

Teething JS Committees

The Jatiya Sangsad adopted on Tuesday amendments to the Rules of Procedures paving the way for formation of parliamentary standing committees. None of the 90 amendments proposed by opposition BNP law makers was, however, accepted. And unsurprisingly, the opposition members walked out. Now the amendments adopted have provided for non-minister members of parliament to head the JS standing committees. This certainly envisions a qualitative improvement in the structure and functioning of the committees. However, the walk-out by the BNP MPs cannot help worrying us. But we refuse to view it as a stubborn and unalterable position. The adoption of the amendments is not the end of the process but just the beginning.

What counts most is the strengthening of the parliamentary committees to the extent where the government functions can be closely monitored to ensure its accountability. Opposition MPs, as head of the parliamentary committees, will definitely have a better opportunity to play their role in this matter.

As for the minor differences such as the size of the JS committees, the least they are made debatable the better. A bigger number is not often the better, specially when intellect and parliamentary experiences are concerned. The bone of contention seems to be the proportionate representation of different parties in the standing committees. The argument in its favour is no doubt strong but if it means exclusion of smaller parties from the committees, it cannot be a very impeccable arrangement.

We would rather suggest that the real business of committee formation be expedited and there the merits of the amended Rules of Procedures will undergo a real test. If the provisions prove inadequate or practically unsound, it will take no time to expose the weaknesses. In the mean time, we can possibly agree on the point that all the 330 MPs can be accommodated in the 35 JS committees. We all know much has been gained through a provision for opposition MPs chairing at least quite a number of standing committees.

If the parties concerned mean business and well-being of the nation, they must go about the task of forming the committees in a spirit of cooperation and consensus. This in fact is the key to making parliamentary system effective and meaningful.

Telelink Disruption

The T&T authorities have informed the nation through press that from around Monday noon, one of their two NWD exchanges at Maghbazar has remained disrupted. Frantic telephone users were told that work was in full swing and normalcy could be restored any moment on Wednesday. T&T no doubt has an excellent PR health. But the nation expects something more than that from them, something called service, efficient and uninterrupted.

The PR release on both the days said that communication with districts had partially been disrupted. In truth, Bangladesh's tele-contacts with the world outside has been affected by the exchange dysfunction. Even for an LDC like Bangladesh, this must have caused enormously in business losses, not to speak of the larger frame of total human intercourse.

Temporary let-ups and breakdowns do occur in everything specially those involving processes and performances. These sudden stoppages can either be man and organisation related or gadget-related. Technical ones. The human and the machine scales are completely two different levels of operation, speed and delivery. Problems at the instrumentation level where things operate and transmit at the highest velocity in the universe, a breakdown of three hours can do irreparable damage. Those who make the gadgets build into their things ways to correct aberrant behaviour. Faults calling for human manipulation come after a pattern and are never out of cure's way for hours on end. It is strange the ailing Maghbazar exchange is taking time to heal.

We are sure that the T&T is trying their best to restore normal operation. Nevertheless, the disruption is a kind of failure on their part and the delay is doubly compounded failure. Let us ensure that such disruptions do not repeat and never, never become routine.

Banning Help-books

The Committee on National Education Policy had a lively meeting with newspaper editors on Tuesday. Committee chief professor Shamsul Huq said the committee would place a draft of the proposed policy in July. Soon after, the draft would be placed before the Jatiya Sangsad for adoption. The Education Minister was present and said government was considering banning note-books and guides etc for up to class X.

Should one feel reassured by the Minister Sadeque's information on note-books? What will such a ban avail if on the levels past SSC it is wholly note-books and nothing beside that the pupils use and write from? We have a disquieting suspicion that the need for such a ban or that the help-books are harmful enough to be shunned has not been sufficiently understood by either the students and their teachers or the decision-makers. Text-books start disappearing at the intermediate level and by masters, the vanishing trick is complete.

True, if the early education up to the SSC level were well-founded, the help-books would not be as harmful as they are now. How then to offer good foundation education up to the secondary level? Not by banning help-books alone.

If only the teachers could or would educate their charge, there would be no question of their turning to expensive supplements or to copying in the exam halls.

When will the pupil learn from the text-book and teacher teach from the same? Will our new education policy show us the way out?

South Africa's Mandela: Is a Personality Cult in the Offing?

THE man of the century, as the Nobel Peace laureate Nelson Mandela is widely described by the white, the black and the coloured alike, is going to attain the ripe age of 80 in a year's time. Mandela has already become a legend in his lifetime. He is ranked in the same group of Gandhi and Lincoln. To many, Mandela is known not merely for his hard and prolonged sufferings in life before the world secured for him the rightful place he deserved to adorn in history. To them he obtained the place by selling a unique example of forgetting the past and forgiving those who had committed the most debased crime against humanity, and by winning as friends his arch enemies.

Those who have traced the recent developments in South Africa are well aware of the nature and depth of the most heinous crime of apartheid perpetrated by the minority white rulers against their overwhelmingly black compatriots. The century old system ended in 1994 when fundamental human and democratic rights of individuals, irrespective of colour, creed and race was recognised and upheld. The blacks and the coloureds were allowed to exercise their right to franchise for the first time, ensuring for all persons

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the opportunity to vote. It was not merely the atrocities and torture committed but the denial of fundamental rights of human beings and specially despising and discriminating them on account of difference in their colour of skin, made the apartheid the most hated of all crimes at all times.

The people, both at home and abroad, were most apprehensive about the consequent catastrophe that would befall South Africans following that dismantling of apartheid. It was a foregone conclusion that such a system could not withstand indefinitely sustained pressures mounted from all quarters, and would ultimately go. People were dreading the transition and its aftermath from the white rule to the black one. They foresaw a bloodbath of unprecedented magnitude, almost proportionate to what the non-whites had suffered in the hands of their white rulers. But it did not happen.

It was not a transfer of power from one race to another. It was the establishment of a system, the most desirable and effective

system, in which all shared power equitably and enjoyed its benefit. People who had been meted out the most inhuman treatment and suffered the most, forgot the past and befriended their erstwhile enemies. And this was made possible only by the vision, patriotism and farsightedness of one person, Nelson Mandela. It not only represented the manifestation of a master strategy in the art of statecraft, but it bared open the lofty human values fondly nurtured and practiced by this great man.



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

Mandela first formed the government of national unity (GNU) in 1994 in which major political parties represented in the parliament participated. The leader of the white dominated National Party, de Klerk,

representing the second largest group, became Vice President. He did not hold a sinecure job. As a matter of fact, having been nominated by President Mandela to hold the rein of the country during his absence abroad, he wielded as much authority as one legitimately

could as a Head of State. Last year, after the National Party pulled out of the government of national unity due to heavy pressure from ultraconservatives, such position of officiating the highest state post is being held, through some way or other, by Chief Buthelezi of Inkatha Freedom Party. Buthelezi also being the chief of the rival Zulu tribe collaborated with the erstwhile white regime and bitterly fought against Mandela's African Na-

tional Congress at their behest. Such illustration of human piety, forgiveness and trust on the part of Mandela is not found in human history.

It is, therefore, no wonder that such a person was accepted by all founding leaders in many countries of Africa as a mediator, sometimes arbiter, in settling their rivalry, quarrels and even armed conflicts. The latest example is the recent situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire, where Mandela was able to avert a heavy blood-bath between supporters of the ousted President Mobutu and those of the new ruler Kabila. Many other instances are available and will be available in future.

Now, it is strange but true that, contrary to normal expectations, people do admire Nelson Mandela but they do not worship him as a god incarnate. His popularity is even further enhanced by his declaration that he would step down from Presidentship following the end of his tenure and rejected the offer of being available for a second term. He decided to stay out

of power voluntarily. It is no mean attitude and act by a person who had spent long 27 years in jail, literally breaking stones and doing other hard labour.

Although, there are special narrations, portraits and even statues of Mandela as a great revolutionary hero in many museums

portraying the history and relevant matters of the land his name is not uttered in all functions and at every opportunity. It seems quite unnatural to us. We are not used to it. In a seminar designed to promote cooperation between industry and labour in Johannesburg a couple of weeks ago, interesting deliberations ensued. It was presided over by the Vice President and attended by at least three Ministers. The Ministers came and took their seats almost unnoticed among participants. There was no banner heralding the names of the Chief Guest and of Special Guests.

What became conspicuous by absence to a stranger like me was that throughout the entire day-long seminar there was no mention and reference, even once, to their great and undisputed leader and hero, Nelson Mandela. How could then a personality cult grow in a land like this, I wondered.

Can We Set a Standard for Our Politics?

by Nilratan Halder

If the BNP can prove what it argues for, it must be able to reap the political dividends accordingly. If it cannot, it must be ready to pay the penalty. In the same way the AL government must be ready to derive what it deserves. What we want is that the issue is settled in a most gentlemanly manner possible within the framework of parliamentary democracy.

FORMER prime minister and the leader of the opposition Khaleda Zia in her customary political attack directed at the ruling Awami League expressed her determination on Sunday to oust that party from the soil of Bangladesh if it does not abandon its plan to sell out the country's independence and sovereignty. The next day her party's secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuyan accused the AL government of attempting to turn the country into a province of India. While the chairperson of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) came up with the contention at a meeting organised to welcome newcomers to her party at her Minto Road office residence, the secretary general made the claim at a representatives' conference of his party in Chuadanga. Charges like these are coming in a continuous flow from the BNP camp. It is hard to believe that the largest opposition in our political history can bring such serious charges against the government without proofs to substantiate them.

The crux of the problem however lies elsewhere: both the ruling party and the opposition are in reality trivialising the issue. The allegation of turning the country into a vassal state or into a neighbourly country's province follows a pattern but the point it misses is the underlying humiliation

that is heaped on the nation. The BNP tries to hammer on the point that the country's sovereignty and national independence are salable commodities. If this is no disinclination, for whose consumption does the party disseminate this earth-shaking news? This is no doubt primarily aimed at exploiting people's ignorance and turned to appealing to and even fanning communal feeling. Ways and means notwithstanding, the objective is to muster support from voters in future.

The ruling party also continues to ignore the attack possibly because it considers the blatant lies would hardly be convincing to the public. It is better to look at the issue in the face. Whether common people are influenced or not, there are at least reasons for them to be confused. For example, issues like the transit facility have given enough scope for their distortion by opponents and detractors. It was necessary to make clear to the people what transit really means. The message that such facilities are offered by one country to another one or a number of countries for

mutual benefits never came through in details and in a convincing manner. It is not for free, nor without conditions incorporated in the agreements that the parties involved reach between or among them. The BNP's main allegations concern the proposed transit facility to be offered to India and the Ganges treaty. On these two issues, the government already has compromised or is giving away the country's sovereignty and interests.

Now the point is why the BNP is going public on these issues selectively. Could it not raise the issue in the Jatiya Sangsad or even go to the court challenging the objectionable clause or clauses, if any, in the Ganges treaty? We would very much like to know on which point the AL government has surrendered national independence and the country's sovereignty. There is no point beating about the bush. No matter even if the government has been elected by popular vote, it has no right to enter into any treaty at the cost of the country's freedom or sovereign

ties, there is no scope for leaving it unresolved for long. It is not just the merits or demerits of the neighbourly co-operation sought, but also the truth behind it. In this age of information, you cannot keep people in the dark for long. Not only will the political future of a party or two will depend on the unravelling of the truth but also the future of the nation. That consideration must not go out of our vision.

If the BNP can prove what it argues for, it must be able to reap the political dividends accordingly. If it cannot, it must be ready to pay the penalty. In the same way the AL government must be ready to derive what it deserves. What we want is that the issue is settled in a most gentlemanly manner possible within the framework of parliamentary democracy. In a parliamentary system all contentious issues are settled in the house. That is the course we must follow to strengthen our democracy. If a party goes for vilification, the chance of developing a democratic culture not only gets dented but also diminished. In the process we

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government is a great paradox. Such contradictory psyche is a serious deterrent to the fulfillment of usual life of a parliament.

The propensity to defeat the ruling party or parties in the ballot is defeated by a lust to topple the government well before five years tenure. This necessitates to make the parliament not ineffective but also inoperative. So the answer is invented in street movements.

What Fate Awaits the Seventh Parliament?

by A R Shamsul Islam

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PARLIAMENT is the hub of national life. Both the ruling and the opposition parties are equally staunch to profess it. But the behaviour of many law-makers does not testify to it. The opposition members sometimes threaten to boycott the parliament. They charge that the government is not sincere to make the house effective, the Speaker is partisan, the opposition members including the Leader of the Opposition are not allowed to speak properly and sufficiently, the government controlled TV and radio coverage of the activities of the legislators in the parliament is motivated, disproportionate and faulty. And as they are committed to defend the country against the alleged conspiracy of the government to sell it out to India, they are left with no alternative to launching stiff movements against the government on the streets. Here two questions are pertinent. First, is the government really selling out the country? Second, isn't it appropriate for the Opposition to fight out the government on this sensitive issue on the floor of Parliament?

The above two points may be analysed fairly. First, allegation of selling out the country is an old bogey found politically used cheaply without making significant repercussions in the mind of the people. As propaganda trumpets, Bangladesh was sold to India by Awami League in 1971. Then it was sold for the second time to Pakistan after 1975. Again, the country

is resold for the third time to India in 1996 when Awami League surges back to power. How many times can one country be sold out? If India had bought it in 1971, why shall it take the pain and penalty to purchase it again in 1996? If Pakistan bought Bangladesh after 1975, who was the seller — India or Bangladesh?

The talk of deals on transit and sub-regional pacts cannot constitute a sale. Even if that be done, selling cannot have any legal basis. These are the cheap politics at the altar of which promising economy of the neighbouring countries is sacrificed years and years over. In fact, India is particularly interested in the market of Bangladesh and she has got it emphatically irrespective of any political parties ruling the country. Second, if the Opposition truly believes that parliament is the focal point of national life, it should fight down the government on the "selling out" issue in the parliament. May be TV radio do not give fair coverage of inside parliament incidents. But will newspapers remain silent over the matter?

Our politicians do not seem accustomed to democratic values and practices. For instance, when Awami League was in the Opposition its leader declared that she would not allow the

government to live in peace. The present Opposition Leader has not only steadfastly taken the cue from her predecessor, she has further strengthened that undemocratic attitude to the point of non-malleability.

Our legislators are alleged not to have learnt either to respect or make proper use of the parliament. Projecting national issues and arriving at consensus on them are the habits that they are far away from. Believably, it is the power politics that emerges as the last word of almost all the political parties of Bangladesh. The only goal of politics is to capture power, no matter what means are wooed. To win power, new strategies are struck. The latter are supposed to be the temporary measures drawn in the context of realities undergoing constant changes. The strategies should not affect the party ideology and far less substitute it. But the undesirable are happening. Party ideology is being vastly compromised with strategies. As a matter of fact, the retention of party ideology, in its fundamental, has come to stake.

Power means earning money. It means gaining activists. Old activists get galvanized. New activists flock in. The truth holds good in respect of leaders too. Acquiring power puts at personal command the

government machinery eager to serve any purpose the master likes. The police, the bureaucracy, the bank, all are seemingly at beck and call.

Losing power not only cuts one's privilege to muster men and money but also makes him answerable for his past misdeeds and corruptions. So power cannot be parted. The most enigmatic Napoleon III, by a show of plebiscite, most illegally extended his presidency partly because he was in personnel financial debt and imagined in the loss of president's office a crackdown of creditors on him. Loss of power also runs the risk of inviting ruling party's vengeance.

A government is destined to rule for five years till next election is held. Opposition members are required to wait for that period to try again to win people's vote to come to power. It appears that five year's waiting is very big for them. On the other hand, the party or parties forming the government consider five years is too short a period for ruling. Further term or terms of rule appear essential to them. The party or parties in government today are very likely to be in Opposition tomorrow. Reconciliation of these two feelings on five years being too long when out of government and too short when in

enough, to return to the day's work, whether at the workplace or for private and personal work.

After finishing one's prayers, one cannot enjoy the luxury of idleness because life has to be lived, with all the life's daily problems (no shirking or retreat). The rest periods can be planned subjectively, after one's duty hours (duty is also farz).

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Prayer and holiday
Sir, Muslims have to pray five times a day, including two during the business hours in the day time. The main Friday prayers take a little longer, and a break for 90 to 100 minutes is

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A Citizen
Dhaka

To the Editor...

Weekly holiday

Sir, The recent announcement by the government to observe 2-day weekly holiday came as a surprise to many, though not a pleasant one. It really is beyond our comprehension as to what led the government to adopt this step.

We cannot claim that our economy has suddenly jumped so high and inflated so voluminous in size that we must put a break to slow down otherwise there is a chance of exploding and falling flat on the ground. Nor alternatively can we claim that the government machinery has become unexpectedly too efficient that we needless time for the high performance and we should have enough time to relax and have fun.

Truly speaking, one is amazed by some of the very short sighted and unthoughtful decisions of the present government. Though many of the

actions have not been surfaced to the public eye, but definitely the handling of the Stock Market and legitimization of black money are some of the steps which have the national economy head towards a shamble. We have observed that there has been nearly an average per cent devaluation of the Bangladesh Taka per month in the last 11 months of the tenure of the government.

The general public is suffering just too much and for too long for the inefficiency and corruption in the government machinery (thanks to the past few governments — democratic or otherwise). This decision of the government came at a time when people are expecting the government to take steps to make itself more efficient. However, contrary to their expectation, the government has acted in a way so as to strike another blow to the national economy.

If the aim of the government is to achieve some popularity from the government servant quarters, then it must be said that it is a very cheap one. Government, along with semigovernment employees do not constitute by itself a sizable electorate which can effectively alter the general public opinion in the election.

We suggest that government should reverse its decision and re-introduce forthwith one day weekly holiday to reduce, to some extent, forces of retardation to the national economy.

Nurul Basher
Washington DC USA

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Sir, Muslims have to pray five times a day, including two during the business hours in the day time. The main Friday prayers take a little longer, and a break for 90 to 100 minutes is

and publish it in the newspapers. The nation could be aware of the thoughts of the opposition over budget. When the government presents the proposed budget in the assembly, the Opposition can exercise constructive criticisms explaining that the government should have drawn the budget weighing the merits of the proposals of the opposition keeping in view the welfare of the toiling masses. By healthy criticism and reasonably pressurising the government, benefit can be yielded for the nation. People could be aware of the people-friendly role of the Opposition and when time comes or pay back to the Opposition, people must not forget it. Poll is the right place where people can choose whom to accept and whom to refuse.

Politicians should on no account miss this truth. Kesari's abrupt withdrawal of support to Deve Gowda's coalition government triggered a great political crisis in India. The matter was resolved constitutionally and in the parliament with IK Gujral being chosen as the new prime minister of India. There was no street performance. Not a single shutter of a shop was smashed. Another demonstration of the strength of democracy and parliament was made.

Parliament is an essential legislative instrument. To run it effectively demands efficient and well-intentioned law-makers. The latter can steer the assembly the way they like. In Bangladesh, poor attendance of MPs at parliamentary sessions, frequent unusually late commencement of daily parleys, random belittling the high offices of the speaker, the prime minister and the leader of the Opposition, creating savage pandemonium in the house, use of unprintable languages by the people's elected representatives in the assembly — all these contrast to what the legislators of the civilised nations practise, out of a sacred commitment, to uphold their parliaments in full sanctity and dignity.

Past records of the lives of the parliaments of our country are far from encouraging. Except the fifth parliament none had enjoyed a full life. And a major part of the tenure of the fifth parliament was plagued by non-stop boycott and mass resignation of the Opposition MPs. Intimidations from the present Opposition legislators to invalidate what they brand as a partisan parliament — all these awaits the seventh parliament?

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