

## Hazare leaves Mumbai for home town

PTI, Mumbai

Anti-corruption crusader Anna Hazare, who called off his two-day fast here for a strong Lokpal Bill due to failing health and poor public response, yesterday left for his native Ralegan Siddhi village. Hazare called off the fast on Wednesday and spent the night at the Maharashtra government's guest house in suburban Bandra and left Mumbai this morning, his associate Datta Awari said. The 74-year-old social activist has been advised rest by the doctors, he said. The Gandhian would be accorded a warm welcome by villagers when he reaches his native later in the day, Awari added. Hazare's three-day fast here came to a surprise end on Wednesday, a day ahead of schedule, amid concerns over his failing health and poor public response.

## Congress fails to get

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chamber filed 187 proposed amendments to the law, Bansal told lawmakers. Singh's government had invested large political capital in passing the so-called Lokpal Bill before the end of the year, insisting they would press ahead with a vote in the upper chamber despite their shaky position. "You must support this bill for the sake of the nation," Congress spokesman Abhishek Singhvi told opponents in parliament. "You want to pretend that you want to have a strong Lokpal bill (but) you are not doing any constructive debate," he added. "You are opposing for the sake of opposing." Arun Jaitley, leader of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led attacks on the government throughout the day and

accused it of being scared and deliberately preventing a vote on the bill because it faced defeat. "The government of today is running away from this house because it is in a hopeless minority," he told lawmakers to cheers from his own benches. The anti-corruption law has been one of the biggest political issues in India for months, the subject of an angry wrangle between the government, the opposition and civil society activists. Anti-corruption campaigner Anna Hazare captured the public's imagination in August when he staged a 12-day hunger strike to demand a strong law to stamp out endemic corruption in Indian public life. The independent ombudsman will have powers to investigate and

prosecute public officials, but the debate has been over which state officials will come under his remit and his autonomy to pursue them. Hazare tapped into widespread anger over an Indian graft culture fed by a series of high-profile scandals involving ministers in Singh's cabinet and senior figures in the Congress party. His latest campaign demanding that the draft law be toughened further was called to a halt on Wednesday with the frail 74-year-old drawing small crowds in Mumbai amid concerns about his health. Asked if the law would be taken up in the next session of parliament in 2012, Law Minister Salman Khurshid told NDTV television: "I hope that it will. I expect that it will."

## Rajuk fails to act

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researchers on urban issues. The government does not have a specific plan for urbanisation, said Syeda Rizwana Hasan, executive director of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, adding it has instead ruined the existing plan. There has not been even a routine attempt to recover the city's parks and playgrounds from unauthorised occupation, she said. The prospect of a livable Dhaka city turned bleak after the implementation of Dap was put under a ministerial committee. Real estate businessmen with political connections misled the prime minister into forming such a committee to slow down planned development as per Dap, said Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, who headed the Dap finalisation body. Abdul Mannan Khan, state minister for housing and public works, said the ministerial committee is not an obstacle to Dap imple-

mentation. Regarding widespread grabbing of wetlands for illegal housing projects, he said, "We will not approve these projects." Dap has identified in details every structure, lake, canal, wetland, water retention pond, road, open space, place of worship and all other topographical features of the city. It has also discouraged unauthorised land use. It has recommended reclamation of more than 2,500 acres of flood flow zones and agricultural land from the grip of unauthorised housing projects, relocation of 2,724 factories and scrapping 16 public and private projects. Of the 1,528-square kilometre Rajuk area, 32 per cent has been earmarked for flood flow zones and wetlands. In June this year, the High Court declared a total of 77 private housing projects illegal for violation of master plan, wetland and environment conservation laws and private housing develop-

ment rules. The court asked Rajuk to remove signboards and earth filling at those projects and stop sale of plots. But Rajuk has only knocked down the billboards. Rajuk has made some patchy attempts to rectify negligible building code deviations by ordinary owners, but failed to take effective actions against the powerful who have built many skyscrapers even without approval. The 18-storey Premier Square, 22-storey Jabbar Tower, 25-storey Doreen Tower, 15-storey Bulu's Tower and 15-storey Natore Tower either lack approval or have gone two or three times beyond the approved height or grossly violated building construction rules. Though Rajuk is trying to enforce the amended building construction rules, it lacks adequate manpower and mechanism to ensure an effective enforcement. The compliance with Bangladesh National Building Code was made

legally-binding five years back. But the government's failure to designate building officials to enforce it left the construction and demolition work in disarray. Suhel Ahmed Choudhury, former housing and public works secretary, said at an international seminar on urbanisation recently that Rajuk has ever been busy with plot development as a housing agency. Widespread corruption and incompetence have weakened Rajuk, he said. Urbanisation experts have said time and again Rajuk must give up its plot development and housing business and instead concentrate on regulating development. But the government paid no heed to their views. It is instead working on only boosting Rajuk's manpower, ignoring experts' plea that it should be reformed and turned into a trust comprising professionals, public representatives and civil society members.

## War criminals must be tried

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of the allied parties to launch a door-to-door hunt to catch the collaborators. Leaders, workers and supporters present at the rally swore an oath administered by Sajeda, who is also deputy leader of the House and coordinator of her party-led 14-party coalition now in a grand alliance along with Jatiya Party. "We are taking an oath to the effect that the way in which we defeated the Pakistan occupation force after forging unity regardless of religion, race and colour under the directive of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and gained independence, is the same way in which we will safeguard our freedom. "And we will try the war criminals who committed genocide, rape and crimes against humanity during the Liberation War. We will root out militancy and fundamentalism from the country, and establish democracy under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Bangabandhu, and build a developed Sonar Bangla as dreamt by Bangabandhu." Announcing torch processions to be organised in districts and upazilas across the country on January 7 and 11, she said, "As part of the programmes, we also will salute those who were tortured during the war of independence."

The crucial rally was arranged in front of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, blocking the busy Matsya Bhaban-Shahbagh road, although Suhrawardy Udyan had earlier been fixed as the venue. The huge gathering caused a gridlock in the area and other parts of the capital for hours, causing immense suffering to people. Tens of thousands of leaders, workers and supporters of the grand alliance joined the rally, which began at 2:30pm. The road from Katabon intersection to Matsya Bhaban turned into a human sea. Addressing the rally, various leaders of the grand alliance leaders said nothing could stop the trial which is the core demand of the nation. The people will be agitating on the streets until the last collaborator is brought to book. AL leader Amir Hossain Amu said the people of Bangladesh, who by responding to the call of Bangabandhu had fought against the Pakistan occupation force in 1971 for independence, would be united again on the issue of the war

crimes trial. He alleged that BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia had become the spokesperson of communal and anti-liberation forces by siding with them. Tofail Ahmed, another party veteran, alleged that BNP-Jamaat had resorted to bomb blasts and vandalism to thwart the war crimes trial. "But no power in the world can foil the trial once it has got underway on this soil." Suranjit Sengupta, advisory council member of the party and minister for railways, said the nation would never allow the opposition to foil the war crimes trial. AL Presidium Member and agriculture minister Matia Chowdhury, however, assured the crowd that BNP-Jamaat would not be able to hinder the trial through bomb attacks or any other kind of violence. Mahbulul Alam Hanif, AL's acting general secretary, said the whole nation was now in favour of the trial. Holding war crimes trial was one of the main election pledges of the Awami League. The government formally started the trial after forming International

Crimes Tribunal on March 25 last year, 15 months after the alliance took office. Rashed Khan Menon, president, Workers Party of Bangladesh, said 40 years into independence, the nation notes that the anti-liberation remnants are still conspiring against the pro-liberation forces. Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haque Inu said after the top-listed war criminals were arrested Khaleda Zia announced her intention of protecting them. This is a bad sign for the country, democracy and the spirit of the Liberation War. Samyabadi Dal General Secretary and industry minister Dilip Barua said the country's politics was clearly divided now that the BNP had adopted a clear stance in favour of the war criminals. AL leaders Abdul Latif Siddiqui, Sahara Khatun and Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya Jatiya Party's Mujib-ul-Haque Chunnun and Nurur Rahman Selim of Ganatantri Party also spoke at the rally chaired by the acting president of Dhaka city AL, MA Aziz.

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