

Historic Constitution Amendment Bills passed

Bangladesh returns to parliamentary system

The nation started its sojourn to parliamentary system of government with the passage of the 12th Constitution Amendment Bill in the Jatiya Sangsad on Tuesday late night amidst thunderous applause. All the 306 members present in the House voted in favour of the Amendment Bills.

Since 1975 the country was under presidential system of government. With the passage of the 12th Amendment Bill the plague of the three Alliances made in their joint declaration during autocracy movement is fulfilled.

Earlier, the 11th Constitution Amendment Bill paving the return of the Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed to his previous office was also passed by 278 votes out of 306 members present in the House. With the passage of the 11th and 12th Amendment Bills, the House witnessed a rare atmosphere of joy and cordiality. The members belonging to the Treasury and Opposition Benches whole heartedly greeted each other. The visitors' galleries were jam-packed to witness the historic event.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda

Zia and the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina went to the lobby to vote for 12th Constitution Amendment Bill together. Both of them greeted each other. It was another rare occasion witnessed by the House.

Both the women members of the Parliament belonging to Jamaat-e-Islami greeted the Leader of the House Begum Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina. Both the Burqa-clad Jamaat women members were for the first time seen smiling from the gallery.

Out of 306 members present in the House excepting 27 Jatiya Party members and lone National Democratic Party leader Mr. Salaudhin Kader Chowdhury all voted for the passage of the 11th Amendment Bill. It may be recalled here that Jatiya Party had note of dissent to certain aspects of the Bill. So the Jatiya Party members abstained from voting while Salaudhin Kader Chowdhury is opposed to the return of the Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed to his previous position of the Chief Justice. Mr. Salaudhin Kader Chowdhury also did not participate in the voting.

Nurul Huda

Eleven seats are vacant. Former President H.M. Ershad, former Prime Minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed, former Minister Sardar Amjad Hossain and former Minister Anwar Hossain who are under detention were absent from the House.

The 12th Constitution Amendment Bill, 1991 was passed amidst cheers and jubilation after five weeks of debate and deliberations since its introduction in the House on July 2 by the Leader of the House, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. The Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali declared the Bill as amended with no vote cast against the Bill.

The bill will be placed before the Acting President who will send it for referendum within seven days before his assent. In all 44 members of the Opposition Bench participated in the four-day long deliberations on the 12th Amendment Bill till Monday night.

Out of 174 amendments moved by the Opposition members, three amendments of Mr. Shahjahan Siraj (JSD) and Mr. M. Nasim (Awami League) were accepted by the House unanimously while the rest were rejected.

The Presidential system had replaced the Parliamentary form in the country on January 25, 1975, through the 4th Amendment Bill passed in 20 minutes without any debate and abolishing the multi-party system.

The Treasury Bench had moved two bills on July 2—the 11th Constitutional Amendment Bill for ratification of appointment of the Chief Justice as the Vice President and all actions taken by him as the Acting President, and the 12th Amendment Bill for switching over to the Parliamentary system. Later on July 4, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Abdus Samad Azad

brought a private member's bill on the same subjects.

The Workers' Party Member Mr. Rashed Khan Menon, introduced four other private members' bills relating to fundamental rights and treaties with foreign countries also on July 4.

All the seven bills were referred to a 15-member select Committee, headed by Law Minister Mirza Ghulam Hafiz, on July 9. The Committee reported back to the Sangsad on July 28 the two treasury bench bills incorporating amendment proposals of the opposition. The House took the two bills for immediate consideration on July 29. General discussion on the two bills was held on July 30 and 31 and August 3 and 4.

Under the 12th Amendment, chapters one and two of part four of the Constitution have been substituted by one, two and three chapters stating, inter alia, the powers of the President and the Prime Minister and abolishing the offices of Vice-President and the Deputy Prime Minister.

After the bill becomes an act, the Executive power of the republic shall be exercised by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet shall be collectively responsible to parliament.

The President who will be the head of state shall be elected by the members of Parliament in accordance

Amendment

(From Page 1 Col.7)

ance with law and shall act in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister. The President shall hold office for two five-year terms "whether or not the terms are consecutive".

The President shall appoint Prime Minister, the Member of Parliament who appears to him to command the support of the majority of the members of Parliament.

Besides the Prime Minister, other ministers, ministers of states and deputy ministers will be appointed by the President, as may be determined by the Prime Minister, "provided that not less than nine-tenths of their number shall be appointed from among members of Parliament and not more than one-tenth of their number may be chosen from among persons qualified for election as members of Parliament." The technocrat ministers shall not be entitled to vote but can make statements relating to their ministries only.

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