

PM's address to nation

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were "Our first and last national goals."

The Prime Minister told the countrymen, "I will give you the assurance with all determination that we shall sincerely discharge the responsibility the people gave us."

Reminding the Opposition of their constitutional and political responsibilities, the Prime Minister said, "I will, in this context, tell them again that the expression of resentments and protests within the constitutional framework is the best way of achieving stability and progress."

The Prime Minister said that the way the Opposition were increasing the woes of the people through acts of indiscipline, hartals and sieges, the way they were trying to stop the advancement of the country, had become a cause of sadness for all.

"In this situation," the Prime Minister said, "There is no alternative before us but to perform the constitutional obligation and the responsibility of power entrusted upon us by the sovereign people."

"The Opposition might move away from the pledge they made to the people, but it is not possible for us to do so," Begum Zia said.

The Prime Minister said, "To us the interest of the country and the nation comes above all else."

She said, "In the Jatiya Sangsad we have passed the Public Representation (Amendment) Bill '94 and the Voters' List (Amendment) Bill '94 with the object of making the election process smoother and freer."

She said that after passing the Bills the Election Commission had been strengthened in such a manner that it became the supreme authority to deal with all matters relating to elections.

The Prime Minister said, "Now there is not the least scope for any party, individual or the administration to influence the election process."

Besides, she said, following the decision to give the voters identity cards to get rid of false votes, all citizens are going to get the guarantee that they will be able to cast their own votes.

The Prime Minister said that the Opposition did not return to Parliament although they were repeatedly invited to come back while these steps were being taken for holding smoother and freer elections.

She said that the illegal and rigid stand taken by the Opposition started creating obstacles on the way of democratic and economic progress of the country.

Begum Zia said that this has created concern among different circles at home and abroad.

At one stage, she said, at the initiative of the Commonwealth Secretary General, the government held dialogue with the Opposition.

She said that the Commonwealth Secretary General's special envoy Sir Ninian Stephen stayed in Dhaka for more than a month while the dialogue took place.

"At the negotiating table we agreed to give as much concession as possible within the constitutional framework and in the interest of democracy and economic progress," she said.

She said, "On the other hand, the Opposition gave their proposal."

The Prime Minister said, "After considering the proposals of both the sides Sir Ninian made a new proposal, to which we expressed our good intention to accept in the interest of the country although we are the majority party in Parliament."

"But the Opposition did not agree to accept the proposal," the Prime Minister said.

"We accepted the proposal to form an interim government comprising an equal number of representatives from the government and the Opposition, although we are an established and constitutional government elected through free and fair elections," Begum Zia said.

She said, "The Opposition did not show any respect to this spirit of accommodation we took."

Instead, Begum Zia said, the Opposition continued with its previous programmes aimed at removing the government through unconstitutional process.

The Prime Minister said that the concept of democracy had been established in the society in the interest of expression of political Opposition, resentments and protests through the statutory framework.

Begum Zia said, one has to differ with another, among ourselves, within the bounds of rules and regulations in the interest of social cohesion, peace and stability.

Begum Zia said that while the battle of logic and arguments must go on, "the entire democratic structure is bound to collapse if we engage ourselves in fights with each other by passing the Constitution and Parliament and by following extra-legal paths."

Begum Zia said, it should not be forgotten that it would again take many years to restore the broken structure.

"But time is the most precious thing for Bangladesh now."

"We have poverty, we suffer the curse of illiteracy, and economic backwardness."

She said, this is the correct time to face these problems. "That is why," Begum Zia, "it would be sheer luxury for us to waste time at this time of change in the global system."

Referring to the election pledges of her party for the socio-economic advancement of the country, the Prime Minister said it was necessary to let the nation know to what extent the government had been able to succeed in fulfilling those pledges made prior to the elections of 1991 despite unwanted hindrances.

"We have to put our relentless efforts in rebuilding the economic structure, which had collapsed during the autocratic regime. With your cooperation, we are today close to success in this process of economic reconstruction and development. We have almost overcome the scenario of a poverty-ridden and helpless Bangladesh, which the world community sadly witnessed during the nine years of autocratic regime," Begum Zia said.

The Prime Minister said that her government had been able to erase the stigma of "bottomless basket" which the nation had to swallow for long because of wastage and corruption.

Begum Zia said that her government had undertaken realistic steps in democratisation, economic reforms, in giving the lead role to individual initiatives, introduction of a market economy, restoration of financial discipline, development infrastructure, gearing up self-employment projects, industrialisation, investment and other sectors.

As a result, the Prime Minister said, Bangladesh is now considered a prospering South Asian country to the world community while industrial countries were now choosing Bangladesh as a place for investing their capitals.

"If the momentum created in the economy is maintained, then at the end of this decade Bangladesh would no longer need foreign assistance. You know, we have already over-

3 die in separate incidents

Three people died in separate incidents in different parts of the city yesterday, police said, reports UNB.

They said Liton, 13, was critically injured as he fell down from the top of a wedding-gate at Mirpur at 5:30 am. He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where he died soon after admission.

In another incident, a confectionery worker, Amina Al Mia, 30, died on the spot after he fell down from the third floor of the Bombay Sweets Factory at Shaytampur in Demra at about 8:30 am, according to police.

A pedestrian, Ful Mia, 45, was run over by a speeding truck while crossing road near Baitul Nur Mosque at Shere-e-Bangla Nagar at 2 pm.

Sarak Paribahan leaders reject strike call

The office bearers of the Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samity yesterday urged the transport owners and workers to reject the unlawful strike call given by a section of the Sarak Paribahan Federation today for realisation of some of their demands, reports BSS.

In a statement in Dhaka, they said such call for strike with the objective of paralysing the entire nation on the eve of the Biswa Ijtema could never be accepted.

The Samity leaders urged all concerned to keep their transport running today. They also demanded the administration to ensure a secured environment and thereby facilitate the movement of vehicles on the day.

The statement was signed among others by Shaharuzzaman Mortuza and Md. Ashraf Khan, executive president and secretary general respectively of the Samity.

The office bearers of the Dhaka Sarak Paribahan Samity also issued a similar statement for rejecting the call of strike.

Fatah's 30th anniversary

GAZA, Jan 1: PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat led some 10,000 supporters at a rally on Saturday with candle lights and fireworks to mark the 30th anniversary of his Fatah movement, reports Reuters.

Fatah supporters throughout the Israeli-occupied West Bank also held parades to mark their group's founding day. Fatah, the largest Palestinian political group, was founded by Arafat on January 1, 1965.

Nominations

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dates Messrs Obaidul Islam Badal, Abdur Rob. KM Enayet Hossain and Nazrul Islam Talukder. This seat had fallen vacant at the death of the then minister of state for education principal Mohammad Eunus Khan.

Three candidates including one BNP nominee and two independents submitted their nomination-papers for JS-148-Sherpur-3 which had fallen vacant at the death of BNP MP Dr Mohammad Serajul Haq. The candidates include Mohammad Mahmudul Haq (BNP), Mohammad Hedayatullah (Independent) and Liaquat Ali Talukder (Independent).

In JS-247-Brahmanbaria-6 four candidates including Shajahan Miah of the BNP, Lt Col (Retd) Nur Mohammad (Independent), Raushan Alam (Independent) and Shahidul Haq (Independent) filed their nomination papers. This seat had fallen vacant at the death of BNP MP Wali Ashraf.

Ministers back Rao to face Arjun Singh

NEW DELHI, Jan 1: Indian ministers rallied around Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao on Saturday to help him fight a key Congress party challenger, reports Reuters.

But to compound the leadership crisis, another rival quit an important party post.

Rao, facing mounting criticism in the party, got his council of ministers to back him in a new year's eve crisis meeting that discussed a letter from Arjun Singh, who resigned last week as human resource development minister.

Singh accused Rao of ignoring the interests of the poor and the minorities, traditional Congress supporters. He also said Rao mishandled a probe into the murder of late prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, killed by a female suicide bomber in 1991.

The meeting completely rejected the allegations made in the letter and referred the matter to the working committee, a government spokesman said after the meeting. The working committee is the party's top-level decision-making body.

Rao, whose party suffered routes in three of the four states that voted last month, is under fire from some Congress heavyweights ahead of elections in five more states in what is seen as an acid test for his leadership.

In another development,

Narain Dutt Tiwari quit as the party's chief in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, in protest over Rao's refusal to withdraw the party's legislative support to the state's opposition party government.

Rao's government faced a grave December. Besides Singh, three ministers have relinquished office during the month, and a fourth resignation is pending.

Resignations

From Page 1 Col 7
that he had heard about such a move but declined to elaborate. He said, "It would be wise not to disclose anything about the discussions because both sides have become scared following some press reports."

He said that the BNP leaders have not yet met to discuss the situation arising out of the submission of the opposition MPs resignation.

Meanwhile, the condition of parliament Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali, undergoing treatment at the Suhrawardy Hospital, has improved further.

The resignations of the Opposition members would not become effective nor the 147 seats be declared vacant unless the parliament secretariat issues a notice.

All the resignation letters are lying with Speaker, who would scrutinise those before notifications.

Khaleda praises JCD role

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movement," she told the cheering students amid frequent applause and recalled with gratitude the sacrifices of the JCD workers for restoring democracy.

In this regard, she urged the students to build themselves up as worthy citizens. The meeting, scheduled to begin at 10 am, started two and a half hours late. The Prime Minister attended the function at 2:40 pm.

Begum Zia spoke only for four minutes and her brief speech frustrated the thousands of JCD workers who had to wait for long six hours to listen to her.

Chaired by JCD chief Fazlul Haq Milon, the colourful function was attended by the organisation's workers from different parts of the city.

BNP Secretary General and LGRD Minister Abdus Salam Talukdar addressed the meeting as a special guest.

Other speakers included Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman, Energy Minister Dr Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain, DUCSU VP Amanullah Aman, MP and GS Khairul Kabir Khokon and JCD leaders Jamal Sharif Hero, Moniruzzaman Monir, Abul Khaer Bhuyan, Quamruzzaman Ratan, Shahiduddin Choudhury Anny, Khandakar Jahangir Alam, Nasiruddin Pintu, Shirin Sultana and Shaqur Rahman.

Congratulating the JCD members on the occasion of their organisation's founding anniversary and wishing them a happy new year, Begum Zia said, "The founder of the JCD Shaheed Zia would have been delighted to see its popularity, spread all over the country."

The JCD has emerged as the largest students' organisation of the country as a result of the untiring efforts of its leaders and workers and the ideals and principles of its parent organisation, the BNP, she said and thanked the JCD workers for their tremendous successes.

Addressing the meeting, Abdus Salam Talukdar said studies are the main concern of the students but as conscious citizens they could not remain silent during national crises. They should do their duties as and when the national interest demanded.

Regarding the resignation of the Opposition MPs, the BNP Secretary General said, the reason for their resignation, as stated in their letters, was "ridiculous."

"How could we make Parliament ineffective? We are the majority in the House!" he said.

About the Opposition demand for early general elections, Salam Talukdar categorically said, "The next polls will be held in 1996."

He also alleged that the Awami League never practised democracy during its long history. Elaborating, he said, this party had killed the Speaker of the then provincial

assembly in 1958, paving the way for Ayub Khan to clamp martial law. The genocide of 1971 could have been averted if the AL had taken into confidence the people. Instead, the party took into confidence Yahya Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, he added.

ASM Mostafizur Rahman, in his speech, said, Shaheed Zia founded the JCD to work for democracy and give a mortal blow to those who spoke against democracy.

"By virtue of the JCD's untiring efforts, each and every citizen of the country is now conscious about democracy," he said.

About the demand for immediate national elections, Mostafizur emphatically said, "We won't announce elections before the completion of the present government's five-year term."

Replying to the Opposition's plan for an all-out agitation to unseat the government, he said, "We are not afraid of such warnings. We were on the streets and now are in power. If need be, we can go back to the streets."

Blasting the Opposition for calling hartals frequently, an angry Mostafizur said, "They call a hartal whenever my guests are here. Do they have any enmity with the Foreign Minister?" he asked pointing to some hartals last year which coincided with the visits of various foreign delegations.

3 floating diesel depots at Nagarbari

NAGARBARI (Pabna), Jan 1: Three floating depots with a capacity of 500 metric tons of diesel each were installed at the Nagarbari ferryghat today to cater the growing demand of fuel oil in northern region during the ensuing irrigation season, reports UNB.

Chairman of the state-run Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) M Fazlul Hoq formally inaugurated the commercial network of the depots.

The depots have been installed under the supervision of Meghna Petroleum Limited, Jamuna Oil Company and Padma Oil Company — three marketing arms of the BPC.

The BPC chairman said the government had launched special drives to keep steady and normal the supply of fuel oil in the northern region, particularly during the forthcoming dry season.

Fazlul Hoq said the normal demand of diesel in the country's northern region is about 7,000 to 8,000 metric tons a month, but during the irrigation season the demand rises up to 20,000 to 30,000 metric tons.

Opposition

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given any solution nor shown any way out.

"People had expected that she would announce the dissolution of Parliament and fresh polls," the JP leader added.

Responding to the address, Jamaat Secretary General Matiuur Rahman Nizami commented that Begum Zia failed to spell out any direction or take any pragmatic step to resolve the post-resignation crisis.

Nizami was also critical of the Prime Minister's warning to deal with the Opposition agitation with a strong hand and said this would only complicate the situation.

The Workers' Party termed Begum Khaleda Zia's speech "frustrating" and said it would not help matters.

At a meeting yesterday, the Workers' Party politburo reiterated its demand for immediate resignation of the government, dissolution of Parliament and fresh polls under a caretaker government.

Reacting to the Prime Minister's address, Shamsuddin, an MP belonging to the Gana Forum, said the crisis could yet be resolved if the two leaders, Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina, sit together for a new round of dialogue.

Hartals

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She said the BNP government compelled the Opposition MPs, who represented 69 per cent of voters, to resign by ignoring the mass demand for a neutral caretaker government.

Meanwhile, the City Awami League brought out a torch procession in the city yesterday evening in support of hartals.

The Awami League will also hold a post-hartal rally today at 4 pm at Bangabandhu Avenue. The rally will be followed by a torch procession.

The Midnight File

First group of Malaysian troops leaves Somalia

MOGADISHU, Jan 1: The first group of 259 Malaysian UN troops left Somalia today amid heavy fighting between rival factions in Mogadishu. At least four people were killed and hospital sources said they had treated 103 people who had been wounded in the clashes which began on Saturday and raged on into today, reports Reuters.

Palestinians protest fresh expansion of settlement

DIR KADIS (West Bank), Jan 1: Palestinians marched today to protest at what they said was a fresh expansion of Jewish settlement in the West Bank, an issue that has sparked a crisis in Israeli-PLO peace talks, witnesses said. They said demonstrators left a mosque in the village of Dir Kadis heading for a construction site near the settlement of Kiryat Sefer, where they said settlers were building on more than 100 hectares (250 acres) of Arab-owned land, reports Reuters.

Mestiri in Kabul for solution to Afghan crisis

KABUL, Jan 1: A senior UN official arrived here today in a new year bid to reach a peaceful settlement to Afghanistan's bloody civil war, just a day after President Burhanuddin Rabbani's term in office lapsed, reports AFP.

"I am here because this is the end of the presidential term of Rabbani, and to see when he will transfer power," UN special representative Mahmoud Mestiri told journalists shortly after his arrival in the Afghan capital.

Rabbani, the leader of the Jamiat-i-Islami faction, was elected Afghan president for a two-year term on December 28, 1992, but has so far declined to hand over power in the absence of an interim government body.

"I do have some suggestions and proposals for President Rabbani about the transfer of power," Mestiri told journalists, this is the main reason I'm here," he said.

Officials said they were told by the latest returnees that a recent reduction in supply of ration, lack of proper medicine and severe cold had forced them to secretly come back to their homeland.

New Year's eve

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played at Mohakhali, the number 1 and 2 roundabouts of Gulshan, and at some other places to avert any unpleasant situation likely to be caused by delinquent youths and drunken drivers.

However, police officials denied, having received any serious complaints during the New Year celebrations.

An official of Gulshan police said they did not detain anybody on the night.

Chakma refugees

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Chakma refugees secretly returned to their homes in Panchhari thana under Khagrachhari district last month dodging the eyes of security personnel at the Tripura camps. They have also been provided with facilities similar to those given to other returnees.

Officials said they were told by the latest returnees that a recent reduction in supply of ration, lack of proper medicine and severe cold had forced them to secretly come back to their homeland.

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