Dhaka, Saturday, November 2, 1996

#### Focus on Agenda

Amid resonant prediction of its fiery, sparkemitting nature, the second session of the seventh Jatiya Sangsad, it seemed, was robbed of the attention its agenda deserved. For all the building up of calescence the fact remains that this session of national parliament does have a number of important issues. One hopes the law makers would remain focused to them throughout and would not misuse time in what Bernard Shaw once termed as the energy of righteousness.

The separation of the judiciary from executive is one of the major expectations built around the inchoate parliamentary session. Law has long been harped to be allowed to live an independent life. Intervention of the executive in the judiciary went a long way in thwarting progress in general. In the present circumstances or the rather messed state of the two founding plinths of the state, not only the sufferings of the citizenry are augmented by the tardy and tortuous operative mode of judiciary but the measures needed for national development also face various crippling bottlenecks.

Also awaited with keen interest is the local government bill for a four-tier system of governance that will include village union, thana and district level units of the administration.

Sparks will continue to fly because Parliament is the place from where a pluralistic political system draws its strength, its diversity. But then a chord of unity regarding national interest must run through all this diversity. This unity in diversity is what makes democracy click as a system and saves a parliamentary session from being labelled as an assembly of cacophony comprising people's representatives.

The Prime Minister's pronouncement on channels of communication with the opposition regarding consensus on national issues should contribute to the qualitative improvement of the session. The ruling party seemingly, has its work cut out. We hope the filibustering zeal and the energy of righteousness will not get the better of the attention on the agenda.

#### Well Done, Garments!

It seems that Bangladesh has largely achieved a garments industry without child labour. That they have arrived at this happy stage, subject of course to the satisfaction of ILO and the importing countries, in about two years time is quite creditable. And it proves once again the entrepreneurial resilience that we have here. Wanted is only the will not to stoop to unethical practices spurred by simple greed. In the case of child labour in garments manufacture, the will came in response to outside pressure. One only hopes now that the will is here. The child ban would continue effectively without any further prodding from abroad. The BGMEA has decided to fine any member manufacturer employing even a single child.

Together with freeing the garments sector of child labour, the BGMEA has successfully arranged for the entire 10,547 identified child workers now out of job to go to 247 schools. Each of these children are getting Tk 300 as stipend. This is truly impressive and we congratulate the garments leadership for this. This we do knowing full well that the lure of cheap labour is something very hard to resist and the happy situation that was reported on Thursday by the BGMEA may come unstuck at any moment if an unslacking vigil is not effectively kept for years to come. Return of children in whatever insignificant number to the industry will not only set at naught the good work but will damage Bangladesh's image abroad badly and for good, exactly as warned by the US Ambassa-

Child labour is not the only malady that the garments sector, or for that matter all exportables are suffering from. Unfair business practice takes many forms. We have to see on our own and without foreign prodding, that these do not encumber our export activity. Save the child labour question no progress is in sight in healing those bad cheating ways. The way we burnt our fingers in our euphoric expansion of prawn culture and export should be a good lesson to benefit from.

Let the garments good news be the beginning of a healthy export industry. The child labour performance should give us confidence.

### National Youth Day

National Youth Day was observed yesterday. The spirit of celebration to mark the day devoted to the youth force of the country was contrasted by a rather gloomy picture painted in one of the leading Bengali dailies. One third of the country's youth population is unemployed and an alarming proportion of it is addicted.

According to Youth Development Directorate statistics, of the total population of eleven crore and ninety lakh, three crore sixty lakh are youths. While two crore forty lakh youths are employed, one crore twenty lakh of their age peers are unemployed.

A survey conducted back in 1992 revealed that about sixty two per cent of those admitted to hospitals with drug related ailments belonged to the youth community. A truly sad commentary but then again the reasons are quite obvious.

While the various projects and programmes aimed at the optimal use of this great youth force now lying in waste call to be lauded, caution should also be taken against the factors that lead to the aggravation of the problem we already have on our hands.

## Of Government and Governance

There is not much sense in saying that the past was bad because had it not been so, Awami League would not have been in the present. People had already rejected the past ...

INCE the assumption of power about five months back. Prime Minister (PM) Sheikh Hasina and her ruling party Bangladesh Awami League (AL) have been showering a lot of their good wishes and showing many ways to meet people's demand. Their unequivocal commitments to display, in the realm of governance, a distinct drift from the past could also be glanced from the various speeches made by the PM and her cabinet colleagues. Quite naturally conscious, citizens of this country started monitoring each and every step of the government and analyzing the results thereof. Few of these upshots had already been published in newspapers and few of them got prominence in seminars. The purpose of the present note is to pull together the various notions about the performance of the present government over its initial 140 days of being in power. The views expressed is mainly drawn from the chit-chats and table-talks heard here and there

In general, people tend to feel that it was a good idea to allow BTV to telecast live the JS proceedings. In fact "Ajker Sangsad" is considered by many as one of the most popular TV programmes that BTV had ever produced. The intrinsic merit of the programme lies in its capacity to build a bridge between the voters and their representatives. The benefits so derived tend to point to an enlarged version of the same albeit in a refined manner. This could argue for the necessity of another TV channel to accommodate other programmes

The news portion of BTV, al-

legedly, continues to disrespect neutrality and monotone views of the party in power. At the initial phase some rays of hopes were ushered with coverage of opposition news, more or less. It is expected that for a more and better transparency. BTV should be allowed to inject more of opposition views. However, the formation of a committee to eke out the modalities to free BTV from the clutches of government control is being considered as a welcome move. The government should however, see that the committee does not take minutes only by losing hours.

The PM appears to have bagged a plus point by agreeing to face people through BTV. The programme, "Shobinoye Jiggasha" as it was called, aimed to portray transparency in the overall management of the government. Like some other projects in Bangladesh, the idea behind the programme sounded rich but the materialization turned out to be absolutely poor and, to a large extent, proctorial. The good wishes of the PM and her party failed to turn up as good horses due to the follies of the organizers and of the "sychophants." The mis-match however, should not deter future attempts to continue a programme like this.

To this effect, viewers Shobinoye Prottasha are as follows: (a) the PM and the Leader of the Opposition should face one moderator and four other participants; (b) there can be an audience with no partici-

pation: (c) telephone calls should be welcome; and (d) the querists should preferably be selected from among relatively

less partisan camps. The government is yet to get a firm grip on the deteriorating law and order situation. After a dip, the rate of hijacking, extortions, murders seem to have peaked once again. The apparent "ceasefire" among contending student political parties seems to provide no sign of consolation whatsoever. The gun battle may erupt any moment in educational institutions. The government once

sent. People had already rejected the past post holders and voted Awami League to power on 12th June. The government should spend more of its time in devising ways and means to present a safe, secure and sustainable present for the people The potential fertiliser crisis that might grip the upcoming boro season, the price hike of non-rice basic necessities, the chaos in the financial sector. the unfinished agenda of reforms etc. should comprise the issues to tinker with. This of course, does not mean that the government should not con-

## Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

again should sit with different political parties (major or minor) and seek their co-operation in this regard. Just to remind, the law and order situation would continue to act as the most effective barometer of government's successes and

failures.

The policy makers should. as many would like to see, cease to chewing the performances of the past governments too much. There is not much sense in saying that the past was bad because had it not been so. AL would not have been in the pre-

tinue its hunt for the killers the crooks and the criminals. All that should be done in a more transparent fashion so that the question of political vengeance does not arise.

As far as foreign policy is concerned, the government seems to have taken the right path. The China visit by the PM at the first lap appears to forstall the fact that in politics nothing is permanent as far as interest of the country is concerned. Her US visit is also reckoned with positive attitudes excepting the following

(i) the size of the entourage in the fleet could be much smaller: (ii) her speech could be better tuned with more pragmatic issues. However, at the end of the day, the successes /failures of the foreign policy of the present government would be judged by the availability of Ganges water during the upcoming winter. The PM did the right job by not raising the issue at the UN in the event of the on going bilateral negotiations. It is hoped that India would extend her friendly hand to the growingly deserted region of Bangladesh so that Bangladesh is not deprived of its due share from Ganges water On the economic front, not

in evidence. And those which are available, appear to hint at some qualitative notions. The recent rise in the bank rate to curb inflation, allegedly, does not appear to be a right step. After all economics is a science of trade offs and any policy step that minimizes the opportunity cost, is deemed to be a good policy step. We have at the moment two imperatives: (a) containing rising price of essentials and (b) augmenting economic activities by making credits available to investors. The first imperative calls for a rise in the bank rate while the second for a lowering of the same. Are we witnessing a surge in demand for bank credit by private investors? If not, the rise in bank rate might add to the falling demand. In that case the economy might have to face a down turn. What about

system But still there is no

movement or agitation to re-

much of evaluations seem to be

the public sector continues to swaflow a larger portion of credit expansion, and thus adds to the inflationing pressures. then why should others suffer for that? The government should, in a haste, attempt to remove the impediments bedeviling the falling demand from the private sector. The framing of the rules of business within the shortest span of time is considered as laudable It is however, expected that actions should immediately follow the proposals. The most serious allegations that are raised against the government is its relatively lukewarm attitude towards loan defaulters. We are yet to hear from the government as to how it would handle the loan defaulting 'kulaks'. The bill for the separation of judiciary from the executive. once passed, should constitute a landmark in the history of Bangladesh. To pursue the economic diplomacy as announced by the PM. necessary steps should be taken to place right kind of people in different embassies. This would mean that merit rather than political allegiance dictates the selection. By and large, the govern-

the public sector borrowings? If

ment has been doing fine on major issues. Hopefully, these would bring large dividends for the country. However, few "inward looking" political attitudes should be shunned so that the government can avail better scores. The government of Sheikh Hasina needs to move very cautiously since every day of her existence in power is monitored not only by her critics but also by her admirers Only the sychophants would say, all is well honorable PM!

## The Malady in UP

What has been done in UP, India's one-sixth in population, to keep the BJP out of power may push liberal elements, if not the party, into the background.

HE Bhartiya Janata Par ty is not my cup of tea. It never was. Its communal politics has muddled waters of tolerance and accommodation in the country. At least, in northern India, the concept of pluralism, which has animated the society for centuries, has got diminished because of its virulent propaganda in the last two decades.

Yet, it will be folly to drive the party to the wall. It may become desperate and may, once again, land the country in the chaotic situation that followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid four years ago. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal, uglier versions of the BJP, may gain ascendancy and silence even the few liberals in the party

Atal Behari Vajpayee, the BJP parliamentary party leader, told me once that they might be able to stall the flood of chauvinism, if given a chance. He did little when the tide of Hindu militancy rose at the time of the Rath Yatra that BJP chief L K Advani led. Still Vajpayee did not become part of repulsive scene. No doubt, the BJP leaders are themselves responsible for taking communalism to a higher pitch to expand the electoral base. But the fundamentalists among them have not had the day in last two, three years.

What has been done in UP India's one-sixth in population, to keep the BJP out of power may push liberal elements, if not the party, into the background. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the party's mentor, may bring back militant Hindus to the centre stage and revive the old agenda on the destruction of mosques, particularly in Mathura and Varanasi, which share the premises of two Hindu temples. Once again, the programme to foment communal troubles

may be put into action. That is the reason why I am disturbed over the developments in UP. Secular forces have not only to play the game by rules but also seen to be doing so. The common perception is that the BJP has been denied power. If that is the general belief, the BJP's angry reaction can well be imagined. Many of its followers argue that the constitution will always be 'subverted' to keep the party out

of power. Desperate remedies are in the air. The fundamen talists are sharpening their

Understandably, the United Front or, for that matter, secular thinking is against the BJP forming a government in the biggest state of the country. But this cannot be at the expense of norms or democratic procedures. Those who have the proud record of upholding the constitution and resisting every effort to maul it cannot afford to flout it either in letter or in spirit. A governor cannot supplant the elected. He has to give people's representatives the chance to sort out their affairs.

True, the BJP could muster only 183 members in a House of 425. But being the largest party emerging from the polls, it was within its right to ask for an opportunity to form the government. As the Sarkaria Commission report on Centre-State relations and the Supreme Court judgement in the case of former chief minister S R Bommai from Karnataka have said that the decision whether a party has the requisite strength to form a government or stay in power lies with the House where the numbers must prove the veracity of a particular party's claim. The governor is no arbiter, definitely not Romesh Bhandari. who has a partisan record as a

governor in Tripura. Only recently did the United Front reiterate its resolve through a motion at the interstate council meeting to stop the misuse of the governor's powers. Its minimum common programme also says so. Political parties have demanded from time to time the deletion of Article 356, which authorises the governor to take over the state administration on the 'failure of the constitution', a pretext often used to dismiss the governments New Delhi has not

My feeling is that in case the BJP government had been constituted in UP, it would have gone the same way as Vajpayee's went at the centre. The fact is that the BJP is on decline in UP. Even vote-wise, the party has been losing election after election since 1993.

And heavens would not have tallen if its government had been installed. It would not have been worse than the Shiv Sena-led government in Maharashtra, where its godfather, Bal Thackeray, continues to confuse Indians from other parts of the country with immigrants. The BJP government in Rajasthan is on another trip. It could not find a single witness to stand up in the state in the court to say that Roop Kanwar. who was forced to climb her husband's pyre, before hundreds of people was sacrificed to perpetuate the custom of sati.

Conceded, the centre had a point when it took over the administration on the plea that it feared horse-trading. Since no political party had attained a majority at the polls, the fear was not unfounded. But this is can try to form a government jointly or otherwise.

But his absence from Uttar Pradesh is like Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. He is an integral part of UP's politics and he should be involved in shaping the picture of tomorrow. If that is not done, the danger of fresh polls is very much there. The voters are sick of elections; another poll will not be fair to them.

However, one redeeming feature of the situation is that the assembly is in the state of 'animated suspension'. The governor can revive it any time. This should be done sooner than later and Bhandari should be asked not to play politics.

In the past, as former prime minister Chandrasekhar has said, the situation like the one in UP would have been sorted

verse the process. Yet, if the nation is to preserve the fundamental values of a democratic society, every citizen in India must display a degree of vigimi the floor of the House.

lance and willingness to sacrifice. People must denounce the loss of values in politics. Means are important. If the BJP forms the government in UP through offering prizes and posts, as it is trying to do, it should be as much condemned as the state governor's decision not to allow the party to show its strength

## BETWEEN THE LINES

#### Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

as much true now as when it was decided to keep the state assembly in 'animated suspension'. How can the central rule stop members from crossing over to the other party as long as they can engineer a split in such a way that their number is one-third of the party's strength, a criterion laid down in the anti-defection law? Former prime minister V P Singh's suggestion that a member changing the party should resign from the seat is worth implementing. The United Front should have done so after assuming power, knowing how the Narasimha Rao government survived by initiating and fi-

nancing several splits. By resigning from the assembly, defence minister Mulayam Singh Yadav has rebuffed the charge that his ambition to become the chief minister had thwarted the efforts to stop any such combination coming to power as was not headed by him. Now he is not in the picture. Both the BJP and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)

out through talks. There was then an atmosphere of give and take among political parties. They never hit below the belt. Now they are so eager to capture power that they use any method to grab it. Hostilities have deepened so much that there is not even a semblance of effort to find the common ground. The arrogance, which Kanshi Ram and Mayawati, the two BSP leaders, reflect makes it clear that either they should be in power or they would not allow anyone to rule.

Developments in Gujarat bring no credit to political parties or members. Who forms the government is not so important to know as who is for clean public life. Politicians have failed again and again because power has become the end. Money, caste or religion tell only part of the story.

The malady in UP, Gujarat and elsewhere is that politics and power have got so intertwined that even the realisation to keep them separate is not there. This is telling upon the

# Buchwald's COLUMN Mugsy Moke's Man

HERE are many people in the United States who have yet to make up their minds about how they will vote in the upcoming elections. They are the same poor souls who decide whether to have Wheaties or Corn Flakes for

breakfast Mugsy Moke is one of them. He came running to me and said. 'I'm going to vote for Bob Dole."

"How so?" "He has just revealed that Clinton is a liberal."

"What's wrong with that?" "Clinton is not just a liberal — he's a liberal's liberal. I can live with a one-liberal president, but not one who is a two-time liberal loser." "Well. I suppose you have a point."

"Bob Dole has taken off the gloves, and he is no longer the Mr Nice Guy from the Senate that we have come to know. He's demanding that Clinton give us the skinny on his political contributions. When I heard Dole reveal that Clinton had taken money from foreign sources and Dole said, 'Come clean, Mr President, come clean,' I said to myself, Dole is no longer mumbling, he's spewing vinegar. This is the man we want to beat up on the nation's schoolteachers.

Mugsy added. "If Dole had taken the low road in the beginning, he would be leading in the polls by now. I may not understand the budget, but I like sleaze when I see it.' "Then you're the type of voter who can't make up his mind

until the candidates start slinging mud. "Not necessarily, but I don't like to watch a debate if one side

or the other doesn't kick someone in the teeth. I would have come out for Dole a lot earlier if he had picked up his wooden podium and thrown it at Clinton." "I know you prefer playing hard ball, but many people don't

like the candidates who wallow around on the low road. "They're not the voters who listen to Rush Limbaugh."

I didn't see Mugsy for several days. When I did he said that he was undecided again.

"Dole isn't as dirty as I hoped he would be. He's complaining about foreign donations being made to the Democrats, but I don't consider that hitting someone in the groin. If Bob wants my vote, he's going to have to demand a debate between Hillary Clinton and Liddy Dole to discuss their husbands' eating

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#### Immigration laws of the West

Sir, I was listening to the BBC early in the morning of 25th October, 1996. BBC was giving news about Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's address in UN General Assembly and they touched only one point of her address and that was Immigration. BBC called her comments on this matter as "mixed" and spent few

irritant minutes on it. A few hours later, I had a chance to look at the full text of the PM's address at the UNGA. I went through the content of her speech and particularly on immigration. I am a person who has spent some 19 years out of the country and had the opportunity to travel in Middle East and European countries. I know by heart what the Bangladesh PM has spoken about and why BBC has termed her address on the matter as mixed and I had a feeling from the BBC commentators tones that they were visibly irritated. Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina has touched a subject matter very sensitive to the western

While I do congratulate and support the PM in her bold expression and call to the world community for redress and look for a solution for the sorry plight of immigrants — legal or otherwise — from Third World countries like Bangladesh, and to find out the root cause of immigration, I must say that the cause of the problem does not lie fully within these unfortunate Third Country Nations (TCNs). Many of these countries including ours has an affluent past. We have been looted and plundered for couple of centuries by an European country where the HQ of BBC is situated. Today's immigration laws of European countries who had colonised so long and usurped the wealth of the nations of Asia and Africa are being made stricter and stricter so that people from their erstwhile colonies cannot enter into their national boundaries in Europe. It becomes an unhappy remembrance to them when they are reminded that their ancestors did not require any passports and visas to come to these countries centuries ago. The then Indian government did not ask Visa from Vasko-De-Gama

when he landed on the Indian

It is a pity that even in the United States which is a land of immigrants, the immigration laws are being tightened.

Through the exaction of apartheid like immigration laws some 75 per cent of the world population are being forced to be content with only 25 per cent of the world wealth, and for the fortunate 25 per cent of the world population some 75 per cent of the world wealth are being ensured. Poverty and its associated vices are being the thrust upon the larger part of

the world population. These unfortunate teeming millions looked for a certain period in the recent past towards socialism for their emancipation — but Alas! that also eluded them, like the way much-expected cloud vanishes away over the desert sky. Finding no other solution for their mere survival, some of them have resorted to immigration legal or illegal. What great a crime it is!

This planet called earth has yet enough resources to feed the human species which inhabit it. Unfortunately, it is the law of the high and mighty which has made unsurmountable artificial geographical barriers which has created a vast population of suffering mass world-

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has probably landed herself onto one of the supersensitive areas of the mighty western world — hence so much

of irritation from BBC. Nurul Basher Khilgaon, Dhaka.

#### Diabolic

Sir. The Dhaka-Aricha highway has virtually turned out to be a death-trap for the passengers. In the recent past some horrifying accidents occurred on this route, claiming many valuable lives.

It appears that we are not fully aware of the hazards of travelling on this route. This is a very busy road and vehicles ply on this road day and night. This is the main road-link between Dhaka and the northern and western part of the country and thousands of people commute between these places everyday. Despite the importance of this road proper attention has not been paid to it in the past. In fact, sustained efforts should have gone into the maintenance and improvement

of this highway We generally blame the accident on the drives' carelessness or incompetence. In many cases it may be true. It is also true that the accidents occur because of defective vehicles. But this is

not the whole story.

in recent years the volume of traffic on this road has increased manifold. But very little has been done to widen this road to cope with the ever-increasing traffic load. We speak of road-worthiness of cars; we must keep in mind the trafficworthiness of the roads also.

It has now become essential to give serious thought to the problem of ever-increasing number of accidents on Dhaka-Aricha route. We must take immediate steps to stop accidents. This could be done only if this vital road is widened. I hope the authority concerned will take a note of it.

Sikandar Rana Dept. of English Jahangirnagar University

#### Why two in one frame?

Sir, Now-a-days, in all supplements of the national dailies, a photograph of our PM is used against the message given by her, as the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. This photograph has attracted my attention. Firstly, whether it is the standard official photo of the PM of the Republic, because, normally an official photo must be used in all formal official occasion when one's official position has been used. Secondly, if that is the standard official photo of the PM, then some norms have

not been followed Prime Minister's present preferred attire (specially, in the attire she preferred to take oath as PM or in the attire she prefers to meet the member of the public and the dignitaries)

is not in the photograph. One's parent's photo is never placed in the background of an official photo of an incumbent. If the photo of the Father of

the National and the remain in the background, then as a matter of standard, that should be applicable for Republic's all official

photographs. In official photo, normally the individual is portrayed and none remains in the background. This norm is being followed not only in the democratic culture, but even in monarchy (where one inherits

the throne from the ex-

monarch). I have never come across any official photo of a head of the state or of a head of the government having another figure in the background. May be, Mr Waliur Rahman (columnist of DS, who often quotes instances close to prehistoric era to make his argument forceful) has some

instances of two-in-one official photo (of a PM of a country) with him. Moreover, the Father of the Nation remains in the heart of

his people, even if, the state ceases to exist. Whereas, a PM fades after a certain term, except few like Mr Lee Kuan Yue of Singapore. So, the Father of the Nation should be respected, as such irrespectively. None should take advantage of his image in one's official photo. only because of one's private relationship with him in any way. Such exclusive public use of private connection amounts nepotism/favouritism/corruption.

other's image in any way.

So, no-one should try to obscure

A R Choudhury Uttara, Dhaka.