

# A milestone

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the two countries.  
"Through the passage of the bill, the commitment of two great leaders of the region as well as the world -- Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Shrimati Indira Gandhi -- has been materialised," she said.  
Hasina said this in her immediate reaction after India's Lok Sabha passed the constitution amendment bill to implement the historic agreement with Bangladesh, PM's Press Secretary AKM Shamim Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

She extended her sincere greetings to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on her own behalf, the government and the people of Bangladesh for the passage of the historic bill in the Lok Sabha.  
"India has been a trusted friend of Bangladesh. India always stood beside Bangladesh during its bad times and is still with its neighbour," Hasina said.

She also extended her sincere congratulation to Indian President Pranab Mukherjee, Opposition Leader Sonia Gandhi, Indian government, members of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha as well as the people and administration of India for the passage of the bill.

Hasina, also chief of the ruling Awami League, hoped that the friendly relations between the two countries would be strengthened day by day.  
The PM congratulated the enclave people from both sides, saying that their longstanding dreams had come true.

She also directed the law enforcement agencies to ensure security and welfare of the enclave people.

UNB adds: Earlier at a meeting with senior officials of the home ministry at the Bangladesh Secretariat, Hasina described the passing of LBA by India's Rajya Sabha a huge diplomatic success for Bangladesh.

She also thanked all those involved in the process.

"The much-awaited LBA Bill was passed in Rajya Sabha unanimously on Wednesday. I think it's a huge diplomatic success for us," she said.

Highlighting the background for initiative for the passage of the bill, Hasina said no step was taken about the issue until Bangladesh's independence since partition of Bengal.

It was Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who first took the initiative after the independence to settle the long-pending boundary dispute between the two countries, she said.

But after Bangabandhu's assassination, the process was stalled and no subsequent governments took any measures to that end, the PM told the meeting.

"The post-75 governments did not take any initiative for resolving any pending issues with India whether it was LBA or maritime boundary dispute," she said.

The PM also said those governments only scolded the Awami League government accusing it of "selling off the country".

"But in fact they did not take any initiative for protecting the hard-earned independence and sovereignty of the nation," Hasina said.

She also said the Awami League government, after taking office in 1996, had taken steps to resolve the pending issues with India and other neighbouring countries.

"But the process got stalled again when the BNP-Jamaat alliance came to power in 2001 as they didn't say anything about maritime and land boundaries," she said.

# Modi's maiden

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The premier has been "eagerly waiting" to visit Dhaka, said the diplomat.

"He [Modi] made a commitment to visit Dhaka after resolving at least one of the two major pending issues -- Land Boundary Agreement and Teesta water sharing deal. As the LBA is done now, his visit to Bangladesh is confirmed."

However, another source in Dhaka said Modi would be visiting Dhaka by the second week of June.

The Indian PM's visit to Bangladesh will contribute positively to Indo-Bangla relations, said an Indian diplomat in Dhaka. Modi has already visited Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka in South Asia.

Officials in Bangladesh and India said both the governments were working to find a mutually convenient time for Modi's trip to Dhaka.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina first invited Modi to visit Bangladesh when she phoned her opposite number on May 18 last year to congratulate him on his party's victory in the national election.

Later that month, she wrote a letter to Modi inviting him to tour Bangladesh.

The Indian premier in a letter to Hasina in the following month said he accepted the invitation. He also invited Hasina to visit India.

Modi in March this year wrote another letter to his Bangladesh counterpart. Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar handed over the letter to Hasina on March 2.

India's Rajya Sabha on Wednesday passed the landmark constitution amendment bill to ratify the long-pending LBA with Bangladesh.

# All clear for land swap

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relating to the Teesta river.  
"The way in which we are now settling the land boundary issue, we will try to settle this issue also," she said.  
Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Syed Muazzem Ali, who watched the debate and the bill's passage in the Lok Sabha, told The Daily Star later that Dhaka is expecting a visit by the Indian PM in the first week of next month.

He, however, hastened to add that no date was finalised yet.

Talking to Hasina after the bill's passage, Modi said the LBA "would contribute to a stable and peaceful boundary, better management and coordination of the border and will lead to enhanced security as well."

Modi, who posted a number of messages on Twitter, said, "Today a historic milestone has been reached in India-Bangladesh relations after the passing of the Constitutional Amendment by Parliament."

"This reflects the collective will of the nation to build constructive relations with our neighbours", he said in a separate post.

On Wednesday, the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of the Indian parliament, passed the bill unanimously.

The bonhomie among India's ruling BJP and opposition parties over the LBA was evident in the fact that not a single "no" vote was cast when the bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha.

The bill aims at giving effect to acquisition of territories by India and transfer of territories to Bangladesh and exchange of enclaves in line with the 1974 agreement.

The territories in Assam, West Bengal, Tripura and Meghalaya come under the ambit of the bill.

In Bangladesh, territories in Nilphamari, Feni, Moulvibazar, Kushtia and Panchagarh come under the domain of the pact.

During the nearly three-hour debate on the bill in the Lok Sabha, Sushma Swaraj said it was beneficial for both the countries, and that there would be a "notional" loss of territory without borders getting contracted.

She said India would get 510 acres of land while Bangladesh will receive 10,000 acres. "But these are notional figures as these areas are deep inside

territories of the two countries. Our borders are not getting contracted."

She was responding to members' questions whether India will lose some territory.

Swaraj said the measure, apart from demarcating the boundaries, would also help check illegal immigration.

"A solution to the problem of illegal immigration is inherent in this legislation. With the land border now being decided [with the passage of the bill], the portions where there is no fencing will also get fenced," she said.

The maritime boundary between India and Bangladesh was settled last year through an international tribunal.

Refuting allegations of India's "big brotherly" attitude towards its South Asian neighbours, Swaraj said, "One is 'big brother' which symbolises arrogance. But there is also the 'elder brother' who is caring. Ours is a caring attitude. India will maintain the attitude of the 'elder brother' with our neighbours."

Swaraj made references to the 1974 LBA signed by Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and its protocol inked during former Indian PM Manmohan Singh's Bangladesh visit in 2011 to pave the way for exchange of Bangladeshi and Indian territorial enclaves.

The Indian external affairs minister said she has been "transparent" in stating that her party BJP was earlier opposed to the bill. It was primarily because of concerns that Assam's interests would be adversely affected.

She said Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, who had earlier expressed some reservations on similar lines, wrote to the PM and her, urging the Centre to include the clauses relating to the state.

**BNP'S REACTION**  
Meanwhile, the BNP last night thanked Modi, his government, and leaders of the political parties that played a vital role in the passage of the LBA bill.

Briefing journalists at party's Nayapaltn central office, BNP Spokesperson Asaduzzaman Ripon claimed Bangladesh would lose around 500 acres of land once the agreement is implemented. He, however, didn't elaborate on his claim.

Asked, he said the party would come up with details after going through the deal.

# Britain votes

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majority in the 650-seat parliament.

However, the surveys suggested there had been some late movement towards Labour.

"This race is going to be the closest we have ever seen," Miliband told supporters in Pendle, northern England, on the eve of the vote. "It is going to go down to the wire."

Cameron said only his Conservatives could deliver strong, stable government: "All other options will end in chaos," he insisted.

The Conservatives portray themselves as the party of jobs and economic recovery, promising to reduce income tax for 30 million people while forcing through further spending cuts to eliminate a budget deficit still running at 5 percent of GDP.

Labour says it would cut the deficit each year, raise income tax for the highest 1 percent of earners and defend the interests of hard-pressed working families and Britain's treasured but financially stretched National Health Service.

"I think Labour is best for the good of the whole country. The Conservatives have cut spending too much," said student Abi Samuel at a polling station in Edinburgh's well-heeled New Town.

Retiree Robert McCairley said it had been a messy campaign.

"What disappoints me is that there was too much on the National Health Service, hospitals and schools but not enough on the deficit - no one showed us the figures," he said.

If neither party wins an overall majority, talks will begin on Friday with smaller parties in a race to strike deals.

That could lead to a formal coalition, like the one Cameron has led for the past five years with the centrist Liberal Democrats, or it could produce a fragile minority government making trade-offs to guarantee support on key votes.

Britain's top share index fell to a one-month low over the election uncertainty although there was no expectation of any significant sell-off.

The pound was slightly weaker but the short-term cost of protection against swings in the pound jumped to multi-year highs.

Opinion polls released yesterday showed the outcome was still too close to call and that turnout would be higher than in recent elections.

An ICM poll had Labour taking a one percentage point lead, and a survey by Lord Ashcroft had the two main parties tied, with Labour wiping out a two-point lead by the Conservatives recorded earlier this week.

An Ipsos MORI poll for the London Evening Standard had the Conservatives one point ahead, down from a five-point lead the party held a week ago, while Populus also had the

parties level.

Leading pollster Peter Kellner of YouGov has predicted the Conservatives will end up with 284 seats to Labour's 263, with the Scottish National Party (SNP) on 48, Liberal Democrats 31, the anti-European Union UK Independence Party (UKIP) two, Greens one, and Welsh and Northern Irish parties 21.

If that proves correct, both the two big parties would need support from at least two smaller ones to get laws through parliament, as the SNP has ruled out any deal with Cameron.

If a durable government could not be formed, Britain could face political instability. When no clear winner emerged in the elections of 1974 and 1923, another election was held within a year - but a law passed four years ago now makes it much harder to hold a second vote within the 5-year parliamentary term.

A two-thirds majority of lawmakers must approve a motion for an early election or a vote of no confidence in the government.

The fractured polls show Britain's post-World War Two political consensus -- which saw the Conservatives and Labour take turns in government -- is crumbling as once-marginal parties in Scotland and England steal millions of votes.

Scottish nationalists, who lost an independence referendum last September, are likely to win the lion's share of seats in Scotland, capturing dozens from Labour, and making Miliband's chances of winning an overall majority much slimmer.

In England, UKIP has courted Conservative and Labour voters but is likely to damage Cameron's chances of a majority most, despite the Prime Minister promising an in-out referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union by the end of 2017 in an attempt to reassure Conservative voters considering straying.

Any referendum is likely to damage the City of London's standing as a global financial centre and unsettle markets.

Cameron has warned that Miliband will only be able to rule with the help of the SNP, a result he says could place the United Kingdom in peril.

Miliband has ruled out doing a deal with the nationalists, despite their overtures to form an alliance against the Conservatives.

If Cameron fails to win a majority, he could try to strike a deal with the Liberal Democrats, a repeat of the 2010 coalition, and possibly also with Northern Irish unionists and UKIP.

Polls opened at 0600 GMT for the United Kingdom's 48 million voters and close at 2100 GMT. An exit poll will be published as soon as polls close, and most results are expected in the early hours of today.

# Kabiguru's

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That is the genius of Rabindranath. Spoken decades ago, these words remain relevant today when religious fanaticism is taking a firm root across the globe.

And the variedness of creation, of individuality, ceaseless and unending, is what he left for us in his lifelong works in the form of songs, poems, novels, short stories, plays, essays and what not. His "profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verses" speak for themselves and have stood, and will perhaps forever stand, the test of time.

But Rabindranath is not all about his elegant prose and magical poetry. He is part of our everyday life, mundane and spiritual. This mystic is omnipresent, through his verses, in our joy and sorrow, in merriment and mourning.

He is for every day. Yet there is something special about today, the 25th Baishakh. For 154 years ago on this day he made his first mark upon the earth and never ceased to do so as long as he lived.

It is not for nothing that Bangalees across the world today celebrate the bard's 154th birth anniversary. Rabindranath became even more pertinent to Bangalees when in 1971 his "Amar Sonar Bangla" stirred up their political awareness and added substance to the Liberation War. The song was later made our national anthem in 1972.

In homage to the Nobel laureate, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will lay the foundation of Rabindra Biswabidyalay at Sirajganj district's Shahzadpur, once a Tagore family estate. The poet had the responsibility to look after the estate himself and visited it many times.

Just like Shilaidah in Kushtia, another former estate of the Tagores, Shahzadpur takes on a festive look on every birth anniversary of the poet. This year, the foundation laying of the university will add flavour to the festivity.

"People in this region had been demanding a Rabindra University at Shahzadpur Kuthibari for long. Our demand is finally being met," Nasim Uddin Malitha, a renowned Tagore researcher, told the Daily Star.

# Rajshahi

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The circular mentioned that Bulbul was charged in three cases, and as the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court accepted the charge sheets, the ministry temporarily removed Bulbul under section 12(1) of the Local Government (City Corporation) Act, 2009.

According to the section, the government can temporarily remove mayors or councillors after a court accepted charge sheets against him/her in criminal cases.

Bulbul was accused in 10 criminal cases, including the murder of police constable Siddhartha Sarker. Three of the cases were filed for allegedly giving orders to throw petrol bombs at passenger buses during the BNP-led alliance's blockades.

M Azar Ali, CEO of RCC, yesterday confirmed The Daily Star that he got the ministry order signed by Local Government Division Senior Assistant Secretary Jashim Uddin Haider.

The circular asked the CEO to execute the order within three working days.

Sources in the LGRD ministry said the ministry suspended the mayor following a report submitted by the Special Branch of police in the last week of April. The report mentioned that charge sheets against Bulbul were accepted by court, the sources added.

Earlier on March 1, the Police Headquarters forwarded a letter of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) to the home ministry requesting it to inform the Local Government Division to suspend Bulbul for his alleged involvement in crimes/criminal cases.

Bulbul, Rajshahi city unit Jubo Dal convener, was elected mayor in June 2013. He is currently on the run.

# Nepal quake leaves a million children without classrooms

AFP, Kathmandu

The Nepal earthquake has left almost a million children without classrooms, the UN children's agency said yesterday, calling for urgent action to repair damaged schools and set up temporary learning spaces.

UNICEF said almost 24,000 classrooms were damaged or destroyed in the 7.8-magnitude quake that hit the country on April 25 and many suffered further damage in the aftershocks that have followed.

# 'Offence' same

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A local AL leader, Hossain is now in a Kolkata jail.

He could have been sacked for two other reasons. Earlier on September 30 last year, he was sentenced to one year's imprisonment by a Narayanganj court for keeping wild animals illegally.

He was absent in at least 10 general meetings of Narayanganj City Corporation.

According to the Local Government (City Corporation) Act, 2009, any elected representative can be removed from office for skipping three consecutive general meetings without any logical ground.

As per Section 12 and 13 of the act, a mayor or councillor, if convicted or charge-sheeted in criminal cases, can be suspended.

Chatail upazila chairman and local AL leader Nazrul Islam Khan was given one year's jail sentence by a Tangail court on March 11 for occupying and destroying forest. Later on the same day, he was granted bail to have a chance to appeal before a higher court.

He is still in office and discharging his duties.

Shahidur Rahman Khan, Tangail Sadar municipality mayor and local AL leader, was allegedly involved in the murder of AL leader Faruk Ahmed. Two of the accused in the case in their confession statement named Shahidur.

Since November last year, he has been in hiding after taking leave in two phases -- first for three months and then for 45 days.

His leave ended on April 8.

Talking to The Daily Star, acting mayor Manobendra Paul Milton said Shahidur neither applied for further leave nor he is attending office.

According to the City Corporation Law, a mayor is entitled to three months' leave in one year.

There is, however, one example in which action was taken against a pro-AL public representative. Jhalakati municipality chairman and local AL leader Afzal Hossain was suspended as he was charge-sheeted in an extortion case.

In more than a year, around 25 pro-opposition elected representatives have been removed from the offices of the city corporations, municipalities and

upazila parishads after being convicted in various cases, including the ones for bus arson and killings. Suspension of some others is in process.

Talking to The Daily Star, local government expert Tofail Ahmed criticised the LGRD ministry's role, saying suspension of elected representatives on political consideration would lead to collapse of local government system.

People will also lose confidence in the system, he added.

Expressing frustration over the Local Government Division's double standard, Tofail said, "All are equal before law. But now law is being enforced in a selective way."

Ashok Madhav Roy, additional secretary of the Local Government Division claimed the ministry is doing every thing following rules and regulations.

On January 7, Sylhet city mayor Ariful Huq Chowdhury was suspended after being charge-sheeted in ASM Kibria murder case. On the same ground, Habiganj municipality mayor GK Gaus was also removed from office.

The pro-opposition elected representatives, who were suspended by the Local Government Division, also include Savar municipality mayor Refat Ullah, Mirsarai upazila chairman Nurul Amin, Charghat upazila parishad chairman Abu Sayeed, Natore municipality mayor Sheikh Emdadul Huq Al Mamun, Kutubdia upazila chairman ABM Nurul Bashar Chowdhury, Gaibandha sadar upazila chairman Abdul Karim, Sundarganj municipal mayor Nurunnabi Pramanik, Sundarganj upazila chairman Majedur Rahman and vice chairman Abu Solaiman, Palashbari upazila chairman Abul Kawar and vice-chairman Abu Taleb Sarker, Nandigram upazila chairman Nurul Islam, Sonatola upazila chairman Ahasanul Tayeb, Dupchachia upazila vice chairman Abdul Mottaleb, Sherpur upazila chairman under Bogra Dabibur Raman and vice-chairman Ariful Raman, Ukiyah upazila chairman Sarwar Jahan Chowdhury and Vice-chairman Soltan Mahamud Chowdhury, Atgoria upazila chairman Jahurul Islam, Chatmohor upazila chairman Asadul Islam and Naikhangchhari upazila chairman Tofail Ahmed.

Some of them were reinstated following court orders.

# 30 more graves found

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The task of tackling human trafficking has to be jointly tackled and it should be understood that the problem did not originate in Thailand, he said, adding the Kingdom was just a transit point.

The proposal was made after Thailand unearthed scores of graves in Songkhla's Sadao border district and found human remains believed to be trafficked migrants who died during their journey. The site in Tambon Padang Bezar was used as a waiting area for the migrants, mostly Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic group in Myanmar, before the traffickers sneaked them into Malaysia.

Prayut said that migrants arrested in Thailand would be taken care of. "They will be charged with illegal entry and after that they would be detained, not jailed. We will also provide them with food according to their religious beliefs. This is the burden of Thailand," he said.

Prayut asked why previous governments had not tackled this issue.

Meanwhile a total of 53 policemen have been transferred in a sudden midnight order amid a pending probe into crimes related to the trafficking of Rohingya labourers.

The policemen were based in provinces where crimes related to the Rohingya were found to have occurred while another 15 officers have been moved to inactive posts pending internal probes into whether they had benefited from the traffickers or it was a case of incompetence.

Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Prawit Wongsuwan yesterday expressed surprise over the ignorance of local police and military units about either the trafficking activities or the graves. Arrest warrants would be issued for anyone suspected of involvement with the trafficking of the Rohingya, regardless of them being government officials or members of local administrative bodies, he said.

Temporary shelter

A police source said the campsite was a temporary shelter for the Rohingya before they were brought from Satun province by smugglers to Sadao district, a border area from where they were taken to Malaysia.

A total of 28 bodies have been verified as those of Rohingya victims of human trafficking, from more than 60 secret and open graves found in Phang Nga and Songkhla provinces. Six bodies are undergoing post-mortem DNA verification.

An abandoned graveyard in tambon Chalung was used to accommodate Rohingya people by smugglers before trafficking them to Malaysia or other countries, a police source said. Local residents said there were only six bodies buried in this graveyard through licensed funerals. A team of civil defence volunteers apprehended 13

Rohingya men at a location in tambon Chalung from a group of 30 while they were on their way to Malaysia. One of the 13 men said they had entered Thailand illegally in Ranong and Satun, before trekking through jungles for 13 days. There are no details about the whereabouts of the other 17 people who were travelling with this group.

Officials from Takua Pa district office in Phang Nga arrested eight Myanmar men and two women while being smuggled by a Thai man to Chumphon province. Smuggler Phidej Janjua admitted to earning Bt2,300 from each of the 10 Myanmar nationals to drive them to a bus terminal. Of the 18 people sought by police, arrest warrants have been issued for 10, seven of whom are local politicians and members of local administrative bodies. Four of them have turned themselves in.

The 53 transferred police officers were serving in various units, including anti-human trafficking, marine immigration, as well as local police attached to precincts in the Regional Police Bureaus 8 and 9, whose jurisdiction covers the upper and lower South respectively.

Prayut said the Rohingya migration and trafficking issue was a long-standing problem, and Thailand has handled the issue successfully, partly by securing shelters in certain third countries for them. He said many of the smugglers were Rohingya people who had escaped persecution in their home country while many accomplices were Thais and those based in destination countries.

He said the question arose as to why previous governments had not tackled this issue.

"It's important now that the issue be handled drastically, with the entire mechanism being scrutinised and managed throughout," he added.

National police chief General Somyot Poompanmoung said the police were not pressured by the 10-day deadline given by the prime minister to complete their scrutiny of joint police-military-civilian authorities on trafficking activities, possible detention camps and graves in southern provinces. He also said the police were not demoralised by the large number of transfers.

"Police officers found not involved but at fault will be repositioned while those found guilty will be prosecuted," he added. He said he would make a request for an ad-hoc transfer list to replace positions left vacant by the transfer of the 53 officers.

The provincial authorities in Ranong have made a request for assistance from forest rangers to help monitor the escape of Rohingya from jungles and national parks.