

Khaleda stresses global action to tackle natural disasters

HARARE, Oct 18: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today stressed the need for global cooperation to tackle the environmental problems effectively to save the vast humanity from the curse of natural disasters, reports BSS.

Begum Zia made the call while intervening the discussion on environmental issues at the executive session of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting at the International Conference Centre here.

She said Bangladesh, prone to natural disasters, could not be concerned about the environmental hazards. She said Bangladesh in the recent past was wrought by the strongest cyclone of the century in its southern parts which was followed by a series of floods in the north. "Being a developing country it is not possible for Bangladesh alone to tackle such recurring natural calamities," she said.

Begum Zia said poverty alleviation and improvement of the living standard of the people were the main thrusts of the Third World countries and Bangladesh was no exception. She called for worldwide cooperation to find solution to the environmental problems so that the Third World nations could sustain their development efforts.

In this context, the Prime Minister referred to the Langkai Declaration of the Commonwealth in 1989 and appreciated the concern expressed by the Commonwealth community about the environmental hazards. She said, "It is high time for the Commonwealth to come forward with financial and technical assistance to study the environmental problems and to find their solutions."

Begum Zia said Bangladesh on its part had undertaken a gigantic reconstruction programme to repair the damage caused by recurring natural calamities. She said a massive afforestation programme was underway in the country particularly in the coastal belt to maintain ecological balance and prevent natural disaster.

Besides, construction of coastal embankments and multi-purpose shelters are also underway to save the people from cyclone and tidal surge," she added.

Begum Zia made an appeal to the international community particularly the Commonwealth to come forward to help implement the programmes.

Foreign Minister A. S. M. Mostafizur Rahman also attended the executive session.

Begum Zia attended a banquet last night hosted by Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe for the heads of government and their spouses at Hotel Sheraton here.

Begum Zia talked to the distinguished guests at the banquet and exchanged pleasantries with them.

Prime Minister assured Nelson Mandela that Bangladesh would extend support to their national reconstruction in the same spirit it was now supporting their liberation struggle by remaining by their side.

The African nationalist leader is currently attending the CHOGM as observer.

Mandela congratulated Begum Zia for her eloquent speech at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting highlighting major issues being faced by the Commonwealth.

He said the Prime Minister had projected important issues of the contemporary world which needed immediate attention and action.

Mandela also congratulated Begum Zia on her assumption of office of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh through a popular vote.

Begum Khaleda Zia extended an invitation to the African leader to visit Bangladesh which the latter accepted.

Foreign Minister A. S. M. Mostafizur Rahman and Bangladesh High Commissioner in Zimbabwe Major General Haroon Ahmed Chowdhury were present on the occasion.

The five-day Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Bengalee Hindu community, ended with the immersion of the image of goddess Durga in the river Buriganga on the day of 'Bijoya Dashami' Friday, reports BSS.

In the city, a large number of processions were brought out with trucks carrying the images. The processions converged on the river bank of Buriganga at Wischhat.

The river bank since early afternoon, wore a festive look as colourfully dressed people from all walks of life and ages assembled on the bank in thousands to see the return journey of the goddess. The images, taken down from the trucks were immersed in mid-river from boats amid frenzied beating of drums.

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Earlier, the new AL members garlanded the portrait of Bangabandhu and presented bouquet to Hasina. AL Joint Secretary Amir Hossain Amu, and other leaders including Abdur Razzak MP, Abdul Jalil, Abdul Mannan were present on the occasion. Chief Whip of the Opposition in the Parliament Mohammad Nasim MP, Abdur Rab, Ivy Rahman, Mostafa Mohsin Mantu, Prof Monam Sarkar, Ali Hossain and Mamataz Hossain also spoke on the occasion.

Meanwhile, the 27th anniversary of birth of Sheikh Rasel, the youngest son of late Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was celebrated Friday.

Rasel Jatiya Shishu-Kishore Parishad organised various programmes which included a juvenile gathering at the Bangabandhu Bhaban, Quran khwani and milad mahfil, feeding the students of Rasel Madrasa procession, and garlanding the portrait of Bangabandhu.

Addressing the juvenile gathering at Bangabandhu Bhaban Sheikh Hasina recalled the tragic end of her family members including Rasel on August 15, 1975.

The killers of Bangabandhu and his family members were not tried but rewarded she said. She demanded repeal of the Indemnity Ordinance to try the killers for the sake of establishing rule of law and consolidating democracy.

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During her meeting with Premier Nawaz Sharif, the two leaders stress for strengthening bilateral relations in various fields. Sharif hoped that the Joint Economic Commission meeting, to be held in Islamabad next month, would take concrete steps in this regard.

Sharif also stressed the need for promoting economic cooperation, both at the government and private levels.

The two premiers discussed the constitutional and political developments taking place in the two countries and thought that there should be regular exchange of ideas.

Begum Zia emphasised the need for strengthening cultural cooperation between Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman and Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman were present from Bangladesh side while Pakistan Foreign Secretary Shaharyar Khan and Md Asad Khan Junejo, advisor to Pakistan premier, were present from Pakistan side.

During her meeting with Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, Begum Zia expressed her thanks for the warm hospitality shown to her and the members of her entourage during their stay in Harare.

She also greeted President Mugabe for his excellent opening speech at the summit which, she said, was a great success.

President Mugabe expressed sympathy for the cyclone and flood-affected people of Bangladesh.

He also agreed, in principle, to take skilled and professional persons from Bangladesh.

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During the meeting with Tanzanian President at the centre, Begum Zia said Bangladesh would extend all cooperation to Tanzania with regard to its rural development.

President Ali Hassan Mwinyi said his country wanted to share Bangladesh experience in rural development and irrigated agriculture system. An expert level delegation from Tanzania would shortly visit Bangladesh, the president said, adding "we want to benefit from your experience."

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and the Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, during their meeting, discussed various issues regarding SAARC.

The two leaders expressed concern at the rise of the sea levels, natural disasters and climatic change. They felt that the Commonwealth has a particular role to play in addressing the problems of the Third World countries.

The third Joint Economic Commission meeting of the two countries will be held in Dhaka early next year.

Begum Zia said the Maldives could recruit professionals from Bangladesh, including teachers.

Earlier on Thursday British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd

assured Begum Zia that Britain would continue to give assistance to Bangladesh for its overall economic development. The British Foreign Secretary called on Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at her Monomata Hotel suite here.

Later briefing BSS Special Correspondent, Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman said they had a cordial meeting for about 30 minutes.

Hurd said the British government would not limit its assistance to Bangladesh during the time of disaster only. He said the government and people of Britain had genuine sympathy for Bangladesh and they would do whatever they could.

Referring to the democratic system in Bangladesh, Hurd said the government and the people in the UK were watching with great interest the remarkable progress towards democracy made in Bangladesh.

Begum Zia mentioned the transition to parliamentary system of government through unanimous decision in Parliament.

The Prime Minister thanked the British government for its generous assistance during the cyclone.

She also referred to the various programmes including those for the women undertaken by her government to change their socio-economic condition.

The Prime Minister thanked the British government for looking after the interest of the members of Bangladeshi community living in Britain.

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ME peace confce Oct 30

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He said later he had received the names of Palestinian delegates to the conference and that they appeared acceptable.

"They appear to me to meet the standards of the process which we have been working on for the past several months", he told journalists after meeting Palestinians from the Israeli-occupied territories.

Reacting to the announcement setting the date and site of the talks, Palestinian leader Faisal Hussein said: "Madrid is a beautiful city."

He continued: "Historically, Arabs and Jews valued it. They have good memories. ... This is a good choice."

Hussein has led the Palestinian delegation in talks with Baker but is not on the list of seven negotiators approved Thursday.

Baker's meeting with Shamir came on a day full of diplomatic contacts to push for the peace conference. He also met with Palestinian leaders and with Soviet Foreign Minister Boris Pankin. Baker and Pankin have been cooperating in trying to set up the peace conference.

But a PLO spokesman in Tunis said the organisation remained committed to its guidelines for the talks that there be representation from Jerusalem and a halt to Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

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