

Parliament's Upset Time-table

There has been a noisy opposition walk-out from yesterday's Jatiya Sangsad sitting over the wording of the resolution on Lalbagh incident. Earlier the session had gone off-course through unscheduled debates for a week or so. recesses excepted. Even so, only two bills, not quite on burning national issues, could be barely tabled day before yesterday among four that ought to have been placed by now before the House, being in session since February 5. The two bills, one from Awami League MP Rafiqul Islam and another from NRP leader Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury are marking time and hurled on a delayed course.

That untoward happenings in the national arena would call for some unscheduled parliamentary debates cannot be basically in question. But there are a couple of countervailing factors of impelling nature which we need to bear in mind lest endless discussions on unforeseen topics go on delaying legislative business of the very urgent variety. The experience has palpably been that prior to almost every parliamentary session a mismeasured executive or administrative action had a fall-out or backlash that invariably spilled over the initial sittings of the Jatiya Sangsad. It hardly ever began with its right foot forward. As the House sat to listen to the Opposition salvos, a consideration of the original agenda got held back even within the limited time span of each session.

The net result is that a legislative backlog keeps mounting much the same way that the carry-over ADP project have upset planned development in the country. We regard this comparison as odious though because legislative business is seminally important to all other things in national life. While the government should handle the prelude to a parliamentary session with an extra bit of care, the opposition need also to contain itself within a reasonable range of reaction — we believe, as a strategy, so that giving a bit of its mind does not consign urgent legislation to oblivion.

Take, for instance the postmortem on judicial appointments. The episode coming to a close to the satisfaction of all concerned with vindicating the democratic principle of consultation with the Chief Justice, the debate could have stopped by making the cardinal point that consideration should be expedited of the law relating to the separation of the judiciary from the executive. For all we know, this is still at a very infantile stage, merely passing time and keeping out of the parliamentary sessions. The unscheduled discussion on the Lalbagh slaughter did not have to be long-drawn because the public are sufficiently outraged only to keep an eye on the course the law takes on the question. Importantly also the Awami League is looking for a revision of the City Corporation (Amendment) Act, 1993, insofar as its provision related to the removal of an elected mayor or commissioner is concerned. Section 10(C) of the amendment which the Awami League had opposed at the time of introduction in the Jatiya Sangsad, states to the effect that if a mayor or a commissioner "refuses to perform or becomes disabled from performing his functions", he may be removed from office. Now that the Awami League-sponsored mayoral candidates have won the elections in Dhaka and Chittagong, the party is expressing a fresh concern over the provision. Regardless of whether an amendment passed by a majority vote can be subjected to a legislative consideration *de novo* or is something that attracts the writ jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, which the Awami League is reportedly up to now, it remains a moot point anyhow in the current national perspective.

Be that as it may, there is so much of unfinished legislation to be in place on burning national problems. The remaining two years of the present parliament look jammed with it all. Some of the priority backlog can be cleared only by an efficient time management through the cooperation of all — particularly with cohesive and thoughtful functioning by the all-party Business Advisory Committee in the Parliament.

Dhaka in Ramadan

The month of abstinence, holy and sanctified as it is, has had very special appeals in Dhaka.

Dhaka of all cities having a big Muslim population in the world was possibly the first to resort to the siren as a far-servicing sound signal marking *iftar* and *sehri* times. Towns and cities in Bangladesh followed suit.

Every *mauhalla* of the city used to raise its own squad of singers with the approach of the Ramadan. After exacting rehearsals the squads would go around the *mauhalla* wakening the believers from slumber and telling them in melody not to miss the *sehri*. Some *mauhallas* are still trying to carry on with this tradition. As a part of upholding the cul'ural heritage maybe we should look into ways of reviving this tradition which made Ramadan in Dhaka so unique.

The genuine charm that remains is gastronomic. Dhaka is a centre of eating delights on the same footing as Delhi, Lahore, Peshawar and Kanpur. To its own *gharana* of the Central Asian and *tanduri* cuisine, come Ramadan, it adds an absolutely glorious array of *tele-bhaja* and other delicacies based on *chana* and *matar*. This very winsome aspect of Ramadan-in-Dhaka is, however, currently under two bad spells. First is price that's hitting the roof. To save oneself from its bashing, many an intelligent bloke is opening a *tele-bhaja* pushing the number of such to vie with mushrooms. Two, the delicacies are dip-fried in oil which is at best suspect and at worst a health hazard. The Public Health officials better not lower their guard on this count. In fact, there is a pronounced reason for both the market watchers and the health vigilantes to operate systematically and without any let-up whatsoever.

Ramadan is a very special season for Dhaka, as exactly it has been for so many decades.

Many of us will see the significance of the recently held convocation at Chittagong University. For the University, it has been an event of historic importance, because it was the first ever held. When you remember that a University that started functioning in 1965 (I hope I am right here) and that has failed to hold a convocation for the entire length of its existence, you will see what I mean.

It is not only Chittagong that has this gloomy record. No University has thought it safe or proper to hold a convocation ever since Pakistan went under military rule of Ayub Khan. Monem Khan, the Governor of East Pakistan and a henchman of the President had his fingers burnt when he tried to do what could not be done, under the circumstances. In Dhaka, students boycotted the convocation, and the same was repeated at Rajshahi. The bitterness of failure made him turn his mind from convocations to something quite different. First, he posted somebody as Vice-Chancellor, somebody who would willingly play his henchman on the campus, as he was doing in Dhaka for Ayub Khan. This, in its turn, resulted in the launching of N.S.F., a student organisation built with the sole purpose of acting as the strong arm of the government. The N.S.F. instead of helping the government, made matters worse.

PRESIDENT Hafez-al-Assad is a man in a hurry. Suffering from diabetes and a heart condition and 66-years-old, he wants to wipe out a blot on his name and regain the Golan Heights which he lost to Israel when he was Syria's Defence Minister.

Even more mortifying, the man he lost the land to, Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin, is now Prime Minister.

For Assad to gain an honourable place in Arab history, he must make good his loss.

As well as the personal factor behind his mid-January declaration to United States President Bill Clinton that he was "prepared to make peace with Israel now," the time was propitious for such a concession for another reason: since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the major arms supplier and diplomatic ally of the Arabs, they are not in a position to make war.

The Arab world is more divided than ever before. Syria lost strategic depth when the US-led coalition defeated Iraq and destroyed Baghdad's military machine in the 1991 Gulf war. And Assad wants the West to recognise Syria's special relationship with Lebanon.

Yet it was personally difficult for the Syrian leader to make his momentous declaration of intent at Geneva because he is a proud man, whose ambition has always been to lead the Arabs, as did his historic rival, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, in the 1950s.

Assad takes seriously Nasser's characterisation of Syria as the "throbbing heart of Arabism". So it must have been galling to renounce, in Geneva, in front of the world's television cameras, the Arab claim to the 80 per cent of Palestine

Convocations and a Few Questions

We had nearly forgotten what a convocation is. The Chittagong event passed off fairly smoothly, to judge from the press reports, despite the demonstration of a section of students, and the non-participation of a section of teachers. These marks of protest should not go unheeded.

The reign of terror it introduced on the campus only strengthened the democratic movement. The gory history of what the N.S.F. did, and how all its leaders got killed themselves, many of them as victims of infighting, has never been fully told. It needs to be told, for the benefit of some of our present-day ministers, those who love to play with student politics on the campus.

We had nearly forgotten what a convocation is. The Chittagong event passed off fairly smoothly, to judge from the press reports, despite the demonstration of a section of students, and the non-participation of a section of teachers. These marks of protest should not go unheeded. Chittagong has had a most troubled time during the last 3 or 4 years, and the manner the present Vice-Chancellor was installed in office has violated the procedure laid down in the University Act of 1973. Also, the recent move of the government to change certain provisions of the Act whereby the powers of the Senate will be curtailed in respect of the choice of a Vice-Chancellor has

been resented generally by the University community across the country.

In fact, this is the issue over which there has been a steep decline in the relationship between the government and the universities. For some time past, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education has been deliberating over

from the political life of the nation. The change from a Parliamentary to a Presidential form of the government made the procedure less innocuous than it originally was. Still, no serious damage was done during the days of President Ziaur Rahman, who had the good sense of letting things move in the normal way. Ershad was

Chancellor, but his regime was flawed and his doings were tainted, since he was required to serve his master, and not his institution. The distortion of the system ruined the career of an otherwise able man; he had to be eased out in the days of mounting agitation for democracy, and he left his university to be our ambassador for — of all countries —

The same fate awaited Mr. Maniruzzaman Mia, now turned a diplomat, but virtually in exile, in remote Western Africa.

These are all sad stories, the ruined careers of men who were either made Vice-Chancellors to serve the purpose of a Chancellor, or who, through questionable means, made themselves eligible for the position.

Convocations could be a sign of the return of normality in our universities, but are they? The present situation raises a number of issues.

For one thing, who is the Chancellor — the President or the Prime Minister? The act says, it is the President. But, as we should remember, an amendment introduced in the

days of Ziaur Rahman, made provision for a person nominated by the President to act on his behalf in his capacity as the Chancellor. While he was President, his Prime Minister Shah Azizur Rahman discharged this responsibility for two of the universities, and his Vice-President Justice Sattar was doing it for the other two. None of them attended a convocation nor did Ziaur Rahman himself. In fact there was no convocation at the time.

Whether a person enjoying a delegated power can or should play a role not expressly meant for him, is a nice point of propriety, if not of law.

The return of the Convocation, despite all the questions surrounding the role of Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors, could still be a sign of hope. The Universities, most of them, are in a mess. There is serious criticism about the administration at Rajshahi, and generally about the administration of a number of universities. At some places, Vice-Chancellors are under attack for their partisanship — what else can be as things are? — and at some places the seat has remained only technically filled, while the government is dreaming of a time when a Vice-Chancellor can be appointed directly by the Chancellor. It is over this issue that the government is going to face trouble. For the government, there is no cheerful message from history.

for peace.

Clinton, let down by Israel after obtaining the commitment on "normalisation" from Assad, may be reluctant to do what is necessary. New to Washington, inexperienced in world affairs, he is particularly vulnerable to the American Zionist lobby which also opposes concessions to Syria.

Israel's only peace treaty with an Arab country is with Egypt, negotiated in 1978-79. The then US President Jimmy Carter played a critical role in that peace process. Israeli President Ezer Weizman who participated in the negotiations said that there would have been no agreement without the US.

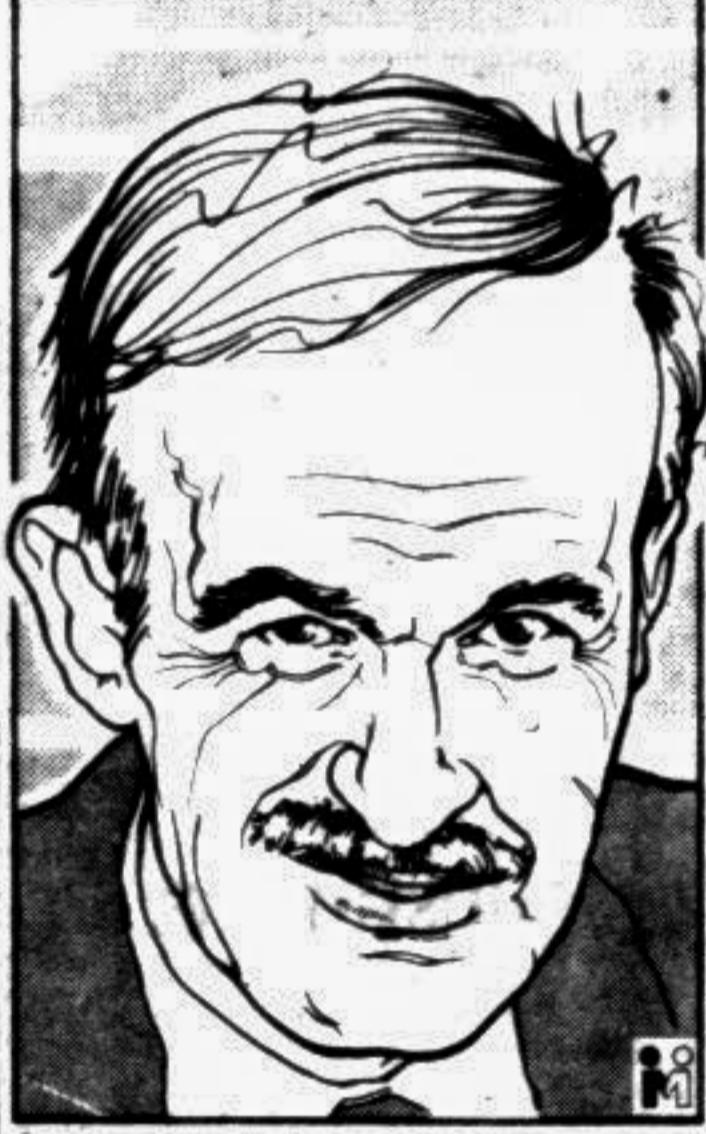
The "full peace" achieved then was at the price of full Israeli withdrawal from every inch of Egyptian territory. Assad has made it clear that he cannot settle for less. The ball is now in Israel's court. It is Washington's task to see that Israel returns it.

MICHAEL JANSEN was born in the US, lives in Cyprus, and has covered the Middle East for many years.

Ailing Assad Looks for a Place in History

Michael Jansen writes from Nicosia

The death in a riding accident of Syrian President Hafez-al-Assad's son Basil — a possible contender for the succession — is another blow to the man who, faced with his own ill-health and the painful reality of Arab weakness, has effectively renounced claims over "sacred Arab land." Despite the personal and political cost of his gesture, Israel may refuse to act positively, unless pushed by Washington. Gemini News Service examines a new twist in the Middle East peace process.



President Assad
Momentous move

occupied by Israel in 1948. It was an admission of the Arab failure to "liberate" Palestine — "sacred Arab land," a central portion of the Arab homeland.

Israel may refuse to act on this breakthrough on the Middle East peacemaking front, thus undermining the peace process. Speaking for other Arab leaders also prepared to bring an end to the 100-year struggle for Palestine with the alien people implanted there by the Western

powers, the President asserted that Syria would establish "normal relations" with the Jewish state.

Although Assad did not spell out what he meant by "normalisation," Clinton did so by stating that Assad had told him such relations include trade, diplomatic ties and open borders.

The Syrian position compels Israel to state precisely what it means by "withdrawal" in reference to the occupied Golan Heights. But instead of responding with its definition of "withdrawal" in exchange for Assad's definition of "full peace," Israel promptly began to play down the significance of Assad's statement.

The Labour-led coalition government announced that it would hold a referendum on whether or not Israel should implement a "significant withdrawal" from the Golan once such an agreement was reached.

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa expressed surprise over the Israeli reaction. He said Syria had expected Israel to welcome Assad's declaration and expressed doubts about the genuineness of Israel's interest in achieving peace.

This is because Israel is not prepared to pay the high price for peace: the return of virtually

all Arab territories occupied by the Jewish state during and after 1967.

The Syrians want to get back all 1,160 square kilometres of the Golan plateau, the Palestinians the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip, Jordan several pockets of land along the frontier and Lebanon the strip of land on its border held by Israel as a so-called "security zone."

In exchange for "full withdrawal" the Arabs are prepared to give "full peace." This means acceptance of and normal relations with Israel.

Whether Assad's concession on "full peace" produces an Israeli commitment to "full withdrawal" may be decided in the bilateral talks which resumed in Washington in late January. Prospects for success are not good. Israel continues to stall on its "withdrawal" from Gaza and Jericho, the two small Palestinian enclaves from which it was due to pull out last December.

The US, which won from Assad his commitment to peace and normalisation of relations, has so far refused to take an active part in the negotiations.

Clinton said that it was up to the parties to settle the details of their peace agreements, although he committed the US to a "comprehensive peace" on all fronts based on UN resolutions 242 and 338.

If Clinton relies on Israel, on its own, to make peace on this basis there may never be peace. In reaction to the Clinton-Assad summit, Israelis opposed to the return of the Golan to Syria have distributed over a million leaflets and stickers stating that the area should be returned to Syria.

Only six per cent of Israelis are prepared to hand it back to Syria. Israeli analysts believe that the weak coalition government needs prompting and pressure from the US to compel it to make the concessions the Arabs demand in exchange

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OPINION

ICC Trophy

Javed Helali

Father sex. Latif, Neaz, Rouf, Raquib, Daulat, etc were called for nets for the Pakistan team and some even played for the national team before 1971.

The standard of cricket worldwide, has improved tremendously especially after the advent of one-dayers and the huge injections of money in the form of sponsorships and fees.

Like the International Olympic Association (IOC) which gives a lot of money to its "developing" members from the profits of Olympic Games (Bangladesh is a beneficiary), the "World Cricket Authorities" are also going to give money to the countries taking part in the present championship.

Let's see how Bangladesh or more specifically the BCCB puts it to use!

Coming back to the present championship, Bangladesh's group is not an easy one, with both UAE and USA boasting a few good players of sub-continental origin. Bangladesh should beat Argentina and E and C Africa but will have to work much harder in their matches against UAE and USA. If Bangladesh comes out top or runners-up in its group, it advances to the second leg which will include three top and three runners-up teams from Groups A, C and D. Assuming that Bangladesh makes it to the second leg, the real test will then begin.

This championship is a chance for the Bangladesh team to show that all the effort and money for their training has not gone to waste. They have been trained well by Mohinder Amarnath who has put great emphasis on physical fitness of the players, and rightly so. This has been proved in the recent games against Pakistan and Zimbabwe. But the BCCB tours of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka do not give great reasons for cheer.

Other than Holland and Kenya, teams to beware of are Denmark, Canada, Bermuda, West Africa and UAE. Had I been given to wager I would bet on Holland 7-1, Kenya 5-1, Bangladesh 3-1, Denmark and Canada 2-1, favourites with Malaysia and Singapore bringing up the rear.

I wish the Bangladesh team well. I am confident that it will reach the finals later this year. But let's keep our fingers crossed — and pray that they fare much better than our national football team.

Government telephones

Sir, This has reference to a news item under the above caption appearing on page 3 of your esteemed daily on 9 February. The Health and Family Welfare Minister disclosed in the Jatiya Sangsad, when replying to a question of Sheikh Harunur Rashid, that punitive action had been taken against 45 pharmaceutical manufacturing companies for production and marketing of sub-standard drugs in 1992 and 1993. The companies against which the punitive measures had been taken in

Dhaka or Dacca?

Sir, For quite some years our capital city is being spelt in English as 'Dhaka' instead of the former spelling 'Dacca'. We though use and write this new spelling. It has often been noticed that letters and documents coming from foreign countries bear the former spelling in the address.

"Newsweek" which is a very widely circulated English weekly of international repute has a good market in Bangladesh also. This journal without taking least care to notice the decision of our government to change the spelling of the capital city has for years been printing the former spelling 'Dacca' as may be seen in their 'subscription rates' column of each issue.

'University of Dacca' is an age-old education institution which has the reputation of being called Oxford of the East. We do not know if its Syndicate by any amendment has brought about the change in the spelling of 'Dacca'. In the distant future our posterity and research scholars would be in a confusion as to whether there were in existence two different cities 'Dhaka' and

'Dacca'. There is another point that should be mentioned. This change in spelling has been introduced on the ground of phonetics. But the same principle has not been followed in other cases as we are still writing 'Bogra' instead of 'Bogura', 'Comilla' instead of 'Komilla' and 'Chittagong' instead of 'Chittagong'.

Should we, therefore, revert to the old spelling 'Dacca' instead of 'Dhaka' — that is still popularly known to the world around which may save us from any confusion in future?

Abdullah Abu Bakar, Birol, Dinajpur.</