



Indian tycoon KK Birla dies at the age of 90

AFP, Kolkata

Indian tycoon Krishan Kumar Birla, whose family empire spanned industries from sugar to newspapers, died Saturday at the age of 90, an aide said.

Birla, whose business holdings included sugar, fertilizer, chemicals, heavy engineering, textile, shipping and newspaper companies, had been suffering from pneumonia, his personal secretary Nand Kumar told AFP.

"Krishan Kumar Birla passed away this morning at his Kolkata residence," Kumar said.



Indian Christian villagers walk down for a mid-day meal at a refugee camp after an attack, allegedly by a group of Hindu fundamentalists, at Tengedapathar, a village in Orissa's Kandhamal district, some 250km southwest of state capital Bhubaneswar on Friday. Indian authorities insisted they had halted deadly clashes between Hindus and Christians in the east of the country that have exposed it to stinging criticism.

Clashes kill a dozen Taliban

AFP, Kabul

A suicide car bomb exploded near international troops in the Afghan capital yesterday, leaving one wounded, while soldiers killed more than a dozen militants in clashes elsewhere, authorities said.

The Taliban insurgent movement said it had carried out the bombing -- the latest in Kabul in a surge of unrest linked to an insur-

40 militants killed in Pakistan airstrike

Missile strike kills 5 others near Afghan border

AFP, Islamabad/Peshawar

quoting local sources, revised the figure upward on Saturday to 40, including two senior Fazlullah commanders.

Local officials said Fazlullah, who since 2007 has been leading a violent campaign to enforce hard-line Islamic Sharia law in the mountainous Swat region, escaped the attack but his group suffered massive damage.

Ali said the group's "core militants" were killed and its communication network destroyed in the operation, one of the bloodiest raids since the army launched the offensive after peace negotiations with local tribes failed.

Troops backed by helicopter gunships and heavy artillery have for weeks been pounding militant positions in Swat, a former tourist spot.

Fazlullah is also known as Mullah Radio for using an illegal FM channel to disseminate the Taliban's agenda.

Meanwhile, at least five people were killed when a missile fired from Afghanistan hit a suspected rebel hideout yesterday in Pakistan's South Waziristan, a known hub of Qaeda, an official told AFP.

"A missile apparently fired from across the border hit a compound near Wana and initial reports say five people died," said a security

official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Local military spokesman Major Murad Khan told AFP that "an incident involving an explosion happened in South Waziristan but we do not know what caused the incident."

A local intelligence official said the missile struck the house of a tribesman in the Zelli Noor area just outside the main town of Wana in South Waziristan.

The official said the owner of the house had recently rented it out to some "foreigners", a term used in Pakistan to describe al-Qaeda fighters.

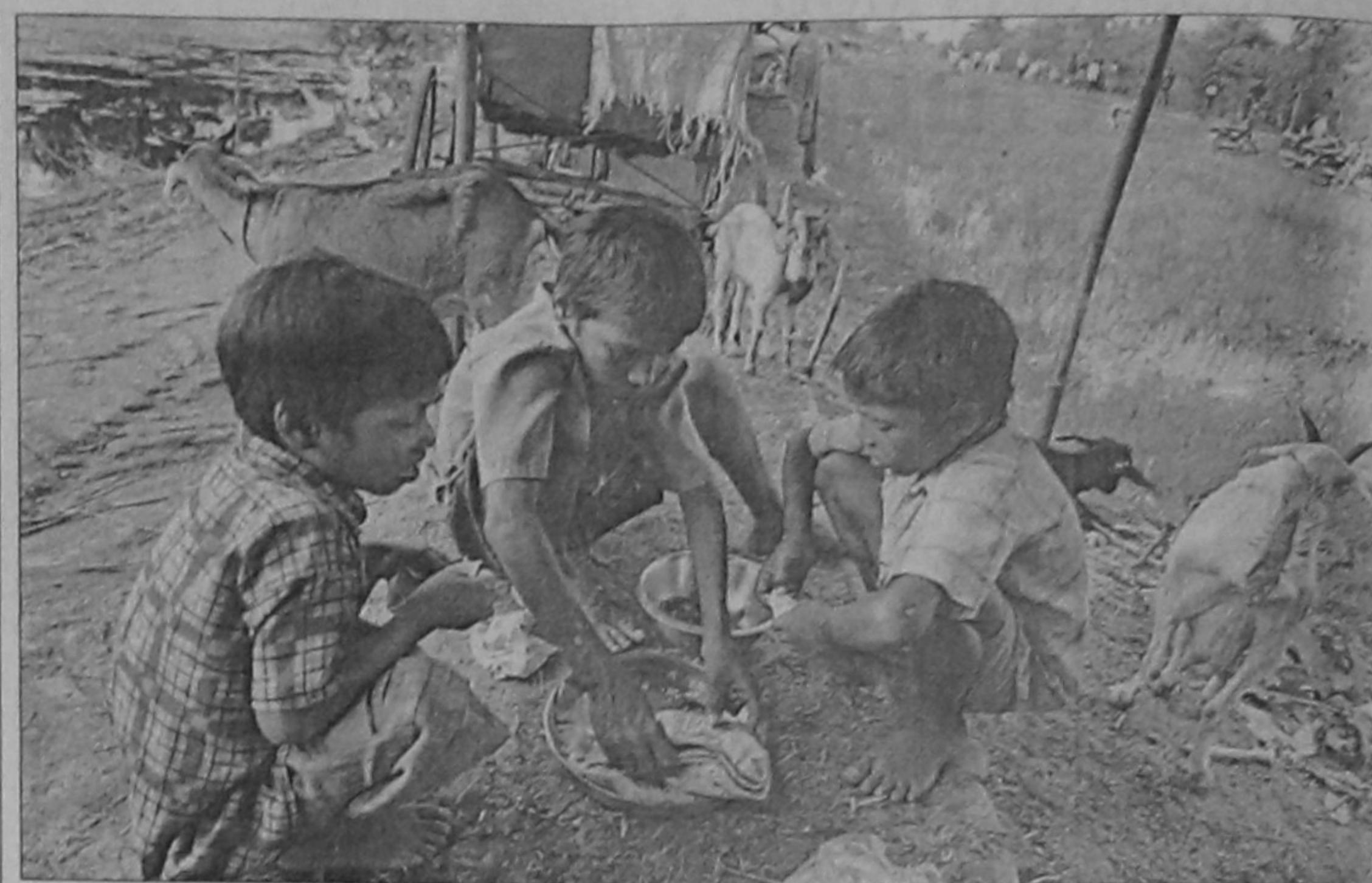


PHOTO: AFP

Indian flood-affected children eat at temporary tent settlement at Jankipur village in Poornia district, some 420km north-east of Patna on Friday. Massive flooding in eastern India has caused a "national calamity," the prime minister said after touring the devastated region where more than a million people remain trapped.

Five million Afghans need food aid Says Oxfam

AFP, Kabul

Five million Afghans face serious food shortages with winter drawing near, but donors have put forward less than a fifth of the money needed to cope, development charity Oxfam warned yesterday.

Time is running out to avert a humanitarian crisis, the British-based group said, urging governments to respond to an emergency humanitarian appeal launched in July.

"Up to five million Afghans face severe food shortages, yet the appeal for Afghanistan has a huge funding shortfall, with less than a fifth of the 404 million US dollars needed to respond," Oxfam said in a statement.

"Large parts of Afghanistan are facing crisis as a result of the cumulative effect of factors including the harsh winter, high food prices, drought, and increasing and spreading insecurity."

One of the hardest-hit provinces is central Daikundi, where an Oxfam assessment shows people may be facing the worst conditions in more than 20 years.

"As it is almost impossible to deliver aid to rural areas during the harsh Afghan winter, concerted

action is needed now to avert the crisis," it said.

"This is a race against time, the international community needs to respond quickly before winter when conditions deteriorate," said Oxfam's head of policy in Kabul, Matt Waldman.

"The health of one million young children and half a million women is at serious risk due to malnutrition," he said in the statement.

The charity also said there is not enough United Nations staff in the country to coordinate the massive aid effort required.

In a letter to development ministers around the world, Oxfam called for help to meet the funding shortfall and to support Afghanistan's agriculture sector and ability to cope with disasters.

"We believe the current situation requires a major humanitarian response," the letter said.

"If the response is slow or insufficient, there could be serious public health implications, including higher rates of mortality and morbidity, which are already some of the highest in the world," it said.

Such a response could also cause displacement and civil disturbances that may undermine security, the letter said.

return home," the state's disaster management minister Nitish Mishra told AFP.

The government has set up more than 100 shelters, but officials said nearly 600,000 people were still waiting to be rescued.

The floods have caused extensive damage and disruption to roads, water and electricity supplies in the affected areas, Unicef said.

"Essential commodities including food are now being transported by boat," the UN body said in a statement.

Tens of thousands of people have been displaced in Nepal, where thousands of Indians seeking shelter from floods in Bihar have also migrated.

Meanwhile, a rescue boat failed with panicked flood victims capsized and killed 20 people in northern India, where monsoon flooding grew worse because of heavy rain and water flowing from neighbouring Nepal, officials said.

"We have been stuck here for the past 10 days with no rescue team reaching here. Our food and water stocks have run out. But they too will fall any moment," Laxmi Singh told the newspaper by telephone.

Survivors at relief shelters said they were not getting anything to eat.

"We have absolutely nothing with us here. We left everything behind," one woman at a crowded relief camp told NDTV news network.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has described the situation as a "national calamity" and announced a relief package of 228 million dollars and 125,000 tonnes of grain.

Massive evacuation in Bihar as millions hit by floods

20 drown as rescue boat sinks

AFP, AP, Patna

More than 300,000 people trapped in India's worst floods in 50 years have been rescued but nearly double that number remain stranded without food or water, officials said yesterday.

About 60 people have died and three million people have been affected since the Kosi river breached its banks earlier this month on the border with Nepal and changed course, swamping hundreds of villages in eastern Bihar state.

Another 300,000 people have fled their homes and are living in government relief shelters, temples and high-rise government buildings.

"Large-scale evacuation will continue 'till all the marooned people are rescued in the next three to four days," disaster management official Prataya Anrit told AFP.

The government said the situation was unlikely to return to normal for months and the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) voiced fears about illnesses breaking out at congested relief camps.

"We will have to provide food and shelter to the survivors until October as they will not be able to



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani former premier Nawaz Sharif (R) shares a light moment with his newly-named party candidate for the upcoming presidential election, Saeed Uz Zaman Siddiqui (L) and other party leaders after a meeting in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistan's presidential election to choose a successor of Pervez Musharraf will be a triangular fight after the Election Commission announced its final list of candidates on Saturday.

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