



PHOTO: AFP

A poor city dweller (L) fetches drinking water as a bread vendor (2L) cycles past municipal workers trying to drain out the flooded Mumbai street. Life in the flooded city is limping back to normal as weather improves yesterday.

## Mumbai limps back to normal

Rains death toll reaches 81 in India

REUTERS, Mumbai

Monsoon rains lashed parts of India's east and west yesterday, taking the death toll from a week of extreme weather to 81 people, but eased over the financial hub of Mumbai after disrupting life for three days.

The June-September annual monsoon, key to India's agriculture and economic growth, revived this week after a two-week lull.

Most of the latest deaths were in the eastern state of Orissa and western Maharashtra and Gujarat and were due to lightning strikes, electrocution and drowning.

At least eight people were swept away in flash floods overnight in Orissa, taking the toll there to 32. More than 3,700 houses — largely mud-and-thatch — were destroyed in Orissa.

In Maharashtra, heavy rains

have killed 28 people in the past three days.

"Most of the people died from lightning," D.K. Shankaran, Maharashtra's top bureaucrat, said.

But the state capital, Mumbai was, however, limping back to normal with flood waters receding from roads and railway tracks.

But residents were angry at the government's response to three days of flooding since Monday.

"There was rainwater in our house for two days. Now it has gone but the whole area is dirty," said Jayant More.

"It happens every time."

Train and air services were normal on Thursday in India's richest city, which shut down for a week in July last year after two days of heavy rains exposed its highly underdeveloped infrastructure and killed hundreds of people.

## I won't contest polls, says Musharraf

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has said he is aware that "as a soldier" he cannot contest elections, but has rooted for the Pakistan Muslim League-Qaid (PML-Q), indicating his keen interest in political affairs.

In a clear response to his critics in the opposition, Musharraf told a rally in Gilgit that he was a soldier and therefore could not contest elections, The News reported.

He also said he would quit office the day people withdrew their support for him.

While declining against any move to retain his post as army chief and get re-elected for a second term as president, Musharraf made clear his political preference

for the PML-Q that seeks to invoke the halo of Pakistan's founding father Mohammed Ali Jinnah.

"If people want my leadership, they should cast votes in favour of my supporters. When people retract their support, I will quit power the same day," he said while addressing a public gathering at the Lalak Jan stadium and members of Northern Areas Legislative Council.

"If people want development, they should support the Pakistan Muslim League and ensure its success in the next general elections," he observed.

Musharraf also underscored the need for stamping out extremism, terrorism and prejudices for the sake of peace and development of the country, the newspaper said.

Promising development for the

remote region, he said: "We are planning to work out a gas pipeline project besides laying the railway track to China and Central Asian republics through the Karakoram highway, keeping in view the geo-strategic significance of the Northern Areas."

A major controversy has been fanned by the PML-Q leadership that promised "a second term in uniform" to Musharraf by conducting polls in the National Assembly and the provincial assemblies.

To counter this move, major opposition parties are securing resignations of its own lawmakers across the country and is planning a no-confidence motion against the government headed by Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz. The likely date is August 2.

## Pakistan raid kills 25 rebel tribesmen

AFP, Quetta

Pakistani security forces killed at least 25 rebel tribesmen in a raid on a fugitives' camp in the country's troubled southwestern province of Baluchistan, officials said yesterday.

"Law-enforcing agencies stormed a fugitive camp at Sangseela mountains of the restive Dera Bugti tribal district on Wednesday and killed at least 25 miscreants," government spokesman Raziq Bugti told AFP.

A huge quantity of weapons including long-range rockets were also seized during the raid, Bugti

said without giving further details.

The rebels denied the incident and claimed killing 40 soldiers.

"There has been no such incident on Wednesday, no one on our side was killed," rebel commander Wadera Alam Bugti told AFP by telephone.

Wadera said the government wanted to counter a rebel claim that they had killed some 40 soldiers who were being deployed in the mountains by helicopter on Monday.

"The bodies of killed soldiers and some other remaining soldiers were airlifted yesterday (Wednesday) by 19 helicopters, while five

gunship helicopters escorted them," Wadera claimed.

Authorities rejected the claim, saying no soldier was killed in the area during Wednesday's raid on the fugitive's camp.

Mineral-rich but sparsely populated Baluchistan has witnessed near daily attacks on security forces and government installations since an insurgency erupted in early 2005 that has since claimed hundreds of lives.

The attacks have been blamed on tribal rebels who are demanding more political rights and a greater share of profits from the region's natural resources.

## Clashes kill coalition soldier, 12 Taliban

REUTERS, AFP, Kabul

Gunmen attacked a patrol of US-led soldiers in eastern Afghanistan killing one member of the force, the latest foreign soldier to die in the bloodiest phase of Afghan violence since 2001.

The US military said the patrol came under small-arms fire in Paktika province, on the border with Pakistan, on Wednesday.

It did not give the nationality of the soldier who was killed but US forces are in charge in that area.

A British member of the force was killed in a clash in the southern province of Helmand, also on Wednesday.

US-led coalition forces killed 35 rebels in a single strike on a "known

Taliban compound" in the same province late Tuesday, the coalition announced in a statement.

Police in nearby Zabul province said meanwhile that they had killed three Taliban in a battle on Wednesday in which an Afghan soldier also died.

Violence by Taliban rebels has surged in Afghanistan this year to its worst level since the militants were ousted nearly five years ago.

Most of the bloodshed has been in the south and east.

The US-led coalition has mounted big offensives in the south and east in recent weeks to push the Taliban back before a separate Nato peace-keeping force takes over from the US-led force in the south.

## Nepali Maoists angry at UN arms move

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's rebel Maoists reacted angrily yesterday to an announcement that the new government has formally asked the UN for assistance with arms management during the fledgling peace process.

"We strongly disagree with the government sending the letter to the United Nations without consulting us first," said Dinanath Sharma, a rebel leader and member of the three-person Maoist preliminary talks team.

The rebels had earlier agreed that the United Nations could be invited to supervise arms management issues involving the Nepal

Army and the Maoist People's Liberation Army.

Their objections, said Sharma, were related to the fact they were not shown the letter addressed to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan from Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala before it was sent Monday.

Though the letter has not been made public, Deputy Prime Minister Khadag Prasad Oli said it had formally requested the UN's help "in managing the arms of the rebels and the government troops."

"The government should have informed us before sending the letter," said Sharma.

The government rejected the criticism saying that the rebels had

already agreed to invite the UN to undertake arms management in the conflict.

"It is not a logical argument on part of the Maoists to claim that they have not been shown the letter before sending as it was the outcome of consultations as per the understanding reached with them," Khadag Prasad Oli, deputy prime minister and foreign minister told AFP.

The rebels and new government have been observing a ceasefire for over two months, after King Gyanendra was forced to end a 14-month period of direct rule in the troubled nation.

## No military solution to Lankan conflict

Says outgoing US envoy

AFP, Colombo

There is no military solution to Sri Lanka's separatist conflict, outgoing US Ambassador Jeffrey Lunstead said, as daily bloodshed has raised fears of renewed war.

Lunstead, who is leaving the country after three years, also said in a statement released Wednesday that a solution to Sri Lanka's civil strife would require "radical changes in the way the entire nation is governed".

These changes must "empower all the people of Sri Lanka: Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and others, and give them a greater say in how they are governed in the areas where they live", he said in an American Independence Day

address. Spiralling violence has claimed the lives of more than 830 people and displaced tens of thousands more since December as a ceasefire agreement between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) crumbles.

The tit-for-tat killings and military operations have sparked fears of an all-out war, with political sniping between the government and rebels effectively crippling truce monitoring efforts.

"I have to confess ... that I leave with some disappointment," Lunstead said.

"Peace talks have not resumed, the ceasefire is under constant pressure. Violence has increased," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran (R) lights an eternal lamp on Wednesday at an undisclosed location in the rebel-held Wannu region in northern Sri Lanka paying tribute to some 261 "Black Tigers" suicide bombers who have carried out attacks since the group's first strike 19 years ago.

## India to buy Russian frigates, missiles

AFP, New Delhi

The Indian government yesterday approved the purchase of three Russian-built warships and multi-role missile systems to strengthen its navy, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee said.

"The three frigates will be acquired at a cost of 51.14 billion rupees (1.13 billion dollars)," the defence minister said after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's security committee gave its nod to the deal.

The first ship would be delivered five years after the signing of the contract with its Russian builders while the remaining two would arrive within 12 months of the first delivery, Mukherjee told a news conference in New Delhi.

"The security committee also approved the earmarking of another four billion rupees (88 million dollars) for certain other equipment for these stealth warships," he said, without elaborating.

Highly-placed defence ministry sources told AFP the funds would be used to arm the three new warships with BrahMos cruise missiles which have been jointly built by Russia and India.

The cabinet also gave the green light for the purchase of 28 submarine-launched KLU land missiles at a cost of 8.4 billion rupees (187 million dollars) for India's Russian-supplied submarines, the defence minister said.

"These missiles would be fitted in six submarines already bought by India," he said, adding that the arming of two of the vessels with the weapons systems would be done in Russia, which accounts for 70 per cent of India's military hardware.