

Adequate TV coverage of JS proceedings urged

The Jatiya Sangsad resumed its sitting at 3.05 pm on Monday with Speaker Abdur Rahman Biswas in the chair, reports BSS.

After the tilawat-e-Quran, the Speaker took up the question and answer session as per order of the day.

As the question and answer session was over, the Speaker mentioned of a complaint by Rashed Mosharrif (AL-Jamalpur) on the television coverage of the Jatiya Sangsad proceeding. The member wanted adequate coverage for the participants on important issues.

The Speaker said since the members were the people's representatives, it was necessary to give the maximum possible coverage by the television to their activities in the House. He requested the authorities concerned to look into the matter.

The Speaker said he had received several notices to adjourn the normal proceedings of the House to discuss issues of public importance. Three of the notices were on the subject of killing of Bangladesh nationals by the Indian BSF along the Kushtia border but an adjournment motion on the same issue had already been admitted, the Speaker said.

Three other notices were not also admitted while the one of the nine call attention notices had been accepted, the Speaker said.

Col (Retd) Oli Ahmed

At this stage, Communications Minister Colonel (Retd) Oli Ahmed, made a statement on the road accident near Manikganj this morning. He said 51 persons were killed and 89 injured in the mishap and many of them were shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. An enquiry committee was set up to look into the cause of the accident, the Minister said.

Leader of the House Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia proposed a condolence resolution on the victims and injured of the accident and a prayer in the House for the salvation of the souls of the dead.

Mattur Rahman Nizami led the prayer after being requested by the Chair.

Sheikh Hasina

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina said her party member Sheikh Selim wanted to raise the issue. But the Speaker requested the Communications Minister to make a statement on the accident without giving an opportunity to Selim.

Sheikh Hasina said road accident taking place so frequently in the country needed to be discussed in the House and deplored that her party colleague Selim did not get a chance to raise the bus accident issue under Article 71 of rules of procedure.

The Speaker said no issue could be raised under the relevant clause of rules of procedure mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition without giving an hour's notice. This formality was not observed in this case and consequently he could not allow Selim to speak. Instead, he had asked the Minister to make the statement since his statement was a matter of great importance, the Speaker said.

Kamal Ibne Yusuf

As asked by the Speaker, the Health Minister, Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf made a statement on the diarrhoeal situation in the country in reply to a call attention notice moved by independent member from Barguna, Nurul Islam Mont.

The Health Minister said that diarrhoea has broken out in Rajshahi, Chandpur, Laximpur, Bogra, Netrokona, Mymensingh, Sylhet, Naogaon, Magura, Nilphamari and Sathkhira districts. He said he had already visited some of the affected areas to see for himself the situation there.

Yusuf gave a district-wise break-up of the death toll and said that since January 1, 1991, 430 people died.

The Health Minister said that necessary steps had been taken by the government to combat the situation. He informed the House that 1,016 medical teams have been working in the affected areas where 59 temporary hospitals had been set up.

He described the situation as grave and called upon the members irrespective of party affiliations, to help the government in solving the crisis.

When the House resumed its sitting after the Azan prayer with Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali in the chair, ASM Firoz (AL-Patuakhali) demanded a full fledged discussion on the diarrhoea situation in the country immediately after the statement of the Health Minister. But the Deputy Speaker requested the Health Minister to complete his statement first.

Nurul Islam Mont

As soon as the Health Minister completed his statement, Nurul Islam Mont (Ind-Barguna) said paucity of pure drinking water had posed a serious problem in the country's southern districts during the current season. Attributing the outbreak of diarrhoea in an epidemic form to the scarcity of pure drinking water, he called for installation of an adequate number of hand operated as well as shallow and deep tubewells on an emergency basis to ward off the scourge of diarrhoea.

The Health Minister in his reply said the government was promise-bound to install tubewells of all kinds as required.

The Deputy Speaker then asked the members whether they were satisfied with the statement of the Health Minister. At this stage, many of the opposition members shouted 'no, no'. The Deputy Speaker then said that the Speaker would give a decision on this matter.



Suranjit

Rising on his feet, Suranjit Sengupta (Ganatantra Party) said, the matter is urgent. "We don't want to make the diarrhoea situation a political issue, but there should be a detailed discussion on this serious matter", he added.

Supporting Sengupta, Awami League leader Tofael Ahmed said that the situation had taken a serious turn in the southern districts. He said the statement delivered by the Health Minister on this issue differed sharply from the actual situation. He pleaded with the Deputy Speaker to allow an elaborate discussion on the issue.

The Deputy Speaker then assured the House that opportunity would be given for holding an elaborate discussion on diarrhoea situation at a later date treating the issue as an adjournment motion.

The Deputy Speaker said time at the disposal of the House has short as a cabinet meeting was to be held. He wanted to know from the Deputy Leader of the House, Badruddoza Chowdhury, whether the House should take up the adjournment motion skipping over legislative business. Prof. Chowdhury requested the chair to take up Monday's adjournment motion today and dwell on legislative business. The chair concurred with the request.

Thereafter, Prof. Badruddoza Chowdhury, who is in charge of the Election Commission Secretariat in the House, sought the permission of the chair to introduce the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 1991 but, as several opposition members stood up to oppose, the chair gave the floor to Tofael Ahmed (AL-Bhola).

Tofael Ahmed

Tofael Ahmed said, in the present days it was well-nigh impossible to cross the Rubicon of the national election with a budget of Tk three lakh. This is reality, he said adding, frankly speaking no-

body gave a correct statement on the source of one's income.

The Awami League leader pleaded for raising the limit of expenditure for election to Parliament considering the objective situation obtaining in the country. Otherwise, corruption would be legalised through the passage of this bill in its present form, he added.

He also demanded extension of the time-limit for submitting the statement of election expenditures saying that the provision of 15 days as incorporated in the bill was too short. He requested the mover of the bill to withdraw it and present a realistic one at a later stage.

Refuting the contention of Tofael Ahmed, Prof. Badruddoza Chowdhury said the Acting President promulgated an ordinance regarding election expenditures of the candidates and submission of statement on election expenditure with an honest intention. In this connection, he pointed out that the nation had the right to know the sources of income of the candidates and the money they were spending in the election. If there was no ceiling on the expenditure for elections the holders of black money would have their day, he added.

Prof. Chowdhury said it was, of course, possible to minimise election expenditures if the candidates refrained from putting JP costly gates, and setting up numerous election campaign offices and slashed down other expenses.

As to the suggestion of Tofael Ahmed to extend the time limit of 15 days for submitting the statement on election expenditure, the Deputy Leader said it could be considered if the members so wanted.

The Deputy Speaker advised Tofael Ahmed to bring amendments to the bill in question.



Replying, Tofael Ahmed suggested formation of a house committee to suggest measures to slash down election expenditures.

Prof. Chowdhury said he was agreeable to the suggestion. At this stage Tofael Ahmed said he was ready to withdraw his objection if the House considered his suggestion.

The Deputy Speaker expressed his satisfaction over the congenial atmosphere in the House and the understanding reached between the Treasury Bench and Opposition members. The Education Minister then introduced the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 1991, in the House.

Badruddoza Chowdhury

Education Minister Dr. Badruddoza Chowdhury, who is also in charge of the Election Commission Secretariat in the Sangsad, moved the Election Officials (Special Rules) Bill, 1991, without objection.

The Education Minister then moved the Delimitation of Constituencies (Amendment) Bill, 1991, for further amendment of Delimitation of Constituencies Ordinance, 1976.

As soon as the Minister took his seat four members from the Opposition Bench Mr. Tofael Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Rashed Khan Menon and Abdur Razzak rose to their feet for drawing the attention of the chair with the intention of raising objection against the bill. The chair, however, gave the floor to Mr. Razzak.



Abdur Razzak

Mr. Razzak said delimitation made under the said ordinance had deprived the greater Faridpur district in respect of number of constituencies. He said the present bill had now become redundant.

Replying to the objection, Dr. Badruddoza Chowdhury said he all had been elected under this ordinance and we only brought it in the form of a bill.

Mr. Razzak withdrew his objection following the statement of the Minister and the bill was introduced in the House.

The Deputy Speaker then gave the floor to Education Minister to move the Representation of the People (Seat

for Women Members) (Amendment) Bill 1991.

As soon as the Minister moved his bill, Mr. Suranjit Sengupta drew the attention of the chair saying that he wanted to raise objection against moving the bill.

Mr. Sengupta said half of our population is women and our Constitution also guaranteed them their facilities. He said there was provision in the 1972 Constitution for reserving women's seats for 15 years hoping that they would come up to the national standard. So no more reservation would be needed thereafter. But, he said, due to consecutive automatic rule they had been deprived and the provision was again revived by an autocrate through a brute majority in the House.

The lone Ganotantee Party member said we cannot allow to continue any mistake that had been done in the past. He said Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh with only 18 Sangsad members and with the help of the party in power managed to get two women's seats in this House.

Sengupta said under the present system any party in power could manage to win all the 30 women's seats by virtue of its majority in the House. He demanded an amendment to this provision.

Farida Rahman

At this stage Farida Rahman took the floor and reminded Sengupta that it would need a two-thirds majority for amending it. She wanted to know from Sengupta whether they had that strength.

Then the Chair put the objection on vote which was rejected by voice vote, the bill was tabled in the House.

Mirza Abbas

After the Magreb prayer, State Minister for Youth and Sports Mirza Abbas sought the leave of the House to introduce the National Sports Control Board (Amendment) Bill, 1991.

The Deputy Speaker then invited Mohammad Nasim (AL-Scrjrajn) to speak on the amendment to the bill.

Mr. Nasim said it was clear from the amendment in the bill of 1974 that only a change in the name of the Sports Control Board was intended. He said mere change of name would not serve any purpose to turn the institution set up in 1974 into a viable one.

The Opposition member said, corruption, mismanagement and other problems had crippled this organisation and as a result, the institution not only failed to earn laurels in the sports arena but gave more disservice than service. It should be made a democratically elected corruption-free institution, Mr. Nasim said.

The Minister Mirza Abbas said the institution was set up in 1974 by the Awami League government and the term "control" in the name of the institution sought to convey the message that it was intended to "control" sports.

The Minister said the intention of the Government now was to expand sports rather than "control" it and many persons associated with the sports arena wanted retaining the institution.

The Chair asked Mr. Nasim whether he would like to withdraw his objections on the bill. Mr. Nasim refused, saying he has given certain suggestions to improve the institution regardless of any political consideration but the minister failed to respond to his advice. The bill was introduced by voice vote.

The Chair then asked Communications Minister Colonel (ret'd) Oli Ahmed to propose that the Eastern Railway Servants Benevolent Fund Ordinance 1969 be taken by up the House for further amendments.

The Minister proposed that the bill be considered.

Taking part in discussion on the bill, Mr. Nurul Islam Mont (Ind-Barguna) proposed that the bill be sent for eliciting public opinion. Mr. Mont suggested that the bill be sent to those whom it concerned before it was passed.

Nazrul Islam

Taking the floor Principal Mr. Nazrul Islam (AL-Bhola) urged the Chair to send the bill for eliciting public opinion. He said the proposed benevolent fund (Amendment) Bill should be formulated in a way so that the people who served in the railways could really enjoy the benefit accrued from the fund. He said, "many governments have come and gone but nothing meaningful was done for the welfare of the railway employees".

He said a certain government tried to build "Natin Bangladesh" but nothing for the old railway employees. He described the quantum of benefit provided under the bill as inadequate.

Salahuddin Yusuf

Participating in the deliberations Mr. Salahuddin Yusuf (AL-Khulna) also stressed on the need for having public opinion on the bill. Otherwise, he said, the bill could not deliver the goods for those it was meant for. He also advocated for increasing the quantum of money to be given to the railway employees as benefits.

Defending the Eastern Railway Servants Benevolent Fund (Amendment) Bill 1991, Communications Minister Col (Ret'd) Oli Ahmed said it was promulgated as an ordinance in 1969 with a provision of Taka 170 as monetary benefit for the officials and employees of the railway service. He said the benefit in case of other government employees was also the same at that time.

The minister said the government increased the benefit for the government employees in 1982 with Taka 200 as minimum and Taka 1,000 as maximum. He said the increase created a big gap between the benefits of the railway employees with those of the government employees. He said the government has presented the bill to narrow down the gap in providing benefits.

The Bill was passed by voice vote. Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali then adjourned the House at 7.40 pm to resume at 3 pm tomorrow.

From the Pedestal of Womenpower

by Sabah Chowdhury

Every session of the Fifth Parliament is a celebration of the democratic rights of the people of our country.

The present House in Bangladesh is the only one in history which is both 'led' and 'opposed' by women. Both the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition are women who have inspired a movement leading to the present parliamentary political power. Apart from Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, there are two other women MPs. Begum Motia Chowdhury and Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, both representing Awami League who have been directly elected by the voters. Out of the 30 reserved seats for women, 28 went to BNP, while 2 went to Jamaat-e-Islami. The voters of the reserved seats were the MPs themselves.

In some ways the uniqueness of the House is that it is the first truly representative one after a long time. Though

in a very 'non-parliamentary' manner, the people hurled stones and screamed slogans demanding a real House, the fruits gained today obviously justify the method. In some ways it testifies that to avoid militant processions on the street demanding the death of a parliament it is best to have a House which would reflect the views of the people. Ironically, though the protesting citizens were largely dominated by males, they were inspired by the two women leaders now seated in the House. In anticipation that the Fifth will be remembered as the House of Women, the Daily Star talked to a number of women MPs who are in the making of a new legislative history.

Begum Sajeda Chowdhury defeated several candidates in an open contest from Faridpur - 2 to earn the right to legislate on behalf of her people. She believes that deciding the form of government is impor-

tant because that is essential to a true representation of the citizens of the country. "We are willing to sit and talk about it and to lend support to the ruling party," said she adding that such a decision was also necessary to fulfill a demand of the people which the Three Alliances jointly agreed to.

Discussing the problems facing the nation she pinpointed certain troubled areas. First among these was the state of the economy which, she contends, has been left so shattered that the impact has been felt in all sectors. "Prices spiral upwards with no control or limit. We must reduce dependence on agriculture, with concurrent plans to introduce rural industries. In this way we can 'lower unemployment at the upazila level'."

Another priority on her list is to put an end to smuggling - "a disease that is eating into the vitals of our economy. Cows are coming in and our valuable

products are going out." When asked about minority rights, she lamented the situation and added that all religious and ethnic minorities must be assured of security and respect. About law and order, her opinion is that it calls for urgent attention.

Begum Chowdhury believes that the seats are no longer required to be reserved for women because she thinks, women have earned the right against considerable male resistance to represent the people. "I am perceived in my constituency as a politician, and not as a woman, who is capable of representing them. That feeling is very important. People are far more liberal, democratic, and progressive today. We don't need compassionate help in politics."

In many matters, Begum Motia Chowdhury echoed the views of her lady colleague. "That voters will reject women is a myth. A quarter of a century ago the Combined Opposition Party candidate in a national election for the Presidency of Pakistan was a woman, and not to mention that she was a spinster. But people voted for her in both parts of Pakistan, and in the than East Pakistan she won more votes than in West Pakistan. If no questions were raised at that time why should they be now?"

Motia Chowdhury is often called "the firebrand girl, a throwback to her fiery speeches as a student leader who pumped the political bellows which created the movement of 1969 and resulted in the overthrow of dictator Ayub Khan. "We don't need the protection of reserved seats anymore. We have come a long way since then, the fact that the two of us, as well as the leader of the House and of the Opposition are here amply proves that point. Reserved seats means managing to bag a seat by keeping the leaders happy instead of the voters."

But this view is contested by Khurshid Jahan Huq of BNP. She is in the parliament for the first time, but has been involved in politics since the multi-party system was re-introduced. Although always interested in politics, she says she had to spend a considerable time of her life looking after her family, and that it was only when they could get along without her constant attention that she started devoting her time to politics. "I firmly believe that a woman's prime responsibility is her home and family. I don't believe in politics at the cost of family life. If a woman is not qualified to look after her family, how can she look after the country?" Mother of four grown up sons, she believes, it is important to have reserved seats for women. Elections involve money, and

most women are not financially solvent enough to spend that kind of money. Thus reserved seats provide an opportunity to bring in able women, women who deserve to hold that seat. Thirty more women naturally means much more good news for women. Why shouldn't women want it?"

Farida Rahman of BNP, also elected on a reserved quota, represents Sathkhira-Jessore constituency. She has had a long political career, and thinks she is now in a position to play an important role. "For those of us who believe in democracy, the House is very important. This House is possibly the most important since Independence, because it is the first one since then whose leaders have arrived with a mission to fulfill, a promise to keep."

Begum Rahman is a staunch defender of the quota system. She feels that discrimination against women is still strong in all sectors. "No one, however powerful, can afford to be free from the need of affirmative action, at various stages of political life except perhaps those at the very top," she says. "Discrimination can be contained only by making sure that there are at least thirty women in the House to uphold the cause of women. Once financial and educational equality is obtained, reserved seats will naturally become redundant."

The two Jamaat-e-Islami MPs with their veils on and sombre views, are a remarkable sight in the hurly-burly atmosphere of the House. Speaking in their office they



Khaleda Zia, the Leader of the male-dominated House



Sheikh Hasina leading the Opposition, also dominated by men