

# PM urges all to work together for prosperity

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday urged all to work together imbued with the spirit of liberation war to build up a prosperous Bangladesh.

She made the call on the eve of the Independence and National Day to uphold the principles of democracy where opposition parties would do constructive criticism of various activities of the government.

"Whichever party we belong to or whatever opinion we hold, we are accountable to the nation to work for progress and development of the country," she told a function of Independence Award distribution.

Addressing the function at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium, the prime minister said in a democratic polity it is usual to have many parties and hold different opinions.

"The opposition parties will do constructive criticism of various

activities of the government and the government will rectify its mistakes through their criticisms... this is the norm of democracy," she observed.

Khaleda Zia recalled her government's political gesture of giving the Independence Award-2003 to late President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman for their immense contributions in various fields of national life, including the country's independence and liberation war.

She said the main objective of independence was to improve socio-economic condition of people.

"They had sacrificed their lives in the liberation war in 1971 with hopes that the country would prosper," she told the function.

The prime minister said the heroic role of the people in the liberation war was not only to change the flag and attain a separate territory, this war was to ensure our dignified existence in the world.

"We have won that war and our objective has been achieved," she said, adding that the country is now gradually marching towards progress in all sectors, including economy, society, culture, education and health.

The Independence Award is the highest national prize, she said adding that, some 150 personalities and organisations have been honoured with this award till 2002.

The prime minister told the function that the award money has been raised to Tk 1 lakh from Tk 50,000 from this year, considering its importance.

The awardees and their family members, some wheelchair-bound disabled freedom fighters, ministers, diplomats, elite and academics, among others, attended the function.

Later, the prime minister went to the disabled freedom fighters in the audience and inquired about their wellbeing.

## Khosru, Reaz quit

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his office, Khosru said, "I have quit the cabinet, not the parliament."

Khosru submitted his resignation yesterday afternoon, amid widespread criticism, even from his fellow ruling-party lawmakers, of the commerce ministry for its failure to rein in the price-spiral of essentials and other commodities.

Altaf too was widely criticised for his failure to maintain law and order and for blurring out words on crimes and victims from time to time that sound insensible. A number of groups have also been demanding his resignation, most demanding the attack on writer Humayun Azad.

A good few BNP parliamentarians have been asking for downsizing the cabinet to a maximum of 30 members and removal of the corrupt ministers, in order to save the government's image from becoming unpopular. At a meeting last week, they also criticised the government's failure to improve law and order and arrest the price hike.

The news of Khosru's resignation triggered extensive speculation across the country yesterday. Phone calls started coming in newspaper houses from afternoon

enquiring 'what really happened in the cabinet'.

Many people even tagged the cabinet-change with the April-30 deadline prophesied by Awami League for the fall of the alliance government. Some again asked whether the resigned ministers were leaving the BNP for the alternative political stream of Badruddoza Chowdhury.

Khosru, however, brushed aside such speculations. "I was in the politics of BNP and I will be there," he told The Daily Star, adding, "I don't believe in the politics of party-hopping."

On whether the prime minister asked him to resign, Khosru said, "I don't want to comment on this."

Although initially he performed impressively as the commerce minister, Khosru in the recent months developed serious disagreements with a minister as senior as Saifur Rahman.

The price hike in soyabean oil, onion and other essentials during the last Ramadan made this former business magnate turned minister apparently unpopular, with many alleging that he was not trying enough to bring the prices down. Most recently, unusual price hike of rods was followed by milk powder.

der.

Another sensitive issue that went against Khosru was his role in allowing a trade office of Taiwan to operate in Dhaka, which enraged China and prompted it earlier this month to warn Bangladesh of 'unimaginable consequences'.

The public resentment generated in recent times by Altaf's failure in improving the law and order ran so deep that businesspeople in old Dhaka launched an intense movement while top business leaders of the country were issuing repeated statements demanding serious steps to improve the situation.

Altaf's effigies have been burnt many times by agitating people demanding his resignation, as the average number of daily killings has gone up to 12 from 10 two years ago.

Yesterday's change is the third shuffling of Khaleda Zia's rather large cabinet. On May 22 last year, she dropped seven ministers and changed portfolios of another 11, cutting down the cabinet's size to 53 from 60.

The first shuffle was made on March 11, 2002 through changing portfolios of four ministers.

## One jailed for killing Bangladeshi diplomat's wife, son in Turkey

AFP, Ankara

A Turkish court yesterday sentenced a Bangladeshi to 36 years in jail for the murders of the wife and son of a Bangladeshi military attache in whose house he worked as a servant, Anatolia news agency reported.

The man, Hafizur Rahman, pleaded not guilty, arguing that the diplomat himself killed his wife and 14-year-old son at their home in Ankara in July 1999 because of alleged sexual relationships he had with the two of them.

Rahman said the attache, Sharif Islam, tried to persuade him to claim responsibility for the murders and when the servant refused, a fight broke out between the two.

The attache, who no longer serves in Ankara, survived the incident with stab wounds.

## Khosru

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talked-about April 30 deadline for the fall of the government.

Asked if the prime minister Khaleda had asked him to resign, Khosru said, "I don't want to comment on this."

"I was in BNP's politics and I will be there. I will go to Chittagong tomorrow and address a public meeting there," said Khosru, who is a parliamentarian from Chittagong, a former chairman of Chittagong Stock Exchange and a leading businessman.

Talking to The Daily Star a couple of hours after his resignation, Khosru said, "I don't believe in politics of changing parties. I have resigned as a minister but I am still a parliamentarian."

About his performance as commerce minister, Khosru said, "I tried many things. I have succeeded in enhancing the country's image internationally. I initiated some reforms."

In reply to a question if his resignation will affect the country's international negotiations on deals like post Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA), the former minister said, "I have not done anything at personal level. An institution (government) has done these. A foreign trade institute has been set up and capacity has been built up. Therefore, whoever takes up as commerce minister will have no difficulty in continuing the negotiations."

He also said, "There are people in BNP more competent than me. Besides, I can't continue to be a minister forever."

## Guerrilla women

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rewards. No-one rewarded them either. They were not properly recognised for their roles.

"Back in 1971, it was not easy for a village woman nor even for an urban woman to go to war," says Kanchanmala of Goriganj village in Munshiganj, who fought with firearms after she was trained in Baroi camp in India as a freedom fighter of the sector 11. "Those who did despite all are still ignored 33 years down the line."

Kanchanmala with a dozen other women were taught to operate guns side by side with their male counterparts and did their regular parades. She was trained to operate a light machine gun (LMG), as she deemed physically fit. But the LMG turned into a problem for her and she was tasked with throwing grenades.

A 22-year-old mother of a son, Kanchanmala was staying with her in-laws in Netrokona before Pakistani forces attacked their home and picked her up.

"Pakistani Major Zahid bundled me into a jeep and took me to Birishiri camp. He confined me to his room for 18 days. I heard many women crying in other rooms." She was brutally tortured on the 18th day -- in captivity.

"I lost my sense from torture. They dumped me in a ditch outside. A boy found me alive and took me to a old woman's house," says Kanchanmala, tears welling up in her eyes.

For fear of further attacks, the woman asked her to leave. The boy took her to Bhabanipur camp in Durgapur where she recovered. Losing everything, she decided to go to war and crossed into India.

"I returned to Netrokona to take part in operations with freedom fighters," says Kanchanmala, who was treated in Bharutara Medical Clinic in India for leg wounds she suffered in fire.

That was September or October. She spent another 45 days in the clinic attending to other injured fighters.

Soon after she returned to Ghatail camp, Bangladesh became independent. She reunited with her husband, but came along humiliation, not joy.

Kanchanmala now figures on the list of freedom fighters. She had to prove to the Muktiyoddha Sangsad four years ago with her freedom fighter number.

Kanchanmala is not alone.

Sakhina Begum of Nokla upazila in Kishoreganj turned 50 when the war raged. Unable to read or write and childless, she was staying with her younger sister after her husband left her.

Now 80, Sakhina says the courage of freedom fighters spurred her on. But no-one wanted to recruit her as she is a woman. She was given spy training in the local "Bashu Bahini" camp after much of her insistence. Sakhina was tasked with surveying an area prior to any operation of freedom fighters.

"I posed as a beggar. Pakistani forces arrested me once. I lied to them and escaped." Sakhina carried a sharp machete with her for self-defence. "I killed seven or eight razakars (collaborators) with the machete," she glows with pride.

Tahera Begum of Raipur in Noakhali, Urmila Roy of Kawkhali in Pirojpur and Ambia Safi in Jessore attended to ailing and injured fighters in hospitals and sheltered freedom fighters in their homes.

"We sheltered up to 200 freedom fighters. I cooked them food," Tahera says.

"My husband fled before Pakistani forces and razakars burnt down our house. I was homeless," recalls Tahera. At 19 then, she returned to her father's and reunited with her husband many years later.

"I suffered a lot of damage for helping freedom fighters. In the last 33 years, no local leader ever helped me with a single penny. They don't even recognise me as a freedom fighter," Tahera despairs.

"Innumerable women contributed to the war in innumerable ways. It's painful to see they were not recognised just because they did not fight with firearms," says Ambia who nursed many injured freedom fighters.

Urmila is now 70. She also dedicated herself to serving injured warriors -- the reason Pakistani forces killed her 13-year-old daughter. "It hurts when people undermine me now."

## Muktijoddha award

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chairman of Transparency International Bangladesh chapter, handed over the awards at a ceremony held at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh in the city.

The other award recipients were Ashalata Baidya, Sadia Khatun, Rowshan Akther Lily, Kanchon Mala, Saleha Begum, Zahura Khatun, Sharifa Khatun, Ambia Khatun, Pushpa Rani Halder and Momena Begum.

Besides, two other women freedom fighters, Rokeya Khatun and Fatema Khatun, were presented with cash rewards of Tk 25,000 each.

Proshika also announced to give a life-long monthly allowance of Tk 1,000 to 10 poor women liberation war veterans.

The chief guest of the function, Prof Murshid observed, "Ironically, the people who were dead against the country's liberation have been

and are gradually acquiring the necessary tools and means for taking over the state power."

"What we dreamt during our liberation war are not only endangered but are already shattered," he added.

Speaking as the special guest, Shyamoli Nasreen Chaudhury, wife of liberation war martyr Dr Alim Chowdhury, said, "Those who opposed the country's liberation are now enjoying the state benefits, while the freedom fighters are denied even due honour."

"All our achievements are going to be lost due to the rising fundamentalism in the country," she apprehended.

Proshika Chairman Quazi Faruk Akbar presided over the function where Colonel (Rtd) Abu Osman Chowdhury, Major (Rtd) Ziauddin, Ferdousi Priyobhashini and some women freedom fighters also spoke.

## Reshuffle draws

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and the cabinet reshuffle have been long overdue. However, they noted, axing ministers right at the moment may prove unwise because of the current political turmoil.

They argued the government could have dropped ministers or reshuffle the cabinet either much earlier or after the April 30 deadline given by the main opposition Awami League to overthrow the BNP-led coalition government.

They fear that this "sudden and untimely" reshuffle may fuel the opposition movement and that BNP's opponents might launch a propaganda campaign that the government has been forced to drop ministers and bring changes to the cabinet in the wake of the ongoing anti-government movement.

The changes may also create panic among the party men and also people in general, they believe.

The leaders pointed out that the demand for trimming the jumbo cabinet dates back to BNP-led alliance's cabinet forming and there has also been severe criticism at home and abroad about the size of the council of ministers.

Many other leaders however hailed the cabinet reshuffle saying that the prime minister has taken a very timely step by bringing about the changes. They said the AL deadline and floating of an alternative political stream would not worry the BNP.

But, most of them expressed surprise at the axing of only one cabinet minister and a state minister, who, according to them, have performed better than those who are 'corrupt'.

They said Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury was severely criticised for the spiralling prices of essentials, but there was no allegation against State Minister for Foreign Affairs Reaz Rahman.

Most leaders think more than a dozen cabinet and state ministers, particularly the home and communications ministers, should have been dropped from the cabinet. Instead, the government just

## Independence Award 2004 handed over

UNB, Dhaka

Seven personalities and three organisations were given Independence Award 2004 yesterday in recognition of their outstanding contributions to national life.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at a function at the Osmani Memorial Hall distributed the awards among the recipients that included a British woman, who has helped hundreds of people with disabilities in Bangladesh.

The awardees are Oli Ahad (independence and liberation war), Comrade Moni Singh (posthumous-independence and liberation war), Brig (ret'd) Prof Abdul Malik (medical science), Muhammad Siddique Khan (posthumous-education), Abu Isahq (posthumous-literature), Altaf Mahmud (posthumous-culture) and Valrie Ann Taylor (public service) and Bangladesh Ansar and VDP (sports), Rural Development Academy, Bogra (rural development) and Sandhani (social service).

The award carries a gold medal, Tk 1 lakh and a certificate.

Family members of the awardees, who won the award posthumously, received the awards from the Prime Minister.

## Sylhet int'l trade fair suspended on Shibir threat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Authorities yesterday suspended the International Trade Fair scheduled to open tomorrow on Sylhet Government Alia Madrasah premises following resistance from some student leaders backed by the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS).

The Sylhet Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) may now shift the venue to the Reserve Police field and fix another date, said an official.

The SCCI leaders tried to win over the dissenters in last two days in vain. An administrative effort taken by the deputy commissioner and superintendent of police of Sylhet also failed.

SCCI President Mohiuddin Ahmed, Vice-presidents Shah Alam and Ziaul Haque and Director Hijil Guljar yesterday at a press conference said they had obtained written permission from the madrasah authorities for the fair. Some students began to protest only three days back, claiming it will cause disturbances, they alleged.

In addition to the local firms, traders from Thailand, Korea, China, Malaysia, Iran, and Taiwan are expected to join the fair hosting 187 stalls and 16 pavilions.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman was scheduled to inaugurate the fair as chief guest.

## Tiger kills fisherman in Sundarbans

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

A tiger Wednesday killed a fisherman in the Sundarbans.

The tiger attacked Ansar Ali Gazi, son of Abdur Rahman Gazi of Bhakhal village in Shyamnagar upazila, when he was fishing in Kachchikata canal at around 11 am, witnesses said.

The 40-year old died on the spot, they added.

Locals later recovered his body from deep forest in the afternoon.

## Restaurant fire

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Ismael had just joined work at around 8:00pm on Wednesday at Tk 450 a month with food and lodging free.

Police and firefighters are yet to find out the cause of the fire. However, police suspect the victims might have kept the gas burners open to dry wet cloth or the fire might have spread from mosquito coil.

Four other workers -- Zakir Hossain, 14, Billal, 18, Mohammad Sujon, the cook, and the restaurant manager, their age unknown, were also sleeping on the other side of the two-room restaurant, but escaped unhurt.

"I woke up at around 4:30am and found thick smoke in the dining room of the tin-roof brick-wall hotel and ran out for cover," police quoted Zakir as saying.

"All the bodies were lying near the kitchen door as they tried to come out of the room," Assistant Commissioner (Mirpur-Pallabi) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Kamrul Ahsan said.

The fire also burnt down a nearby printing shop, Jiko Printers, and a doctor's chamber, Samajik Swasthya Kendra. No-one of the shops was injured, however.

"Since the shutters of the shop was closed, none of us really knew what happened inside," said Hossain, a cigarette-seller on road No. 3.

# Alternative stream goes political April 12

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The alternative political stream launched by former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury will take the shape of a political party with a name at a grand rally at Paltan Maidan in the capital on April 12.

The political forum will also float its student wing to be named Bangladesh Chhatra Dhara on March 29 in front of the National Press Club.

National committee member of the forum Mahi B Chowdhury announced these at a press conference yesterday at KC Memorial Hospital at Baridhara.

He also announced the platform's action programmes till the end of April 30, which includes observance of "hated toward the corrupt day" on April 6. To mark the day, members of the public will throw stones, shoes and whatever they like at an effigy representing the corrupt at Muktangan, he said.

Mahi said they have sought permission from the authorities for the rally at Paltan and no-one else has asked for permission to hold any programme at the same venue on that day. They have also sought the venue for their rally on some other dates around mid-April in case they are not permitted to hold it on April 12, he said.

Earlier this month, the forum was not allowed to hold a rally at Paltan and its scheduled rally at an

alternative venue -- Muktangan -- was also foiled by the ruling BNP men.

The forum has also asked for permission to hold the April 6 programme and he is hopeful of getting permission. Mahi said, "If the government prevents us from holding the programme against corrupt people, it will mean sheltering them."

He said the previously-announced protest programme in front of Bangladeshi high commissions and consulates abroad remains unchanged.

About the proposed student body, he said its formation will be based on a survey of teachers, students and guardians.

The forum leader also announced some social programmes to begin on April 9 and continue till April 30, which include one titled "Take responsibility of poor children."

Under the programme, the new party will collect data of 5,000 poor children aged up to 12 and take their responsibility in cooperation with various non-governmental organisations.

The party will also make six villages in the six divisions 'ideal villages,' he said.

About the Awami League's April 30 deadline to overthrow the government Mahi said, "Perhaps the party has some serious plans for a movement and that is why it has issued such ultimatum."

# Independence

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the highly trained army in the world to snatch the freedom, even at the cost of three million lives.

People at large took up arms, Bangalee policemen and paramilitary men and army personnel defected and trained the people to war. They fought without proper food, shelter, training, or firearms. But it was the determination to free their motherland and the all-out support of the people that finally saw the birth of a nation that was seeded nine months ago on this day.

The nation pauses in solemn silence to observe its 34th Independence Day today.

After the Pakistani forces brutally cracked down on the unarmed people of the then East Pakistan on the night of March 25, 1971, the Bangladeshis fought for independence under the leadership of Bangabandhu and joined an all-out guerrilla war.

Today, a population that has doubled over the years will pay rich tribute to the three million martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the War of Independence. They also take vow afresh on this day to build a prosperous Bangladesh free from disparity and exploitation as dreamt by the martyrs.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina gave messages paying respects to the Liberation War martyrs.

The president in his message urged all to work selflessly to fulfil the basic needs of people such as food, clothes,

## Tagore's Nobel

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connection for interrogation. No arrest has so far been made, he said.

The Chief Minister said that he talked to Visva Bharati Vice-Chancellor Sujit Basu and senior police officers over phone to enquire about the theft.

He said that a CID team was being rushed to Shantiniketan to investigate.

Tagore had received the Nobel Prize in 1913 in literature.

## Suharto

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high in a country with an average GDP of just \$100 a person.

It amounted to 40% of the \$12bn in aid Zaire - now the Democratic Republic of Congo - received during his 32-year rule.

"The abuse of political power for private gain deprives the most needy of vital public services, creating a level of despair that breeds conflict and violence," said IT's founder and chairman Peter Eizen.

In producing this year's report TI has focused on political corruption, partly to highlight new conventions which it hopes will help the fight against graft.

The United Nations Convention against Corruption was completed on December 9 last year, while the African Union's own convention came out in July 2003.

Ratification of these conventions, said TI UK chief Laurence Cockcroft, would help root out corrupt politicians and - just as importantly - get the stolen cash back home.

The UN Convention, he said, "provides a formal framework for multi-lateral action" by law enforcement.

"And it greatly improves the scope for repatriation of assets by cutting through the legal obscurantism of the past."

That could - for example - help Nigeria recover the \$2bn-\$5bn estimated to have been stolen by late President Sani Abacha.

Switzerland has promised to hand back more than \$500m in its banks, but less progress is being made on the \$1bn-plus held in London.

# Internet telephony

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The cabinet on November 10 last year gave nod to legalisation of internet telephony, popularly known as VoIP (voice over internet protocol), aimed at reducing international call rates.

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has been assigned to set the modalities for issuance of licences. The BTRC formed a committee comprising stakeholders aimed at setting modalities for establishing an internet exchange but the committee is yet to reach a decision.

BTRC took the decision to form a committee following a consultative meeting with the internet service providers (ISPs) and other prospective VoIP operators.

The stakeholders strongly differ on the issue of having a single gateway for VoIP calls, as proposed by BTRC.

"This is a move that goes

# JS session

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chair decided to adjourn the House last night for resumption at 5:00pm on April 25.

The parliament-boycotting Awami League (AL) smelt conspiracy in the unusual dragging of the session that began on January 18, but Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said it was aimed at passing an amendment to the constitution.

The 14th Amendment to the Constitution Bill, 2004 placed in the House on March 17 proposes a set of six changes, including 45 women's reserved seats, permanent provision for display of the portraits of the president and prime minister and speedy swearing-in of lawmakers-elect by the outgoing speaker.