

FARMER UNREST IN INDIA

Sonia vows land reforms

Backs Rahul, flays UP govt

AGENCIES

India's most powerful politician Sonia Gandhi yesterday promised a change of law to reform land acquisition laws after deadly clashes near the capital.

"We will soon bring a bill in parliament on land acquisition," Gandhi told a Congress rally in the city of Varanasi in northern Uttar Pradesh state.

The national Congress government is planning to replace the 1894 Land Acquisition Act introduced during British colonial rule with new legislation aimed at cutting down conflicts over the valuation of land and seeking to minimize social disruption caused by projects.

Strongly backing Rahul Gandhi, Congress president Sonia Gandhi yesterday slammed the Uttar Pradesh government over the "brutalities" perpetrated on farmers in Greater Noida villages, saying the state has descended into "anarchy and lawless-



ness".

With a just a year left for assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, she expressed confidence that Congress could come to power in the state as well.

A week after Rahul's visit to Bhatta-Parsaul villages of Greater Noida where he empathised with farmers agitating against land acquisition, Sonia said she

was "ashamed" to see the "brutalities" perpetrated in Bhatta-Parsaul and accused the Mayawati government of using state machinery to acquire land for projects.

On Monday, Rahul attacked the UP government and led a delegation of farmers from these villages to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to complain against police "brutalities".

His remarks that women were raped and men were burnt to death had triggered a controversy with media reports quoting the villagers questioning the veracity of the allegations.

Addressing the convention on Wednesday, Rahul repeated the charge of police repression in Greater Noida but was silent on rape of women and burning of men alive.

Farmers have been staging protests for over three months to push for more money for the land which is to be used for a new 165-kilometre expressway to the city of Agra in Uttar Pradesh.

US envoy meets Suu Kyi

AFP, Yangon

A senior US diplomat met Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday for talks about the country's new political landscape following the recent dissolution of the junta.

Joseph Yun, the deputy US assistant secretary for East Asia and Pacific affairs, described the meeting as "very good" but did not reveal details of his discussion with the Nobel Peace Prize winner.

US President Barack Obama's administration in 2009 launched a drive to engage with Myanmar's junta, which in March this year made way for a nominally civilian but army backed government after the first election in 20 years.

Al-qaeda releases new Laden tape

REUTERS, Cairo

Al-Qaeda released a posthumous audio recording by Osama bin Laden in which he praised revolutions sweeping through several Arab countries, and called for more Muslim "tyrants" to be toppled.

Al-Qaeda and other militant groups have waged bloody, but unsuccessful, campaigns to topple these same rulers and by praising the revolts, bin Laden, who was killed in a US Raid on May 2 in Pakistan, appeared to be trying to make the Islamists relevant again.

Al-Qaeda had said bin Laden recorded a message a week before his death. The audio was included in an Internet video more than 12 minutes-long and posted on Islamist websites.

"The sun of the revolution has risen from the Maghreb. The light of the revolution came from Tunisia. It has given the nation tranquility and made the faces of the people happy," the speaker, whose sounds like bin Laden, said.

"To the Muslim nation -- we are watching with you this great historic event and share with you the joy and happiness.

Congratulations for your victories and may God grant your martyrs mercy, your injured recovery and your prisoners freedom."

Tunisia's president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali was overthrown by mass protests in January, followed by Egypt's Hosni Mubarak.

Bin Laden praised the Egyptian revolution and urged Arab protesters to maintain their momentum, adding: "I believe that the winds of change will envelope the entire Muslim world."

"This revolution was not for food or clothing. Rather, it was a revolution of glory and pride, a revolution of sacrifice and giving. It has lit the Nile's cities and its villages from its lower reaches to the top," he said.

"To those free rebels in all the countries -- retain the initiative and be careful of dialogue. No meeting mid-way between the people of truth and those of deviation."

Bin Laden made no specific reference to Libya, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen, where pro-democracy protesters have had less success than in Egypt and Tunisia, but said Israel, reviled by many ordinary Arabs, was worried by the unrest.

US-Pakistan hold second high-level talks in days

AFP, Islamabad

US special envoy Marc Grossman held talks with Pakistan's leadership yesterday, stepping up efforts to smooth over a crisis sparked by the US operation that killed Osama bin Laden.

In the second high-profile American visit to Pakistan in days, the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan held talks with President Asif Ali Zardari, Pakistan's powerful army chief General Ashfaq Kayani and other senior cabinet ministers in Islamabad.

In a brief statement, Islamabad said only that the meeting followed talks with US Senator John Kerry on Monday, which came in the wake of the May 2 raid in Abbottabad that killed the al-Qaeda chief.

A separate military statement after yesterday's Grossman-Kayani meeting said "During the meeting the visiting dignitary discussed

the future of Pak-US engagement concerning the reconciliation process in Afghanistan."

Kerry said Tuesday Pakistan was stepping up efforts to battle extremists and help stabilise Afghanistan, where US-led foreign troops are trying to end a 10-year Taliban insurgency, amid pressure on US lawmakers to cut aid to Islamabad.

He said there were a number of "actions" that would lead to an improvement of the relationship and that were being undertaken.

Kerry said senior US officials would visit Islamabad to work on the details of implementing the initial steps and that if further talks went well, then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would decide "when and if" to visit Pakistan.

Clinton told reporters at the State Department this week that Grossman's visit would "continue more detailed consultations."

Taliban attack kills 36 in Afghanistan

AFP, Khost

The Taliban attacked an Afghan road construction company early yesterday, triggering an hours-long firefight that killed 36 people and wounded another 20 in the worst single attack for months.

The attack happened in the eastern province of Paktia, which borders Pakistan, at around 2:00am and lasted for several hours, a provincial spokesman said.

"Thirty-five guards and staff of the company were killed and 20 were injured. There were casualties on the Taliban side as well," Samoon added that eight Taliban were killed.

The director of the Afghan company targeted, Galaxy Sky, told AFP that the death toll was in fact 36 and included a Pakistani national.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the movement carried out the attack, killing 40 people and torching four vehicles.

The Taliban have been waging a 10-year battle to evict foreign troops stationed in Afghanistan in the wake of the 2001 US-led invasion that toppled their extremist Islamist regime from power for sheltering Osama bin Laden.

Extinction rate overestimated

AFP, Paris

The pace at which humans are driving animal and plant species toward extinction through habitat destruction is at least twice as slow as previously thought, according to a study released yesterday.

Earth's biodiversity continues to dwindle due to deforestation, climate change, over-exploitation and chemical runoff into rivers and oceans, said the study, published in Nature.

"The evidence is in -- humans really are causing extreme extinction rates," said co-author Stephen Hubbell, a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of California at Los Angeles.

But key measures of species loss in the 2005 UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report are based on "fundamentally flawed" methods that exaggerate the threat of extinction, the researchers said.

Funds okayed for 50

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environment and forest.

"At present, the World Bank manages the resilience fund. The government will take over the charges once the capacity is built," said the minister while briefing journalists after the meeting held at the ministry auditorium.

For the capacity building, the meeting has approved another \$200,000. A secretariat under the ministry will be set up with the money, said the state minister.

Right now, around 40 projects involving over \$300 million are awaiting approval, he added.

As per the meeting decision, Palli Karma-Sahayak

Foundation (PKSF) will monitor 10 percent of the BCCRF money to be spent by the non-government organisations.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Food and Disaster Minister Abdur Razzaque, State Minister for Water Resources Mahbubur Rahman were present at the meeting.

World Bank Country Director Ellen Goldstein attended the meeting as the observer while European Union delegation's charge d'affaires Milko van Gool and Walanda Right, a representative of Department for International Development, were present.

Argentina plane crash kills 22

BBC ONLINE

A small plane has crashed in southern Argentina yesterday, killing all 22 passengers and crew on board, officials say.

The plane went down in the Patagonian province of Rio Negro, after issuing a distress call, the operating company Sol Airlines said.

Rescuers were sent to the crash site near the town of Los Menucos.

A local hospital director said no one had been found alive and that "everything was destroyed and burned", Argentine media reported.

One-staff school

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Contacted, Abdul Haque Molla, president of the school management committee, said once the recruitment of teachers and staff was in the hand of the committee, but now it is under government control.

A teacher vacancy was advertised on a newspaper one year back and a number of aspirants submitted applications to the school authority.

But nobody could be appointed as the government in the meantime enacted a new law stripping the management committee of its power to recruit teachers and staff, he said.

However, Rajib Khan, a postgraduate student of Government Devendra College of Manikganj volunteered to teach in the school.

To run the school, said Rajib, it is urgent to appoint some trained-up teachers.

A guardian, China Begum, said her three sons read in class-I, II and IV. She will shift her kids to another school if the authority fails to take immediate measure.

Naim Mia, a class-IV student, said he is considering changing his school.

Established in 1972, the school has only three rooms, and classes are held in two shifts to avoid accommodation problem.

Contacted, Shahin Ara Begum, district primary education officer, said she was aware of the matter. "But we cannot solve it as the government is directly in charge of teachers' recruitment according to the new regulation."

Mamata' life to come on silver screen

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee's landmark feat of ending 34 years of Marxist rule in West Bengal will be captured on the celluloid by internationally-acclaimed director Goutam Ghosh.

Apart from chronicling the extraordinary journey of a simple middle class girl who becomes West Bengal's first woman chief minister, the documentary will stress on the humane side of her personality, the director said yesterday.

"I will try to delve into the humane self of Mamata, the way she interacts with the masses, the way she conducts herself in the elite business circles and the way she pursues her interests at home like painting and her love of Rabindra Sangeet," he said.

"Remember how she was once derided by the urban class who made fun of her English accent, her sartorial tastes and earthy image at cocktail circuits. I was very shocked at this and tried to protest it. But see now how everybody is lapping up her every word?" Ghosh said in his interview.

He said he will sit down with Mamata once things settle down after she takes up office today and discuss ways to capture her life on celluloid.

Ghosh recalled how legendary Bengali poet, the late Subhas Mukhopadhyay, had once described Mamata as 'Banglar Agnikanya' or Bengal's firebrand daughter during a chat with the director. Mukhopadhyay had said that 'this girl' had sincerity and a dream and was destined to rise.

Goutam Ghosh's latest film 'Moner Manush' about the life of mystic folk singer Lalon Fakir won the top prize at the International Film Festival of India in November last year. Ghosh has also made a documentary on Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama and West Bengal's own legendary Jyoti Basu, the late Marxist patriarch of politics.

The director described his portrait of Basu 'a part of my endeavour to capture an important phase of our country's political history of which Jyoti Babu was an integral part'.





Vacancy Announcement
Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP)

The Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP) is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), implemented by Maxwell Stamp, and sponsored by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives of the Government of Bangladesh. More information about CLP can be found at www.clp-bangladesh.org.

The objective of the CLP is to improve the livelihoods, incomes and food security of extremely poor and vulnerable women, children and men living on the remote isolated riverine char islands of North Western Bangladesh. The CLP currently works in: Gaibandha, Rangpur, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Pabna and Tangail.

CLP is seeking candidates for the following District level positions:

- Social Development Manager, Microfinance Officer, Infrastructure Manager, Infrastructure Officer, Livelihoods Manager, Livelihoods Coordinator, Livestock Services Officer**

This position would suit both women and men with experience of designing and implementing poverty alleviation programmes, able to demonstrate their achievements and experience in their respective field. The full job descriptions can be found on the Vacancies section of the CLP website and applicants are strongly advised to read these before applying.

Candidates will have a mixture of the following essential competencies:

- Experience in coordinating and managing development field projects;
- Good interpersonal skills. Able to collaborate with and manage other team members, GoB, NGOs and other external collaborators;
- Excellent communication and presentation skills. Able to clearly express and present complex ideas and findings. Written and spoken ability both in Bangla and English;
- Knowledge/experience of effective representation of community views and priorities to local government and line agencies;
- Willingness to reside at the District/Upazila level, with extensive travel to the Upazilas, Unions and Chars;
- Well conversant with the packages of Microsoft Office, especially Word, Excel and PowerPoint; and
- Must have valid driving license and should be willing to drive motorbikes.

Positions will initially be based in one of the District towns in which CLP operates, with extensive travel to the field.

Please send a CV with a covering letter stating the position applied for and names and addresses of three professional referees to Operations Director, CLP Secretariat, RDA Campus, Sherpur, Bogra-5842. Positions applied for should be clearly stated on the envelope without which your application will not be considered.

The deadline for applications is 2nd June 2011.



Vacancy Announcement
Smiling Sun Franchise Program

Smiling Sun Franchise Program (SSFP), the largest health project of USAID-Bangladesh, is moving fast forward, to become one of the world's largest health social franchise. In fulfillment of this mission, SSFP has been maintaining a highly motivated and fairly large team of skilled personnel from medical, engineering, business and communication disciplines, employed by Chemonics International Inc. Smiling Sun Franchise Program (SSFP) in Bangladesh announces vacancy for the following position for Dhaka.

1. Franchise Operations Officer (One position)

For details of the Terms of Reference and instructions to apply, please visit our website: <http://www.smilingunhealth.com/jobs>. Interested candidate are requested to send their CV in strict confidence, mentioning current salary by emailing to jobs@smilingunhealth.com. Please mention the position in the subject line. **Application should be submitted no later than May 25, 2011.**

"Only short-listed candidates will be contacted. Submitted documents will not be returned to the applicants".

"Qualified female candidates are strongly encouraged to apply"