

Maoist fighters vote for 'new Nepal' and uncertain fate

AFP, Shaktikhor Camp

Maoist fighters in Nepal were voting in an election yesterday aimed at bringing the country into a new era of peace -- and putting them out of their jobs as hardened revolutionaries.

Still dressed in combat fatigues but confined to camp as part of their ceasefire, members of one of the world's grimmest guerrilla forces said they were nevertheless optimistic that their struggle was coming to an end.

Ten years of fighting in our People's War was just to bring us to this moment. The new constitution will take our poor country forward by 25 years," said beaming rebel commander Bibidh.

Tomorrow, this country will be ours," said the top rebel in Shaktikhor camp, one of several sites where the Maoists, who have about 20,000 fighters, are being watched by the United Nations while the peace process plays out. Shaktikhor, situated in Nepal's

central Chitwan district and 100km from the capital, is home to 2,600 rebels.

Thursday's elections are a landmark for the impoverished country, still struggling to emerge on the other side of a decade-long civil war that left at least 13,000 people dead.

The polls will appoint a new body that will rewrite the constitution and likely abolish the monarchy -- a longstanding demand of the rebels.

As polls opened, a steady stream of rebels snaked to the voting centre next to their tidy cantonment of wooden houses with corrugated tin roofs.

"We will do well unless the election workers and observers rig the elections," said deputy brigade commander Kanchan, aged 36 and a fighter for the past 10 years.

The Maoists' leader, Prachanda, has said he will respect the vote -- but has threatened mass protests if there is any snafu of rigging.

"There are still a lot of achieve-

ments to be made. We want the basic needs of the people to be met -- a home, food, education, jobs," Kanchan said.

But a more immediate concern is what will happen to trained and indoctrinated soldiers such as Kanchan now that the war is over.

The political parties and the former rebels were brought together by common opposition to Nepal's autocratic King Gyanendra, who sacked the government in 2005, blaming it for being unable to vanquish the Maoists.

Widespread protests forced him to cede power a year later, and the Maoists and mainstream parties went on to sign a peace accord in November 2006 that saw the Maoists lay down their arms.

Early into the peace process the Maoists called for their soldiers to be integrated into the 90,000-strong Nepal Army, also confined to barracks as part of the pact.

But Nepal's interim Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala said

earlier this year that the People's Liberation Army combatants were too "politicised" to join the regular army.

The Maoists say it must happen. "Our major objective is to be part of the national army, and after we are joined we can build a new Nepal," said smiling deputy brigade commander Madhu Lama, 25, who was selected by camp leaders along with other soldiers to be interviewed by AFP.

"If it doesn't happen we won't be able to make a new Nepal."

For now, the camp is offering classes to the soldiers, many of whom left school early.

"We are giving them military training as well as some other kinds of training such as computer classes, driving classes, English language and medical," said Bibidh.

"They are also taking classes in political economy and philosophy."

Soldiers at the camp said they were willing to go into any line of work that their leaders decided on.



Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) Maoist cadres cast their vote in a remote village, Kamaljhara in Eastern Nepal yesterday as the country went to the polls.

Court clears Zardari in Murtaza murder case

THE DAILY TIMES, Karachi

A Sindh High Court judge on Wednesday cleared PPP Co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari of involvement in the 1996 murder of Murtaza Bhutto. Murtaza and his men were gunned down in an alleged shootout with Karachi police on Sept 20, 1996. Zardari was arrested for conspiracy to murder shortly after the dissolution of the PPP government and was jailed for six years pending a trial in the case.

On Wednesday, Justice Syed Pir Ali Shah allowed Zardari's criminal revision application challenging an order of the District and Sessions Court that had rejected Zardari's application for acquittal, which had been moved under Section 265-K of the Pakistan Criminal Procedure Code.

The bench said that Special Public Prosecutor M Ilyas Khan conceded that all the prosecution witnesses regarding the conspiracy had been examined. The court also noted in its order that Zardari was not nominated in any of the three FIRs of the case.

Conservatives win South Korea vote

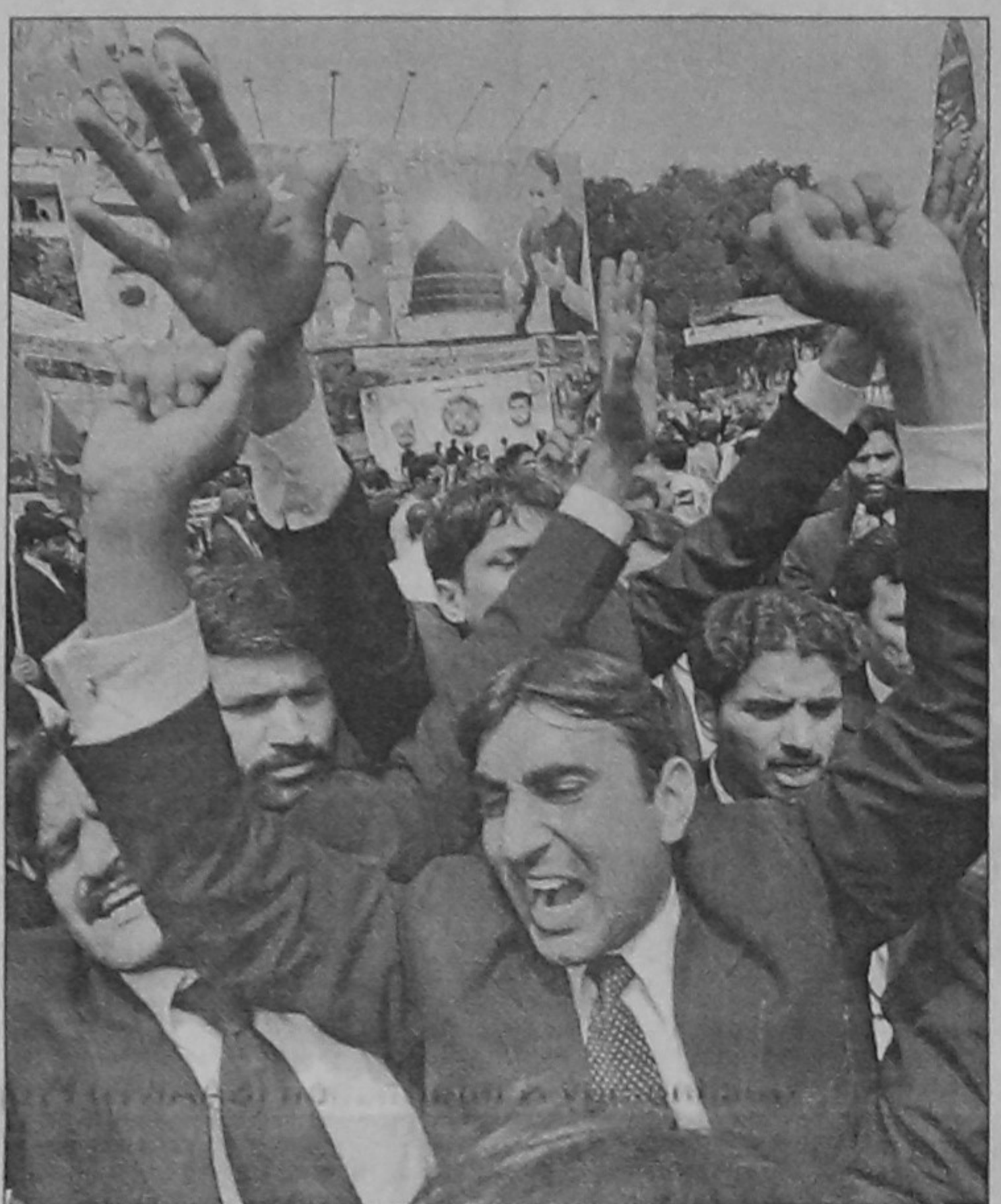
AP, Seoul

Conservatives allied with South Korea's president won a thin majority in parliamentary Thursday, boosting the government's plans to revive the economy, embrace the US and talk together with North Korea.

President Lee Myung-bak, a former Seoul mayor and Hyundai executive, took power in February pledging to streamline government, tear down barriers for business and restore ties with Washington that frayed under a decade of liberal rule.

The win by his Grand National Party in Wednesday's parliamentary vote will make it easier for Lee to push through his agenda, particularly economic proposals that include a showpiece "Grand Canal" project through the country to aid transport and draw tourists.

"I feel thankful" to voters, Lee said in a meeting with senior secretaries Thursday morning, according to his office. "I became easier to seek the National Assembly's understanding and cooperation in running state affairs toward the national mission of building an advanced country."



Pakistani lawyers march during a protest in Lahore yesterday. Thousands of lawyers protested in Pakistan on Thursday as tension mounted over the deaths of 10 people in political clashes between supporters and opponents of President Pervez Musharraf.

Boro harvest

FROM PAGE 1

Remittance flow is also strong, clocking \$4.6 billion or a 28 percent growth in the first seven months and it is now safely predicted a \$7 billion inflow by year-end. If exports closely follow the target of \$14.5 billion then together with the remittance, the total foreign exchange inflow will stand at around \$20 billion.

Square it up with import obligations and a new picture will emerge. In the first seven months of this fiscal year, import bills stood at \$10.5 billion or an 18 percent surge. With Boro harvest, rice import obligation is likely to ease in the next five months and import bill for petroleum products has very insignificantly increased by 1 percent over last year. All this means there would be little pressure on balance of payment and foreign exchange reserves, providing a comfort zone for the government.

"This is why when we borrowed on hard terms for oil imports, we should have analysed this scenario," said Mustafiz.

Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud also talked in a similar tone at a seminar earlier when he was critical of the government's decision to borrow to import oil.

The Central bank's foreign exchange management has also proved prudent when it pumped in around \$500 million into the market to keep taka stable against dollar. Had the local currency sank further, it would have built up a case of importing inflation.

Revenue collection, now on a 28.5 percent growth streak -- income tax a component of it, clocked an all time record of 64 percent increase, is another comfort zone for the government in balancing its budget.

But the major concern remains ADP utilisation, which is at its lowest at 25 percent in the first seven months of the fiscal year against last year's 31 percent. At a time when cost of living is shooting up, low ADP implementation means lesser employment and lower income opportunities for the rural people.

As construction material prices spiral out of hand, contractors are simply unable to proceed with works. Unless the construction price is re-fixed there is little chance of revamping development work.

Meantime, a paradox has been created in the investment situation. Disbursement of term loans used for project investment has taken an upswing of 65 percent in the first six months of the fiscal year. However, this is not matched by capital machinery import, which showed only a 2 percent growth in LC opening and an even worse 3 percent negative growth in settlement.

"One possible explanation for this may be that money is going into land and township development," Mustafiz says.

Unlike the economic situation analysis, rice situation looks a little bit tricky because of its political implications. There are many hard and clever decisions to be made -- whether to depress price forcefully and dismantle the traditional stocking system, whether to bank on the future production and abstain from further imports and so on.

Dr Sajjad Zohir of Economic Research Group (ERG), an independent think tank, explains the coming Boro harvest in four ways.

First, there is an expectation of increased production, even if the optimistic 17% increase may not be realised. Second, politics over the last year has significantly intimidated the traders (and the rhetoric continues) and there is strong apprehension that the traders may not adequately engage in the private procurement (out of fear) and thereby depress price.

Third, Dr Sajjad says, one would anticipate that the prices of urea and other inputs will soon go through upward adjustments, which will induce many farmers to sell early to support fruitful engagement in Aman production and early sales is likely to further depress the post-harvest rice price. Fourth, the world price of food grain is expected to remain high in the coming year (and possibly beyond), and even an increased Boro production will not secure us with food as a nation. It will take two consecutive good crops at the least.

"A depressed Boro price will encourage leakage into the 'world' market, worsening the national food security status," he says. "At the same time, it will dampen the incentive of farmers to put the extra effort in Aman rice production."

"Basic economics suggests that we are likely to be more food-insecure if the farmers are deprived of reasonable prices after the harvest. While the rice prices are expected to fall with the coming of the Boro, we have to get used to high nominal prices, and face it with expanded employment and higher wages and salaries backed by higher productivity. In the face of an 'unfriendly' outside world, such transitions will be possible if we can ensure higher degree of self-sufficiency in food production. And the latter requires ensuring right incentives to those who produce food," Dr Sajjad says.

The purpose of 'procurement policy' in the coming season should be to ensure a floor price quite contrary to the idea of bringing down rice prices.

Dr Sajjad says obviously the prices are expected to decline with the harvest, but they should not be allowed to go below a floor price. There is a need to make the best possible judgment in fixing such a price, which should be immediately announced openly and the government should be ready to procure any amount at that price.

Such procurements should ideally be made in the form of rice, and the signals should go on board to the millers, who are an important agent to integrate markets across transformed products (paddy to rice), across locations, and over time through making decisions on stocks to smooth seasonal variation in prices (often unintelligently identified as hoarding!).

"Such an announcement will hopefully be read as putting trust back on the business community who may then actively engage in their usual role and contrary to the popular views, the self-motivated traders may serve better to ensure the incentives to the farmers in a tight food market world-wide," Dr Sajjad says. "This will also save the resources of the government in micro-management. And given the uncountable numbers of 'paikars' and 'aradars' getting the space with less hostile attitude, the economy is bound to get a fresh breathing in the coming months."

"This year, Boro production cost has been around Tk 18-20 a kg. When fixing procurement price, this cost has to be kept in mind," said Mustafiz. "Whether the government could meet its target of procuring 10 lakh tonnes of rice will depend on a competitive price. We have to keep in mind that the government could purchase only 2 lakh tonnes or half the target of 4 lakh tonnes of Aman rice."

The international rice market is now full of speculation and Thailand, the top exporter of rice, is now selling rice at a prohibitive \$780 a tonne. Apprehensions are that price will increase further. Cambodia, another rice exporter, does not want to sell rice because of fears of domestic price hike. Vietnam also wants to keep its market closed. Internationally, December is the major rice harvest season as against Bangladesh's Boro season in April. So, the global market is expected to remain tight until then, and as it seems now, even if the market loosens up a little at the end of the year, rice price may settle at around \$400 a tonne as against the previous \$200.

Any stock decision of the government has to be based on this reality. "We have to think from now on how to smooth out fertilizer distribution problem for Aman rice. Availability has to be balanced out with fertilizer price, which is now highly subsidised, to ease pressure on budget."

But whatever be the situation, the government is faced with the unpalatable truth of providing huge subsidy -- it would not be anything less than \$1,700 million with \$700 million on rice, \$500 million on fuel and \$500 million on fertiliser. And the money has to be collected internally. And this will need prudent policy choices about the source of funding.

Israel threatens retaliation after Gaza violence

9 killed as militants storm border

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel warned on Thursday it will retaliate against Hamas, blaming the Palestinian Islamist group for a deadly explosion of violence in the Gaza Strip that followed a month of relative calm.

Israeli authorities said they temporarily shut down the Nahal Oz fuel terminal following Wednesday's attack, but insisted they would continue providing minimal fuel supplies to the Palestinian territory that has been under a crippling blockade for months. "We will settle the score with Hamas which bears sole responsibility for what happened in the Gaza Strip," Deputy Defence Minister Matan Vilnai said.

"We will choose the time and the place," he told Israeli army radio, as residents in Gaza awoke to a tense

calm.

Gaza militants on Wednesday breached the border with Israel under cover of mortar fire, killing two Israeli contractors working at the Nahal Oz terminal that provides the Palestinian territory with its fuel supplies.

On the Palestinian side, four civilians and three fighters were killed in a day of violence that followed a pre-dawn firefight which also left an Israeli soldier and a Palestinian gunman dead.

Islamic Jihad warned there will be "other operations" to respond to Israeli aggressions and crimes. The group and two smaller militant organisations claimed they carried out the Nahal Oz raid, but the Israeli government insists Hamas is ultimately responsible because it controls Gaza.

Hamas violently ousted troops

loyal to moderate Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas in June.

Israel subsequently imposed a tight embargo on the impoverished, overpopulated sliver of land on the Mediterranean coast, cutting off all but the most essential supplies.

Vilnai made it clear Israel would not completely cut off fuel deliveries to the Palestinian territory.

"We cannot afford to provoke a humanitarian crisis," said the deputy minister. "We will supply enough fuel to ensure the vital minimum for the Palestinian population."

Nahal Oz was closed on Thursday as senior military and government officials assessed the situation. "Its opening will depend on the security evaluation," said Shady Yassin, spokesman for the Israeli military liaison office with Gaza.

Fresh battles kill 7 Tamil rebels

AP, Colombo

Scattered battles in the war-torn jungles of northern Sri Lanka left seven Tamil separatists and a soldier dead, the military said on Thursday.

Fighting between the two sides has sharply increased in recent weeks, with the government vowing to retake Tamil Tiger-controlled territory and crush the rebels after more than two decades of warfare.

Government troops killed three Tamil rebels in fighting Wednesday along the west coast of Mannar district, a defence ministry official said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media.

Pakistani PM warns of 'dictatorship'

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan's prime minister warned Thursday that dictatorship threatened the country's newly restored democracy as mounting unrest revitalised the allies of embattled President Pervez Musharraf.

An outburst of violence Wednesday in Karachi left 10 people dead, bringing the new government's honeymoon to an abrupt and bloody end just as it prepared to assail Musharraf's powers.

Opponents of the US-backed president swept to power in February parliamentary elections, but the clashes could set back their coalition's

efforts to woo political rivals and cement Pakistan's return to democracy after years of military rule.

Opposition lawmakers boycotted parliament Thursday as politicians traded accusations about who was at fault for the chaos in Karachi, which began with a brawl among pro- and anti-government lawyers.

Farooq Sattar, a senior leader of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, or MQM, an ethnic-based political party that was part of the previous government, called the incident in Karachi "a bid to sabotage democracy" and said "the country is being pushed toward anarchy."

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1. Citizen of Bangladesh
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The course will be full time and divided into 2 semesters. Detailed syllabus, rules and regulations will be provided along with the application form.

Application forms are obtainable from the office of Institute of Information Technology (April 12, 2008 to May 15, 2008), University of Dhaka, on payment of Tk. 500/- in cash (non-refundable) between 10.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.

Schedule for Admission Procedure:

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| Last date to submit the application | May 15, 2008 (Thursday) |
| Date of written test | May 16, 2008 (Friday, IIT Building, DU at 3.00 p.m.) |
| Publication of result of written test | May 18, 2008 (Sunday) |
| Date of viva voce | May 21-22, 2008 |
| Publication of the list of eligible candidates | May 26, 2008 (Monday) |
| Date of registration for MIT admission | June 10-19, 2008 |
| Publication of waiting list | June 21, 2008 (Saturday) |
| Date of registration from waiting list for MIT admission | June 21-26, 2008 |
| Orientation | 1st July 2008 (Tuesday) |

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Vacancy Announcement

Project Officer-Market Research & Development

(2 Posts based in Bogra & Rangpur)

CARE Bangladesh invites application from qualified candidates for the "Strengthening the Dairy Value Chain in Bangladesh" funded by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The project will cover 9 districts of north and north-west of Bangladesh for a period of 4 years up to October 2011.

In rural Bangladesh livestock are important asset for the poor and landless households. The project therefore proposes active milk value chain participation by exploring upstream and downstream linkages among market and producers, improved dairy practices and management, and enhanced market access for rural people that can have a significant impact on the lives and livelihoods of the rural poor, including vulnerable people. This project aims to improve the livelihoods of rural small-holding and landless households in the north and north-west districts of Bangladesh by enhancing their participation in and profit from the milk value chain.

Key Responsibilities:
The incumbent is to focus the market research and development work on the special challenges of enabling poor and marginalized dairy producers to benefit from the growth of the dairy sector in Bangladesh. S/he will provide leadership, technical and conceptual guidance for economic empowerment for poor and marginalized people, partnerships with the private sectors and social entrepreneurial activity, represent the SDVC project related to market development and economic development at regional level. S/he will also be responsible for coordinating a core team of trained field staffs representing all levels of the market development activities implementing in the field. S/he will provide guidance and support to programs initiating economic development and market linkages work. S/he will forge strategic relationships with external stakeholders, the market development groups at regional level and internal collaborations of CARE Bangladesh at field.

Requirements:
• Minimum of Bachelor Degree in Business, Economics, Agriculture Economics.
• At least 3 years relevant working experience in Market and Business Development, Market oriented initiatives and work with the private sector or INGO.
• Good analytical and leadership skills.
• Experience of business planning for small and medium enterprises.
• Very strong presentation and inter-personal skills.
• Experience in networking with national and international organizations and institutions.
• Good Negotiation, Collaboration, Coaching, Operational/Strategic Decision Making skills.
• Problem solving and trouble shooting capability.
• Good written and oral communication skills both in Bangla & English.

Compensation: Monthly gross salary is Tk. 23,500 plus other admissible benefits.

Interested candidates who fulfill the above requirements are requested to drop or mail their CVs (with cover letter, recent passport size photograph, and names/addresses of two non-relative referees) to: CARE-Bangladesh, 20-21, Kauran Bazar, Dhaka addressing Section Manager-HRM, HRD&M Department or send in your application to hr@carebangladesh.org on or before April 21, 2008.

Note: • Women and different ethnic groups are particularly encouraged to apply. • Any persuasion will disqualify the candidates. • Applicants who have relatives in CARE are discouraged to apply. • Only short listed candidates shall be invited for the interview. • Please write the position applied for at the top right hand corner of the envelope.

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