

For a More Accessible PM

The 'Prime Minister's Question Time' was a good thought. The opening programme at the Jatiya Sangsad on Tuesday, as televised full on BTV, must have been one of the most seen chunks by the viewers. We welcome it with the rest of the nation. The duration of the programme — 15 minutes — however, does not do justice to programme's potential for good. It should right away be extended to half an hour. Depending upon the time of the Sangsad and importance of questions, a further extension by another quarter or half hour should be decided.

There is a general feeling that the Prime Minister is being boxed up by bureaucratic demands on her time and thought. The question time in JS will lessen the pace of her isolation from the parliamentarians. But what about the ordinary people? Perhaps, this was the consideration behind that grand meet-the-people programme on TV that came to a grand fiasco. That programme should be revived at once with lessons of the fiasco used for correcting the aberrations of the anchorman of the first show.

It is also very necessary that the Prime Minister meet the leaders of the professions, such as scientists and teachers, doctors and social workers, mathematicians, weather people and engineers, agronomists and water management experts. This can be held once every two months. In the intervening months she can get briefings on the state of the arts and also of society from the intellectuals, writers and artists.

Equally, if not more important than these is the need for the Prime Minister to meet the Press at a regular interval. These should be where she will seek to be questioned, may even be grilled. And these should be strictly business meetings.

This kind of exposure to many and better minds of the nation will complement the picture she gets from bureaucrats and her party colleagues — of the nation.

Neither the best of knowledge nor the best of intentions in the nation reside exclusively in the politician. There are enough temptations to feel that the politicians shun these as also do these the politicians. This must go and the two should combine to give the nation what has long been due to it — wisdom and application fused together and rendered in the loving and sincere resolve of a patriot. Who can initiate the process better than the Prime Minister? Hers must be a most accessible persona, hers must be a government crystal transparent. For the good of us all.

Can't We Beat Mosquitoes?

It is quite a revelation that the country's mosquito eradication programme is dependent on foreign aid and the government will be able to take effective measures against the tiny insects only when enough such foreign funds are available. Local Government Rural Development and Co-operatives Minister Zillur Rahman however did not specify, during his disclosure of the information at the Jatiya Sangsad, if we are entirely or partially dependent on foreign aid for our war against mosquito, nor did he mention the exact position of the fund in question. But it does not require great wisdom to understand that the fund situation is far from satisfactory. Why else should the minister speak in terms of future programme which is again conditional to the availability of fund?

Then should we consider we have lost our fight against mosquitoes? One might wonder why a country infested with mosquitoes cannot have provision for local resources in the annual budget for the purpose. The days of malaria in an epidemic form seems to have long gone but that is no guarantee for its total elimination. If not for anything else, at least for its nuisance values mosquitoes need to be effectively controlled. How annoyed people are can be gauged by the nickname (or should we call brand name?) they ascribe to mosquitoes after the name of DCC's mayors. Eradication of mosquito is quite a serious task and it should not be made conditional to the availability of foreign fund.

Yet there is no reason either to refuse foreign help if offered voluntarily. We are glad that the visiting mayor of the Birmingham City Council has offered her help in eradicating mosquitoes. Although we cannot be sure how experienced her city council is in dealing with mosquitoes, we can easily accept the help in waste disposal. If the city gets rid of its heaps of garbage and filth, half the job will be done. If the same rule can be applied to the improvement of environment throughout the country, arresting the proliferation of mosquitoes will be much easier. We exactly need such a country-wide drive.

Welcome, Prince Charles

Charles, Prince of Wales and heir apparent to the throne of the United Kingdom, arrived yesterday in Dhaka on a three-day goodwill visit. Prince Charles is more a human being than a strait-jacketed royal and much of this is his own deliberate doing. Intelligence had never been a necessary attribute for royalty. Charles not only has a great store of it but also, very unlike blue-blooded ones down the pages of history, has chosen to show it and pit it against others.

We welcome Charles amongst us with an unavoidable unease as to if he will find anything interesting here at all. A good reader of a medley of subjects and not a mean fashioner of things and ideas, the Prince of Wales, more a German than a Briton though he is, will find it diverting that it was a Welshman who founded here in Bengal the Indian Empire to the great glory of the court of St James and that the loot Clive and his cohorts made of Bengal — then the richest of world nations — saw Britain rule over world business for nearly two centuries. The Anglo-Saxon prevalence in the ethnic-cultural melting pot of the us owes in unknown measures to a spilling of the Bengal loot across the Atlantic.

The muslin is no more and the Royal Bengal is on the way out and is so pathetically here that Charles must have seen better specimens in the zoos. Can he not show any interesting pieces of architecture — medieval temples and mosques and modern structures with one or two redeeming points of departure and innovation?

We wish him delightful stay.

Dates and Their Observance

25th March 1971. Our glorious independence and National Day. On this day, a heinous and brutal attempt was made to kill the pursuit of democracy by a democracy-loving people, albeit without success.

EVERY object, even a concept, may provide a different perspective or picture, if viewed from a different angle or with a different attitude. This applies quite vividly to the efforts made by diverse political parties in commemorating what they regard as a specially memorable day either in favour or against its significance relating to democracy.

15th February 1997. The first anniversary of what the ruling party, the Awami League, has termed as the democracy destruction day. A year ago, on this day, election to the 6th Parliament was held. Since the ruling Awami League party and its principal cohorts, the Jatiya Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami, boycotted participation in the election, the election as such lost its desired character as the appropriate tool for choosing public representatives from the entire population, professing all shades of political opinion. Does this imply that the elec-

constitutional requirement, finally gave in to the extraordinary method of referring the matter to the Supreme Court. The opposition then refused to cooperate and sought political advantage to discredit the ruling party and to bring down the government by force. The government somehow succeeded to stay in power till the end of its full term and transferred power peacefully to the caretaker government after having enacted the enabling legislation before dissolving the 6th Parliament.

In reply to the opposition claim for the 6th Parliament to be unrepresentative and consequently invalid, the BNP's contention was that it represented the only legal and constitutional process to establish the extra-constitutional institution of a caretaker government. But for this, the country would have plunged into utter chaos, no election could be held under the caretaker government and the Awami League could not come to power by legitimate

amendment, introducing one-party political system in the country. A totalitarian system cannot be supplanted by a democratic process, historic evidence suggests that. According to the previous logic, in the absence of a general consensus, this day cannot also be acceptable to the people in general to be termed one way or the other. Nevertheless, it still remains to be the independence day of the two states created by the British at the end of their rule in India.

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6th December 1990. The day



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

tion was not valid? Moral compunction will naturally dialect people not to accept validity of the election due to its failure to choose representation from all sections of people. On the other hand, one may note that, despite occasional conflicts between morality and law, the latter normally prevails over the former in less than the ideal society of ours. Therefore, if the election was not an unlawful act, did it serve a useful purpose? Did it promote the cause of democracy or did it actually aim at killing democracy?

These are issues which legitimately agitate minds of politically-conscious citizens. The then opposition parties stand was clear. Their boycott of the polls stemmed from their contention that any election under the existing government would not have been free, fair and impartial. They demanded election to be held under a neutral, non-partisan caretaker government. The BNP, which had earlier dismissed the proposal on grounds of its failure to meet

means, it was pointed out. Both sides advanced apparently cogent, forceful, convincing but contradictory arguments, rendering the people divided to subscribe to one view or the other. So, the 15 February could be observed, strangely enough, both as a Democracy Day or a Democracy Destruction Day. There is no consensus and, therefore, cannot be observed in that spirit on a national scale.

15th August 1975. Several argue, with some justification, in favour of calling this day as the Democracy Destruction Day. On this day, Head of State and Head of Government of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was assassinated, the Constitution was abrogated and power was seized by an unlawful authority. This is a classic case of demolition of democracy. In contrast, some section of people argue that democracy, in fact, did not exist in the country at that particular time. Democracy had already been killed by way of constitutional

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OPINION

Minimising Power Blackouts

Azabr

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Electricity has to be rationed — that is the unpleasant reality of the day (and night) — and it gives a negative point to governance. From the shortage of surface-flowing water, the problem of shortage has spread to the electricity sector. More than that, the prime-mover area is also adversely affected, namely, the gas production, supply, and distribution (the indirect message is that we are running out of the natural gas reserves). Not the public is being told that there is also shortage of gas pipelines! The government is silent about thousands of illegal electric connections — misplaced kindness! How the 20 per cent human systems loss is being decreased?

Pessimists might get some sardonic pleasure in spreading some wrong signals by pointing

marked the fall of General Ershad, who had ruled the nation for long 9 years, setting an unbroken record, from practically an absolute rule. He had assumed power staging a military coup, dismissing the government elected a short while ago through a general and widely-participatory election. The reasons stated to justify the action were sham and the resignation of the incumbent President had been achieved at bayonet point. Although President Ershad sought to legitimise his authority through elections, people are well aware of their lack of credibility. Despite some worthwhile development work to his credit, a popular upsurge was spontaneously generated and erupted in a mass movement which was participated by almost all the political parties. This led to the fall of the autocratic leader. This day, therefore, factually represented a day to reckon well, after the War of Liberation, and can well be observed as the Democracy Day in Bangladesh.

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the adverse supply and demand situation.

The policy publicity is on the proposed import of electrical power (and the message: 'wait for the new gas supply from under the Bay of Bengal'). These may be a long-term plans, and offer no immediate solution (three years' time-lag). The technical report on importing power is also not very encouraging.

There are other potential micro solutions on which enough initiative and publicity are not forthcoming. Attractive incentives may be offered to new small fixed and mobile private power operators, not only for import of the machinery, but also to encourage the private industrial sector to gear up, under a crash programme scheme, for assembly and part manufacturing of the needed components and ancillaries.

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