

Pakistan flood situation worsens, 270 killed

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan called on the world yesterday to speed up relief efforts after torrential rains exacerbated major floods, killing 270 people and making another 200,000 homeless in the south of the country.

Local officials say devastation in parts of the country's main breadbasket is worse than last year, when a fifth of the country was left under water by the country's worst ever floods that affected a total of 21 million people.

The government is trying to fend off criticism of an inadequate response to the floods for a second year running, by urging the international community to step up help to already aid-dependent Pakistan.

For months, aid groups had warned the government to invest in adequate prevention measures to mitigate against seasonal rains, avoid a repeat of last year's \$10 billion losses, and protect those left vulnerable two years running.

"At least 270 people have died so far because of falling roofs, drowning in flooding waters and subsequent diseases among the affected families," said Sajjad Haider Shah, a disaster management official in southern Sindh province.

Government officials say at least 5.3 million people and 1.2 million homes have been affected, with 1.7 million acres of arable land inundated.

But a spokesman for Pakistani charity Pattan, working in the affected areas, feared that up to 10 million people could be at risk.

"Estimates show that 1.2 million houses are affected and people are really in a bad condition, so that's why I'm saying this figure must be close to double," Sarwar Bari, Pattan's national coordinator and spokesman, told AFP.

Pakistan's meteorological department says average rainfall across Sindh is three times normal, with the worst-affected districts of Badin, Mirpurkhas and Thar seeing eight times the usual levels.

Chief meteorologist Mohammad Riaz told AFP the figures were a 51-year record, and the rains would continue for the rest of the week.

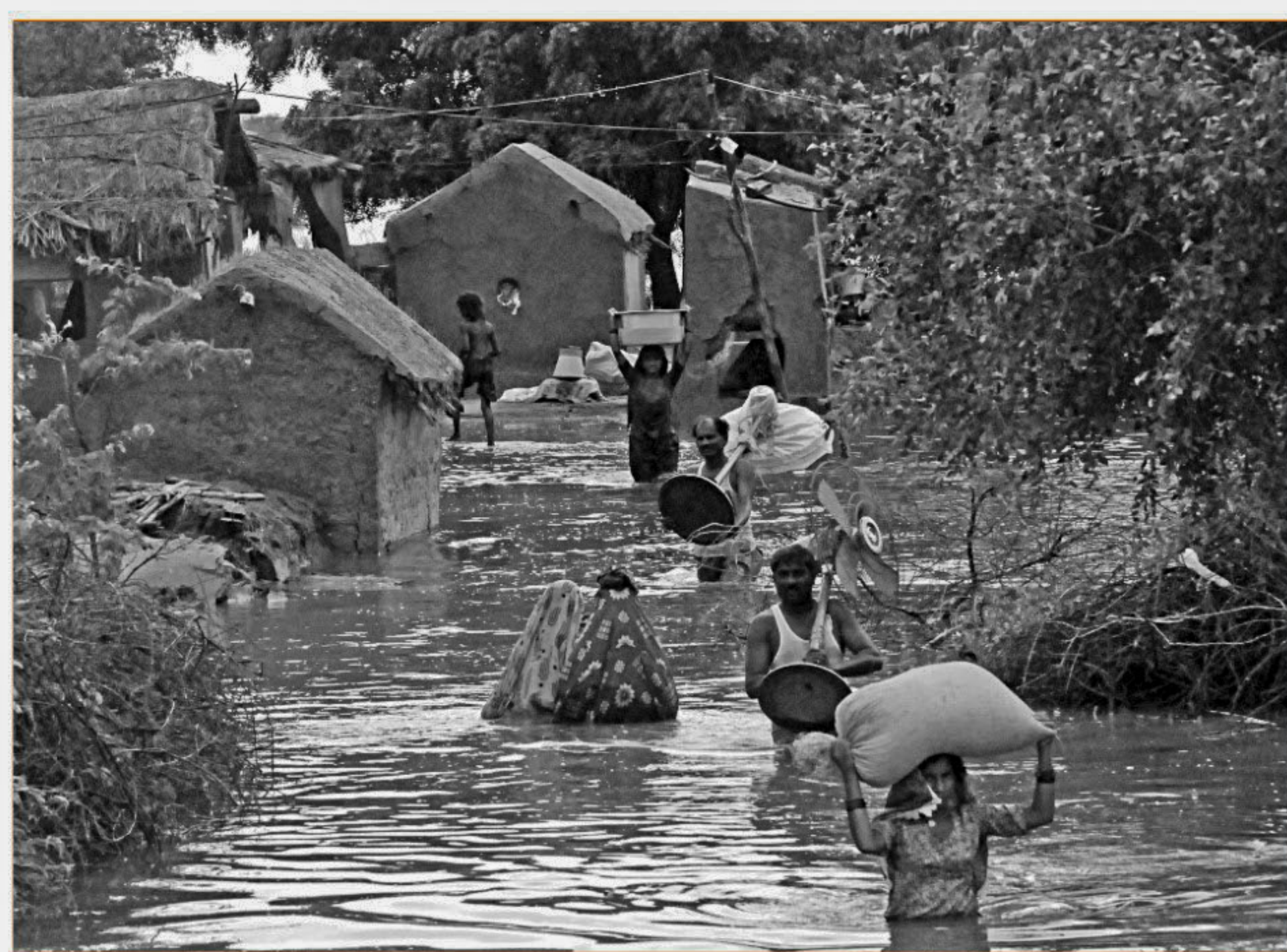
The UN's World Food Programme agency is working to provide emergency supplies to half a million people.

The United States, whose relations with Pakistan nosedived after American troops killed Osama bin Laden near Islamabad in May, says it is sending food aid for nearly 350,000 Pakistanis and medical assistance for about 500,000.

Yousuf Talpur, an MP for the main ruling Pakistan People's Party, said his home district of Umerkot was almost entirely inundated and that little effort was being made to provide relief.

"My party is in government, yet I won't hesitate to say it is yet to go in full throttle to provide relief to our people," he said.

In the southeastern town of Sanghar, most of the 125,000 residents have left home because of flooding, said local official Anwer Narejo.



Pakistani villagers carry their belongings through flood water following heavy monsoon rain at Golarchi town in Badin district, about 200 km east of Karachi yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

MISS UNIVERSE BEAUTY PAGEANT



Miss Angola 2011 Leila Lopes is crowned Miss Universe 2011 by Miss Universe 2010 Ximena Navarrete of Mexico at the 60th annual Miss Universe beauty pageant at the Credicard Hall in Sao Paulo. PHOTO: AFP

Angolan beauty wins

AFP, Sao Paulo

Angola's Leila Lopes has become the new Miss Universe, edging out beauties from Ukraine, Brazil, the Philippines and China as the pageant marked its 60th anniversary.

Lopes, 25, wearing a glittery strapless gown with feathery fringe, accepted the crown on Monday from last year's winner, Mexico's Ximena Navarrete.

Ninety-eight young women took part in the contest -- in South America's largest city, Brazil's industrial hub of Sao Paulo -- watched by an estimated one billion people around the world.

"Now I have work to do, and I want to try to keep my feet on the ground," Lopes told reporters as she struggled to hold back tears after receiving a standing ovation at Sao Paulo's Credicard Hall.

UN Sri Lanka report sent to UNHRC

AFP, United Nations

UN leader Ban Ki-moon on Monday sent a report accusing Sri Lankan troops of killing tens of thousands of civilians to the UN Human Rights Council, bringing a potential international inquiry one step closer.

Ban has said that he alone cannot order an inquiry into the killings during a final offensive against Tamil separatists in 2009 -- which the Sri Lankan government has strongly denied -- but that a forum such as the Human Rights Council could do so.

UN spokesman Martin Nesirky said the report had been sent to the Human Rights Council and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

A panel of experts named by Ban said in April that the Sri Lankan army killed most of the tens of thousands of civilian victims of a final offensive against Tamil separatists in 2009 but both sides may be guilty of war crimes.

The panel's report -- angrily opposed by the Sri Lankan government -- painted a barbarous picture of the offensive on the Tamil enclave in the north of the island that ended a three-decade war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Nesirky told AFP that Ban had not made a recommendation calling for an international inquiry. "The secretary general is simply sending the report. Its for members to decide how to respond to it."

Hospitals, UN centers and Red Cross ships were deliberately shelled by government forces, prisoners shot in the head and women raped during the 2009 offensive, the panel said. LTTE leaders used 330,000 civilians as a human shield and deliberately shot those who tried to escape.

Top militant killed in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

A top commander of a powerful Pakistan-based militant group was shot dead yesterday by Indian troops during a gunbattle in a sensitive township in Indian Kashmir, police said.

Abdullah Uni, a self-styled divisional commander of Lashkar-e-Taiba -- the group blamed for the 2008 Mumbai attacks that left over 160 people dead -- was killed during a gunbattle in northern Sopore town.

"Uni's killing is a big setback to Lashkar in (the) Kashmir valley," police officer Imtiaz Ahmed said.

Indian police spokesman said that Uni was at the top of the police "most wanted" list for planning and executing attacks against security forces, civilians and politicians.

Lashkar has not confirmed Uni's death so far.

Train collision in Chennai, 15 killed

AGENCIES, Chennai

At least 15 people were believed to be killed and up to 80 injured when two passenger trains collided in southern India yesterday, local police said.

"Three carriages were derailed by the impact and so far five bodies have been recovered," a local police official told AFP by telephone.

Inspector General (North Zone) Satyendra Babu told NDTV over 80 injured passengers have been rushed to hospital and seven bodies have been recovered so far. More than 100 police officials and firemen are involved in the rescue efforts. Navy personnel and two teams of the National Disaster Relief Force (NDRF) are also at the site.

Eyewitnesses say that the accident occurred at 9:30pm, adding that three bogies have been derailed. Many passengers are trapped under the debris. Heavy rain and darkness are hampering rescue work.

The accident happened between Arakkonam and Chiteri, about 80 kilometres from Chennai. Outbound train services from Chennai disrupted due to the collision.

Television channels, which broadcast footage from the site showing rescue teams trying to cut their way into the wreckage, said up to 50 people had been injured.

India's state-run railway system -- still the main form of long-distance travel despite fierce competition from new private airlines -- carries 18.5 million people every day.

Experts say the system, the world's second largest under a single management, is desperately in need of new investment to improve safety and help end transport bottlenecks.

The last major accident occurred in July when a packed express train travelling from Kolkata to New Delhi derailed at high speed in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, killing 63 people.

NEWS IN brief

Child abuse victims sue pope for crimes against humanity

AFP, Vatican City

An international group for victims of sexual abuse by priests said today they were suing Pope Benedict XVI through the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.



The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) said it had filed a complaint calling on the ICC to "take action and prosecute the Pope" for "direct and superior responsibility for the crimes against humanity of rape and other sexual violence committed around the world".

In a statement, SNAP said members from Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the United States had travelled to The Hague to urge prosecutors to investigate the head of the Roman Catholic Church.

Egypt military to widen state of emergency

AFP, Cairo

One of Egypt's ruling generals said Monday the military will expand a state of emergency because of a "breach in public security" after protesters stormed Israel's embassy and clashed with police, state news agency MENA reported.

The ruling military council issued a decree to widen the scope of the emergency law -- restricted in 2010 by ousted president Hosni Mubarak to narcotics and terrorism cases -- to target labour strikes and the "spread of false rumours."

Myanmar says 20,000 prisoners released

AFP, Geneva

Myanmar has released about 20,000 prisoners this year under an amnesty programme, the country's foreign minister said yesterday.

"Approximately 20,000 inmates from prisons and labour camps were released until the end of July 2011" under an amnesty order issued by President Thein Sein in May, Wunna Maung Lwin told the UN Human Rights Council.

He did not give details on the types of prisoners released.

Kashmir bus plunge kills 22 in India

AFP, Srinagar

At least 22 people were killed and 18 others injured yesterday when a passenger bus plunged into a deep gorge in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said.

The accident took place in the mountainous district of Ramban, about a four hour drive from the Indian Kashmir summer capital of Srinagar.

Police said the driver of the bus lost control while negotiating a sharp curve on the main highway connecting Srinagar with winter capital Jammu and other parts of India.

Bus accidents are common in the region because of a combination of bad roads, overcrowding and poor vehicle maintenance.

Ties sour between Congress and Trinamool

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Rough edges have developed in relations between India's ruling Congress party and its senior coalition partner in Pachimbanga Trinamool Congress, just over three months after the two parties fought together to end 34 years of Left Front rule in state assembly elections.

The rift became clear when a delegation of Congress leaders from Pachimbanga met their party general secretary Rahul Gandhi, the scion of Nehru-Gandhi family, here on Monday and sought his intervention to stop attacks allegedly by Trinamool Congress on Congressmen in different areas of the state.

The delegation, also consisting of some members of state legislative assembly, also met Shakeel Ahmed, Congress general secretary in charge of party affairs in Pachimbanga, complaining that Trinamool Congress had been not only poaching on Congress rank and file but fighting for party offices.

Congress chief Sonia Gandhi's political secretary Ahmed Patel said "we have received complaints and are trying to sort out the problems through discussion with Trinamool Congress leaders".

Vice President of Pachimbanga unit of Congress party Debabrata Bose said a memorandum has been submitted to the party national leadership requesting them to take up the issue with Trinamool Congress.

"We have told Rahulji that we are being compelled to raise the issue of our relationship with Trinamool Congress which is attempting to thwart our move to strengthen our base in the state", Bose said.

He also alleged that leaders of Congress party's student front Chhatra Parishad were being told by the Trinamool Congress not to contest students union elections in colleges.

In fact, the strain in ties between Trinamool Congress and Congress have come to the fore soon after the assembly elections held in April-May this year as both the parties moved in to expand their bases in Pachimbanga. As the battle for political turn escalates, the relations nosedive.

Congress is a junior partner to Trinamool Congress in Pachimbanga while it is the lead partner at the federal government where Mamata's party is the second largest constituent with 19 members of parliament.

The question being asked in political circles

in both Kolkata and New Delhi is that: Has Mamata begun moving away from Congress?

The divergence first came to the surface when Mamata opposed the Teesta water-sharing treaty and refused to accompany Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Dhaka. A few days later, her party also opposed certain provisions of a proposed federal government law against communal violence arguing it eroded the state's autonomy. Interestingly, the draft of the law was framed by Sonia Gandhi-led National Advisory Council which advises the Indian government on policy matters.

Mamata also stayed away from the meeting convened by Prime Minister Singh here last week where the bill against communal violence was discussed.

However, for now, Congress is seeking to downplay the differences with Trinamool Congress.

Congress spokesman Abhishek Singhvi said "honest merit-based differences on matters of law can arise. They will always be and have always been sorted out because they are bonafide differences. To play up these differences as political differences is wrong".

Pak school bus attack kills four children

REUTERS, Peshawar

Pakistan's Taliban claimed responsibility for an attack on a school bus yesterday which killed five people, saying the children on the bus were from a pro-government tribe.

The attackers fired a rocket-propelled grenade and AK-47 assault rifles at the vehicle in the northwestern city of Peshawar, killing four children and the driver. Eighteen people, including 15 children, were wounded, police said.

The Pakistani Taliban, seen as the biggest security threat to the government, have become more brazen since their ally Osama bin Laden was killed in a US raid in Pakistan in May.

The militants have carried out high-profile suicide bombings and attacked a major naval base and Western targets.

They have also stepped up pressure on tribes who oppose them. "Our comrades attacked the bus which was carrying children from the Aka Khel tribe, whose people are fighting against us at the behest of the Pakistani army," Taliban spokesman Mohammed Afridi told Reuters by telephone from an undisclosed location.

"They have been told time and again to desist from any activity against us but they did not listen. We will continue to carry out such attacks."

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- Fareast Islami Life Insurance Company Ltd. (FILICL) has taken up a scheme to construct a 18-storied commercial cum office building on a very potential land at Chandipur, Rajshahi and intends to implement the project successfully & efficiently through appointing a Consulting Firm and is inviting the reputed engineering-firms for submitting offers (Technical and Financial) for providing architectural and engineering consulting services for Construction of a 18-Storied Commercial cum Office Building at Zero Point, Chandipur, Rajshahi. The eligible firms/bidders should have proven experiences with the similar nature of works of minimum 15-Storied+ 2-basements commercial building with the Govt./Semi Govt./ Autonomous/Private Organization over Taka 35 (thirty-five) crore project-cost in a single tender within the past five years. The intending bidders shall have to apply in their letterhead pad along with the following documents in support of their eligibility for obtaining the Terms of Reference (ToR).
- The ToR may be collected from the Engineering Department, Fareast Tower (Level - 2), 35 Topkhana Road, Dhaka 1000 during office hours upon payment of a non-refundable fee of Taka 5000 (Five Thousand).
- The Bid/Offer to be submitted to Project Incharge, Fareast Tower (Level - 2), 35 Topkhana Road, Dhaka till 04:00 PM on 23.10.2011, and no offer shall be received after this designated time & date.
- FILIC reserves the right to accept any offer or to reject any/all offers without assigning any reason whatsoever.

Managing Director