

Indian copter

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Razzak Ali, while rejecting an adjournment motion by independent member Nurul Islam Mont, invited the concerned minister to make a statement since the incident was important.

Tofael Ahmed of Awami League took the floor and said it was unfortunate that the Prime Minister did not know anything about the incident even though she had taken oath as Prime Minister on March 20.

In reply Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury of BNP clarified the statement of the Leader of the House saying the meat that she did not have enough information to make a statement in the House.

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasin seized the opportunity to say that the incident was related to the security of the nation. She said, "if the Prime Minister does not know about the incident, where does the nation stand?"

In reply Begum Zia explained that all powers are still vested in the Acting President because a presidential system is in force. It has nothing to do with the oath taking or assumption of office. It is therefore, not unnatural that we do not have details of everything, she said.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abus Samad Azad said the people did not want to see this dichotomy. They wanted the Prime Minister to have all power of the Leader of the House of a sovereign parliament. He said the present parliament is unique as it is the outcome of a bloody movement and the people wanted to make it 'sovereign'. The Awami League member urged the Treasury Bench to immediately introduce a constitutional amendment bill to make the parliament 'sovereign'.

Replying to this Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury said BNP also wants parliamentary sovereignty. He asserted that the parliament is sovereign in respect of its legislative powers. The parliament's law making powers are enormous and it is also empowered to enact law.

Although the Deputy Speaker who was in the chair closed the debate after Prof Chowdhury's statement, National Democratic Party member Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury and Ganatantrik Party member Suranjit Sen Gupta took opportunity to ask as to whether the Treasury Bench has the right to introduce bills in the House to transform ordinances promulgated by the Acting President into laws.

Dhaka Jail

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But the remission and amnesty failed to defuse agitation by the prisoners and they made fresh demands.

Since the December revolt the Dhaka Jail was virtually under the control of prisoners the authorities managed to quell the situation in other jails.

Dhaka-Beijing

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of late President Ziaur Rahman in founding the relationship between Bangladesh and China and said Zia's visit to China had contributed immensely to strengthen the ties.

The Chinese Vice Minister expressed his confidence that Bangladesh would flourish under the competent leadership of the present government. He also gave a resume on the progress that China had made in socio-political and economic fields.

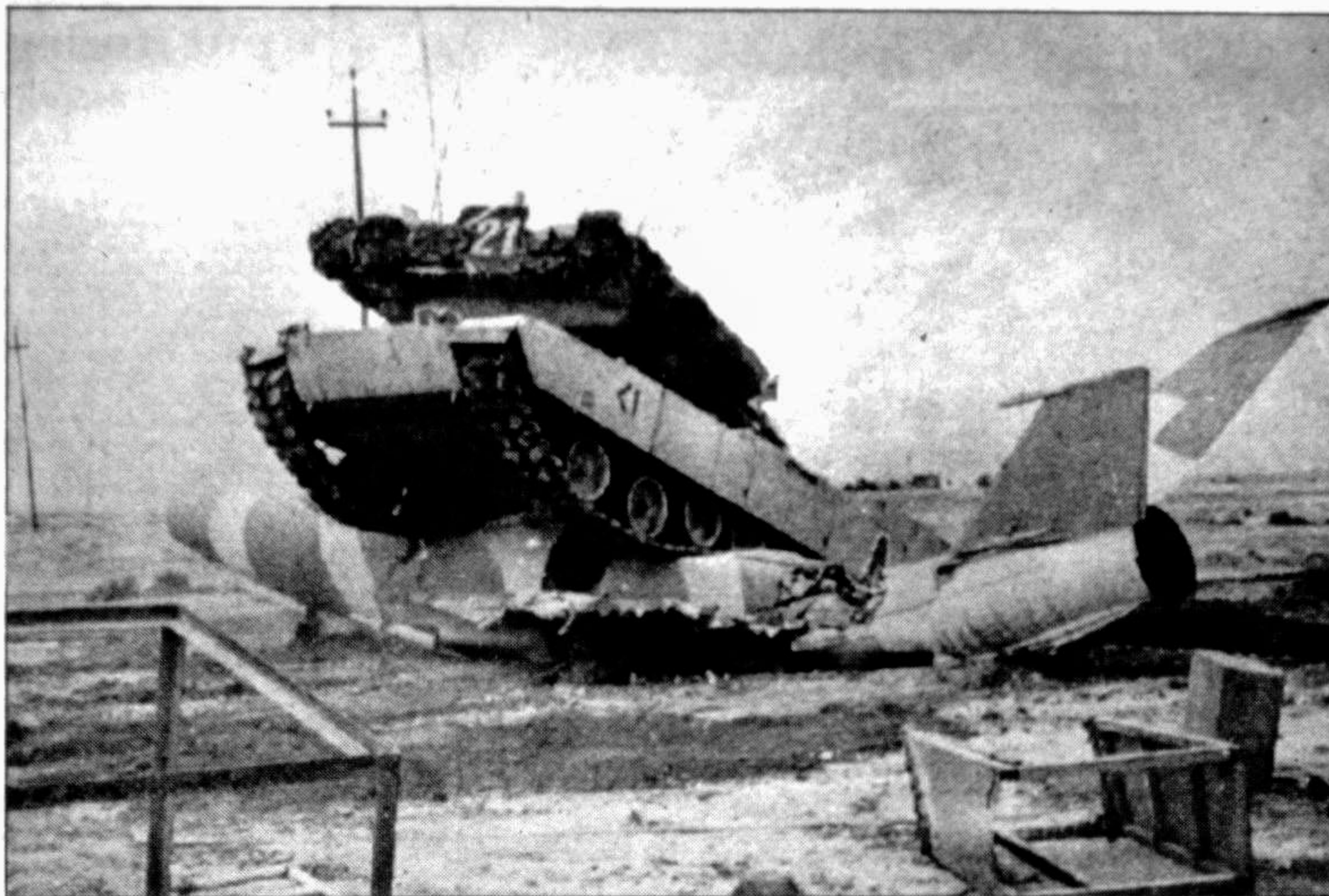
Reciprocating the sentiment of Chinese delegation, Begum Zia requested Mr. Wang to convey good wishes to the people and government of China on her own behalf and on behalf of the people of Bangladesh.

The Prime Minister also apprised the Chinese team about the programmes of her government for socio-economic development of the common people particularly peasants, youth and women.

She said her government would work for implementing her party's 19-point programme with a view to meeting the basic needs of the people.

Begum Zia wished the success of the current session of the joint economic commission of the two countries.

Secretary of the External Relations division Mr. Enam Ahmed Chowdhury, Bangladesh Ambassador to China Farooq Sobhan, Chinese Ambassador Mr. Chen Song Lu were present.



A US M1 tank crushes Sunday the wreck of an Iraqi Mig 21 plane found near a motorway 300 km south of Baghdad. Iraqi pilots used motorways as takeoff runways during Gulf war as Allied forces bombed air bases. —AFP photo

Pandemonium in parliament

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M. K. Anwar retorted the Awami League members that they were trying to create obstacles to healthy conduct of normal business by the House. "Had they not participated in 1986 elections, a representative parliament like the present one would have been elected five years ago", he observed.

Shivering with anger, he told the House that autocracy began in 1972 and the government officials could not perform their normal duties due to high-handedness of the then ruling party. The public officials were also associated with the anti-autocracy movement last year, he added.

He said, "we know who hobbled with the autocratic ruler". In a stout self-defence, he said he polled more votes than the Leader of the Opposition in the last parliamentary elections.

The observations by M. K. Anwar evoked angry responses from the Awami League members. Begum Sajeda Chowdhury took the floor and reminded the House that the fall of the autocratic regime was the outcome of the people's movement. The credit should not be claimed by any single individual, not to speak of a former civil servant like M. K. Anwar who served the autocratic regime.

But, there was a stronger defence for M. K. Anwar from Treasury Bench member Amanullah Aman, who is also the Vice President of Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU). Taking the floor, he said the 1986 parliament could not be termed "a lawful one" because it only strengthened the hands of 'autocrat' Ershad to perpetuate himself in power. The students and the workers shed their blood in the long nine years' struggle against the autocratic regime, he added.

Amanullah Aman noted that a former Inspector General of Police under the Ershad regime got the nomination of

Awami League in the last parliamentary election. The students and the workers were killed and tortured during the anti-autocracy movement at the instruction of the said official, he alleged.

The noisy scene in the House lasted for about 40 minutes with members from both sides booing at each other while thumping their benches. The deliberations by the members and also the Speaker's orders were deafened by the shouts.

It all started when Awami League member Akhtaruzzaman Babu raised a point of order on whether the Deputy Speaker while presiding any sitting of the House should be addressed as Speaker or not. He cited instances from the 1986 parliament in this context. And then, uproar began, making it free-for-all for the members to make charges and counter-charges against each other.

State Minister for Food Nazmul Huda took the floor and objected to any references to the 1986 Sangsad. Such a reference will be disrespectful to this House, duly constituted through a free and fair election following a successful people's movement against autocracy, he contended.

Awami League member Tofael Ahmed welcomed the point made by Treasury Bench members about the 1986 parliament. But he observed that many important functionaries of the fallen autocratic regime were sitting on Treasury Benches in the new parliament.

Whip of Awami League Parliamentary Party Mohammed Nasim strongly supported Tofael on this point. He said he was a member of the 1986 Sangsad, but high officials of the fallen regime like M. K. Anwar and Keramat Ali were Treasury Bench members of the Fifth Parliament. "Those who took benefits from the Ershad government are now with Bangladesh Nationalist Party", he observed.

He said, 30 women mem-

bers of the current Parliament are "the outcome of an illegal parliament under the Ershad regime". He noted that the Treasury Bench wanted to take all the advantages of all "illegal actions" by the fallen autocratic government.

The House turned more boisterous then. Begum Farida Rahman from Treasury Bench, who earlier made several attempts to draw the attention of the Speaker succeeded finally to take the floor. "We are here because of the constitutional provisions made in 1972 reserving 15 seats for women. The number of the reserved seats was later raised to 30 under an amendment to the Constitution made during the government of late President Ziaur Rahman. The autocratic Ershad government wanted to snatch our rights but did not succeed because of our strong and effective opposition outside the House", she said.

Two Jamaat members, Maulana Abdus Sobhan and Kazi Shamsur Rahman, urged the Speaker at this stage not to allow any wastage of valuable time in the Sangsad on peripheral issues. Maulana Sobhan maintained that the Sangsad must be made functionally more effective. Kazi Shamsur Rahman suggested that proper discipline must be restored in the House to facilitate its conduct of important business.

The heat in the House still continued. Treasury Bench members accused the Awami League members of having collaborated with the fallen Ershad regime. They said the Sangsad of 1986 in which Awami League was represented legalised the 'illegal regime of Ershad'.

The Awami League members retorted the Treasury Bench for harbouring the 'henchmen' of the fallen autocratic regime. They counter-charged that BNP 'legitimized' the martial law in the seventies.

While the pandemonium still continued, Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali put an end to the debate.

Seen from the gallery

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Sheikh Hasina made an abortive attempt to provoke the Leader of the House saying that she felt insecure when the Prime Minister said that she was not aware of the incident.

Khaleda Zia did not reply herself. Dr. Badruddoza Chowdhury came to her aid and said that the Prime Minister would inform the House after gathering detailed information.

The Treasury Bench and Opposition members equally greeted the Leader of the House when she stood for the second time to reply to the Leader of the Opposition.

But in was very short reply. The members seemed to have a strong desire to hear the Leader of the House speak more in the House to make the proceedings livelier.

The Opposition did not miss the opportunity to press for amending the Constitution to make the Prime Minister the head of government when Khaleda Zia said that the Acting President was the Chief Executive and that the real power lies with him.

Awami League member Tofael Ahmed rose to his feet and said "We want to see Begum Khaleda as a really powerful Prime Minister".

Sheikh Hasina nodded in support to Tofael's submission. None responded from the Treasury Bench.

The Opposition members on Monday made it a point to raise the demand for reverting to a parliamentary system whenever they got the chance to do so.

Suranjit Sengupta rising to speak on the Hindu Welfare Trust Fund made the parliamentary form of government an issue which the Speaker pointed out as irrelevant.

Law and Justice Minister Mirza Gohar Hafiz probably cannot forget that he is no more the Speaker.

While making a statement when introducing an amendment bill on the privileges of the Supreme Court Judges he pointed out the mistakes committed by some members when raising points of order.

But his performance was really very good and he was very candid while making his points.

Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali though for the first time in the chair, conducted business in an orderly manner displaying the true talent of a Speaker.

He make the proceedings lively by allowing a debate on the 1986 parliament.

Akhtaruzzaman Babu of the Awami League put his party in trouble making a reference to the 1986 Parliament.

The Treasury Bench rose in unison to protest the citing of any convention from the 1986 House which, according to them, was highly controversial.

The Treasury Bench members provoked the Opposition accusing them of collaborating with the autocratic regime of Ershad in 1986.

Awami League MP Mohammad Nasim returned the accusation to the BNP saying that it was sitting with Ershad cronies like M. K. Anwar and Keramat Ali.

M. K. Anwar gave a biting reply reminding the leaders including the Leader of the Opposition about their role during the last nine years.

He seemed to frighten when some of the Opposition stalwarts saying that he knew many things about them.

But the bureaucrat-turned politician refrained from mentioning anyone by name.

The Opposition leaders did not want the discussion to continue.

DUJ rally today

Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) will hold a rally today (Tuesday) at 9 a.m. at the Jattiya Press Club in protest against the harassment of journalists by the newspaper owners, according to a press release, reports BSS.

All members of the union have been requested to attend. The executive committee of Dhaka Union of Journalist (DUJ) on Monday expressed deep concern and anger at the alleged "unholy activities" of some newspaper owners creating tension in the newspaper industries, according to a DUJ press release.

The DUJ executive committee observed that these newspaper owners were pushing the industry towards a deadlock by resorting to unilateral closure of newspapers, irregular payment of salaries and allowances and retrenchment of journalists.

The DUJ urged the owners of newspapers to stay away from such activities and solve the problem through negotiations with the union.

The committee also urged the government to take initiative for solving the problems in the newspaper industries and announce an effective code of ethics.

BSP statement travesty of truth : Hawkers

Dhaka Sangbadpatra Hawkers' Union Monday said that Newspaper Hawkers' Association was absolutely welfare-oriented and non-commercial engaged in ensuring the distribution of newspapers in the greater Dhaka city and paying the newspaper owners their dues in full, reports BSS.

A press release of the Union signed by its President Md Lutfe Ali and General Secretary Md Mostafa Kamal said the statement of the Bangladesh Sangbadpatra Parishad (BSP) about the Hawkers' Association and its newspaper distribution system was irrelevant and a travesty of truth.

They said the Newspaper Hawkers' Association was formed at the initiative of some newspaper owners having sympathy for the hawkers and some prominent journalists. They said the present government recognised the newspaper hawkers cooperative constitutionally.

They said the newspapers in the Pakistan days used to be distributed in the Dhaka city through some agents engaged by certain individuals. A substantial portion of the commission was taken by them and they used to give little to the poor hawkers. In certain cases the commission of the hawkers was not given for days together on the one hand and the dues of the newspapers' owners were also not realised on the other.

The hawkers leaders said the commission for distribution through individual agency was little over 33 per cent which has been raised by only 1.75 (one point seventyfive) per cent. The owners pay commission at the rate of 35 per cent in different places outside Dhaka in addition to bearing the transports cost, they added.

Bijrani calls on Hasina

Visiting Pakistani special envoy Mir Hazar Khan Bijrani called on Awami League Chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina on Monday, reports UNB.

Dispute

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including Jamaat-e-Islami and Jattiya Party and three independents remained absent in the House. They staged a walkout to protest the wrong placement of Opposition Leader's name in the 15-member advisory committee. Their demand was to put the name of Sheikh Hasina just after the name of Leader of the House.

Before beginning the proceedings according to order of the day, the Leader of the House and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia requested the chair to adjourn the House for sometime so the problem could be settled through discussions. She mentioned the abstention of opposition members in the House and said she wanted to see a lively House. The Deputy Speaker adjourned the House for 20 minutes at her request.

The leaders of Treasury Bench and Opposition parties and groups met at the chamber of the Speaker where the problem was amicably settled when Treasury Bench leaders assured to place the name of the Opposition leader at the appropriate place in the list.

In the meeting, Treasury Bench was represented by Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury, Barrister Nazmul Huda, Barrister Rafiqul Islam and Abdul Matin Chowdhury, while the opposition was represented by Awami League's Chowdhury, Tofael Ahmed, Mohiuddin Ahmed and Abdur Razzak, CPB's Shamsuddoha, Workers Party's Rashed Khan Menon, JSD's Shahjahan Siraj, Jamaat's Maulana Mattiur Rahman Nizami, Jattiya Party's Reazuddin Ahmed and others.

When the Opposition members came out from Speaker's chamber after the meeting they were found happy and told reporters the Treasury Bench leaders agreed to place the name of the Leader of the Opposition just after the name of the Leader of the House.

When the session resumed at 11-25 p.m. all opposition members attended and proceeding continued.

During the afternoon session that began at 2 p.m., Law Minister Mirza Gulam Hafiz sought permission to place a bill to amend Supreme Court Judges (Remuneration and Privileges) Ordinance, 1978. After some discussions, Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali, put it to voice vote. The Treasury Bench members voted in its favour while the opposition remained silent and did not oppose.

At this stage, Leader of the Opposition took the floor and suggested that it could be considered as unanimous opinion of the House to table the bill. Suranjit Sengupta supported her saying, "We want to set an example by giving an unanimous decision from this House. There is no controversy about the independence of judiciary."

Afterwards, the Deputy Speaker declared that the bill was placed without any objection from any side. AL leader Tofael Ahmed requested the chair for a statement on the discussion between Treasury Bench and Opposition at Speakers chamber during the 20 minute's adjournment in the morning where the upgradation of Opposition business advisory committee was discussed.

In reply, Deputy Speaker said Speaker himself would make a statement on it later.

Loans

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Planning Ministry. State Minister for Finance Mujibur Rahman, Principal Finance Secretary Khorsheed Alam, Governor of Bangladesh Bank SB Chowdhury and Managing Directors of different nationalised commercial banks, the heads of different development financial institutions and non-banking financial institutions were present in the meeting.

Govt's activities

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Gulshan in the city. Referring to some articles of the Constitution the JP leader said appointment of Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed as the Acting President and all the activities by his interim government are illegal as per relevant provisions of the Constitution. Besides, holding the post of the Acting President by the Chief Justice is a clear violation of the Constitution, he added.

The JP leader cautioned that any responsible citizen of the country could challenge the legality of the present government's steps.

Mann demands army withdrawal

NEW DELHI, Apr 8: Sikh politician Simranjit Singh Mann demanded the Indian army's withdrawal from Punjab today, report AFP.

The Midnight File

Fresh LTTE attack in naval base

COLOMBO, Apr 8: Tamil Guerrillas launched a fresh attack on the main naval base in northern Sri Lanka, killing an officer, as large parts of the embattled region was brought under fresh curfew today, officials said. Activists from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked the Karainagar Naval facility with mortar bombs overnight Sunday killing the 27-year-old Sub-Lieutenant, a military spokesman here said, reports AFP.

Malaysia yet to decide on refugees

KUALA LUMPUR, Apr 8: Malaysia has not decided whether to treat 108 Indonesians as refugees from fighting in North Sumatra or illegal immigrants, government officials said Monday. They said the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had to determine whether they qualified for refugee status, reports AP.

Major for EC relief for Kurds

LUXEMBOURG, Apr 8: British Prime Minister John Major on Monday called for the European Community to put together an emergency relief programme for Kurdish refugees fleeing civil war in Iraq. Sources said his package would cost 200 million dollars. Speaking at an EC summit meeting, Major also called for the creation of a safe haven for Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq under United Nations auspices, reports AP.

Hong Kong talks extended

HONG KONG, Apr 8: Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd said British and Chinese officials had extended their talks in Beijing today, raising a glimmer of hope for a breakthrough in a dispute over plans for a new airport in Hong Kong. Hurd had directed his officials to end negotiations by the time he left China if no breakthrough was in sight, reports Reuter.

China shakes up legislature

BEIJING, Apr 8: China's legislature on Monday appointed the reformist Mayor of Shanghai and the Head of the State Planning Commission as Vice Premiers, but the standoff between conservatives and reformists appeared unrelieved. Shanghai Mayor Zhu Rongji, 62, and planning chief Zou Jiahua, 64, join three existing Vice Premiers, two of whom are in their 70s, reports AP.

AL strategy

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The Awami League which is striving for a parliamentary form of government and had made it an election issue is now contemplating to bring a bill on the private members' day.

But such an attempt by the Awami League would ultimately turn the issue into a dead one, political analysis observed.

Felicitating the speaker last Sunday Ganotantri Party leader Suranjit Sengupta said that the Treasury Bench should take the initiative to bring a bill on the form of government.

He also stressed the need for a parliamentary democracy making the parliament 'sovereign' to establish a fully democratic government in the country, which would remain accountable to the parliament.

Jamaat leader Mattiur Rahman Nizami said that the Jamaat would favour a government which would remain accountable to the parliament. But he categorically said that they want a balance between the presidential and the parliamentary system.

It is evident from the remarks of the leaders of different parties that three clear lines will be pursued by three groups.

BNP will try to retain the existing system of government, the Awami League will try to change the form to a parliamentary one while the third will strive for a balance between the presidential and the parliamentary systems.

Meanwhile the smaller parties like Rashed Khan Menon's Workers Party, Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury's NDP and Shahjahan Siraj's JSD that have expressed their support to the BNP government will try to play a match-making role.

However the smaller parties basically practising socialism (except the NDP) will look at the matter from a different angle. Meanwhile they said that the debate on the form of government was mainly due to the contradiction between the national bourgeoisie.

They decided that the parties which believed in socialism and national democratic revolution should try to cap-

talise on the contradictions of the bourgeoisie class to expand their party activities.

Insiders of both the parties said that the smaller parties have a great responsibility in narrowing down the differences between the bigger parties, i. e. the BNP and the Awami League. But their passive attitude to the politics of the big parties may upset the potentialities of a national consensus on the form of government.

Ganotantri Party leader Suranjit Sen told the Daily Star that everyone must be sincere about their respective theory and practice.

He said that if there was no understanding between the Awami League and the BNP on the form of government the stalemate would persist.

Jamaat leader Mattiur Rahman Nizami said that the Jamaat would favour a government which would remain accountable to the parliament. But he categorically said that they want a balance between the presidential and the parliamentary system.

The BNP has not yet discussed the issue openly, but has asked its members to remain alert about a future presidential election.

Begum Khaleda Zia has not said anything in public about a presidential election and has kept the option open to debate.

Political analysts said that the Awami League as the proponent of the parliamentary form would not try to go for this change so early. They would rather keep the issue alive as a political lever to agitate once again in the name of parliamentary democracy.

The differences between the two major parties is too wide and it will take time even for the development of a parliamentary behaviour between them, said the observers.

Hence the question of a national consensus on any major issue will be a far cry at this stage. But that the country is likely to go for an election once again in maintaining the supremacy of the Constitution over the 'Joint Declaration'.

Bill introduced

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(Amendment) Bill was introduced by Prof M. A. Mannan, State Minister for Religious Affairs. The bill also seeks to validate an ordinance promulgated for an extra grant of Taka one crore to Hindu Religious Welfare Trust.

State Minister for Land Zamiruddin Strar introduced the Premises Rent Control Bill. It provides for refixation of rent on the basis of appeals of the owner or the tenant after every two years. The bill, if passed, will be a permanent law on premises rent control.

Rival BNP groups clash: 20 hurt

NETRAKONA, Apr 8: At least 20 people were injured, seven seriously, in a violent clash between supporters of two rival BNP leaders at Purbadhala upazila today, police said, reports UNB.

The seven seriously injured were admitted to Purbadhala Health Complex.

All help to democratic govt : Chinese minister

The Chinese Vice-Minister for Foreign Economic Relations and Trade, Wang Wen Dong, said Monday that his country would extend all possible cooperation and assistance to the democratically elected new government of Bangladesh, reports BSS.

Addressing the plenary of the sixth session of Bangladesh-China Joint Economic Commission, which began Monday morning, Wang expressed the hope that economic and trade relations between the two countries would be further widened and diversified to the mutual benefit of the two countries.

The Chinese Vice-Minister hoped that efforts would be made during the current session of the joint commission meeting to identify new areas of cooperation and rectify the imbalance in trade.

Editor : S. M. Ali