

New Indian land laws to expedite projects hurt farmers, activists say

REUTERS, Mumbai

Farmers and activists are protesting legislative efforts in two south Indian states that would make it easier to acquire land for infrastructure projects, as the battle for scarce land in the country becomes more contentious.

Andhra Pradesh state will introduce a law to accelerate land acquisitions for "public purposes", Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu said over the weekend.

Neighboring Telangana state last week passed a law that drops the federal requirements for public consensus and a social impact study for land acquired for infrastructure projects.

"Telangana's new law shuts the doors on farmers and other vulnerable communities who depend on the land for their livelihood," said Kiran Kumar Vissa at Rythu Swarajya Vedika, an umbrella organization of non-profits focused on agriculture.

"It puts all the power in the hands of the state and wealthy land owners. The state will become nothing but a real estate agent for corporations."

His organization has held protests in Telangana's capital Hyderabad, and plans a statewide campaign against the law, he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrababu Naidu defended the new law, saying India's 2013 Land Acquisition Act had slowed Telangana's development projects.

"It is not possible to do development projects without taking land. We have a right to amend the act," Rao said.

Land-related conflict is the main reason behind stalled industrial and development projects in India, affecting millions of people and putting billions of dollars of investment at risk, according to a recent report.

Federal law requires consensus to buy land, a social impact assessment, rehabilitation for those displaced, and compensation up to four times the market value.

States including Rajasthan and Gujarat have introduced laws that dilute some of the federal law's provisions.

Activists say states' ability to bypass these requirements sets a dangerous

precedent, dismantling vital checks and balances.

The All India Kisan Sabha, a union fighting for peasants' and farmers' rights, has also held protests.

India has introduced several land laws in the past decade to give the vulnerable more rights, but many of these laws are diluted and do not protect poor farmers enough, activists say.

In Telangana, protests had erupted over the state's plan to acquire land for a reservoir with its controversial GO123 order that diluted several conditions of the federal law.

Andhra Pradesh recently introduced a land pooling scheme for its capital city Amaravati that activists say puts pressure on owners to give up their land.

The proposed new law gives the state even greater power, said E.A.S. Sarma, a land rights activist.

"In the name of expediting infrastructure projects, the new law does away with key safeguards," he said.

"The proposed amendments are highly regressive, anti-farmer and facilitate human rights violations. You can expect to see more protests."



Md Arfan Ali, president and managing director of Bank Asia, receives the MasterCard's principal membership licence from Syed Mohammad Kamal, country manager of MasterCard Bangladesh, at the corporate office of the bank in Dhaka on January 1.

Alliance condemns arrest of labour leaders

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"And by July 2018, we will have established worker safety committees—groups of workers trained and empowered to monitor on-site occupational safety and health issues—in all 600-plus Alliance factories."

To the Alliance, empowering workers is nothing short of fundamental to ensuring factory safety, according to the statement.

The Alliance has trained 1.2 million workers in fire safety and evacuation

skills, and trained 22,000 security guards to play a leadership role in protecting worker's lives—not property—in case of emergency.

The platform operates Amader Kotha—the nation's first and only worker helpline—which allows more than one million workers to report issues of concern within their factories anonymously and without fear of retribution.

The Alliance is proud to have provided wage compensation to the more

than 6,600 workers displaced by factory repairs.

While progress has been made, dedicated efforts to support worker's rights in Bangladesh must continue, and any unwarranted detention or interrogation of labour advocates should not be undertaken or tolerated.

"We call for workers and management to settle any differences at the negotiating table, peacefully and in accordance with Bangladesh law," the Alliance said.



Akku Chowdhury, CEO of Transcom Foods Ltd that operates KFC in Bangladesh, along with actors Bonna Mirza, Sharmin Lucky, Munmun and Tusty poses at the launch of KFC Burger Fest at its Gulshan outlet in Dhaka on December 31. The fest started on January 1 at KFC's Gulshan, Banani, Dhanmondi, Mirpur and Uttara outlets.



Md Hasanur Rahman, CEO of AK Chowdhury Science and Synergy, presents a crest to Professor Nilufar Nahar, chairperson of the chemistry department of Dhaka University, at the launch of operation of the scientific and lab related equipment supplier, at a programme in Dhaka on January 1.

New HR head for IDLC Finance

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Akhteruddin Mahmood has recently joined IDLC Finance and its three subsidiaries—IDLC Securities, IDLC Investments and IDLC Asset Management—as the head of human resources department.

"Mahmood's expertise across multiple sectors such as Bangladesh Air Force, British American



Akhteruddin Mahmood

Tobacco Bangladesh, Nestlé Bangladesh and STS Holdings Ltd represents his attunement to our mindset for building the best HR practices in the financial industry," said Arif Khan, CEO of IDLC Finance.

Mahmood obtained his bachelor's degree in aeronautics and later did his executive MBA, IDLC said in a statement.

Remittance inflow lowest in five years

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If the ongoing fiscal consolidation in the GCC countries is sharper than expected, remittance flows could slow sharply, the WB said. But Zahid Hussain, lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office, said the decline in remittance is not just because of the depressing effects of low oil prices on incomes and employment in the oil exporting countries.

Since July, remittances have declined very significantly from the US and the UK as well, which together accounted for 22 percent of total remittances received in fiscal 2015-16. More significantly, a decline in remittances from the US and UK accounted for nearly 46 percent of the total decline in remittances during the first five months of fiscal 2016-17 from a year earlier.

"These declines cannot at all be explained by the oil price factor," Hussain said, adding that four other factors contributed to the remittance decline.

Transferring funds across countries through formal channels have become cumbersome after the recent spate of ter-

rorist attacks in some major cities around the world. Second, the premium for the informal market exchange rate has widened steadily since January 2015 from almost zero to nearly Tk 5 per dollar.

"This has also strengthened the incentive for remitting through informal channels," Hussain.

Third, since the UK referendum vote in favour of Brexit, the taka has appreciated against the pound by about 17.6 percent and the appreciation was sharpest during July to mid-October. "This discouraged remittance from migrants who earn their income in pounds."

And fourth, the US election result does not bode well for income and employment prospects of migrants in the US, including Bangladeshi legal and illegal migrants.

The rising uncertainties with respect to the extent of the tightening of US policies against migrants may be discouraging Bangladeshis in the US to part with their savings so that they are not caught unprepared to face any unforeseen disruption in employment and earnings, Hussain added.

Internet, social media blackout costs \$69m

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The report said it is important to point out that the analysis only looked at the economic impact on GDP.

It did not include estimates for lost tax revenues associated with blocked digital access, impact on worker productivity, barriers to business expansion connected with the shutdowns or the loss of investor, consumer and business confidence due to such disruptions.

As such, the \$2.4 billion figure is a conservative estimate that likely understates the actual economic damage, according to the report.

The report shows there were 81 disruptions in 19 countries during the period.

As the digital economy expands, it will become even more expensive for nations to shut down the internet.

"Without coordinated action by the international community, this damage is likely to accelerate in the future and further weaken global economic development," said the report.

Around the world, digital technology is seen as vital for economic development.

A 2012 World Bank analysis found a 10 percentage point increase in fixed broadband generated a 1.35 percent increase in per capita GDP for developing countries and a 1.19 percent increase for developed countries.

Since then, developing nations have become even more reliant on the internet, and digital technology has expanded its role in the overall economy.

The centrality of the internet to social and economic life recently led the United

Nations last year to enact a resolution.

The resolution specifically unequivocally condemns measures to intentionally prevent or disrupt access to or dissemination of information online in violation of international human rights law and calls on all nations to refrain from and cease such measures.

"Yet powerful forces continue to threaten the vitality of the internet," the Brookings report said.

The governments give many reasons for ordering the disruptions such as safeguarding government authority, reducing public dissidence, fighting terrorism, maintaining national security and protecting local businesses, according to a study by researchers of the University of Washington.

The Brookings report said government officials in many countries around the world appear increasingly comfortable blocking access to online services and apps despite the significant economic and social damage that internet service disruptions bring to their countries.

"Whether their ostensible motivations are public security or political self-preservation, government officials should understand the wide-ranging and destructive consequences of these moves."

"Shutting down access to popular services or to the whole internet -- even for a short period of time -- undermines economic growth, puts lives in jeopardy, separates people from friends and family and erodes confidence in the governments that take such drastic and ill-advised steps."

Foreign exchange dealers' assoc re-elects chairman

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mohammed Nurul Amin, managing director of Meghna Bank, has recently been re-elected as the chairman of Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Dealers' Association for 2017 and 2018.

The election of the executive committee of the association took place on the premises of the association in Dhaka on December 28.

The association also elected Md Abdus Salam, CEO of Janata Bank, as vice chairman and Md Ataur Rahman Prodhan, managing director of Rupali Bank, as treasurer, the association said in a statement.



Mohammed Nurul Amin

A water plant that brings jobs to people with disabilities

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He said production capacity of the plant is much higher than it is bottling now. "Our capacity has increased after the modernisation of the plant," he said, adding that the bottles are manufactured at the plant.

The bottled water market in Bangladesh would be more than Tk 500 crore a year, said industry insiders. The market is expanding fast, attracting multinational firms as well.

Mamun said Maitri Shilpa employs 75 people and 60 percent of them are physically challenged. They get salaries from the income of the plant, he said. Maitri Shilpa became profitable in fiscal 2014-15, he added.



Sumala Subhat Chowdhury, director and chief operating officer of Tiger Tours, and Zunaid Hossain, executive director of Airspan Ltd, attend a deal signing ceremony in Dhaka on January 1. Airspan will act as a marketing agent for the Cruise Vessel MV Tanguar Haor, owned by Tiger Tours, to promote riverine tourism in Bangladesh. Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, managing director of Tiger Tours, and Kazi Wahidul Alam, editor of the Bangladesh Monitor, a fortnightly tourism magazine, were also present.

AIRSPAN



Amit Rathuri, country manager of Whirlpool India; Indronil Sinha, regional director; and Tahmid Zaman Rashik, director of Best Electronics, authorised distributor of Whirlpool in Bangladesh, attend the opening of a cooking workshop at Raowa Club in Dhaka on December 29.

BEST ELECTRONICS