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JS tidbits

By Nazmul Ashraf

A walkout by BNP lawmakers came as a blessing to Commerce and Industries' Minister Tofail Ahmed in parliament yesterday.

"I can never speak uninterrupted with the BNP MPs present in the House. They start shouting whenever I speak. I'm now very happy that they've left," Tofail said, as soon as the opposition members, angered by his statement, walked out.

A happy Tofail repeated his feelings while replying to Badruddoza Chowdhury, the deputy opposition leader.

"I feel very happy, so happy that I feel grateful to them... I can now speak freely," said the minister who concluded before the BNP deputies staged a comeback.

Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury outsmarted Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, the BNP lawmaker who played smart with the Chair in the parliament yesterday.

The Chowdhurys had a brief exchange on the length of discussion on four topics the House accepted on the day.

Against the Speaker's decision that each of the topics will be discussed for 90 minutes, the front bench opposition deputy asked for 120 minutes.

Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury told Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, who seldom attends the session, "In that case, I would like to see you in the House until the discussions are over at around 9 at night?"

"I, too, would expect you (Speaker) on your chair until then?" said S Q Chowdhury.

"I'll be here, if not on the Chair, I can send the Deputy Speaker to the chair. But you don't have any such prerogative," a witty Speaker said smilingly. The BNP legislator, smiled back, too.

Education Minister ASHK Sadeque wondered how Mashirul Rahman of BNP could speak for the police, as the latter like many others in his party, called policemen terrorists and extortionists the day before.

Responding to Mashirul's statement that police was angry on the government for politicising the police department, Sadeque said, "The police must be stunned by your statement today, but they will thank you."

The Speaker pronounced only Khoka, the pet name of Sadek Hossain, while giving the floor to the BNP MP, during a debate on law and order in the country.

Deputy food minister Dhirendra Debnath Shambhu said, "How much can a Khoka (Bangla for kid) speak?" This sent the Treasury Bench laughing.

"Let's try, how much I can talk," replied Sadek Hossain.

At this stage, the Speaker had to repeat himself -- Honorable member, Sadek Hossain Khoka.

"This is very nice of you, thank you, Mr Speaker," Khoka responded.

JP lawmaker Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto described how illegal firearms are smuggled in the country and how and where those are sold. Ending his lengthy statement on the matter, during the debate on law and order, a smiling Bhutto told the Speaker, "You won't understand these things."

Commenting on the Treasury Bench resolution that expressed satisfaction over the current law and order, BNP MP Major (retd) Hafizuddin Ahmed said, "It's a very unusual joke. [In fact], it is the greatest mockery of the century."

Bills placed

From Page 1
Corporation (Amendment) (Amendment) Bill, 1999.

All the four bills were sent to the standing committee on the Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives to submit its report to the House by next Sunday.

The LGRD minister also introduced the Upazila Parishad (Amendment) Bill, 1999 in the parliament.

The Bill was sent to the standing committee on the LGRD Ministry to submit its report by Sunday (July 4).

Four other bills introduced and referred to the standing committees are: The Speaker and the Deputy Speaker (Remuneration and Privileges) (Amendment) Bill, 1999, the Members of Parliament (Remuneration and allowances) (Amendment) Bill, 1999.

The Negotiable Instruments (Amendment) Bill 1999 and the Members of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (Terms and Conditions of Service) (Amendment) Bill, 1999.

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Happy facade of unhappy lives

At the traffic lights, on the parking lots or in the shopping places, they are there with flowers, begging rather than selling.

— Star photo: Zahedul Khan

Flowers that are stones

By Navine Murshid

Children selling flowers. It is a good combination, especially because both are equated with innocence and purity. This brings to mind a smiling child surrounded with flowers to sell.

In the Bangladeshi context, children are much better off selling flowers than begging. The argument that child labour is being used can be quashed on the ground that the 'opportunity cost' is either begging or starvation. These poor children are assets of the family rather than a burden and they will continue to be so, until they come out of the poverty trap.

Selling flowers is a trade, a means of livelihood. There is nothing degrading, demeaning or even controversial about it. Children on the streets of Dhaka who are in this business can easily earn a lot. And they probably do. But there is a problem here: they do not like what

they are doing or even if they do, they do a bad job.

When we think of children selling flowers we assume they would be smiling and they would be happy. But when a 'flower child' comes to a potential customer, his offer to sell resembles more of begging than selling. Their marketing strategy is such that they force their customers to buy either out of sympathy or out of the impulse to get rid of them as a strategy they have in common with beggars!

Now, why is that? They are in a trade. They are much better off than those who show off different disabilities in order to earn a living. They should have higher morale, more confidence and they should be proud that they are not at the mercy of others.

The culture and the norm that prevails among the poor can be blamed for such attitudes

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Tanvir Rahman, who topped the merit list in SSC examinations under Comilla Board receiving prize from Hamida Ali, Principal of the Vikarunnessa Noon Girls' School and College at CIRDAP auditorium in the city yesterday.

— Star photo

Talents honoured

Prothom Alo hosts reception

By Staff Correspondent

A grand reception was accorded to the most successful students in the SSC examinations yesterday.

Leading Bangla daily the Prothom Alo in collaboration with International Office Equipment (IOE) and Institute of Information Technology (IIT), arranged the reception for top five students in the combined merit lists in Science, Humanities and Business Education groups of all the five education boards.

Held at the CIRDAP auditorium in the city, the programme was attended by a cross-section of people, including parents, teachers and educationists. Each of the 56 talented students was presented with a packet of books, a bouquet and a citation.

Felicitating the students, Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury underscored the need for self-improvement every moment to change the world. He urged them to make integrated efforts to break the shackles of backwardness and build a better world. He stressed the need for cooperation among all in achieving the cherished goal.

Prof Mozaffar Ahmed advised upon the students to be increasingly aware of the world outside textbooks. "Our system of evaluating talent is faulty and it should be updated."

Editor of The Daily Star and publisher of the Prothom Alo Mahfuz Anam said that the students would have to start a resistance movement against the all-pervasive decadence around us. He called upon all to come forward to rebuild the values of education. Reiterating that the adults today have failed to provide the new generation a bright future, Mahfuz Anam said, "You will be the crusader of tomorrow against all the ills and we will be assisting you in marching towards the golden days."

The others who spoke on the occasion included DG of Bangla Academy Dr Syed Anwar Hossain, Prof Mohammad Kaikobad of BUET, actor Asaduzzaman Noor, singer Tapas Chowdhury, artist Rafiqunnabi, Principal of Vikarunnessa Noon Girls' School and College Hamida Ali and Editor of the Prothom Alo Matur Rahman.

Atabul Islam representing hosts IOE and IIT gave the vote of thanks. Popular writer Anisul Haq and Sumana Sharmin of Prothom Alo concluded the function.

SNS demands
Punish rapists,
stop abusive
words in JS

By DU Correspondent

The Sammilita Nari Samaj (SNS) yesterday demanded punishment to all those involved in rape and harassment of women.

Leaders of the SNS, a women's rights body, said repression on women is increasing in the country day by day and the culprits are threatening the victims because they are not punished.

Addressing a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club, they also protested alleged indecent remarks about women in the Jatiya Sangsad recently and urged the women legislators to stage walkout in case of any such incident in future. Male members are using abusive words against women in the House.

They welcomed the new provision for direct election of female Union Parishad members and urged the government to ensure security to the female UP members.

They also urged the government to make public the Nari and Shishu Nirjatan Protirodh Bill, 1998.

The SNS, in a memorandum to Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury on Tuesday, demanded restriction on use of indecent language about women in the Sangsad.

Among others, Farida Akhter, Advocate Sultana Akhter, Elina Khan, Shima Das Shimu, Shasunnahar, Ayesha Islam, Masuda Shefali and Natasha Ahmed were present at the press conference.

Monthly remuneration of an MP is Tk 6,000 now. Besides, a

To sign or not to sign
Registers for 'daily allowance' of MPs

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday witnessed a stormy debate over a proposed pre-condition of signing of registers by MPs for 'daily allowance' for attending parliament sittings or meetings of parliamentary bodies.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina strongly supported the proposal made by Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Abdul Matin Khashru that an MP's claim for daily allowance has to be 'supported by record'. But the Opposition proposed to raise the monthly remuneration to Tk 10,000.

Prof Shahidul Islam of BNP said the proposal for signing registers is 'inconsistent with a legislator's prestige and privileges'.

The opposition MP said, "The government is virtually trying to impose a pre-condition. It is insulting for all the members of parliament. I would request the minister to introduce the bill after discussions with leaders of both the sides."

In reply, the law minister said the Opposition should not oppose the pre-condition on moral ground. "An MP should not receive daily allowances without fulfilling his obligation by attending parliament sittings," the minister said.

The minister made the proposal yesterday morning while seeking the Chair's permission to introduce an amendment bill — The Members of Parliament (Remuneration and Allowances) (Amendment) Act, 1999 — seeking enhancement of remuneration and allowances of MPs.

"A member shall be entitled to receive a daily allowance at the rate of four hundred Taka and a conveyance allowance at the rate of one hundred Taka for each day he attends the sitting of Parliament or the meeting of committee or any other official duties in parliament and the allowances prescribed under this clause shall only be admissible where the presence of Member is supported by record," the proposed amendment said.

Monthly remuneration of an MP is Tk 6,000 now. Besides, a

legislator gets an allowance of Tk 200 and a conveyance allowance of Tk 50 for attending a sitting of the Sangsad or a parliamentary committee meeting.

The amendment has proposed to raise the monthly remuneration to Tk 10,000.

Prof Shahidul Islam of BNP said the proposal for signing registers is 'inconsistent with a legislator's prestige and privileges'.

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The Prime Minister took the floor again. "It appears that the sense of integrity varies from person to person. MPs are elected to perform certain responsibilities in the Sangsad. How come, an MP receives remuneration without meeting the obligation," she said adding that her conscience did not permit her to do so.

Referring to the Opposition Chief Whip's point that the proposed pre-condition would pull down the status of an MP to that of a day labourer, the Premier said that the statement was insulting for poor voters, especially the poor.

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Price situation
AL satisfied,
Opposition
protests

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday passed by voice vote a resolution expressing satisfaction over government steps in containing prices. The resolution was moved by Awami League Whip Abdus Shahid.

The move sparked a 100 minute heated debate with the ruling party, predictably, thanking the government for keeping the prices within people's capacity and the Opposition, as usual, blaming the government for an unabated price hike.

Before Commerce and Industries' Minister Tofail Ahmed rounded up the discussion, two MPs from the ruling party, eight legislators from the BNP and two lawmakers of the Jatiya Party spoke on the issue.

BNP MP and former planning minister Dr. Abdul Moin Khan reported an 8.8 per cent inflation rate now, against 2 per cent in the first two years and 2.4 per cent in the second two years of the BNP rule. "A sick economy is bound to decrease people's capacity to purchase things," Dr. Khan explained.

The BNP lawmaker also mentioned devaluation of taka against the US dollar. "Besides, prices have also increased due to a government announcement to raise salaries of government employees which (salaries) did not materialise."

Abdul Mannan of BNP said imposition of 10 per cent supplementary tax in the just-passed budget would further increase the price of items, produced locally. Because, he argued, those items would now be smuggled from India.

Other opposition MPs -- Shahidul Islam, Abdul Kalam Azad Siddiqi, Najimuddin Alam, Akhter Hamid Siddiqi, Ruhul Kuddus Talukdar Dulal of BNP and Mujibur Rahman and Rahimuddin Barashara of JP also blamed the government for the 'sky-rocketing' price of essentials, forcing the common people to a sub-human life.

Refuting opposition claims, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said despite deficit of essential items in the country good management by the government helped keep all prices stable. "Prices remained unchanged even after the worst flood in the country. A good management helped it."

AL MP Sultan Mohammad Mansur Ahmad alleged the past BNP government miserably failed to stabilise prices. People died of starvation and women were forced into prostitution and sold their children due to poverty, he added.

Concluding the debate, Tofail Ahmed told the House prices of all items were now lower than before. "The government can't control prices all the time in a market economy. But we keep constant vigil on the prices," he added.

In this regard, he blamed the BNP for conspiring to create an artificial crisis of certain items including salt, but the authorities' timely action had foiled it.

Defending the rise in price of fertiliser, the minister said it was done to stop smuggling to India.

Quoting official statistics, Tofail said people's purchasing capacity had risen 3.95 per cent from 2.2 per cent during the BNP regime.

All essentials are cheaper in Bangladesh than in India or Pakistan. Our economy is still sound, despite the south-east Asian economic collapse."

