data," assistant director of the National Disaster Manage-ment Centre G.M. Gunawardena said. "It looks as though the worst affected areas are the north and east.

Officials said there was no figure yet on deaths caused by the floods but newspapers said that at least two people were killed in central Colombo when a wall, weakened by the rain, collapsed

NEPALI POLITICIANS SAY

King in 'panic' over pact with Maoists

AFP, Kathmandu/United Nation

Nepal's opposition party alliance said yesterday King Gyanendra has been thrown into panic by its pact with Maoist rebels aimed at restoring democracy in the Himalayan kingdom. The government named by the

king late Wednesday denounced the alliance struck this week between the seven-party coalition and the Maoists as "unholy.

King Gyanendra dismissed Nepal's coalition government and seized executive power nine months

ago in what he said was a bid to end an increasingly deadly revolt by the Maoists aimed at toppling the monar-

"The unholy 12-point alliance-Maoist compact frames an agreement to abolish the monarchy through elections to a constituent assembly, said the government statement carried by the official RSS news agency

The state-run newspaper Rising Nepal carried the government's statement in its Thursday edition while the independent Himalayan Times called the pact a "historic

wait for the Maoists to follow through development" in an editorial "The government has started to with a pledge to lay down arms before panic now," said Krishna Prasad launching the movement. Sitaula, spokesman for the Nepali Under the agreement the Maoists, who have been fighting to turn Nepal

Congress, the largest political party. "The government wants to prolong its undemocratic regime. It's not serious about ending the conflict," added Minendra Rijal, a leader of the Nepali Congress-Democratic, part of the four-party coalition sacked by Gyanendra.

Gyanendra's power grab in On Tuesday the opposition alli-February drew international condemance and rebels announced plans for a nation and sparked widespread joint campaign to end the king's direct protests across the nation, one of the rule. But the parties said they would world's poorest.

to boost defence ties

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India and Indonesia, Asia's largest democracies, agreed on Wednesday to forge closer defence and trade ties and cooperate in combating terrorism.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and visiting Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said, "we agreed on a new strategic partnership which calls for closer diplomatic consultations, stronger defence relations and enhanced economic ties, especially in trade and investment.'

A joint declaration issued after the talks between the two leaders said Yudhoyono welcomed India's offer of

areas of technologies, supplies, joint production and joint projects. Calling for increased visits by defence officials of the two countries,

the two leaders agreed to hold an annual "strategic dialogue" at the level of senior officials with the first meeting to be held in the first half of next year. Condemning terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, whose threat is faced by both India and Indonesia, Singh and Yudhoyono

deplored any attempt to link it with any particular religion or ethnic group.

India, Indonesia agree Tigers to set the course for new Lankan govt 'state of the nation" speech a day later

> Sri Lanka's new hawkish president is to make a policy statement today pledging prosperity, but analysts and diplomats say they are focusing on a speech by the Tamil rebel leader this weekend that could fan fears of a slide back to civil war.

> Left-leaning President Mahinda Rajapakse is slated to open a new session of parliament Friday with a policy declaration that government officials say is likely to be a reiteration of his election manifesto that was packed with promises of subsidies to

boost the island's economy However, analysts and diplomats at the end of "heroes' week" which say they are more keenly awaiting the annual policy declaration of Tamil

commemorates rebels who perished in three decades of fighting. More than 60,000 people have died in the Tamil separatist conflict fears of the country slipping back to and four previous peace attempts have ended in failure, leading to more

"Prabhakaran's speech will be

"We're anxiously waiting for (Tiger bloodshed. leader Velupillai) Prabha-karan to make his speech," a diplomatic more important than anything else at source said. "That will give us an this time," said former air force chief inkling about the direction of the Harry Gunatillake. "We can expect a hardening of his stance and I fear he may signal a drift towards hostilities.

Tiger chief Prabhakaran, who turns 51 Saturday, is to deliver his

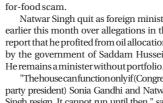
OIL-FOR-FOOD SCANDAL Chaos in Indian parliament

AFP, New Delhi

India's parliament erupted in chaos vesterday as the opposition attacked the ruling coalition over alleged links between a federal minister and Iraq's oilfor-food scandal

Members of the opposition and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Congress-led coalition traded charges over the naming of former foreign minister Natwar Singh and Congress as beneficiaries in a UN report on the oil-

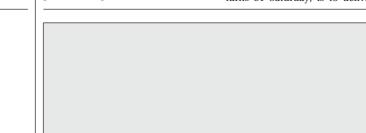
Natwar Singh quit as foreign minister earlier this month over allegations in the report that he profited from oil allocations by the government of Saddam Hussein He remains a minister without portfolio. "The house can function only if (Congress party president) Sonia Gandhi and Natwar Singh resign. It cannot run until then," said Vijav Kumar Malhotra, a leader of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).



defence cooperation, specially, in AFP, Colombo Tiger rebels in view of the new hardline administration and renewed

peace process.

war





HOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka's new Media Minister Anura Priyadarshana Yapa (L) addresses a press conference with Health Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva in Colombo vesterday. Yapa announced that the government was inviting all political parties for talks on salvaging a peace process with Tamil Tiger rebels.