

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.

"Whatever 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 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.

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.

Khosru, Reaz quit

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his office, Khosru said, "I have quitted 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 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 insensitive. A number of groups have also been demanding his resignation, most recently after the attack on writer Humayun Azad.

A good few BNP parliamentarians have been asking for downscaling 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 soybean 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 pow-

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 a 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

against the growth of private sector and is aimed to keep the ICT (information and communication technology) sector under a restricted regime," said Akhtaruzzaman Manju, president of Bangladesh Internet Service Providers' Association.

"The delayed process for awarding licence and even setting modalities for the VoIP is a deliberate act of the government to give the state-owned BTTB an unfair advantage," said a telecoms expert on condition that he not be named. He added that such a move would hinder the independent growth of the ICT sector.

Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) has introduced VoIP to generate calls to 10 countries without licence.

"BTTB's introduction of VoIP is against the concept of the independent telecoms regulator to ensure a level playing field for all," Manju pointed out.

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Khosru

FROM PAGE 1 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.

"He's running the House in freestyle. Abdul Jalil made the deadline statement outside parliament, but the speaker allowed BNP deputies to speak on the issue on March 24 and termed Jalil's statement unconstitutional as violation of the rules of procedure," the former speaker alleged.

"He's in the habit of giving rulings on every issue."

The duration of the session, initially scheduled to be prolonged, was earlier extended until March 30 with an 11-day-break from March 4.

The session stretching decision coincided with a cabinet reshuffle yesterday.

Leader of the House Khaleda Zia, LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Oli Ahmed, Chief Whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Moudud and Prime Minister's Parliamentary Affairs Adviser Salauddin Qader Chowdhury attended the BAC meeting.

Moulana Abdus Sobhan of Jamaat-e-Islami represented Industries Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami to the meeting.

Referring to ruling BNP law-makers' demand for taking Jalil on remand for information about his prediction of the government's fall by the deadline, Hamid criticised the speaker for allowing treasury bench members to speak on the issue in the House that stemmed outside.

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

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.

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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 speedily swearing-in of lawmakers-elect by the outgoing speaker.

The bill was sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the law ministry for scrutiny in 15 days after introduction, but the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday sanctioned the body six more weeks for the task.

Briefing newsmen at his Sangsads Bhaban office, Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid said the 'unprecedented extension' of the session was a ploy of the government that he said became shaky over the AL's April 30 deadline for the fall of the government.

He said the session extension was against the spirit of the constitution and a breach of the president's authority of prorogation.

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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 Kanchanmalal Goriganj village in Munshiganj, who fought with fire arms 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."

Kanchanmalal Goriganj village in Kishoreganj turned 50 when the war raged. Unable to read or write and childless, she was staying with her young sister after her husband left her.

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