

## 14 die in Nepal plane crash

AFP, Kathmandu

All 14 people aboard a small plane heading for the Everest region, including four Americans, a Japanese and a Briton, were killed when the plane crashed in bad weather near the Nepalese capital yesterday.

"Our teams have now reached the site and I can confirm that there are no survivors. All 14 people are dead," said Bimlesh Lal Karna, head of rescue operations with the civil aviation authority.

The Agni Air plane was returning to Kathmandu after it was unable to land at Lukla, its intended destination in a popular trekking spot in the Everest region of eastern Nepal, home ministry spokesman Jayamukunda Khanal told AFP.

Thousands of travellers fly into Lukla, 140 kilometres (90 miles) northeast of Kathmandu, every year to access the stunning Himalayan range that forms Nepal's northern border with Chinese-controlled Tibet.

Local villagers said they saw the plane crash into a field next to a school about 15 miles south of Kathmandu and break up on impact. The cause of the crash was not immediately clear.

"There are small pieces of the plane all over the field and you can see body parts. We are all so shocked," villager Pratap Lama told the Kantipur radio station.

Relatives of some of the passengers gathered at the airport in Kathmandu to wait for news.

"My cousin is a trekking guide and he was flying up to take a group of tourists to Everest base camp," Ganesh Rijal, 40, told AFP.

"He got married recently and his wife is in deep shock. I have been waiting here for hours, but nobody has been able to tell me anything."

The 550-metre-long (1,800 feet) sloping airstrip at Lukla, perched on a hillside 2,757 metres above sea level, is considered one of the most difficult landings in the world.

The last major accident there was in 2008 when a Twin Otter plane carrying 18 people crashed killing everyone on board.



Nepalese soldiers carry the bodies of passengers and crew from a helicopter on the tarmac at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu yesterday, after their deaths in a plane crash. An Agni airplane crashed en route to Lukla in the Everest region with 14 people on board including four Americans, a Japanese and a Briton.

## Next Nepal PM duel on Sept 5

IANS, Kathmandu

After failing to elect a new prime minister Monday despite five rounds of vote spread over a month, Nepal's parliament will now hold an unprecedented sixth round of election Sep 5 amidst growing protests at home and concern among the world community.

It is likely to be the last chance for Maoist chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda and his sole rival, former deputy prime minister Ram Chandra Poudel of the Nepali Congress, to win the support of at least half the 599 MPs or clear the decks for a different solution.

Nepal has been without a government since Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal resigned in June due to Maoist pressure.

Though the former communist guerrillas were able to force the communist leader's resignation, they have however failed to form the new government after the communists retaliated.

Nepal's communist party, the third largest in parliament with 109 MPs, has been sitting neutral all through the voting, resulting in neither contestant crossing the 300-vote mark needed to win.

The chance of a decisive victory has also been marred by a group of four ethnic parties, who together comprise the fourth-largest bloc in parliament, trying to drive a hard bargain for itself and refusing to vote till its demands are met.

If the communists and the Madhesi parties' front refuse to relent, the sixth round of election will also end in fiasco.

## Ahmadinejad to visit flood-hit Pakistan

AFP, Tehran

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will soon travel to flood-hit Pakistan to witness first hand the impact of the natural disaster that has engulfed Iran's eastern neighbour, the interior minister said yesterday.

"The president has decided to personally visit the affected areas to decide how to better help the flood victims," ILNA news agency quoted Mostafa Mohammad Najjar as saying.

Najjar did not specify when Ahmadinejad's visit would take place.

The worst natural disaster in Pakistan's history has already affected 20 million people in nearly a month of flooding triggered by heavy monsoon rain, and killed 1,500 people by official count.

## Flood recovery will take years: Zardari

Pakistan warns of new floods in south

AP, AFP, Islamabad/ Hyderabad

Recovering from the devastating floods still battering Pakistan will take at least three years, the president said, as the waters swept south after leaving millions homeless and submerging millions of acres of farmland.

The floods that began nearly a month ago with hammering monsoon rains in the northwest have affected more than 17 million people, the UN estimates. Most of the 1,500 deaths occurred early in the flooding, but the crisis still is growing.

President Asif Ali Zardari defended the government's much-criticized response to the unprecedented floods but acknowledged recovery would take a very long time.

"Three years is a minimum," Zardari said in an interview Monday with a small group of foreign reporters in the capital, Islamabad.

Meanwhile, Pakistan faces a critical risk of yet more flooding in the next three days in its fertile southern plains, officials warned yesterday, as a major river threatened to burst its banks.

The worst natural disaster in the country's history has already affected 20 million people in nearly a month of flooding triggered by heavy monsoon rain, and left 1,500 dead by official count.

Five million people have been made homeless across the country but that figure could surge higher if the swollen Indus river, whose fast-moving waters are piling pressure on sagging embankments, continues to fill up.

The widespread misery caused by the floods has triggered worries about social unrest, food riots or even a challenge to the government's rule before its term ends in 2013.

Local charities, the Pakistani army and international agencies are providing food, water, medicine and shelter to the displaced, but millions have received little or no help. Aid officials warn that widespread outbreaks of waterborne diseases such as cholera now pose a threat.

On Tuesday, officials announced that the government would give 20,000 rupees (\$230) to every family affected by the floods, with a statement from Zardari's spokesman calling the payment "initial assistance."

## India backs tribes in mining ruling

AFP, New Delhi

India's environment minister struck down a controversial mining project yesterday by multinational Vedanta that threatened a tribal group whose fate had been compared to the stars of the film Avatar.

Jairam Ramesh rejected the proposal by British-based resource giant Vedanta, owned by Indian businessman Anil Agarwal, to build an open-cast bauxite mine in the Niyamgiri Hill range in the eastern state of Orissa.

The 8,000-strong Dongria Kondh tribal people believe the remote hills are the home of their God, Niyam Raja, and rely on the land for their crops and livelihood.

Survival International, which fights for tribal groups, has run a highly successful public relations campaign likening the plight of the Dongria Kondh to the fictional Na'vi tribe in the blockbuster James Cameron film Avatar.

## AFGHAN POLLS ON SEPT 18 Security deteriorates ahead of election

AFP, Mazar-I-Sharif

As the Taliban spread their tentacles across the formerly peaceful north of Afghanistan, upcoming elections are proving a target for the insurgents.

Across the northern provinces of the war-torn country, Afghans doubt the country can hold free and fair parliamentary polls on September 18 in a rapidly deteriorating security situation.

Worst affected is Kunduz, in the northeast, though authorities in Balkh, Faryab and Jawzjan provinces noted the encroachment of Taliban insurgents who are trying to create a battle line marking their area of control.

According to people in the region, the Taliban are on the march. "Taliban fighters are no longer just in limited numbers in our village, they are now in their hundreds," said Mohammad Fedaa, 22, from Boka village in Balkh.

Sitting in front of his shop on the Balkh-Jawzjan highway, Fedaa said Taliban numbers had grown so much in recent months they now had a visible presence in many villages in the area, day and night.

People in Balkh, Chimita, Chahar Bolak and Sholgara districts in Balkh province told AFP the Taliban were regrouping ahead of the elections, causing concern about how safe they will be in casting their votes.

"Elections can't be held, no one can go to polling stations because the Taliban have warned people not to participate," said an official in Chahar Bolak with the Independent Election Commission (IEC), which oversees the polls.

## DIFFERENT bites

'Author's toilet' put on sale for \$1m

BBC ONLINE

A toilet described as once having belonged to US author JD Salinger has been put on sale on the online auction site eBay for \$1m (£644,000).

The vendor says he obtained the "used toilet commode" from a couple who now own the former home of the Catcher in the Rye author.

It comes "uncleaned and in its original condition", the ad for it states.

"Who knows how many of [his] stories were thought up and written while Salinger sat on this throne!", it adds.

## 'Survival of the fittest' is disputed

BBC ONLINE

Charles Darwin may have been wrong when he argued that competition was the major driving force of evolution.

He imagined a world in which organisms battled for supremacy and only the fittest survived.

But new research identifies the availability of "living space", rather than competition, as being of key importance for evolution.

Findings question the old adage of "nature red in tooth and claw".

The study conducted by PhD student Sarda Sahney and colleagues at the University of Bristol is published in Biology Letters.

The research team used fossils to study evolutionary patterns over 400 million years of history.

## Govt to set up

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subscribers. He said according to the plan, infrastructure building including provision for connections needs to start now so that electricity could be supplied to the consumers as soon as it is generated.

In Dhaka 3,568km new lines will be set up through 21 Palli Bidyut Samity offices under a Tk 498 crore project for expanding electrification in rural areas. Around 1.6 lakh people will get power connection under the scheme.

The project also includes fixing of 532km lines and repairing and setting up of power sub-stations.

Under the other project, 3,400km lines would be set

up at a cost of Tk 498 crore to provide power connectivity to 1.9 lakh subscribers in Chittagong and Sylhet. Besides, 1,100km lines will be fixed while new sub-stations will be set up and the old ones repaired.

According to project documents, the government has a master plan to provide electricity to all in the country by 2020.

Around 3.30-lakh km power lines would be set up throughout the country under the master plan. Of these, already 1.18-lakh km lines have been set up.

The project document said from 2010 to 2015 some 9,426MW additional power would be generated which will meet the demand

increasing now.

Planning ministry sources said the two projects sanctioned yesterday were earlier presented in Ecneec meeting but the PM did not approve those. She asked to place the projects again mentioning how the additional demand would be met.

Yesterday's Ecneec meeting also approved a project for setting up 30 technical training centres in 30 districts at a cost of Tk 698 crore.

Two other projects approved in the meeting involved Tk 66 lakh for jute related research and Tk 87 crore for infrastructure development in Chittagong City Corporation area.

## Otobi gets court order

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worsened the load-shedding situation.

PDB Chairman Alamgir Kabir said, "There is no justification for obtaining the injunction...because it was clearly stated in the contract that they would have to pay a penalty of \$500 dollars per megawatt for each day's delay till the commercial operation date is achieved."

"The question of converting a diesel plant into an HFO plant does not arise, especially when they have sued us," he added.

Back in July, the PDB fined Otobi and Rahimafrooz, two reputed local enterprises, for failing to bring in their diesel-fired rental power plants for which they had signed agreements in February 4. RZ

Power Ltd of Rahimafrooz failed to launch its 50MW diesel plant in Thakurgaon.

Otobi attributed the delay to "law and order situation" at the project site, while Rahimafrooz cited technical glitches behind the delay.

On August 2, Rahimafrooz achieved commercial launch of their plant, according to PDB member generation Mostafa Kamal.

RZ Power official Arifur Rahman told The Daily Star that the company was penalised Tk 5.25 crore in total for the delay in launching.

The PDB had flawless success with two rental power contracts with British company Aggreko that had launched their 200MW units ahead of their deadline. Aggreko's units in Khulna and Ashuganj completed full

power generation capacity test yesterday.

But Otobi was set to pay huge penalties to PDB as it had set September 30 as its deadline, nearly four months behind its agreed schedule.

Chief of Otobi Animesh Kundu explains why his company chose to obtain court injunction against the penalty by saying that as his company sought to change the diesel-based plant into an HFO-based plant, it needed time to see the PDB's response.

Kundu argued that turning the diesel plant into an HFO-based plant would save the PDB fuel cost of Tk 1,035 crore in the next five years, while Otobi would have to invest Tk 115 crore for the conversion.

PDB officials, however, say that the government had chosen to install a diesel-based plant because it wanted power as early as possible and Otobi had signed the contract promising to deliver that plant. Otobi has signed for another plant based on HFO as well, which it is supposed to launch in October.

In the past local rental power companies failing to meet deadlines resorted to obtaining court injunction against payment of penalties. PDB officials say that it was a bad practice for local contractors as they lose credibility and they would, at one point, have to pay their penalties anyway if they are guilty of breaching the contract.

## Rising high the audacity

FROM PAGE 1

which too turned it down on the ground that the building had already been built in violation of the approved design.

But the owners still continued with the construction.

Although Rajuk served a demolition notice in August 2006, it did not execute it. The owners got the demolition stayed by the High Court in February next year.

Up to the 17th floor of the building have already been sold or rented out, said Jabbar.

He said Rajuk should have no reason to deny him an approval for the building, as they approved the 24-storey Westin Hotel on Gulshan Avenue.

**PREMIERSQUARE**  
Situated on plot no-78 on Gulshan Avenue, the building is owned by Momtaz Begum, wife of HBM Iqbal, vice-president of Dhaka city unit of ruling Awami League, said Nazmul Islam, manager of Iqbal Centre, a commercial high-rise owned by Iqbal himself.

Rajuk served a demolition notice to the owner in April this year, as she failed to produce any document in support of the building's approval

despite repeated notices.

Nazmul however claimed that Premier Square was built conforming to the approved design.

Asked whether they had any documents, he handed over the phone to one Md Mostafa, who identified himself as an employee of Iqbal Centre and said, "Newspaper reporters are not the authorised persons to whom we are obligated to show documents."

On July 22, Nazmul showed up at The Daily Star office, and claimed that the building has an approval for 16 storeys.

Asked again for documents, he said he had a copy of the approval, and would show it on July 24. Contacted on that date, he said the document was with HBM Iqbal, and he was abroad. The building's Site Engineer Kamal Hossain said the first three floors of the building have already been rented out.

**BULU'S TOWER**  
The 15-storey commercial building on Gulshan Avenue has approval for only six residential floors, which was issued in 2006.

It is on a 26-katha plot, and first eight of its floors have been rented out, said its owner MNH Bulu, chairman of BNS Group.

As the building's construction violated the approved design, Rajuk undertook a demolition programme in April 2008, but then stopped it after the owner gave an undertaking that he would demolish the illegal portion on his own.

He however continued with the construction in violation of the approved design.

Rajuk served another demolition notice in March this year, but did not execute it as the owner filed a petition with the High Court.

Bulu claimed he has an approved design for a 20-storey building, and said he would show documents. On the appointed day, he said he was sick. Contacted again, he said, "You better not write this report."

**NATORE TOWER**  
The 15-storey commercial building is on a 12-katha residential plot in Uttara. Rajuk served the first notice to the owner asking for a proof of approval in March 2008, it served another notice last year informing the owner of the construction deviations, and this year it served a demolition notice.

The owner obtained a stay order in April and again in July on Rajuk's demolition notice from the High Court bench of Justice Mamtaz Uddin Ahmed and Justice Naima Haider.

"We started the construction in mid

2007, and Rajuk didn't stop us while we were erecting the whole building," said Md Abul Kashem, managing director of Hamja Chemical Industries also owner of Natore Tower.

He said he has an approved design for 15 storeys.

Sheikh Abdul Mannan, director of Rajuk, said the design could not be authentic, as there was no rule allowing buildings above six storeys on residential plots in Uttara Model Town back then.

The design Kashem showed is for a residential building, and it bears signatures of Rajuk officer Shamsur Rahman, member Nasir Uddin, and assistant engineer Zahid Hossain Khan, none of whom is with the agency anymore.

The state minister for housing said he will pursue a legal course to rectify those unauthorised constructions. Rajuk Chairman Nurul Huda said he sent a list of illegal buildings with various extents of violations to the attorney general, including the four buildings discussed in this report.



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