

PM tells press in Tokyo

Next stage is to improve living condition

TOKYO, Mar 31: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today said that after achieving near self-reliance in food her three-year old democratic government was working hard to lead the country to the next stage of economic development for improving the living condition of the common people, reports BSS.

Begum Zia told a press conference at the Japan National Press Club that her government was determined to transform the national economy so that poverty in Bangladesh became a matter of the past.

She said that her government already achieved some degree of success in restoring financial and economic disciplines through a host of drastic reform measures to make the national economy dynamic.

Our government, Begum Zia said, has adopted market friendly economic policies, envisaging a strong role for the private sector.

"I have informed the Japanese investors of the various facilities and incentives the government of Bangladesh offers to foreign investors," she said.

Begum Zia thanked Japan, Bangladesh's largest bilateral development partner and said, "We expect continued Japanese support for social sectors such as primary and mass education, universal health coverage, poverty alleviation and environmental development."

Supporting Japan's bid to get a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, Begum Zia said, "We, the Asians, would be happy to see Japan play a more active and significant role in the UN system."

Begum Zia said that during her visit to Japan she had the opportunity to pay her respects to the Emperor and the Empress and had a 'fruitful

discussion' with them.

She said that during her official talks with Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa they had exchanged views on a wide range of bilateral, regional and international issues.

SAARC, she said, provided South Asian countries an important forum for regional dialogue and added peace and prosperity in South Asia would have to be based on mutual trust and accommodation.

"I believe," she said, "We are moving in the right direction."

Replying to a question on the possibility of a limited war breaking out between India and Pakistan, Begum Zia said, "I believe all South Asian countries will resolve their disputes peacefully."

Asked what influence she could make as SAARC Chairperson in this regard, Begum Zia said, "If our cooperation is sought we shall not hesitate to extend it."

"We want solution to all bilateral disputes through negotiations rather than through conflict," she added.

WP to announce fresh programme April 6

By Staff Correspondent

The Workers' Party (WP) of Bangladesh will announce a fresh programme on April 6 to mobilise public opinion in favour of solving the "socio-economic crisis" in the country.

This was disclosed by the WP general secretary Rashed Khan Menon, MP at a news conference held at the party's Topkhana Road office in the capital yesterday afternoon.

The programme will be made public at a rally in the outer stadium in the city.

Tk 10,500 cr ADP target

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Acknowledging that the economic reforms are facing resistance from vested interest groups affected by the measures it, however, pledges to carry out the ongoing structural adjustment programmes.

It also points out that the ADP outlay of Tk 9,750 crore of 1993-94 has been revised downward to Tk 8,500 crore.

On the other hand, the World Bank-IMF's CEM stresses on achieving a higher growth rate to make a dent in the country's poverty situation.

Saying that the number of people at the absolute poverty level is continuing to increase at an annual average of around four per cent, it notes that at the current level of growth it will take 25 years for a person to rise above the poverty line.

The CEM, however, adds that this period can be halved if the growth rate is increased to around six to seven per cent.

It says that the country is at the 'threshold' of higher growth and places special emphasis for improvement in four areas: increasing both public and private sector investment; reducing losses incurred by the public sector enterprises; removing the weaknesses of the financial sector; and improving the relationship between the labour sector and management.

The WB-IMF memo notes that although progress was made in implementing economic reforms during the past three years, investments failed to pick up due to procedural and administrative 'weaknesses', resulting in a low growth rate.

Despite the government's thrust towards export-led growth and the adoption of adequate necessary policies, it says, in some cases the results of the policy measures are not reaching the entrepreneurs due to administrative bottlenecks.

It is also critical about the continuing losses by the public sector enterprises and points out that the 1992-93 amount of Tk 2,000 crore is equal to 45 per cent of the annual foreign aid disbursement. The amount of such losses, it adds, for a period of 18 months would have paid for the construction of the Jamuna Bridge.

The CEM suggests privatisation of selected state-owned enterprises, managing the remaining public sector units along commercial lines and off-loading shares of the power, water and gas companies for public subscription.

It is also critical about the delay in implementing the financial sector reform project and about the weaknesses of

PM meets Akihito

TOKYO, Mar 31: The Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia had an audience with Emperor Akihito and the Empress at the Imperial Palace today, reports BSS.

The Emperor exchanged greetings with Begum Zia and recalled his visit to Bangladesh and also Begum Zia's previous visits to Japan with President Ziaur Rahman.

The Emperor, during nearly an hour-long conversation showed his keen interest in economic development in Bangladesh.

The Emperor introduced Crown Prince Norihito and his spouse Princess Masako Wada to the Prime Minister while the Crown Prince introduced the other members of the royal family to her.

The Prime Minister after conveying her personal regards congratulated the Emperor for the marriage of the Crown Prince while the Emperor also congratulated her for her son's wedding.

The Emperor expressed his confidence that the hard working people of Bangladesh would achieve the dreams of the War of Independence of Bangladesh under her dynamic leadership.

The Emperor also hosted a luncheon in honour of the Bangladesh Prime Minister.

The wife of the Japanese Prime Minister, Mrs Morihiro Hosokawa, Deputy Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata, President Japan-Bangladesh Parliamentary League Hiroshi Mitauzaki, MP, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Mostafizur Rahman, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, Prime Minister's Special Envoy M Moshed Khan attended the luncheon.

Khaleda addresses seminar in Osaka today

OSAKA, Mar 31: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia arrived here tonight from Tokyo by train on the last leg of her five-day official visit to Japan, reports BSS.

Begum Zia will address a seminar tomorrow on investment opportunities offered by Bangladesh.

Leading Japanese entrepreneurs and investment corporations will take part in the seminar.

The Prime Minister will leave here tomorrow afternoon for home.

Ahmadiyas accuse 'religion peddlers' of fanning communal strife

By Staff Correspondent

Leaders of the Ahmadiya Muslim Jamaat yesterday accused a section of 'religion peddlers' of capitalising on the "Quadiani" issue for their political gain.

"The communal force, which was rejected by the people during the recent elections, were trying to make a position in the country's politics by inciting strife among the members of different communities," the leaders said while addressing a press conference at the Ahmadiya central office in the capital.

"They are conspiring to amend the Constitution on the pretext of saving Islam," said Muhammad Mostafa Ali, National Ameer of the Ahmadiya community.

"They are also out to destabilise the communal harmony, deteriorate the law and order situation and thwart the on-going development process," he said.

The press conference of the Ahmadiya Muslim Jamaat was organised one day after a sit-in staged by the activists of the Majlis-e-Tahaffuz Khatme Nabuyat near the Secretariat in Dhaka Wednesday.

Mostafa Ali expressed grave concern of the Ahmadiya community over a recent government instruction to the police to gather information on the number and location of the Ahmadiya community members.

The government's efforts to collect information on the oppressed, and not on the trouble makers, has sounded a grave warning to us," he said.

The leaders of the Ahmadiya community informed that the anti-Quadiani campaign in Bangladesh has been fanned by a section of Pakistani religious leaders who have been denounced by the people in their homeland.

Quoting a report of the Pakistani daily Dawn, they pointed out that Maulana Allah Wasaya, a district Ameer of the Majlis in Pakistan, has been declared a 'tout' by a Pakistani court.

The court also prohibited his entry in Pakistani police stations, government offices and district courts.

Allah Wasaya came to Bangladesh in December last year and addressed an anti-Ahmadiya rally held at the Manik Mia Avenue, they pointed out.



School students and locals of Mirpur Section One pelting stones at policemen during a clash over the possession of a piece of land yesterday. — Star photo

Rauzan power plant

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According to sources, the fire-fighting system of the plant was virtually inactive, leaving the plant at high risk till December last.

The hot-start system which allows a unit to begin power generation within two hours after being started, was also absent in the first phase.

The Chinese proposal for the second phase work includes several amendments which might affect the interests of the country's power sector.

The consulting firm for the first phase work of the Rauzan power plant has clearly told the PDB that the CMEC had failed to run the plant to full

BSF attempt to build road in no-man's land

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Mar 31: Traffic came to a halt today at the Benapole checkpoint for nearly two hours following tension over an alleged attempt to construct a road in the no-man's land by India's Border Security Force (BSF) men.

At around 10 in the morning BSF Inspector Raus with 150 workers attempted to start construction of a road near the Benapole checkpoint. Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) men posted in the area immediately prevented the BSF move, sources said.

Later, a Battalion Officer from Jessore Major Siddiqi held talks with the BSF Company Commander to defuse the tension.

A flag meeting may be held today, sources said.

Visit to strengthen ties

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Prime Minister Begum Zia for democratisation and economic development and expressed his support for social and economic stability in Bangladesh.

Begum Zia expressed her gratitude to the government and people of Japan for the official development assistance provided by the government of Japan, which made a significant contribution to the economic development of Bangladesh.

Prime Minister Begum Zia outlined the achievements of her government in consolidating the democratic process, making macro-economic reforms, and pursuing social and economic development, especially her policy of 'dal bhat' for poverty alleviation, primary education, basic health care and creation of employment in the rural areas.

The Bangladesh Prime Minister conveyed to the Japanese Prime Minister her deep sense of appreciation on behalf of the people of Bangladesh for the decision taken by the government of Japan to participate in the co-financing of the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge project, which will play an important role for the economic development of the northern areas of Bangladesh.

The joint statement said that Prime Minister Hosokawa, after reiterating the commitment of the government of Japan to continue to provide official development assistance for social and economic development of Bangladesh, requested further cooperation by the government of Bangladesh for prompt and smooth implementation of official development assistance projects.

The two prime ministers confirmed that the two governments continue to hold regular bilateral consultations on assistance provided by the government of Japan to Bangladesh.

The joint statement said that the two Prime Ministers confirmed that efforts by the government and private sector of Bangladesh to promote further trade and investment are essential for enhancing economic relations between the two countries.

The joint statement said that the Bangladesh side, recognising the importance of

Clash in Mirpur

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When the schoolboys demolished a wall, the members of the cooperative society sought the help of the police.

A large number of policemen, accompanied by Ansars, came to the spot and started lathicharging at around 11 am. In retaliation the agitated schoolboys and some local people pelted stones and bricks at the policemen.

Later, the students took shelter on the rooftops of the adjacent Kalmilata and Muktiyoddha markets and kept on hurling bricks at the police. Police lobbed tear gas shells which created panic in the whole market place and many were injured. At one stage the Ansars fired shots to disperse the mob.

Window panes of several minibuses were broken during the clashes and the bus stand at Mirpur Section One remained almost deserted for over two hours.

The Mirpur Government Boys' High School and the nearby Upashaha Government Primary School also remained closed.

The members of the Muktabangla Cooperative later brought out processions in the area.

Hasina

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Sheikh Hasina said with the Secretariat gherao programme on April 7 the agitation for the removal of the government would begin. She called upon the people to make the gherao programme a success.

The AL chief said her party was determined to build an exploitation-free society as dreamt by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Hasina later went to Tungipara and offered feteha at the mazar of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman there.

Hartal observed in Sylhet

From Our Correspondent

SYLHET, Mar 31: A dawn-to-dusk hartal was observed here and in all 11 thanas of the district today in demand of the release of Ilyas Ali, a former Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leader.

The hartal called by the Ilyas Mukti Parishad was observed peacefully.

Kotwali police arrested Nazrul Islam, an activist of the organisation for picketing at Nazirbazar.

The Midnight File

Russia warns Japan against border violations

MOSCOW, Mar 31: Russia warned Japan on Thursday against further violations of its territorial waters by Japanese fishing boats and said its coast guards will use force to stop trespassers. Backing up the government's words, border guards blocked large groups of Japanese fishing boats from entering Russian waters Thursday, the troops' command said, reports AP.

Somali gunmen abduct US aid worker

MOGADISHU, Mar 31: Gunmen abducted an American aid worker and killed his Somali guard Thursday in a shootout near the UN headquarters in southern Mogadishu, Ann Stingle, a Red Cross spokeswoman in Washington, DC, identified the American as Alfred Petters, 37, an engineer who specialized in water and sanitation issues, reports AP.

PLO-Israeli accord on security for Hebron

CAIRO, Mar 31: The PLO and Israel signed an agreement Thursday on protection of Palestinians in the West Bank town of Hebron and immediate resumption of overall peace talks, reports AP.

The agreement was signed by the chief negotiators, Nabil Shaath of the PLO and Israeli Maj Gen Amnon Shahak. The two men refused to answer reporters' questions after the brief ceremony in a Cairo hotel.

A PLO official close to the negotiations said earlier the agreement came after the two sides settled the difficult issue of international observers in Hebron, site of the February 25 mosque massacre that halted the main peace talks.

The PLO dropped its demand for putting Palestinian police in the town in exchange for Israel agreeing to double the number of foreign observers it would allow there, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Tongi college closed sine die

From Our Correspondent

GAZIPUR, Mar 31: The Tongi College was closed sine die today following armed vandalism.

The decision was taken in an emergency meeting of the college authorities this morning after a fourth-year student received bullet wounds in a clash.

College sources said, tension mounted in the college when the Sangrami Chhatra Samaj and the Bangladesh Chhatra League activists clashed Tuesday.

Five BCL leaders were assaulted Tuesday by their rivals. Of the injured, BCL leader Gamruzzaman was admitted to the Tongi Sadar Hospital with severe stab injuries.

Azam leaves

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the portraits of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, General MAG Osmani and others, allegedly by Jamaat activists.

On Wednesday, the Jamaat activists and members of other political bodies were involved in sporadic clashes centering around the visit here of Golam Azam.

Convener of the the All-Party Alliance and the Zila Juba League president Momtullah Mohon and the Office Secretary of the Muktiyoddha Sangsad, in separate cases lodged with police, charged Golam Azam and 12 other Jamaat MPs, with unleashing terrorism and ransacking the local Muktiyoddha Sangsad and Awami League offices.

The opposition parties have convened a general meeting at the Shaheed Abdur Razzak Park on April 5.

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