

Shun path of violence, join JS, Khaleda urges AL

UNB, Bhanga (Faridpur)

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday urged the main opposition party to join parliament and no to disrupt country's development process.

"Still you have time, so join parliament taking correct decision, do constructive politics shunning the path of violence and chaos," she said at a big public meeting.

The meeting was held at the Pilot High School ground here on the occasion some political leaders and workers joining her party, particularly a prominent local Awami League leader, M M Shahriar Rumi, who was a rebel candidate of Awami League in the last general election.

Assuring that all local demands would be fulfilled through the leadership of Rumi, Khaleda hoped people of the area would give her an MP in return from this seat at the next election.

Shahriar Rumi is son of veteran Awami League leader Shamsuddin Mollah who was elected MP from Bhanga on Awami League ticket in 1970 and 1973.

Other leaders who joined BNP included Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Jewel and prof Javed Ali of Jatiya Party and Mizanur Rahman of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal.

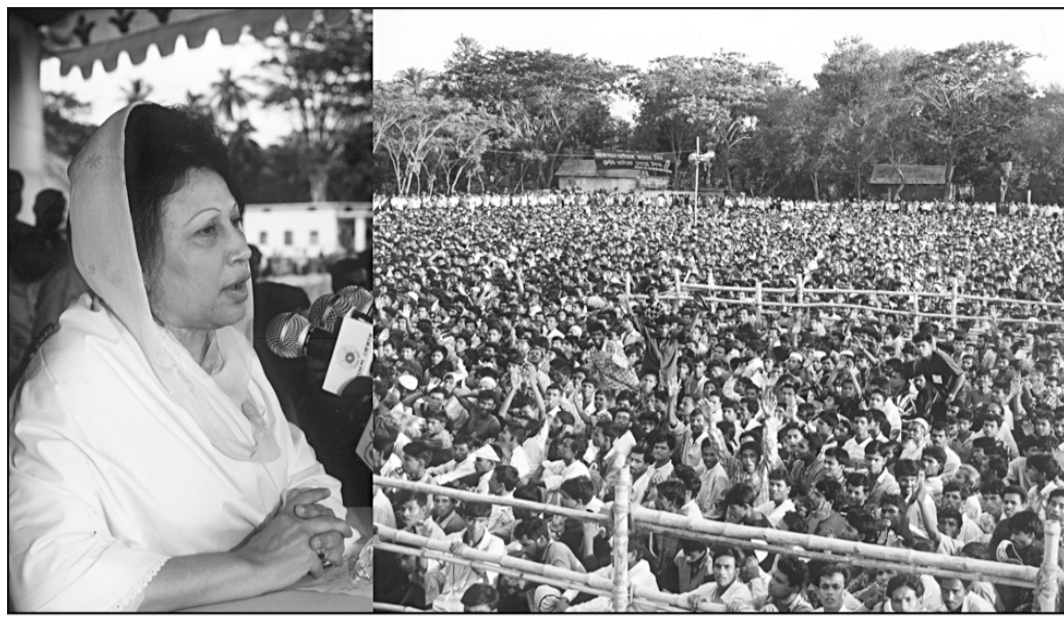
Earlier, the Prime Minister unveiled the plaque of foundation-stone of upgrading the 31-bed Bhanga Upazila Health Complex to 50-bed one and emergency labour-

care unit with an estimated cost Tk 3.21 crore and 43 lakh respectively.

She also distributed some goats among some women under her government's newly introduced programme for alleviation of poverty and increasing incomes through goat farming.

Addressing the meeting, Khaleda observed that Awami League speaks for democracy but doesn't believe in and practice it. "Even democracy is not practiced inside the party."

Referring to Rumi's change of party, she said Awami League did not evaluate the contribution of seasoned leaders and workers rather favoured relatives. And this is why Rumi did not get AL nomination after doing the party politics for long.



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia addressing a public meeting at Bhanga Pilot High School ground in Faridpur yesterday.

Ministers assure

Addressing the gathering, the foreign minister assured them of steps for release of the innocents. The minister for CHT Affairs Moni Swapon Dewan in his speech said that the killings of the Buddhist monk and the Hindu priest of Khagrachhari might be linked.

The ministers later went to Khagrachhari to visit the Hindu temple where the Hindu priest was killed a few days back.

As the ministers arrived at the Buddha Bihar, several hundred people of the Buddhist community carrying placards and chanting slogans appealed for a fair trial and exemplary punishment to the killers of their "Guru" (religious teacher).

The Buddhist people led by Dr. Bikiron Prasad Dey and Dr. Jinobodhi Bixmu also demanded release of the relatives and other innocent people arrested and remanded in connection with the murder.

27 Bangladeshis elected councillors of Power Hamlet Borough Council

UNB, London

Twenty-seven Bangladesh nationals have been elected councillors of Power Hamlet Borough Council, the most important local government body after Parliament.

Of them, 22 were elected from ruling Labour Party while the rest five from Liberal Democratic Party to the 51-member Borough Council.

The election was held on May 2.

Besides, a number of Bangladesh nationals were elected to Oldham Borough Council, Newham Borough Council, Camden Borough Council, Westminster Borough Council and Redbridge Borough Council.

Pak opposition to prove fraud in referendum

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan's opposition parties yesterday said they will publish findings to support claims of massive fraud in the referendum extending President Pervez Musharraf's term for five years.

"We have documentary evidence to prove that police had stamped ballot papers at the deserted polling stations to ensure Musharraf's success," said Qazi Hussain Ahmad, leader of Jamaat-e-Islami, Pakistan's largest Islamic group.

Ahmad's group had earlier made an abortive attempt to stop the referendum by challenging its constitutionality in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The court dismissed the challenge.

Ahmad said Musharraf should quit, claiming the majority of the people were opposed to his continuing leadership. Although the results showed more than 50 per cent participation, with more than 97 per cent in favour of Musharraf staying in office, Ahmad claimed that only 3 per cent of the electorate voted.

Law Minister Khalid Ranjha rejected such claims as "baseless allegations," and urged critics to lodge their complaints with the Election Commission.

Gas committee may prescribe two options for govt

UNB, Dhaka

The National Committee on gas utilisation in a meeting yesterday decided to prescribe in its report two options for the government -- one for limited export from the explorers' share and the other for non-export choice.

Sources concerned said the non-export option would show that the government would have to spend six billion dollars from its own balance for the energy sector by year 2020.

The expenditures will include 4.5 billion dollars for making payment for the international oil companies (IOCs), 500 million dollars for development of Petrobangla fields and one billion dollars for new exploration.

The committee in its report will make observations that the country will have to arrange the expenditures entirely from its own funds as donors will cease to help development of the energy sector if gas is not exported.

Former Secretary and committee Chairman Azimuddin Ahmed presided over yesterday's meeting that decided to prepare the draft report on May 11.

Over the next four days, the

committee members will go through the draft and a final report is likely by mid of this month.

Regarding pipeline export, the committee report will discourage exporting only from Bibiana of Unocal as proposed by the US company. "If the government decides pipeline export only from Bibiana, it'll be a disastrous decision," said a committee member.

He said their report would suggest pipeline export under government management, if finally a decision comes for exporting gas from the shares of the international oil companies exploring hydrocarbons in Bangladesh under production-sharing contracts.

Oath today

UNB, Dhaka

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan will administer the oath of office to the commissioners on May 7 at 3:00 pm at the LGED auditorium in the city.

All the three mayor belong to BNP. Most of the commissioners-elect are also from the same party. The commissioners include at least 50 who are accused in various criminal charges.

Mongla Port workers call off strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Mongla port workers called off their strike at 6:30 pm yesterday following a tripartite meeting.

The meeting was attended by leaders of Mongla Bandar Sramik Sangha, Stevedores Association and port officials of Mongla Port Authority.

The port workers went on an indefinite strike on Thursday to realise their 63-point demand including increase in salary.

Fuelwood trader murdered in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Fuelwood trader Ratan Kumar Bose, 35, was stabbed to death at midnight on Friday at Garhakhola in Phultala upazila.

Police recovered the body early yesterday morning.

Son of Samindra Kumar Bose, Ratan was kidnapped by some unidentified armed men while returning home at Jamira village of the same upazila.

A case has been recorded with the Phultala rail police station since the body was recovered from that area.

9 big launch disasters

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Most of the nine major launch accidents took place due to reckless plying of those, overloading and negligence of the authorities concerned. Storms caused a few accidents.

At least 121 people were killed when two launches capsized in the Meghna in Narsingdi district due to a norwester on May 1, 2000.

A launch carrying 350 passengers sank in the Meghna in Chandpur on August 20, 1994 because of a storm, leaving around 100 people killed and nearly 100 others missing.

At least 62 people drowned when a launch capsized in the same river in Bhola district on March 26, 1993 during a storm.

On December 29, 2000, at least 64 people including 33 children and 18 women were killed and 25 were missing when an overloaded launch was hit by another in the Meghna at Ekhaspur, some 30 kilometres north of Chandpur town.

Two launches engaged in a reckless race collided at Badarpur channel in Barisal on June 14, 2000. It left 20 people killed and 50 others missing.

An overloaded passenger launch sank in the Meghna on December 11, 1999, leaving around 63 people killed and over 100 missing. In another incident, two launches collided in the Jamuna near Aricha in Manikganj on May 24,

1996, killing at least 77 people. Several others were missing.

Around 175 people drowned when a launch capsized in the river Tetulia in Barisal on March 28, 1993.

According to BIWTA officials, around 300 big launches are plying the major routes from Dhaka's Sadarghat. In addition to this, nearly five lakh vessels are plying the country's waterways without required documents or clearance whatsoever.

But the authorities concerned lack adequate monitoring mechanism. Taking advantage of this, overloaded and unsafe water vessels continue to ply and also engage in reckless races, endangering passengers' lives.

"Whenever there is a launch accident, the higher authorities seem to be very active. But within a month, they simply forget that in the absence of proper action, such accidents would continue to take place," said a frustrated BIWTA official.

2 made secys

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secretary to the prime minister during 1991-96.

After the 1996 general elections, Sabhiuddin was made member of the Handloom Board. Later, he was made OSD till November last year and did not get any promotion.

Pvt container

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clear term strongly raised their voice against construction of any such private terminal at the aforesaid estuary, which might pose a real threat to the national security," the CCCI president said.

Referring to a roundtable on "Chittagong Port: A General Consensus on Balanced and Sustainable Growth vis-a-vis Challenge of Globalisation", which was held on 25th August, 2001 and jointly organised by CCCI, The Daily Star, Prothom Alo, Daily Purbokone and Daily Azadi, Chamber president said that the roundtable had unanimously resolved that the construction of SSA-proposed container terminal at the estuary of Kamaphuli river would not be sensible, pragmatic and justifiable so far sovereignty and interest of Bangladesh are concerned.

In the message, the CCCI president urged the BNP-led government to show respect to the views and concern of the people of the country in this regard.

Free access

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December 2002. But the Indians sidestepped the new list and instead, agreed to give access to some items on the previous list."

The commerce secretary said he does not understand why India is unwilling to allow free access to 244 items under the 25-category list since it has already allowed tariff concession under SAPTA to over 2000 items.

"If they have good intention, they could have given similar facility to 244 more items," he expressed.

He however said further discussions will take place this year, but the date is yet to be fixed.

Speaking at the briefing, C K Hyder said non-tariff and para-tariff barriers are the main problems in increasing exports to India.

When Bangladesh tried to export an agricultural item, India tagged a condition that it must have chemical test report. But Nepal exports the same item without India asking for chemical reports, Hyder stated.

"This does not show good intention of the Indians," he said.

Mostafa Abid said products having high export potentials were excluded from the list. "Besides, the 16-category products as defined by India are not the same we had on our list."

Citing the experience of lead acid battery export, he said India violated the WTO rules in this case.

Md Abul Kalam Azad said the country's exports to India would increase if the non-tariff and para-tariff barriers were removed.

India considers melamine products and soap as luxury items, he pointed out to showcase export barriers.

According to the ministry, the country's trade gap with India was US\$150 million in fiscal 1990-91. This soared to over \$1.1 billion in fiscal 2000-01.

Bid for judicial council

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yesterday but failed to reach a decision on a unified judicial service.

Chaired by Industries Minister MK Anwar, the meeting was participated by LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Law Minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Information Technology Minister Dr. Abdul Moyeen Khan and Land Minister M Shamsul Islam.

In its previous meeting, the committee decided that there would be a single judicial service.

But the administration cadre expressed its reservation about the unified service in a written statement. In retaliation the judiciary cadres filed their own written reservation about not having a unified judicial cadre at yesterday's cabinet committee meeting.

Both administration and judiciary cadres have started rallying for their demands separately when the government began the process to separate judiciary as per the Supreme Court instruction.

The administration cadre argues, inclusion of magistrates in the judicial service violates both the constitution and the Supreme Court instruction. The Supreme Court directive 49 (C) seeks separate appointment of magistrates.

The verdict said that administration cadre magistrates would be controlled by the Supreme Court advice as per article 116 of the

constitution when they are working as chief metropolitan magistrates (CMM) or district magistrates (DM) or additional district magistrates (ADM).

Again, when these magistrates would return to administrative posts, they would be controlled by laws promulgated by the parliament as per article 133 of the constitution. And they would be treated as executive magistrates.

The administration cadre demanded setting up of a separate service named judicial magistrate. Those who would be posted in judicial tasks in metropolitan areas, districts and upazila should be placed under the following designations -- judicial magistrate, senior judicial magistrate, joint judicial magistrate, chief judicial magistrate and chief metropolitan judicial magistrate.

"Our association will not accept any decision that goes out of the parameters set by the Supreme Court verdict," said DC of Dhaka Barrister Haider Ali who is also the secretary-general in charge of the BCS Administrative Association.

"Our stance is clear -- magistrates will oversee criminal cases. They have been doing it for 200 years and have developed an expertise. The judges will oversee civil cases. And both these groups would be placed under the Supreme Court. But the BCS Judiciary Association is demanding authority

over both criminal and civil cases by setting up one service. This violates the Supreme Court directive."

On the other hand, the judicial cadres demand that the magistrates would be placed under one single Judicial Service because they would be deployed for judicial tasks.

The association of judicial cadres argues that the constitution's article numbers 115, 116 and 116 (A) clearly mentions a judicial service. Ten out of the 12 Supreme Court directives also mention the judicial service. Thus, a separate service of judiciary violates the constitution and the Supreme Court verdict.

The BCS Judiciary Association further says the unified judicial service may have the provision of deputing magistrates for judicial tasks for interim period and then gradually withdraw them.

West Bengal

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minutes, Mukherjee said.

Two people died as they were hit by falling trees near Diamond Harbour, while lightning killed three people in West Midnapore district. Falling trees and crumbling walls killed four people in East Midnapore district, Mukherjee said.

Two more persons were drowned as a boat carrying them capsized in Howrah district, he added.

No more tax holiday

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corporate tax to 10 per cent from the existing 40 per cent, but I won't allow tax holiday anymore," the finance minister said.

Suggestions were also made for empowering the local governments and giving them financial power.

However, Saifur said corruption in the local bodies is rampant. "be it the city corporations or the union parishad, all types of corruption take place there. But it does not mean that I am against the local bodies," he added.

Highlighting the fall in aid disbursement and commitment, Saifur said about US\$ 1400 million in aid was disbursed in the last fiscal. But till February of this fiscal, the total aid disbursement was only US\$ 500 million.

During the meeting Saifur had a debate with former finance minister AMAMuhit on the overall macroeconomic stability, budget deficit and the expansionary monetary policy.

Saifur said the macroeconomic imbalance has reached such a critical point due to deficit financing and expansionary monetary policy followed during the last five years that it would not be possible to manage the situation in the next five years.

But Muhit, who joined the Awami League before the last general elections, differed with Saifur and said deficit financing is not going to cause any harm and can be corrected in a year or two.

"With the current strong economic fundamentals, it should not be a problem to correct the deficit financing situation," Muhit said.

"You (Saifur) are now blaming these things on the Awami League because you have lost your credibility with the international donors," Muhit told Saifur.

In reply, Saifur said, "My credibility with the donors is still very high."

He also mentioned that domestic debt has ballooned to about Tk 40,000 crore due to expansionary monetary policy followed during the last five years.

Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud mentioned that the big challenge for the next year's budget was to frame it in a tight resource situation.

"This year's ADP has been slashed down and it is not possible to frame a big ADP for the next year. The challenge is to maintain economic growth, create jobs and reduce poverty," Mahmud said.

Mentioning that the government

does not have the capacity to finance huge number of projects, he said, "It is a challenge for the finance minister to formulate the ADP in a tight resource situation and pacify the demands of his party lawmakers and different ministries."

Professor Rehman Sobhan suggested reviewing the already privatised state-owned enterprises and placing the report before the parliament.

"We are talking of privatisation, but nobody has taken any initiative to review how the privatised SOEs are faring," Prof Sobhan said.

M Syeeduzzaman said restoring the private sector's confidence and addressing the SOE privatisation would be very vital for the new budget.

Another crucial issue, Syeduzzaman mentioned, would be to arrange payment to the independent power producers and international oil companies for power and gas purchase.

Syeduzzaman also suggested floating bonds for industrialisation and tapping idle fund of the commercial banks and insurance companies for this purpose.

However, Saifur said this is an issue to be discussed at a different forum since the next budget cannot address it.

Hafizuddin Ahmed said improving the law and order is very vital for the economy.

He also suggested checking wastage in the public sector and stressed prudence in resource mobilisation.

He said lowering interest rate on savings instruments would hurt the honest low-income people.

Former Bangladesh Bank governor Dr M Farashuddin said the rural economy was revamped in the 1990s and it would be wise to provide collateral-free fund for the small and medium agro-based industries.

Saifur agreed with his proposition and said he is contemplating the idea.

Former finance secretary Motiul Islam said the private sector can participate in the Annual Development Programme with commercial capital if scopes were created.

"If the government agrees, then the private sector can scan the ADP and inject commercial capital," Islam said.

Polls in France

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builds significantly on his first round score of 16.86 percent his xenophobic and anti-European views will move to the centre of political debate.

A strong showing would also help the FN in the parliamentary elections that take place in June, and which will have a crucial effect on the ability of the next president to carry out his programme.

Supporters of Chirac fear a big FN vote in June will reduce the representation of the mainstream centre-right, and allow a humiliated left to bounce back to keep control of the National Assembly -- rendering the president essentially powerless.

The Pen's first-round victory stunned France and led to the biggest mass movement on the streets since May 1968, as the left mobilised to expunge the shame of its defeat.

Tomorrow, Chirac is expected to accept the resignation of Jospin's Socialist-led government, before appointing a new team to lead the right into the June election.

At a midday press conference, Le Pen cited several examples of alleged fraud, such as voters receiving two ballots bearing Chirac's name, instead of one for each

candidate, and the failure to deliver some election documents.

Registered French voters receive ballot papers and other information by post ahead of the election.

"It's a laundry list of cheating methods," Le Pen told reporters, adding he feared that representatives of his party would not be permitted to enter polling stations on Sunday.

Final opinion polls show Le Pen garnering up to 25 per cent of the vote on Sunday, compared to just under 17 per cent in the first round.

Parents

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FIR-listed accused in the four cases for murder of Shamim, Masud, Ashique and Palash. The first two were killed at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Asique, a contractor was killed at Shabbagh and Palash was murdered in Mohammadpur area.

It may be recalled that the family of the victims held a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club in December last year and appealed to the prime minister to ensure justice. They alleged that charge sheet in the case was made 'as wanted' by the then Awami League Lawmaker Haji Mookbil Hossain and demanded reinvestigation into the case.

Vajpayee govt changes Gujarat strategy

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

After the defeat of the opposition-sponsored censure motion on communal violence in the Lok Sabha, India's BJP-led government has, in a change of tack, agreed to support a similar motion in the Rajya Sabha where it does not have majority.

The motion has been admitted in the upper house under a rule, which entails voting at the end of the debate.

The government of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has agreed to support the motion seemingly for two reasons.

First, it expects the motion to take the sting off the opposition offensive against the BJP administration in Gujarat and the central government for their "failure" to contain violence in Gujarat where over 900 people have been killed. Second, it wants to avoid embarrassment of a defeat in the upper house.

Another reason why the government has chosen to accept the opposition motion is its mild wording.

The motion expresses "anguish"

over the violence in Gujarat and asks the federal government to intervene effectively under Article 355 of the Constitution to protect lives and property of the people in the state and ensure proper relief and rehabilitation of violence-hit survivors.

Leader of the Rajya Sabha Jaswant Singh said that the government shared the sentiments voiced by the opposition motion.

But if the government idea was to blunt the opposition attack, it did not

clusively at the stroke of midnight Thursday.

Initiating the debate, senior Congress leader Arjun Singh said government failed to maintain communal harmony in Gujarat and warned if peace and amity were not restored soon India's integrity would be threatened.

Congress member from Gujarat Ahmed Patel emphasised the need for providing "healing touch" to violence-hit people of the state and said government was not doing enough for their relief and rehabilitation.

The strongest defence for the government came from Law Minister Arun Jaitley who cited statistics of arrests to refute criticism that Gujarat administration was not acting against troublemakers. He countered the opposition members' attempts to compare the happenings in Gujarat with the Nazi history.

A defeat for the government in Rajya Sabha in voting on the motion will not oblige Vajpayee government to quit and will give moral victory to the opposition.

Meghna tragedy

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Just as it reached Shaitnal, about 25 kilometres away from Chandpur, a sudden and violent twister rocked and capsized it within seconds. The two other vessels immediately changed their direction and headed for the shore towards the Shaitnal village about half a kilometre away. MV Salauddin was not lucky.

Shah Alam, who came to look for his sister-in-law, Taslima, 20, missing since Friday, quoted his injured brother, Zillur Rahman, 25, who was in a cabin of the vessel with his wife Taslima.

Shah Alam said that Zillur was in the Narayanang Hospital with a dislocated collarbone. Alam said that Zillur and Taslima were travelling in the cabin on the top floor of the vessel when suddenly it rocked heavily.

When Zillur opened the cabin door to check, the vessel capsized tossing the newly married couple backward. After that he found himself in the turbulent Meghna clinging to a wooden plank, with his wife Taslima nowhere to be seen.

But when other survivors snatched the plank away from him he slowly started to swim in the darkness of the night. He found

several people clinging to an empty oil drum and grabbed its side. Slowly, they swam to the shore at Shaitnal village and survived.

BIWTA officials said that two vessels, travelling in a convoy with MV Salauddin, managed to escape the short-lived twister.

One of the lucky vessels, MV Muladi, soon returned to the spot and threw life buoys into the water picking up 62 passengers, claimed Deputy Director of the BIWTA and Commander of the salvage unit MV Rustam.

Saiful Haque Khan, another Deputy Director of the BIWTA said yesterday afternoon that according to their sources, so far a total of 97 people have survived.

"There are probably many more who went home without letting us know," said Saiful Haque Khan.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday formed a three-member inquiry committee to investigate the accident. The deputy secretary of the shipping ministry will lead the committee.

Another three-member committee was formed to find out why the vessel capsized. The principal officer of the Mercantile Marine Department will head the second committee.

NEWS ANALYSIS