

## LAND BOUNDARY BILL

## Congress opposes exclusion of Assam

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's main opposition Congress yesterday opposed the BJP government's move to keep northeastern Indian state of Assam out of implementation of the Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh.

Sources said Congress, at a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee of the Rajya Sabha, conveyed to the government that it will oppose the bill unless Assam is included in the deal.

The constitution amendment bill aimed at operationalising the LBA was expected to be placed at the Rajya Sabha next week.

"How can you keep Assam out of it [the LBA]? The [Congress] government of Assam was in favour of the bill. Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi had even accompanied Prime Minister Manmohan Singh when he had visited Bangladesh in September, 2011 to sign an enabling agreement to implement the LBA.

"This is weird that even as the government of the state is in favour of the agreement, it is being kept out because the opposition party [BJP in Assam] there does not want it," a senior Congress functionary said.

Sources said the bill has been deferred for the time being with Congress opposing tooth and nail the exclusion of Assam from the ambit of the LBA.

Indian Parliamentary Affairs Minister M Venkai Naidu had said on Wednesday that the bill will be placed in the Rajya Sabha on May 5, the first day of the last week of the budget session, with the important change by keeping Assam out of it.

The BJP wants to exclude Assam

from the deal due to sensitivities in the state where BJP aspires have chances to come to power through assembly polls due early next year.

The BJP unit in Assam has opposed the exchange of enclaves between Bangladesh and India involving the territory of Assam since the party fears LBA implementation by including the state will have adverse impact on its electoral prospects in Assam.

A senior Congress functionary said, "The LBA was our bill. We had championed but why to remove Assam? We have told the government to bring the bill only after including Assam into its purview. Otherwise, we will oppose it.

"Earlier, the bill could not be brought because Mamata Banerjee was opposing it. Now when she has come on board, the BJP has excluded Assam whose government was already on board on the issue. We will not allow this," he said.

The leader also said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said at a rally in Assam in December last year that he was in favour of the land swap deal but its state unit opposed it.

The Indo-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement involves Assam, West Bengal, Tripura and Meghalaya in India.

Meanwhile, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee yesterday said she had given her consent to the LBA with Bangladesh during her discussion on the issue with External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj.

"The bill on the proposed LBA is likely to be moved in the parliament on May 5. I have already cleared it giving my consent, but with some conditions," Mamata told reporters in Kolkata.

## Cry for food, shelter

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hundreds in the makeshift encampment fear they will be stuck here much longer.

Sturdy military tents ring the outside of Ratna Park, but no such structure exists within the middle of the field. Here there are just tarps and bamboo poles.

Inside, families have set up propane tanks and stoves to cook whatever food they have. They pass the time however they can, knowing they have no home to which they can return.

Some homes were destroyed in the earthquake. Others suffered structural damage and are effectively unliveable.

As international aid trickles into Nepal, the citizens of Tent City wait for it to make its way to them.

Many have lost faith in their own government to provide help and food. Instead, they believe their best hope lies with the supplies and aid pouring in from overseas.

Children play cricket or soccer in open areas of the park offering a bit of laughter at time of great difficulty. Their parents, meanwhile, wonder where the next meal will come from. And when it will come.

Aircraft loaded with tents are expected from India and Thailand in the next day, he said, with another 100,000 tents expected from Pakistan.

Two UNICEF flights arrived Wednesday with supplies such as water-purification tablets, family hygiene kits and tents and tarps.

UNICEF Regional Communication Advisor Jean-Jacques Simon said the supplies "are desperately needed by those living in camps, and other areas in Kathmandu, the Kathmandu Valley and in hard-to-reach remote areas, where UNICEF plans to distribute the items as soon as possible."

The United Nations has said the quake has affected 8 million people across 39 districts.

Rijal said 21 helicopters, including seven provided by India, were helping in the rescue and relief efforts, with 866 people rescued by air and a little more



Nepalese police personnel carry Pemba Tamang, 15, on a stretcher after his rescue from a destroyed hotel building in Kathmandu on April 30, 2015, bringing a rare moment of joy to the earthquake-hit city. Story on page 9. PHOTO: AFP

than 1,000 rescued using land transport.

As rescue workers seek to reach people who desperately need help, the weather is making things worse.

Heavy rain has intensified the hardships for the countless Nepalis who are sleeping out in the open because their homes were destroyed or they don't feel safe inside buildings amid continuing aftershocks.

At Tundhikal Park, known now as Tent City, the crowds are thinning, but it's not necessarily a sign of improvement.

On Wednesday, some had enough of sleeping huddled in a tent and were readying to return to their houses. That's the correct term -- houses; they were no longer homes, no longer places of sanctuary.

US President Barack Obama called Prime Minister Sushil Koirala on

Wednesday to express condolences, the White House said. This is the first time Obama has spoken with the Prime Minister since Saturday's first earthquake.

Obama and he talked about disaster response efforts and Obama pledged that the United States "will do all that it can to help the people of Nepal in their time of need," the White House said.

## VITAL SUPPLIES

In the district of Gorkha, where the magnitude-7.8 quake was centered, a large storm rumbled over the mountainous terrain Tuesday afternoon.

"That essentially shut down helicopter missions for the entire afternoon, except for a small window before sunset," Matt Darvas, an emergency communications officer for the humanitarian group World Vision, told CNN on Wednesday. He's currently in the main town in Gorkha.

But signs of improvement can be found.

Outside the walls of Ranta Park's tent city, the streets are beginning to come back to life. Small groups work together to clear sidewalks and roads of rubble after the earthquake. Cars and motorbikes buzz down the streets, while shops reopen for business. Street vendors are out once again.

But Ranta Park is still a grim place. There are few signs of activity here, as families wait for some change in the status quo.

**MAKESHIFT FIELD HOSPITAL**  
Some 5,489 people were confirmed dead as of yesterday morning as a result of the massive earthquake, with another 11,440 injured, Nepal's National Emergency Coordination Center told CNN. Officials have warned the death toll is expected to rise.

## Decoration of Zia's grave vandalised

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified miscreants damaged the decoration of the grave of BNP founder and late president Ziaur Rahman at the Chandrima Udyan in the city's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

Police said the incident might have happened sometime Wednesday night.

Several Ansar members, who were supposed to guard the grave area around the clock, could not say anything about the incident.

"We are yet to ascertain who vandalised the tomb decoration and when," said Gopal Ganesh Biswas, officer-in-charge of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station.

The OC, however, added that police detained five Ansar men, who were on guard on the tomb premises on Wednesday night, for interrogation.

Mizanur Rahman, a sweeper appointed by the BNP, said he spotted 11 damaged marble plates of the surrounding design of the tomb when he went there around 6:00am, and informed BNP leaders.

The round-shaped tomb had 124 pieces of marble plates on it, Mizanur said.

Shawkat, an Ansar member who watches over the grave area during the

day, told this correspondent that two Ansar members constantly guard the grave in rotation. They change shifts every eight hours.

BNP International Affairs Secretary Asaduzzaman Ripon demanded immediate arrest of the culprits. He also urged the government to ensure the security of all establishments across the country.

"It is not only a security threat to Zia's grave, it is also a threat to the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban as it is close to the grave. The government should take the issue seriously," Ripon said.

Housing and Public Works Minister Engineer Mosharraf Hossain said they would take actions against those responsible for the vandalism after investigation.

"I have already asked the PWD [Public Works Department] authorities to form a probe body in this regard," the minister said, adding that the ministry would replace the marble as soon as possible.

On May 30, 1981, Ziaur Rahman, who was a sector commander during the Liberation War in 1971, was assassinated by a group of army officers at Chittagong Circuit House. He was initially buried at Rangunia upazila in Chittagong, but his body was later moved to Dhaka.

## Chaos over mobile court

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Witnesses said Dhaka North City Corporation Magistrate SM Mahbubur Rahman, who led the drive, was surrounded by traders and a scuffle had broken out between the police and traders. The magistrate issued the order to open fire.

Traders of the market, owned by the city corporation, alleged that the magistrate with the policemen launched the drive around 11:00am and started to fine shops for "hanging goods in a disorderly manner" and "keeping chairs outside the shops".

A group of traders, including the market's traders' association general secretary Mahmud Hasan Azad, had approached the magistrate and protested. They also questioned the legality of the drive and wanted to see if the magistrate had permission for the drive.

They alleged that the magistrate got infuriated by this and censured Azad. The traders too were furious at this and a scuffle with the law enforcers ensued.

"At one stage, the magistrate ordered police to open fire at the traders," said Mohammad Milon, a shop owner.

Among the injured, Alamgir Hossain, Jamal Hossain, Mintu Sarker and Abdul Halim were undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital while the others received treatment at Kurmitola General Hospital and other hospitals. Halim was moved to DMCH from Kurmitola hospital.

The shop owners claimed that the mobile court drive was launched as the



Bullet injuries on the back of trader Halim, who was shot apparently from close range by police in Banani Super Market yesterday. The magistrate who had ordered police to open fire claimed that pellets from shots fired in the air could have landed on the trader's back. The photo was taken at Kurmitola General Hospital.

traders did not pay the magistrate illegal toll. They also claimed that the magistrate used to collect the toll through three agents.

BM Enamul Haque, chief executive officer of the DNCC, said the magistrate along with some policemen went there to evict structures erected illegally inside the market.

Being attacked and besieged by the shop owners and employees, police were forced to fire in self defence, he claimed.

Magistrate SM Mahbubur Rahman said he asked the traders beforehand to clear illegal structures erected under and around the staircases, blocking the stairs.

"Visiting there I asked the traders to remove the illegal structures, but instead of complying, Azad told me off and rushed towards the police," he said. Traders instigated by Azad also threatened him of confinement, he added.

The magistrate also alleged that when they came out, the traders threw brick chunks at him and the police, leaving three policemen injured. It was then he ordered firing shots in the air, Mahbubur claimed.

Azad vehemently denied the allegations made by the magistrate.

When magistrate Mahbubur's attention was drawn to an injured trader, who had more than 100 pellets in his back suggesting he was shot from close range, Mahbubur's shocking reply was that the pellets of a shot fired in the air might have fallen on the traders back.

He outright denied the allegation of collecting toll.

Officer-in-Charge of Banani Police Station Bhuiyan Mahabub Hasan said shots were fired after the traders attacked the magistrate when the mobile court went on a drive to evict illegal structures.

## CITY ELECTION

## ASK worried at media facing obstruction

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ain O Salish Kendra has expressed grave concern over the media reports on journalists facing obstruction from the pro-ruling party men at different polling centres during Tuesday's city polls.

In a press release yesterday, the rights group also demanded that the Election Commission and the government investigate the instances of violence, booth capture, intimidation of polling agents and voters.

"These incidents have put a negative impact on democracy and democratic ruling system, which is certainly not desirable," said the release signed by its Executive Director Sultana Kamal.

On the other hand, BNP's early boycott was undesirable. They had the opportunity to create public opinion against rigging and raise specific allegations of irregularities in the voting process, it said.

Referring to different media reports, ASK said the allegations of irregularities had been raised during the city corporation polls at different polling centres.

Issuing threats to the polling agents by the law enforcers, barring the agents from going to the centres, facilitating the activists of the pro-ruling party, attacking journalists and creating obstruction for voters and journalists allegedly happened on the polling day, it said.

## Are we doomed to flawed polls?

FROM PAGE 1

election two days, remained immaculately confined to files.

Two instances - one dealing with Khaleda Zia's motorcade and the other with deployment of the army - were the final straws that broke the EC's 'Credibility' camel's back. Issuing election code violation notice against Khaleda Zia focusing only on the number of cars in her motorcade and ignoring the fact of the attack on her personal vehicle and on some of her security personnel were indeed as one sided as one could get. Even if it was a "staged drama" as claimed by the government, the EC should have investigated and reprimanded the BNP chief for doing so. Ignoring such an event widely covered by the media further dipped the EC's credibility.

The EC's u-turn on army deployment and decision to confine them to their respective cantonments stood in stark contrast to the practices in previous elections. As we saw later they were never called though there were many instances of violence. In fact the whole affair was left only to the police, whose active role in electoral malpractice has been elaborately highlighted in both the electronic and print media.

The fact that Awami League was never interested in a truly free and fair and well contested election was evi-

dent early by its use of police to harass the opposition candidates in every way possible.

Awami League got a godsend to hit out against its perennial opponent when BNP invited on itself severe criticism and widespread and justifiable public condemnation by its use of violence during its anti-government agitation in the January-March period. Their mindless calling of hartals and nearly three months long 'oborodh' (siege), especially its indiscriminate use of petrol bombs on bus passengers significantly destroyed its reputation as a democratic political party. This gave the ruling party the perfect chance to use the legal system to arrest and 'put on the run' thousands of BNP leaders and workers and use police to keep most of them out of the campaigning process. BNP's mayoral candidate for South Dhaka could not campaign for a single day due to fear of arrest.

The provision of 'unnamed assailants' while lodging FIRs gives police the scope to put anybody's name in an act of arson, petrol bombing, or other forms of violence. This was successfully used to intimidate BNP activists and local enthusiasts of the opposition and keep them away from the election.

The case of Mahmudur Rahman Manna is illustrative of how Sheikh

Hasina's government used the state machinery against its real or potential opponents. Manna's intention to contest in the mayoral polls was well known. He was building up his own support base towards it and was sending out feelers to all and sundry, including the BNP, for possible support.

With his Awami League pedigree and profile as an effective and successful former Chhatra League and DUCSU leader along with possible opposition support, he hoped to provide a credible alternative to the future AL mayoral contender.

His 'potentiality' did him in. Early alarm bells went off and the government's formidable coercive machinery was set in motion to 'destroy' his reputation and his political future. The way he was removed from the scene and his political career made controversial along with the physical hardship he was subjected to through an unheard of 20 days 'remand' for a politician, all on the basis of an illegally 'taped' telephone conversation, speaks volumes about the political situation prevailing for anybody who wanted to represent the opposition camp.

The 'disappearance' of the BNP spokesman Salahuddin Ahmed, taken by a group who claimed to belong to the law enforcement establishment,

according to two witnesses who said they saw how he was taken, sent shivers through the spines of all BNP leaders, more so among the grass roots workers, most of whom do not have any way to survive any police or legal onslaught.

As for our final conclusion, we are clear in our mind that BNP was never interested in going the whole hog with the polls and their boycott decision was predetermined.

As the final vote tally shows BNP had some real chance to pull off a miracle like the recent Sri Lankan election, though ours was not a national one. But either through an unthinking reaction or due to immaturity or due to, what we believe to be the case, a decision taken earlier, Khaleda Zia decided to boycott the polls mid-stream. This we think was a grave error and gave the ruling Awami League a walkover much like that of January 5, 2014.

Analysing the numbers proves our point. The combined total votes obtained by AL-backed mayoral candidates is 14.70 lakh which for BNP-backed candidates stand at 9.24 lakh. It is logical to assume that bulk, if not all, of the votes for BNP was cast by 12 noon, before it announced its withdrawal. So within the first four hours in Dhaka and about three plus hours in

Chittagong - out of an eight hour polling day - BNP was able to get what amounted to 35% of total votes cast as against 55% for AL, the latter's coming from a full eight hour period of polling.

This happened in spite of a near absence of polling agents of BNP backed candidates in both Dhaka and Chittagong. Begum Zia's appeal for a "silent" response appears to have been in progress when suddenly the plug was pulled out of a process that had the potential for a surprise.

We conclude by repeating a question that our prime minister has asked, why should anybody vote for BNP? After all it was BNP-Jamaat agitation that left nearly a hundred dead and several hundred injured from petrol bombs thrown into running buses. How can people forget about the months of destructive 'oborodh' and now almost fully abandoned but nevertheless disrupting 'hartals'?

We think the PM's questions are well merited and we echo them.

Could the answer be that these votes are not in support of BNP but to protest the way the country is being run now? Could these be protest votes of which Bangladesh has a very long tradition? To dismiss this as a mere anti-government rhetoric would be a fatal mistake.