

PARLIAMENT ROUND-UP

Tangled Business and Frayed Temper

HONOURABLE Finance Minister, how do you feel travelling across the world seeking aid and grants for the nation round the year, asked an Opposition MP, Shamsul Hoque of the Awami League (AL), in the last session of parliament.

The eighth in the country's Fifth Parliament, the last session, a 68-day-one with a total of 32 working days, resumed January 3, and prorogued on the 13 of this month.

In the period, a total of around 500 questions from members of parliament belonging to both the Treasury bench and the Opposition were answered by the cabinet ministers.

But the question of questions, the one from Shamsul Hoque, that really moved the minister concerned, M Saifur Rahman, came January 21, the sixth working day in the last session.

An emotion-charged Finance Minister replied, 'I feel really bad, I feel humiliated.'

'It's a soul destroying job for any finance minister, whatever may be his political belief, to knock at the doors of developed nations and beg grants for his own country, the Minister told the House adding 'I wouldn't have done it for personal reasons.'

What else the Finance Minister told the House on the issue was that a nation begging around the world could not assert its sovereign rights at different international forums.

Any sane individual can understand the truism that a population desiring to exercise its sovereign rights, as an independent nation, must concentrate on getting economically self-reliant mobilising domestic resources at an increased rate every year.

The Finance Minister, however, concluded his deliberation on AL MP Shamsul Hoque's question with a call for a consensus of the political parties on issues of national interest.

Following the soul searching answer of the Finance Minister to a question on national integrity, there was a pin-drop silence in the House.

The silence seemed to have left an impression, at least for while, that Parliament members would concentrate on, instead of wasting time debating on trivial issues, ways and means to economically strengthen the country. But it was really an illusion.

The reality was that the eighth session of the present

Parliament witnessed the highest number of unanchored debates on issues that even most of the debaters, later, felt unimportant.

Besides, the MPs debated many issues, mostly talked out, except the ways and means of the economic emancipation of the country.

An adjournment motion on the recent armed conflict between the Jamaat-backed Islami Chhatra Shibir and the All-Party Students Unity at the Rajshahi University campus that left at least five persons killed, was discussed in the House February 10.

The AL-led Opposition accused the Jamaat of attacking the students belonging to rest of the student organisations at the RU and blamed the ruling BNP for providing the Shibir political patronisation.

The ruling party, on the other hand, failed to refute the Opposition allegation and virtually tried to avoid the situation on the plea that with few cases lodged with the local police station the matter was subjudice.

The ruling BNP and the mainstream Opposition failed to chalk out plans with a view to putting campus terrorism to an end.

A total of four 'short discussions' under Rule 68, on different issues took place in the House mostly with no concrete decisions.

The issues included, police atrocities against Mohammad Nasim, Chief Whip of the Opposition in Parliament; desecration of the Central Shahid Minar on the eve of historic February 21, problems of the peasant community following price hike of the agricultural inputs; and 48-hour road and railway barricade of the jute and cotton mills workers in the mid-February.

The discussion on the 48-hour road and railway barricade took place in the House only after the programme was over. The opposition MPs felt that the government had adopted a policy to bypass Parliament in 'tackling' the issue.

The workers observed their programme to press implementation of the accord signed with the government 15 months ago.

The ruling party MPs, especially the ministers concerned, taking part in the discussion, wanted to save face terming

the programme illegal. They, however, did not explain the dilly-dallying in implementation of the accord.

The ministers also accused the workers of a lower rate in production in mills and factories.

The Opposition MPs, especially Matia Chowdhury, tried to defend the cause of the workers in Parliament but her arguments were rhetorical.

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Any sane individual can understand the truism that a population desiring to exercise its sovereign rights, as an independent nation, must concentrate on getting economically self-reliant mobilising domestic resources at an increased rate every year.



The ministers seemed unaware of the fact that the workers only could not be blamed for 'lower rate' of production. No MP pointed out what even a novice of economics could understand that production factors included 'land, labour and capital.'

Besides, poor condition of the machinery, expenditure behind a heavy-at-the-top-administration in the public sector mills also had an important role behind the loss in the mills.

A total of 12 bills including a private member's bill was

passed in House. Of 12 bills, only one was passed unanimously. Despite passage of 11 bills, the ruling party failed to accommodate even a single amendment to the legislations proposed by the Opposition MPs.

The Parliament Members (Allowances and Remuneration) (Amendment) Bill,

By Nurul Kabir

provision of pension for the MPs, indeed, was a good example of the legislators' self criticism.

The Treasury bench and the Opposition also failed to adopt a consensus resolution on an issue, generally discussed in the House for five consecutive days — the Babri Mosque incident in India.

moved by the Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina that condemned both the demolition of the Mosque and the destruction of temples in the country was rejected.

Lack of coordination among the Opposition parties in Parliament was also evident with two other resolutions on the same issue, one from the Jamaat and the other from the Jatiya Party, being moved in

feature of the last session.

The session, however, witnessed a very unfortunate incident relating to the violation of rules on February 1 when Sheikh Hasina did not hesitate to argue that she, as the Leader of the Opposition, had the right to violate the rules.

The most unfortunate incident relating to the violation of rules of procedure however took place on 12 this month, the day before the eighth session of present parliament was prorogued.

A group of Awami League MPs led by Mohammad Nasim, Chief Whip of the Opposition in parliament, jumped on the raised open space in front of the Speaker's podium while shouting at the top of their voices.

The angry group of the AL MPs consisted of, among others, senior people like Abdul Razzak, Shudhangahu Shekhar Halder and Matia Chowdhury.

Shamsul Hoque, who enquired about the feelings of the Finance Minister about begging around the world, however, did not join the group.

The AL MPs stepped up in front of the Speaker's rostrum protesting the Chair's (Deputy Speaker Ilumayun Khan Pannd was presiding) decision to allow Enxray Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain to make a statement on an alleged corruption of his ministry.

Two hours before the incident, Tofael Ahmed of the Awami League termed the minister's silence over the opposition allegation as mysterious while the moment he was granted floor to explain his position in the House, Mohammad Nasim and others got furious on the plea that a notice for a 'short discussion' on the issue was pending Speaker's ruling.

Majid-ul-Hoque, who was appointed Acting Deputy Leader of the House following Prof. Badruddoza Chowdhury's departure for Bangkok for treatment, compared the incident with the one taking place in the then East Pakistan Assembly in 1956. In that incident Deputy Speaker Shahed Ali was hit by an opposition MP and Shahed Ali died in the hospital on the next day.

Despite Majid-ul-Hoque's observation was a correct one, the regular visitors have reasons to believe that Hoque failed to act that day as Acting

Deputy Leader of the whole house. Rather, he appeared to be the leader of the ruling BNP, sitting idle during the incident and taking the floor only after the AL MPs went out of the House.

The leader of the House and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, on the other hand, once again showed her indifference to a convention of parliamentary democracy not uttering a single word during the 68-day long session.

Khaleda Zia, however, came into the House on seven working days while Hasina attended parliament proceedings on a total of 21 days.

Both of them, however, were absent from the House on March 12, the day parliament witnessed 'extreme protest' against the chair by the AL MPs.

The session witnessed a division vote on an opposition resolution seeking yearly allocation of Taka one crore for each constituency to be disbursed through the local MPs for development work.

MPs irrespective of party affiliation supported, by thumbing their benches, Abdul Awwal Miah of the AL while he was arguing in favour of the resolution.

With the concerned minister's opposition to the proposal, the resolution was put to the vote. The resolution virtually was defeated by 103 to 72 votes.

Incidentally, a clause of the 12th amendment to the constitution does not allow any MP of any party to vote against his or her party stance on any issue.

The session ended on March 13 following a prorogation order of President Abdul Rahman Biswas.

Earlier, a vote of thanks to the President for his address in the House on January 3, the opening day of the year's first session, was adopted by voice vote.

The Awami League and the Jatiya Party boycotted President's speech on the inaugural day of the session. They, however, participated on the twenty-two-hour general discussion on the presidential speech.

The ruling party, in general, was appreciative of the speech while the Opposition parties were critical of it.

However, the MPs participating in the last session can only say what contribution they made during the 68-day long session to economically advance the country.

Feature

South Africa's HIV Time Bomb

by Wilson Carswell

AS South Africa focuses on the unfolding political drama which may transform its society, HIV has been spreading quickly and quietly throughout the country. Time is running out. Unless South Africa implements effective AIDS strategies, the future looks very bleak.

As in other parts of the world, the pandemic is made up of several small epidemics. The first of these was as early as 1982 and affected white men who had sex with men.

The number of reported AIDS cases among gay men has now reached a four-year low, suggesting that the number of new HIV infections is dropping, probably in response to community-generated AIDS education.

But the heterosexually-acquired epidemic is on the increase. There is little evidence that HIV was present among heterosexuals before 1987.

Since then it has spread at a rate similar to that seen in other eastern and central African countries. South Africa shares some of the conditions which have led to the explosive spread of AIDS in the continent, such as a high prevalence of sexually-transmitted diseases (3 million cases a year) which facilitate HIV transmission.

South Africa's considerable epidemiological resources have allowed a clear picture of the epidemic to emerge. Because of the time lapse between HIV infection and AIDS, the current number of AIDS cases (1,295) only represent the epidemic's past.

The present is determined by extensive surveys of a number of groups — from blood donors to pregnant women — and the results are sobering, indicating that by the end of 1991, about 180,000 people were infected with HIV, increasing by about 400 people a day.

There are wide variations, depending on gender, ethnic group and geographical location — in Natal, in the north-eastern part of the country, young adults had a prevalence of over 2.8% in 1991, while in the southern Cape Province the corresponding rate was under 0.4% — but high rates

were recorded among groups at particular risk. Among women attending municipal STD clinics in Johannesburg, more than one in seven have HIV; one in eight newly-diagnosed female tuberculosis patients are also HIV-infected.

Generally, as in other African countries, women are infected more readily and at an earlier age than men.

Among prospective blood donors in 1991, 1.06% black women had HIV against 0.71% black men. By contrast, only two out of 22,400 prospective white female blood donors had evidence of HIV infection. This ethnic disparity is also visible in the results of a 1991 survey of 17,000 pregnant women attending antenatal clinics: overall HIV seroprevalence was 1.49% for one pregnant woman in every 67, but analysis by ethnic group gave the following seroprevalence rates: Asian 0.11%, coloured 0.14%, white nil and black

1.84%. The future of the pandemic, according to several short-term projections, suggest that the numbers infected are doubling every 14 months at present — 250,000 at the end of 1992, rising to nearly 750,000 by mid-1994. After that date, the rate of increase will depend on behaviour change and other interventions.

Initial scepticism in South Africa was followed by setting up epidemiological monitoring, ensuring the safety of the blood supply, and providing factual information. Since 1985 over 5 million potential blood donors have been screened. But these early responses have had no significant impact on the pandemic.

Non-governmental organisations and special interest groups have played an increasing role in prevention, and moved from providing information into education and care of people with HIV and their families.

The government response

AIDS TH... YOU CAN PREVENT AIDS... SAFER SEX SAFER FROM AIDS... if it's not ON... it's NOT on... AIDS personified as the grim reaper in this black township poster

Health

British Scientists First to Test Anti-cancer Vaccine

by Veronica Rose from London

Cancer is one of the most prevalent modern diseases, with 5.9 million new cases worldwide each year. The exact causes are not clear, but in a major step forward, British researchers have developed a vaccine which may help in the battle. The vaccine, reports Gemini News Service, has shown promise for a small class of virus-related cancers, but it could pave the way for further research against all 200 known varieties of the disease.

years of research in three centers, in Bristol, Birmingham and Manchester.

The research has centered on the Epstein Barr Virus (EBV), first identified by Anthony Epstein and Dr Vivienne Barr. EBV, a herpes-type infection, replicates itself and attacks the white blood cells, thus defeating the body's defence system, leaving it especially susceptible to two types of cancer affecting the throat and the jaw.

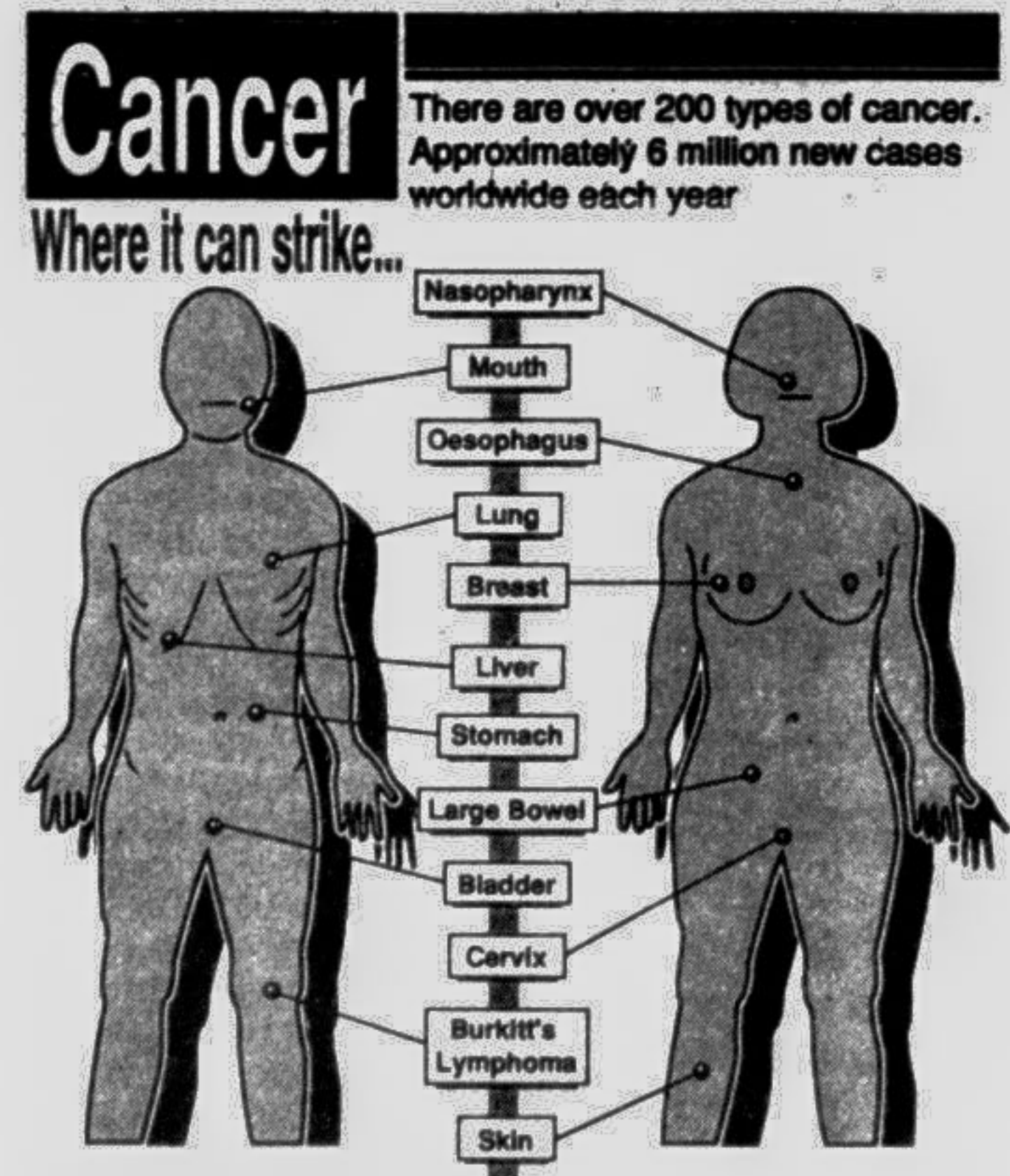
Arrand, who is with the Paterson Institute of the Holt Christie Hospital in Manchester, says it is an exciting time for cancer researchers. 'If the patient trials repeat the success of our earlier work, we expect this vaccine has the potential to protect millions of people throughout the world from often fatal EBV-related cancers.'

EBV causes glandular fever, also known as infectious mononucleosis, in adolescents and has somewhat erroneously been described and the kissing disease since it is spread by droplet infection.

Once infected, the virus never leaves the body. As a result, 90 per cent of the world population carries EBV. An estimated 40 per cent of children will be infected before the age of five, although it seldom causes more than a slight fever or tonsillitis in that age group.

In adolescents, EBV can be unpleasant, even debilitating, sometimes leading to serious complications among which is thrombocytopenia, a complete absence or vastly diminished number of blood platelets. This prevents blood from clotting and the first manifestations of the disorder is widespread bruising which is not unlike the early signs of acute leukaemia.

However, it is the more malevolent behaviour of the



How to prevent it...

- Quit smoking. Greatest risk for lung cancer. Linked with 1 in 3 all cancer deaths
● Eat plenty of food containing fibre and vitamins, especially fresh fruit and vegetables. Avoid being overweight
● Drink in moderation, alcohol linked to 3% of all cancers
● For women, 'smear' test helps detect cancer of the cervix

virus which makes the vaccine's development so important. EBV has long been associated with Burkitt's Lymphoma, a cancer of the jaw which afflicts children, and nasopharyngeal cancer, which affects the nasal cavity and throat. EBV may also be tied to Hodgkin's disease, a swelling of the lymph nodes, spleen and liver.

children the sad victims of the disease.

Nasopharyngeal cancer is rare among Caucasians but has very high incidence rates in China. It has an incidence of 50 per 100,000, with an annual death rate of 50,000 in South China. It also occurs among Chinese immigrants in other countries, in parts of Africa, South East Asia and among Eskimos.

Hodgkin's disease, a cancer of the lymphoid tissue, affects people throughout the world, although it is more prevalent in Caucasians.

Scientists have long since suspected viral links with several other types of cancer apart from the three associated with EBV. These include: Hepatitis B, linked to liver cancer, Human Papilloma Virus, cervical cancer, and Human T-Cell Lymphotropic Virus, tied to some acute leukaemias.

CRC researchers have also worked on a vaccine for the Hepatitis B virus, which is now being evaluated in laboratories in China.

To the scientists, it made sense to attack the cancer-causing viruses rather than the cancers themselves. This would leave the field clear to concentrate on the many other forms of cancer which cripple and kill, and for which there is neither an obvious cause or effective treatment.

As Arrand, one of the developers of the EBV vaccine, explained, 'EBV is one-component which is necessary to cause nasopharyngeal cancer and Burkitt's Lymphoma. The evidence is that it is involved with Hodgkin's disease is becoming more conclusive. If we can eliminate one necessary component, by vaccination, we should be able to prevent the cancers.'

McVie, of the CRC, says the current results vindicate much of the past 15 years in research. 'This is a tremendous example of CRC collaboration between Manchester, Bristol and Birmingham, which underlines our policy of commissioning science where our strengths lie. We are committed to prevention of cancer wherever possible, and the success of the venture vindicates the emphasis and years of research devoted our vaccine program and represents another British first for the cancer research programme.' — Gemini News