

PAKISTAN FLOOD

UN urges world to step up aid efforts

BBC ONLINE

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has urged the world to speed up aid to Pakistan after devastating floods which the government says have affected 20 million people.

Ban is in Pakistan to visit PM Yusuf Raza Gilani and President Asif Ali Zardari, whose handling of the crisis has been widely criticised.

The risk of epidemics in flood-hit areas is now seen as a serious threat.

On Saturday, the UN confirmed at least one case of cholera among the victims.

"I'm here also to urge the world community to speed up their assistance to the Pakistani people," Ban told reporters as he arrived.

"We will try to mobilise all necessary assistance and remember that the whole world is behind the people of Pakistan in this time of trial", he said, adding he would report back to the UN General Assembly first thing this week.

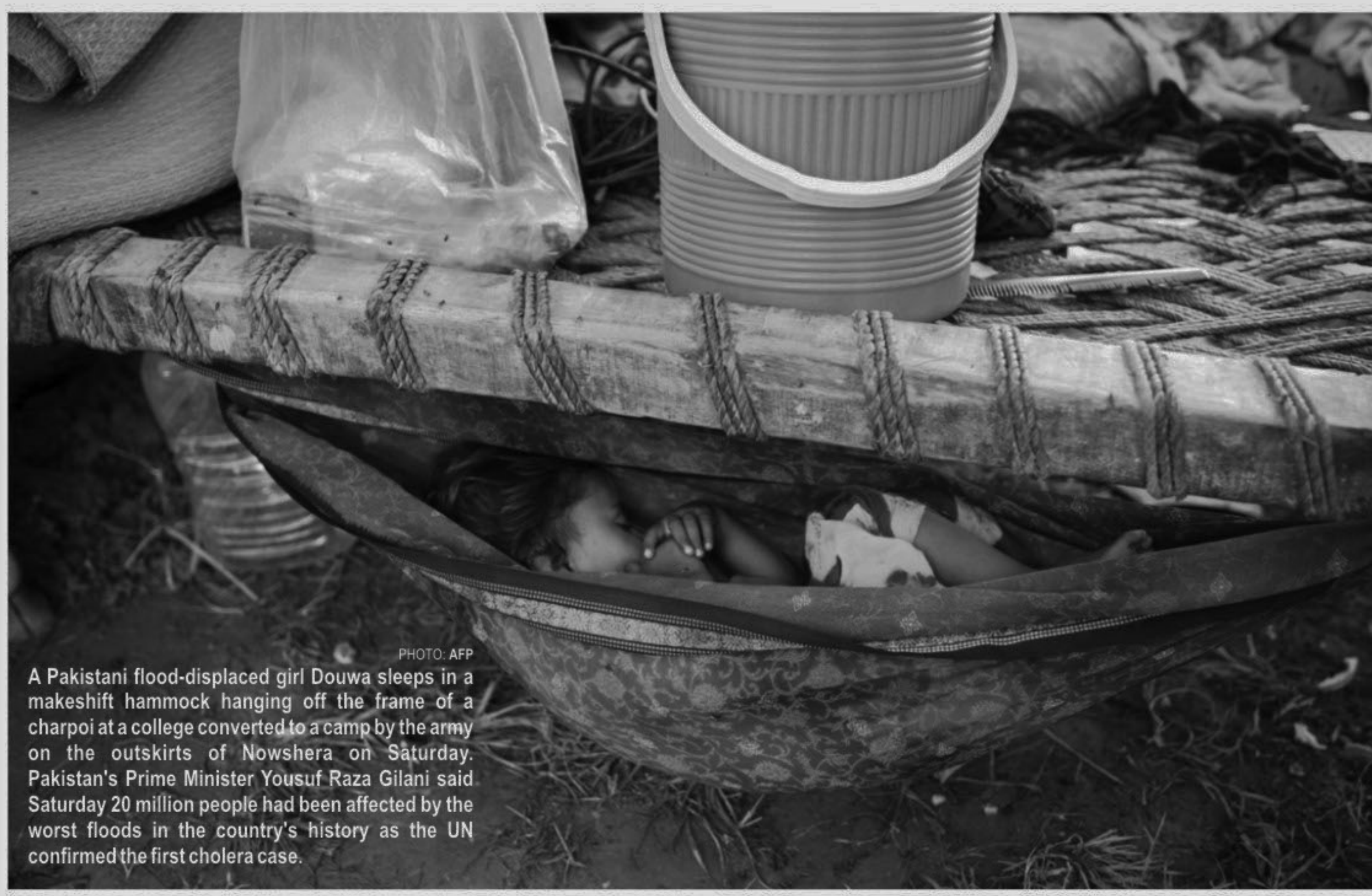
Despite the scale of the disaster, Pakistan officials have expressed concern about the international community's response.

On Saturday, Pakistan's UN envoy Zamir Akram told the BBC that the immensity of the devastation was only now being recognised, and that so far there had not been enough help.

The UN on Wednesday launched a \$459m (£294m) appeal for emergency aid, but says billions will be needed in the long term.

The US is at the forefront of the relief effort, having donated at least \$70m to the country, which is a key regional ally in fighting terrorism.

The US has also sent military helicopters to rescue stranded people and drop off food and water.



A Pakistani flood-displaced girl Douwa sleeps in a makeshift hammock hanging off the frame of a charpoi at a college converted to a camp by the army on the outskirts of Nowshera on Saturday. Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said Saturday 20 million people had been affected by the worst floods in the country's history as the UN confirmed the first cholera case.

Fonseka's party to appeal conviction

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's former army chief Sarath Fonseka will appeal against a court martial conviction that stripped him of his rank, pension and prestige, his political party announced yesterday.

President Mahinda Rajapakse formally removed Fonseka's rank and medals and stopped his pension on Saturday, a day after a court martial found him guilty of engaging in politics while in uniform.

"We do not accept the court martial process, but we are going to appeal to a civilian court against this decision," said Anura Kumara Dissanayake, legislator and spokesman for Fonseka's Democratic National Alliance.

Dissanayake said the government was trying to destroy the political career of Fonseka, who attained national hero status as the battlefield architect of the military victory over Tamil Tiger rebels in May last year.

End Kashmir violence

Indian PM appeals to protesters

AP, New Delhi

India's prime minister appealed yesterday to the people of Indian-controlled Kashmir to end violent protests and said his government is ready to hold talks to resolve their long-standing problems.

"The years of violence should now end. Such violence will not benefit anyone," Manmohan Singh said in a speech marking India's Independence Day.

"We are ready to talk to every person or group which abjures violence."

Indian-administered Kashmir has been rocked by near-daily protests and clashes with security forces, leading to the deaths of at least 57 people over the last two months. The protesters have set official buildings and vehicles ablaze and government forces have used guns and tear gas in an effort to contain the unrest.

Singh insisted that "Kashmir is an integral part of India," adding that "within this framework, we are ready to

move forward in any talks."

Sunday was a rare quiet day in Kashmir, largely because of a strict curfew clamped on most major towns.

However, at an Independence Day ceremony in Srinagar, the main city, a protester hurled a shoe at Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, the region's top elected official. The shoe missed its target, and Abdullah continued with his speech after a pause.

Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan but claimed by both. Anti-India sentiment runs deep in the portion of Kashmir it controls, with most people favouring independence from India or a merger with mostly Muslim Pakistan.

Singh said he had embarked on a new round of talks with political leaders from Kashmir last week and he wanted to take the process forward.

"India's democracy has the generosity and flexibility to be able to address the concerns of any area or group in the

country," he said.

In his 30-minute speech delivered from a bullet-proof glass booth on the ramparts of a 17th-century fort in New Delhi, Singh referred to a host of other problems besetting India, including growing attacks by Maoist rebels and the need to speed up development programs for millions of Indians still mired in poverty.

Singh also appealed to Maoist rebels, saying they should work with the government to speed up lagging economic development of rural areas, the main cause of the rebels' discontent.

Inspired by Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong, the rebels have tapped into the rural poor's growing anger at being left out of the country's economic gains. They now have a presence in 20 of India's 28 states.

Singh has often called the rebels the country's greatest internal security threat.

Indigenous group calls strike in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

A group representing Nepal's indigenous communities brought much of the country to a standstill yesterday to protest against the parliament's failure to draft a new national constitution.

Shops and offices closed and most vehicles remained off the roads across Nepal, where Sunday is usually a working day, after the group called a nationwide general strike.

Police said they had detained 60 people in the capital, Kathmandu, where some vehicles were vandalised, although the protest was mostly peaceful.

"We want the political parties to get serious about writing a new constitution for the country," said Raj Kumar Lekhi, chairman of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities.

Myanmar's military dons civilian mask before vote

AFP, Bangkok

Two decades after the Myanmar opposition's stolen poll victory, the junta is again gearing up for elections, but experts say years of planning mean the cards this time are stacked in its favour.

The vote is widely seen as a way for the military to put a civilian face on its iron-fisted rule, with 77-year-old junta head Senior General Than Shwe likely to retain a crucial -- if perhaps lower profile -- role.

Myanmar's leader will want to ensure that the November 7 election produces precisely the result he requires to shield himself from a slew of enemies within the country, said Thai-based analyst Aung Naing Oo.

"Than Shwe has held the Bengal Tiger by the tail and he cannot let go, so he has to make sure that everything goes to plan," he said.

Had democracy been allowed to take its course, the generals would have been swept aside by the landslide victory of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for

Democracy (NLD) in Myanmar's last election in 1990.

But the party was never allowed to take power and Suu Kyi has spent much of the intervening 20 years in detention.

Analysts say the ruling generals are taking no chances this time, reserving a quarter of the seats in parliament for the military and crafting election rules to ensure junta-backed parties have the upper hand.

"The generals may be exchanging their khakis for civilian clothes, but these polls are still a carefully arranged plan to keep power in the hands of the military junta," said Elaine Pearson at New York-based Human Rights Watch.

Suu Kyi, known as "The Lady" in Myanmar, is still seen as the most potent threat to the military, which has ruled the country for nearly half a century.

She is barred from standing in November because she is a serving prisoner -- the election falls days before her current term of house arrest expires -- while the NLD is boycotting the vote, citing unfair rules.

Policeman hurls shoe at Kashmir's CM

AFP, Srinagar

A policeman flung a shoe at Indian Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah at an Independence Day event yesterday, which saw thousands of Kashmiris in the streets protesting against Indian rule.

Security was tight across the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley for the annual national holiday, which separatists traditionally mark as a "black day".

At the main official function in a sports stadium in the Kashmiri summer capital Srinagar, Abdullah had just unfurled the Indian national flag when the show was thrown.

The minister was not hit and the policeman, who had chanted "we want freedom", was quickly overpowered by bodyguards.

Police identified the attacker as Abdul Ahad Jan.

"He is mentally unsound and facing charges in a criminal case. He has already been suspended for his criminal activities," a police statement said.

"Hurling a shoe is better than hurling a stone," Abdullah commented after the incident. The chief minister heads the National Conference, the main pro-India party in Kashmir.

Stone-throwing protesters have been defying almost daily curfews over the past two months and clashing with police in Srinagar and other towns in the valley.

The unrest has claimed 57 lives, most of them young men or teenagers killed in police firing.

On Friday and Saturday, security forces shot



dead six protesters and bystanders in clashes with demonstrators.

One of the young men killed on Saturday was from the southern town of Anantnag, where thousands of residents -- men and women -- held noisy night-long anti-India demonstrations, witnesses said.

Night protests were also held in Narabal, on the outskirts of Srinagar, where another protester was killed Saturday.

There were demonstrations in Srinagar on Sunday, one of which turned violent as police responded with tear gas and baton charges after a crowd pelted them with stones.

India's highest representative in Kashmir, state governor N N Vohra, has urged the security forces to "revisit their strategies and tactics of crowd control for securing maximum protection of human life".

The recent surge in anti-India protests began when a teenage student was killed by a police tear gas shell on June 11 in Srinagar.

1.8b barrel oilfield found in Afghanistan

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghanistan said yesterday it had discovered an oilfield with an estimated 1.8 billion barrels in the north of the war-ravaged country, where US and other foreign forces are trying to tame a Taliban-led insurgency.

The discovery of the basin between northern Balkh and Shiberghan provinces was made after a survey conducted by Afghan and international geologists, said Jawad Omar, a spokesman for the ministry of mines.

"I do not know its price in the market. But the initial survey says there are 1.8 billion barrels of oil and I think there will be more than what is estimated," he told Reuters.

Various estimates of Afghanistan's hidden wealth have been made in recent years, but the challenge of exploiting the resources in a country at war and with little mining infrastructure is daunting for most investors.

Foreign troops deaths in Afghanistan pass 2,000

REUTERS, Kabul

Total foreign military deaths in Afghanistan have passed 2,000 since the war began in late 2001, unofficial tallies showed yesterday, more than 60 percent of them Americans but still far behind ever-growing civilian casualties.

The deaths of at least one more US service member, an Australian and a Briton announced in the past two days have pushed the total to 2,002 since the Taliban were ousted in late 2001 by US-backed Afghan forces.

The total is less than half that suffered during the seven years of the Iraq war but is a significant milestone nonetheless, with Nato allies like the Netherlands pulling out of the alliance and others reviewing their future roles.

১১তম মৃত্যু বার্ষিকী স্মরণে



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