The Jatiya Sangsad resumed its sitting Thursday at 11-10 am with the Speaker, Abdur Rahman Biswas, in the chair, reports BSS.

The day's proceedings began with recitation from the current session.

Taking up the day's business, the Speaker informed the House that he had received three notices for special privilege motion.

The first motion came from Niamatullah (BNP-Dhaka) relating to breach of his privilege by a newspaper item. The Speaker rejected the motion saying that the news item did not, in any way, breached the privilege of the

The second and the third notices were served by Shajahan Omar (BNP-Jhalakati) and Alamgir Kabir (BNP-Naogaon) respectively, but the Speaker rejected both notices saying those were not related to the privileges of the respective members.

After disposing of notices for privilege motion, the Speaker said he had also received four notices for adjournment motion.

The first notice for adjournment motion was brought by Mustafizur Rahman (AL-Ctg) regarding erosion which endangered the existence of Sandwip.

The Speaker said, the notice could not be entertained as it was a "regular happening." The remark of the Speaker. however, evoked a mixed reaction among the members most

of whom rose to their feet to

say something. **Tofael Ahmed**

The Speaker then gave the floor to Tofael Ahmed (AL-Bhola). Tofael Ahmed said the curse of river erosion was an issue of national concern. Hundreds of people were being rendered homeless by erosion in various parts of the country.

Tofael particularly mentioned the serious situation created by continuous erosion by the Meghna in various belts of Bhola.

Participating in the discussion on the motion. Syed Shahidul Huq Jamal (BNP-Bakergani) said the vast areas of Barguna, Patuakhali, Banaripara. Swarupkathi and other parts of greater Barisal district had already been eroded by the rivers. The erosion is still continuing threatening the existence of the localities in the respective areas.

Mohiuddin Ahmed

Mohiuddin Ahmed (AL-Bakergani) said, three upazilas of Bakergani district, namely. Mehediganj, Hijla and Muladi were the worst victims of river erosion. He demanded that one full day should be fixed by the Speaker to discuss the issue in the House.

Abdur Razzag

Abdur Razzaq (BKSAL) Madaripur also demanded full discussion of the issue saying that vast areas of Sharlatpur. Madaripur and other parts of greater Faridpur district had fallen prey to erosion.

Amanullah Aman

Amanuilah Aman (BNP-Dhaka) said, many people of Keranigonj had been rendered homeless by erosion. Calling attention of the Speaker to the grave erosion situation of Narayanganj, Aman demanded immediate embankment to save the district.

Rashed Mosharraf

Rashed Mosharraf (AL-Jamalpur), called upon the government to take necessary action to rehabilitate victims of erosion of Jamalpur who were passing sub-human lives. He invited the Flood Control Minister to visit the erosion affected areas of the district.

Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury, drawing the attention of the Speaker said, the relevant minister would give a statement on the erosion problems of the country.

The Speaker put an end to the discussion on the issue saying that after the statement of the minister, the members would be given sufficient scope for discussion.

The second notice for adjournment motion was brought by Mosharraf Hossain (AL-Mymensingh) regarding a clash between two rival groups in his locality. But the Speaker turned down his notice saying in can not be the subject of an adjournment motion.

The third notice was brought by Motiur Rahman Nizami (Jamaat-Pabna) regarding Wednesday night's Sreepur Mita Textile Mill incident in which a number of people died following roof collapse.

The fourth notice was brought by Rahmat Ali (AL-Gazipur) also over Mita Textile Mills incident and the death of many people in Sreepur by cy-

clone. The Speaker said, he had also received notices for nine call attention motion on various issue of public interest. He rejected all notices except one of Latifur Rahman (Jamaat-Nawabgonj) regarding construction of a bridge on a river.

Bodies of cyclone victims yet to be recovered: Hasina Plea to ameliorate lot of farmers

The Leader of the Opposi tion Sheikh Hasina took the floor and requested the Speaker to allow the members to discuss at least the Mita Textiles incident and the cyclone that swept over different parts of the country including Sreepur and Khulna.

She said, the bodies of the cyclone victims had not yet been recovered in different parts of the country and the people were passing their days under open sky.

She hoped that members of the Treasury Bench would discuss the humanitarian issue.

B Chowdhury

The Deputy Leader of the House Prof. Badruddoza Chowdhury informed the Speaker that the concerned minister after collecting information would give elaborate statements over the incidents.

Prof. Badruddoza also in formed the House that the Deputy Commissioner of League member, Deputy Gazipur had already rushed to the spot and two cranes of roads and highways had been sent to the place of occur-

Matiur Rahman Nizami

The Speaker then allowed Moulana Matiur Rahman Nizami of Jamaat-e-Islami to take the floor.

Moulana Nizami called for constitution of an enquiry committee to look into the incident of roof collapse at Gazipur District and said the accident had occurred due to sheer irresponsibility of the people involved in the construction work of the building. He also urged that the families of the victims be given compensation and the injured proper treatment.

Rahmat Ali

Rahmat Ali (AL-Gazipur) said he was personally present three till 4 am Thursday and saw 12 bodies recovered from the rubble of the roof. He apprehended that there might be another 50 to 60 bodies trapped inside the debris.

Rahmat Ali demanded exemplary punishment for those responsible for faulty construction of the the building.

He also suggested that a parliamentary enquiry-committee be formed to look into the matter. As the government will have to send relief mater als to the families of the cyclone victims and injured per-

As Rahmat Ali resumed his seat, Prof. Badruddoza Chowdhury informed the House that he had just received information that State Minister for Religious Affairs Prof. Abdul Mannan was supervising the rescue operation in the area.

Azizur Rahman

Azizur Rahman rose on a point of order. But the Speaker told the member that he was talking irrelevant, so he could not be given the floor.

Suranjit Sengupta drew the attention of the Speaker and suggested taking up the day's

Nurul Huda

At this stage, State Minister for Information Nurul Huda sought permission of the Chair to make a statement on the situation prevailing in the newspaper industry in Dhaka. Huda said the government

would take legal measures if any one caused distress to the journalists and the employees by violating the existing laws of the land.

He said at the same time the government wanted to see congenial atmosphere between the owners and the journalists in the newspapers as it believes in freedom of the press.

He called upon the owners of the newspapers to pay salaries of the journalists and ensure the security of service by abiding by the existing laws of the country.

He said considering the difficulties of the newspapers, arrangements had already been made for payment of advertisement bills of the newspapers amounting to Taka 1.50 crore at the directive of the Prime Minister. This amount was supposed to be paid in the month of May. Besides, he said, for the solution of economic crisis in The Bangladesh Times, arrangements had been made to provide Taka 10 lakh under a special arrangement.

The State Minister gave a vivid picture prevailing in the Dainik Desh, Bangladesh Observer, The Azad, Dainik Dinkal, Dainik Nabo Abhijan, Dainik Patrika and The Bangladesh Times.

Shawkat Ali

Taking the floor, Colonel (Retd) Shawkat Ali (AL-Shariatpur) drew the attention of the chair to an article published in a Pakistani Daily in

which the writer had made certain "audacious remarks" on relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan.

He said, "two countries -one hation" was the caption of the article published in the "Daily Nation" in a supplement brought out in observance of the Independence Day of Bangladesh, he said.

The Opposition member said several comments made in the article amounted to as person on our independence and the writer also sought to belittle our heroic war of independence in 1971. The author of the article went to the extent of suggesting several measures like close cooperation in the defence sector so that the two countries could become really close, he added.

Col Ali called this article "a conspiracy against Bangladesh" and urged the government to come out with a statement on the issue.

Replying to the Awami Leader of the House Dr. Badruddoza Chowdhury, said the government roundly condemned such observations in the article. However, he added that the government would make a statement on the matter after making a thorough enquiry into it.

The Speaker then picked up the order of the day and in vited "private members resolu-

Nurul Islam Moni

Nurul Islam Mont (Ind-Barguna) moved three resolutions while Rashed Khan Menon (Workers Party-Barisal) and Rahmat Ali (AL-Gazipur) moved one resolution each.

The Independent member complimented the government for waiving the interest on agricultural loan upto Taka 5.000 and also land revenue upto 25 bighas. No doubt, it was a good step from a government which had taken over only a few days ago, he ob-

Moni said the importance of agriculture could not be over emphasised in a country like ours where the farmers provided the most important service to the nation.

It was necessary that all assistance must be given to the farmers, he said but lamented that on such assistance was being given them although

many other categories of people were receiving generous loans from the banks.

Moni said it was wellknown how much money was taken as loans from different banks by some people just to enhance their affluence, and in most cases such loans remained unpaid. But the extent of agricultural loans had not increased, he said adding that in 1989 much more was realised from the farmers than

what was given as loans. "We import foodgrains by spending a huge amount of money but why do we not intensify efforts to reduce the import of foodgrains by increasing loans to the farmers and extension of other facilities to them?" he asked.

Mont cautioned all that the Parliament, which has come as a symbol of people's aspirations, would be failing in its duty unless something tangible was done for the farmers. He called for exemption of interest of the agricultural loan upto

Shahjahan Siraj

Supporting the resolution. Shahjahan Siraj (JSD-S) said by accepting the resolution, the BNP government would get a good opportunity to serve the peasants who constituted the majority of the population.

Siraj appreciated the BNP government's cabinet decision regarding the exemption of holding tax upto 25 bigha and agricultural loan upto Taka 5,000. He hoped that the Sangsad would unanimously accept the resolution exempting interest on agricultural loan upto Taka 10,000.

The JSD member was critical of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and said had the BNP government not taken a quick decision about the exemption of land tax and agricultural loan, these two organisations would have raised objection. Siraj pointed out that

though all the political parties had spoken about emancipa tion of the peasants, the prices of agricultural inputs like fertilizer, power pump, etc. had increased many times. As Sirai resumed his seat

the Speaker adjourned the House at 1.03 pm to resume at 2 pm.

The House resumed sitting after Zohar prayer with

Speaker Abdur Rahman Biswas in the chair.

Making a brief departure from the order of the day, the Speaker said he would like to give the floor to Shahjahan Omar (BNP-Jhalakathi) to make a statement on a note of personal explanation since something was mentioned about him in the House earlier.

Omar said Awami League member Mohammad Nasim had made derogatory remarks about him which, he said, were untrue and baseless. Omar said he was described

as an accused in a criminal case but it was not true. He was a valiant Freedom Fighter who had won the title "Bir Uttam" for his role in the Liberation War, he said. Omar made some other re-

marks which brought Mohammad Nasim (AL-Seraigani) to his feet to say that the member could not say anything debatable on a note of personal explanation. The Speaker said he was

batable. Omar had said would be expunged from the proceedings. Suranjit Sengupta (Gonotrantrik Party Sunamgani) to

aware of this and whatever de

take part in the discussion on private members resolution. Gupta said the resolution introduced by Nurul Islam Moni for exemption of the interest on agricultural loan upto Taka 10,000 was important although this should not have come in the House in this

The Opposition member said an elected government took over after the recent elections which were won by the BNP party and its leader Begum Khaleda Zia. Begum Zia had made several promises to the electorate during the electioneering and she had already waived interest on agricultural loans upto Taka 5,000 and land revenue upto 25 bighas.

Gupta said these decisions were no doubt praiseworthy but Begum Zia had also made an election commitment to waive interest on agricultural loan upto Taka 10,000 and this pledge should have been ful-· filled by the government instead of a demand coming in the form of a private member's resolution.

Shahjahan Chowdhury

The Speaker then gave the

floor to Shahjahan Chowdhury (Jamaat-Chittagong). Chowdhury said 85 per cent of the population of the country was involved in agriculture and exemption of agricultural loan was a commitment to them even before the independence. He regretted that the commitment had not yet been ful-

filled.

Chowdhury said Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh had committed to the people before the elections to provide interest-free agricultural loans to the farmers. He called upon the government to write off loans upto Taka 10 thousand and withdrawal certificate cases started against the farmers. Otherwise, he said, the farmers would not be able to contribute to the effort of achieving food autarky in the

Mosharraf Hossain

Mosharraf Hossain (AL-Netrokona with Mymensingh) took the floor and said during the period of Awami League agricultural inputs including fertilizers were provided at subsidised rates. But the governments after Awami League had withdrawn these subsidies causing sufferings to the farmers. He also called upon the ruling party to exempt interest on the agricultural loans upto Tk 10,000 so the farmers who were able to pay back the loans could increase production in the fields.

Nazir Hossain

Nazir Hossain (CPB-Sunamganj) took the floor and thanked the Speaker for giving him the floor as he said, he had observed that during the last sittings 15 to 16 members in particular were given the floor repeatedly.

Hossain pointed out that faulty agricultural loan recovery process was creating addi tional sufferings to the poverty-stricken farmers. He said because of this faulty process, the villages were becoming resourceless and the farmers were losing their buying capacity. He called for immediate steps to modify the process to boost production in agricultural fields. He also underscored the need for writing off agricultural loans upto Taka 10 thousand which would be a substantive economic relief for the farmers.

ASM Feroz

The Speaker then gave the floor to ASM Feroz (AL-Patukhali).

Feroz said all the political parties had pledged to write off agricultural loan when they sought votes from people before the elections. He said we must remain equal to the our pledges to improve the condition of the farmers. He called upon the government to reduce the rate of interest for agricultural loans from Taka 17 to Taka 5.

Monirul Hug

Monirul Haq Chowdhury (JP-Comilia) said Nurul Islam Mont had brought this resolution in the last session of the House. He congratulated the BNP government for exempting payment of interest on agricultural loans of upto Taka five thousand.

Chowdhury said they would support the BNP government in fulfilling its election commitments made to the people.

The JP member said the farmers were not getting sufficient capital to purchase agricultural inputs. They were in a deplorable condition because they were not even getting reasonable price of their produce. He said there was a Gulf of difference between the production cost and the price of their products.

Chowdhury called upon the government to take steps so that the purchasing capacity of the people could increase.

He claimed that he had supported a similar resolution brought by the same member in the last Sangsad but it could not be carried out due to some unavoidable reasons. He said governments Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, President Ziaur Rahman and the former President Ershad wanted welfare of the farmers and had taken steps in that direction.

Chowhury called upon both the leaders of the House and the opposition and members of the treasury and the opposition benches to support the resolution for exempting payment on agriculture loans upto Taka 10 thousand.

Enamul Haq

Enamul Haq (Jamaat-Cox's Bazar) urged the House to bring salt loan within the purview of agricultural loan in the greater interest of salt producers in the greater Chittagong district.

He said the bulk of the country's salt is produced in Maheshkhali, Banshkhali and Kutubdia areas of the district and if the producers were not encouraged the salt production might suffer.

He said the producers of salt were not getting fair price of their produce, adding if the producers did not get any incentive they would not increase production.

He said the chairman of a union parishad in his constituency sent a telegram to him expressing his despair and dismay for not incorporating the exemption of interest on salt loan in the government announcement for writing off interest on agricultural loan upto Taka five thousand.

Enamul Haq said the poor producers had become poorer paying interest to the moneylenders at an exorbitant rate varying from 75 to 100 per cent. He said the exemption limit of the interest on agricultural loan should be raised to Taka 10 thousand along with that of salt loan.

Shamsuddoha

Mohammed Shamsuddoha (CPB) said the government of Begum Khaleda Zia came to power at a time when the country's economy was in shambles. He thanked Begum Khaleda Zia for exempting interest on agricultural loans upto Taka five thousand.

Giving a picture of the sufferings of the peasants who constituted 85 per cent of the country's population, he said their backbone had broken by repeated visits of natural calamities. In different forms, moreover, he said, the farmers were passing their days in agony with certificate cases. attachment of property and other cases.

He said both the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition had committed to the people during their electioneering that they would take measures to change the lot of the people. He said, "we all should come forward to build the country forgetting party affiliations."

Rashed Khan Menon

Taking the floor Rashed

Khan Menon also expressed his satisfaction at the exemption of interests on loans upto Taka five thousand. He said the three alliances during the anti-autocracy movement took some united decisions to mitigate the sufferings of the peas-

Menon expressed his apprehension that the benefit of any government announcement would not reach the people. Because, he said," there were many impediments in the way of its implementation. He also mentioned World Bank

in this connection. He said the deposed President also had made some announcements to give benefit to the farmers in a bid to become Pallibandhu but those did not

materialise. He said the peasants of the country had to be freed through the Debt Settlement Board. Otherwise, he said, the farmers would continue to suf-

Menon also pleaded for the reduction of interest rate on agricultural loan to five per cent. He supported the motion tabled by Nurul Islam Moni for the exemption of interests on agricultural loan upto Taka 10 thousand.

Razzak defends Baksal

Baksal leader Abdur Razzak said the peasants of Bangladesh had been suppressed, repressed and explotted for ages. Because of their perpetual problems they can never repay the loans and interests taken from banks and money lenders, he added.

He said Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Huq had saved the peasantry from the burden of loans by establishing Debt Settlement Board. After the independence of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman sought to mitigate the hardships of the peasants by exempting land revenue on upto 25 bighas of land, he added.

Defending the formation of BKSAL, Mr. Razzak said the Second Revolution launched by Bangabandhu solely aimed at improving the lot of the common man.

Mr Razzak supported the resolution of Mr. Moni stating that it was the election pledge of the major political parties. He expressed the hope that the Prime Minister would give an announcement to write off interests on loans upto taka ten thousand as "Eid bonus" to the farmers. He suggested adoption of an overall plan to solve the various problems of the peasants.

Matia's plea to dissolve **Debt Settlement Boards**

Begum Matia Chowdhury, (AL), who was a well-known student leader in the late sixties, said the problems of our peasants are immense. She pointed out they thought they do not get proper prices of what they produce. They have to pay much higher prices for what they purchase. In this connection, she mentioned the high prices of insecticides

and fertilizers. She said after the liberation of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman exempted land revenue upto 25 bighas of land and withdrew certificate cases for agricultural loans taken during the Pakistani period.

Begum Matia Chowdhury said in many western countries and the United States of America the peasants are given subsidy by the government so that they do not losses for their produce. They are also given price support by the government, she added.

Making a strong plea for writing off interest on loans upto Taka ten thousand, Begum Chowdhury said the concept of market economy would not be successful keeping 85 per cent of the country's peasants under the burden of agricultural loans and interests.

She called upon the government to dissolve the Debt Settlement Board constituted during he Ershad regime. These Boards set up in the country with touts and looters and were designed to bluff the people and encourage more corruption, she said.

Latifur Rahman

Speaking next, Mohammad Latifur Rahman (Jamaat-Nawabganj) thanked the mover of the resolution for pleading the interest of the poor peas-

The Leader of the Opposttion Sheikh Hasina supported the resolution and said there were 5,17,506 certificate cases against the peasants in the country.

She said though Bangladesh is regarded as an agricultural country, the peasants are being harassed, and the country is depending more and more on import.

The past governments, Sheikh Hasina said, were interested in imports because of "commission." Sheikh Hasina said after the

independence of the country, the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had exempted land tax upto 25 bighas and taken steps to supply agricultural imputs including fertilizers. and power pumps at a cheaper rate. The government of the Bangabandhu had also ensured a system of selling farm products at fair price. But after the killing of the

Bangabandhu, the condition of the peasants started deterio-

(Incomplete)

GLIMPSES FROM Corridors of Power by Fayza Haq & Rahat Fahmida and people of his age who the recent disaster in although a pair did remind Anything appears a trifle deja

vu if you have read about it earlier. But the Jatiya Sangsad building appeared cool and serene even at three in the Thursday afternoon, with the drooping Japanese type blossoms on the lining the Manik

Mian Avenue. After you had circumnavigated the entrance which reminded you of an airport check to a far away world of USA or Australia, you entered Louis Kahn's fascinating creating of labyrinths. With the help of a guide you enter the press box and lo behold you are under an umbrella or a flowerburst of most sublet pattern. There were too the magical mysterious lights that lit up the place like diamonds on a beautiful woman's neck.

There were turquoise blue seats, green files and a thick moss green wall to carpet. The desks were highly polished and the walls were like marble. As you entered, initially, you got the impression of a palatial palace with the expensive potted palms kept in brass and polished wood containers. There were at least six clocks all around the Assembly Room. There were the well-dressed messengers in "sherwani"

you of Laurel and Hardy.

Arabian Nights' lure

In the midst of all this splendour were Members of Parliament ranging from Jamatis in their "sherwani" that was tightly buttoned to the neck, with beards to match, and the ladies with the Arabian Nights's lure of the "naqab" in the pale silk "burga". There were the black jacketed vociferous Awami Leaguers, while some sported brilliant red ties with handkerchief to match, or even safari suits. The ladies were there brave in their silk and cotton ex-

travaganza. This was the Private Members' day on Thursday and the Leader of the Opposition had a red and white apparel while others struggled with their silk "aanchal" constantly falling from the neatly done hairdo.

At one point the mike failed to work. This resulted in and instantaneous hubbub. Even though every speaker had a mike some spoke so loudly that they appeared to spill out their guts with the intensity of their emotional speeches.

Except for the time that the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina spoke about

Khulna and Gazipur, and when there was mention of the newspapers going on strike, the members of the Parliament were behaving like boys on a holiday, or in a village school with no master or monitor to supervise, although one would not dare ignore the Speaker. Some jumped about like jack in the boxes, waved their arms, yelled and carried on like an audience at a soccer match.

On one occasion the leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami spoke with enthusiasm but the people were calmly walking out for their individual work, indulged in laughter. and quips, and even read newspapers as if they were on a plane or train journey. As we sat in the journalists'

box, our inquisitiveness led

us to discover and remember all the peculiar incidences. We kept our ears and eyes peeled despite the disturbance of the microphone. What one saw one tried to analyse. One attempted to read into the characters of say the chiffon clad MP from Rangamati. Mamya Ching, and tried to work out exactly how wellread was Abul Hasan Chowdhury, or "Kaiser" as he called himself. One also admired Mohammadullah

said that they felt "rejuvenated" coming to the Sangsad. There were others like Farida Hassan who played hard to get for a Even in inter-collegiate debates speakers are allowed to say what they willed

without constant interrup

tions and bickering but this

was absent in the grand hall of politics. A display that

is dazzling

Sitting in the cafe, one was surrounded by more plants a wall carpet and oil paintings. The lobby where the correspondence was kept for the MPs boasted of more "nakshikatha" tapestries. Cushions were of velvet. For one of the poorest countries of the world such a display was indeed dazzling.

One was not there long enough to get an incisive and total picture of the goings on of the Parliament. But a glimpse of four hours told one of what shape the political scene of the country had reached with women leading the House while another sat at the Opposition. Yet the scenario with the bick

ering and tussles with constant jibes made one aban don any ambition of ever wanting to be an MP.