

Indian cabinet nods to land bill

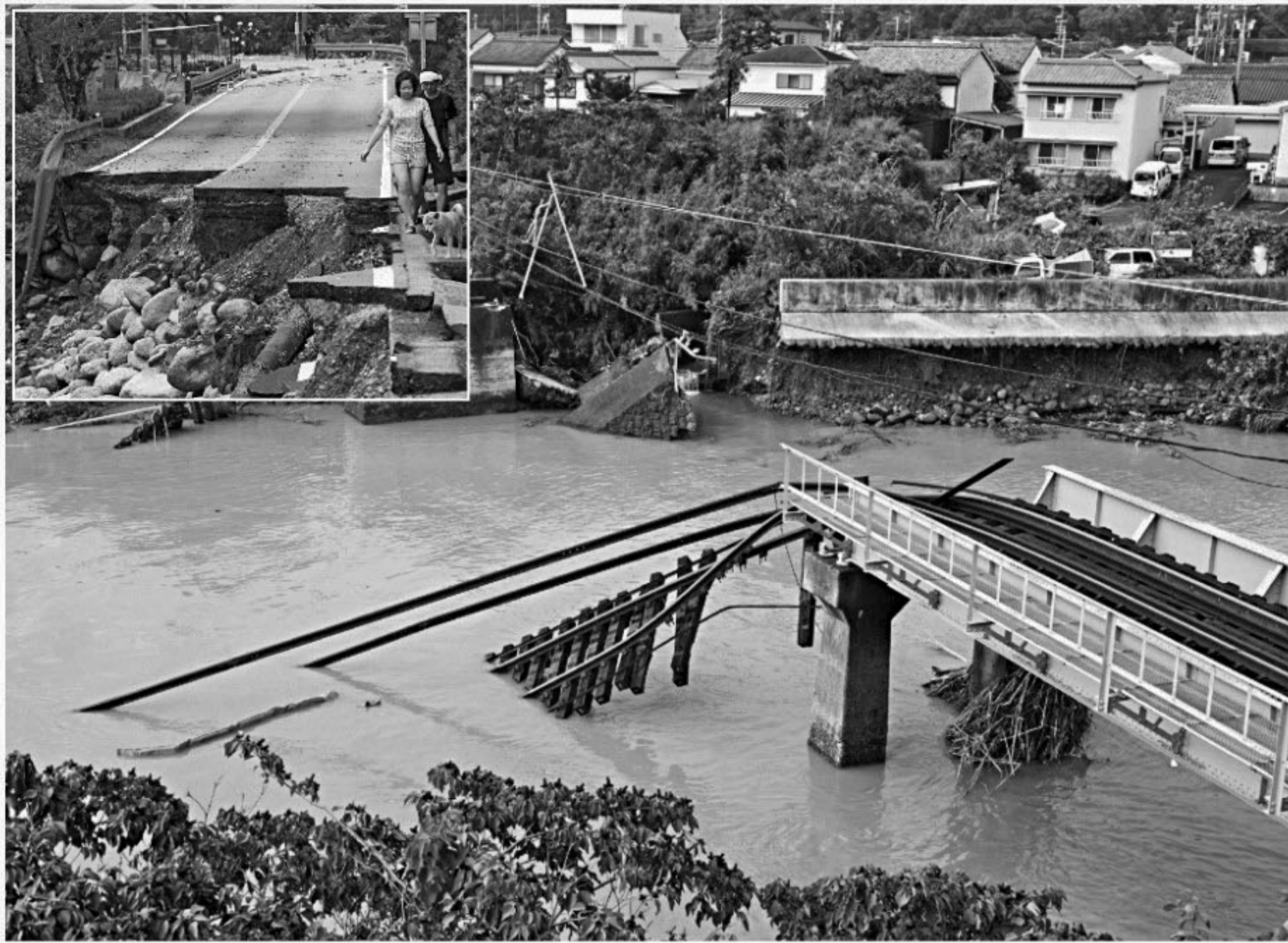
PTI, New Delhi

The Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation Bill, which provides for enhanced compensation to land owners and a slew of other benefits, was yesterday approved by the Indian Cabinet.

The bill, which was fast-tracked in the backdrop of a number of agitations in parts of the country, will be introduced in Parliament on Wednesday, a senior minister said after the Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

The Land Acquisition, Relief and Rehabilitation Bill, 2011 is believed to have a proposal for compensation four times higher than market rate to the owners.

The bill proposals include a subsistence allowance of 3,000 per family per month for a year and an annuity of 2,000 per family per month for 20 years.



This photo shows a railway bridge collapsed in the Nachi river and residents of an affected town cross a damaged bridge, inset, caused by severe flooding in Wakayama prefecture, western Japan yesterday.

Grim search after 31 die in Japan typhoon

AFP, Tokyo

Rescue teams carried out a painstaking search yesterday for the missing after a typhoon pounded western Japan leaving at least 31 people dead and more than 50 unaccounted for, local authorities said.

Torrential rain brought by powerful Typhoon Talas, which made landfall Saturday and was one of the deadliest in years, caused rivers to swell and triggered floods and landslides that swept away buildings, homes and roads.

Police and firefighters resumed a search for the missing early yesterday, warning that the number of victims was set to rise as the continued threat of landslides and damaged access routes hampered relief efforts.

In the deadliest typhoon since an October 2004 storm killed nearly 100 people, floods triggered by Typhoon Talas gave rise to scenes eerily reminiscent of the aftermath of the March 11 tsunami that hit northeast Japan.

In Nachikatsuura town, a railway bridge was swept into a river, while TV footage showed splintered trees, crushed houses and cars tossed onto walls and buildings by the raging floodwaters that inundated entire neighbourhoods.

By Sunday, Talas had been downgraded to a tropical storm after it moved over Japan and into the Sea of Japan (East Sea), the Meteorological Agency said, but risks of further landslides posed a threat to rescue and recovery efforts.

The storm came after new Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda was sworn in on Friday, replacing Naoto Kan, who was heavily criticised for the government's response in the aftermath of the March 11 disasters.

"We will do our best in saving lives and finding the missing," Noda told reporters yesterday.

The Talas weather system, moving as slow as 10 kilometres (six miles) per hour, dumped 1.8 metres (six feet) of rain on a village in Nara prefecture for five days through Sunday, more than Tokyo's annual average rainfall, said the Yomiuri daily.

Wakayama prefecture was the hardest hit region, where 21 people were killed and 35 were missing. More than 200 rescue workers continued the search on the ground yesterday.

"We are struggling to get a hold on the current situation... electricity is out and destroyed roads are preventing our vehicles from going into affected areas," said an official at the fire department in Tanabe, Wakayama prefecture.

MINING SCANDAL

Indian ex-minister arrested

AFP, Bangalore

Police in India's southern state of Karnataka yesterday arrested mining baron and former state minister G Janardhana Reddy over a massive mining scandal.

An ombudsman said in July that illegal iron-ore mining had cost the public exchequer \$3.6 billion from 2006 to 2010 and recommended that the then chief minister of Karnataka state BS Yeddyurappa be prosecuted.

Reddy's arrest followed a pre-dawn swoop by detectives on his office and home searching for documents related to alleged bribery and illegal mining in the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh.

Reddy was infrastructure development minister of Karnataka from 2008 to 2011 in the BJP state government headed by Yeddyurappa.

Floods in Pakistan affect 5m, kill 132

AFP, Karachi

Monsoon rains in Pakistan have affected up to five million people and killed 132 others in a month, a senior disaster official said yesterday, as the country braced for more wet and wild weather.

Southern Sindh, a flood-prone province where authorities said more heavy rain was expected in the coming days, was the hardest-hit area, with crops and many houses destroyed.

"The floods triggered by heavy rains have killed 132 people and affected four to five million people," doctor Zafar Qadir, the country head of the National Disaster Management Authority, told a press conference in Islamabad.

Qadir said most of those killed died as a result of falling roofs, drowning and water-borne diseases.

An unknown number of women and children are among the victims.

"The magnitude of the calamity is worse than our expectations. We are facing difficulties with every passing time," Qadir said.

"A total of 690,000 houses were damaged, in which 250,000 were completely destroyed," Qadir said, adding floods also killed an estimated 100,000 cattle.

Last year, the worst floods in Pakistan's history affected 21 million people and killed an estimated 1,750, with the south again taking the brunt of mother nature.

Charities have accused Pakistan of since failing to invest in flood prevention measures.

Sajjad Haider Shah, an official at the disaster management authority in Sindh, earlier told AFP that 2.2 million people have been affected and 300,000 displaced there.

INDO-BANGLA LAND SWAP DEAL

Assam witnesses shutdown

HINDUSTAN TIMES ONLINE

Assam witnessed a nine-hour shutdown yesterday, as taking a rigid stand on the proposed land swap deal with Bangladesh the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and BJP's Bharatiya Yuva Manch jointly called for a bandh.

The bandh, which was supported by the Asom Gana Parishad, partially impacted life across the state. However, educational institutes were exempted from the purview of the bandh owing to Teachers' Day celebration.

"The move to give away our land to Bangladesh is terrible. We're giving away the land where our soldiers had laid down their lives for the sake of the nation," VHP Assam unit leader Abhijit Dekha said.

Reasons for U-turn

FROM PAGE 1

the state government. Any agreement that we conclude will have to be acceptable to the state government; at the same time, it would also have to be acceptable to Bangladesh."

An official of the Indian external affairs ministry said Mamata was well informed about the content of the deal as she was consulted three times before the draft was finalised.

Indian National Security Adviser Shiv Shankar Menon and Water Resources Secretary Dhruv Vijay Singh met Mamata in Kolkata last week and apprised her of the treaty and other issues including border demarcation and enclaves.

In fact, Menon consulted her twice in one week, the official added. Sources in India said Mamata had objected to

alleged difference between the quantum of Teesta water-sharing between the two countries in the first draft of the treaty and its final version.

She had agreed to 33,000 cusecs of water for Bangladesh in the first draft but was miffed when the figure in the final draft was hiked to 50,000 cusecs (a measure of flow rate and informal shorthand for cubic feet per second).

Her aide Dinesh Trivedi, who is also railways minister, had a heated argument on the issue with Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee on Saturday.

Meanwhile in Dhaka, an official of the water resources ministry said the agreement on Feni, another common river, will not be signed if the Teesta deal falls through.

Contacted about the

uncertainty over Teesta deal, a foreign ministry official said, "We are not formally informed about the developments. This is about their internal politics. We are still hopeful about the deals. In fact, we have prepared our final papers and waiting for those to be signed."

The deal on Teesta, which originates in Sikkim and flows through the northern part of West Bengal before entering Bangladesh, was a big-ticket item on the agenda of Manmohan's visit.

The Indian sources said Mamata is apprehensive of the political fall-out from the Teesta accord in the northern districts of West Bengal state, where people are already upset over her government's signing of an agreement with Gorkha outfits for an autonomous body to run Darjeeling hill

areas. She fears the Teesta deal might aggravate the drought and flood situations in six northern districts.

It is also understood that Mamata has got a wind of the possibility that her main rival the Left Front was preparing for street agitation if she gives consent to the 50,000 cusecs of water to Bangladesh.

Besides, she is aiming to make political inroads in northern parts of West Bengal, traditionally a bastion of her coalition partner Congress party, to expand Trinamool Congress' political and electoral base there.

Protecting and expanding political turf appear to be more important to Mamata than any diplomatic initiative by the federal Indian government, added the sources.



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