

Mind Your Words in Parliament

HERE is no earthly reason why Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed felt that much nettled to do the tongue-lashing he did on Tuesday at the Jatiya Sangsad. Equally we are dumbfounded by the unprintable language some BNP MPs used in reaction to Tofail's words. Parliament is no place for *tamasha*.

It all began when opposition whip and BNP MP Major (Retd) Hafizuddin sought a clarification from the Speaker on a point of Rules of Procedure. He wanted to know from the Chair whether it was in order that the commerce minister had replied to some opposition objections to BTV's coverage of parliamentary proceedings when the State Minister for Information was present in the House. Normally the Rules of Procedure requires the minister concerned to speak on a subject-matter of his or her domain. Tofail Ahmed went overboard in a number of ways. First, Hafizuddin's question was directed to the Speaker not to Mr Tofail, but the latter took it upon himself to injudiciously react to it. This was uncalled for, to begin with. Then, he chose not only to evade direct and specific answer to the question, but what he also obnoxiously did was to advise Hafizuddin to 'teach the Leader of the Opposition Rules of Procedure' because she had recently 'criticised the Speaker outside the parliament'. We have no hesitation in saying that the commerce minister overstepped his limits by dragging the opposition leader's name into the controversy. This was done in a grossly unwarranted fashion betraying a complete lack of respect for the sanctity of her position.

All this is highly regrettable at a time when the opposition have pledged to participate in the budget session, hartals have been scaled down and the Business Advisory Committee's meetings have proved constructive by way of bringing both sides into a positive mental frame. The opposition has looked geared to contain themselves within the four walls of the Jatiya Sangsad. This paper always wants to push forward with a positive trend and demurs at the slightest prospect of any negative chink in it.

Having said that, we shall be failing in our duty if we did not make a final point of the unprintable language the BNP legislators used on the floor of the House in reaction to Tofail Ahmed's insinuating words against the opposition leader. These words hardly did any honour to Begum Zia. Alas, from unparliamentary words we are now down to unprintable words.

Hail Hippocrates

THE doctors at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital have certainly set a precedent of unflappable dedication to their profession. Their undeterred determination to serve patients in dire need of medical attention may have invited the wrath of the striking employees at the hospital but on another level it has indeed touched the collective sensitivity of the society. In their defiance of extreme intimidation and provocation from the proponents of the work stoppage, revealed was a simple but strong message: for them, patients have the priority, politics does not. By adhering to the Hippocratic oath, they have certainly set an example worthy of emulation by their colleague in similar circumstances.

With an end to the work stoppage enforced by the nurses, cleaners, *ayas* (maids), security guards, etc., looking increasingly elusive, doctors remained the last bastion of hope for patients who had no other option but to suffer. The doctors have lived up to their responsibilities. However, the indifference of the striking workers has already transformed into hostility and the situation may get even worse. If it does, the doctors, valiant they are though, may not be able to continue with their good work.

Here comes the question of immediate government intervention. But unfortunately, there seems to have been no substantive efforts from the health ministry to that end. Varied, and at times contradictory, reports on an abortive attempt to get the strikers to the negotiation table have come out. While some say the striking leaders did not turn up at the health minister's office at the appointed time, others say just the opposite. Whatever the case may have been, a speedy end to the dreary situation at the hospital is imperative and the government should take a meaningful step in that direction. At the same time, striking workers must recognise that their right to protest should not impinge on others' right to work. Their grievances should not, and must not, get in the way of doctors discharging their responsibilities towards patients.

Muscular Monopoly

THE story of alleged intimidation of rivals by a ruling party MP in old Dhaka has been published in an influential Bangla daily Tuesday.

The report says that the MP has submitted tenders for seven ferryghats (terminals) on the river Buriganga, belonging to the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), for the year 1999-2000. This MP is alleged to be exercising illegal influence and intimidating other tenderers to refrain from submitting their offers for these terminals.

The BIWTA had twice before floated tenders for bids from genuine parties but none except the MP has submitted any offer. The BIWTA have fixed a minimum of Taka 2.5 crore offer for these terminals but each time the MP submits an offer of Taka one crore and none else is allowed to submit any tender he retains the chance of a walk-over. The BIWTA has now floated the tender for the third time and the same situation has arisen with the ruling party MP left to enjoy a monopoly position. This not only forces the BIWTA to face a heavy loss but also blocks the future chances of this organisation to get much better offer from genuine parties.

We strongly condemn this high-handedness of the MP and urge the minister concerned to immediately probe the matter. If the charges are found correct, the MP should be prevented from misusing his position in public matters. Let there be open contest as per the rules of the BIWTA so that all parties can participate in the tendering process without fear of intimidation and harassment. The government can do without one more embarrassment.

An Opportunity for National Understanding Lost

We have our own idiosyncrasies which we refuse to give up under any circumstances... A golden opportunity was lost for the ruling party and the opposition to be on the same platform to demonstrate national solidarity on a glorious occasion.

sport and through it the prospect of making name and fame for the country.

The people of Bangladesh wanted to accord a befitting reception to their new-found heroes. All people — men, women and children irrespective of their political affiliation — wanted to hold a glorious function in which all would participate. Unfortunately, it so happened that a civic reception was arranged by the Mayor of Dhaka city on the parade grounds of Manik Mia Avenue in which opposition leaders became conspicuous by their absence. Why was it so? The reason was simple but ridiculous. All facilities, training and encouragement were confined to West Pakistan. The eastern wing remained neglected in sports as it had been in many other sectors. Even during the period following liberation little attention and patronage were made available to encourage young people to generate interest in cricket.

It is only during the current decade one can say that the authorities realised the promise of Bangladeshis boys in this

any political party. The government holds the purse strings of state coffers and is in a position to spend public money right and left at will. Money has often been spent in the name of

termed a national function. At least, one person, Leader of Opposition in the parliament, should have been invited to speak as a Special Guest. Otherwise, no one expected that she

tatives of a large section of the people will not make a partisan occasion a national one.

It is more so now when support in favour of the opposition political parties has bulged forth considerably and exceeded that for the government party. This has been stated indirectly by the Hon'ble Prime Minister herself. The Prime Minister recently made a statement dismissing the possibility of holding mid-term polls now, saying that she would hold election only when the Awami League will win the election. In other words, she thinks that the Awami League, if an election is held today, will get even less than 37 per cent of votes she had received in 1976 to enable them to form government. It may, therefore, be taken as self-admission of popular no-confidence and there are instances of resignation of governments faced with a similar situation in other countries. But, we are no other countries. We have our own idiosyncrasies which we refuse to give up under any circumstances. Therefore, absence of representatives of about 63 per

Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

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