

FORTY YEARS OF BANGLADESH PARLIAMENT : TRENDS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES*

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This article makes a stock-taking of performances of the parliaments constituted in Bangladesh during 1973-2013. For the convenience of analysis, this article has been divided into a number of sections. The first section presents a brief background of Bangladesh parliaments. The second section gives a summary of the parliamentary elections held to date along with the internal composition of the parliaments. The third section identifies the major trends developed through the functioning of the parliaments during the period covered under the study. The fourth section discusses the achievements of the Bangladesh parliaments. The fifth section deals with the challenges that the parliament is confronting with until today and will be facing in the days to come. In the final section some concluding remarks have been made about prospects of parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Over the last one hundred and fifty years Bangladesh has been familiar with the parliamentary style of governance. The Bangladesh Parliament 'owes its origin to the British Parliament. Its precursor, the Legislative Council of Bengal (hereafter Council), was established in 1861.'¹ During the British rule the Council evolved as a constitutional body though it lacked true representative features.² However, the representative character of the Council was

* Paper presented at the Two-Day National Seminar on 'Bangladesh at 40: Achievements and Challenges', 15-16 March 2013, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka.

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1 Nizam Ahmed, *The Parliament of Bangladesh*, Ashgate, Burlington, England 2002, p. 25.

2 The Mutiny in 1957 compelled the British colonial power to rethink their administrative arrangement in India. They felt it necessary to allow the native people in a legislative process. Sir Bartle Frere, a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council commented: 'The addition of the native element has, I think, become necessary owing to our diminished opportunities of learning through indirect channels what natives think of our measures and how the native community will be affected by them. It is a great evil of the

incorporated into in the wake of a serious of reform acts such as 1909, 1919 and 1935 India Acts. After the partition of India, Pakistan introduced the parliamentary form of government. The years (1947-1958) represent the years of parliamentary experiments.³ The martial law of General Ayub and the provisions of the 1962 Constitution of Pakistan contributed nothing to the growth of legislature; it was only made an appendage of the executive branch. But the Bengalis during their anti-Ayub movement and struggle for independence demonstrated their commitment to and faith in democracy and upheld the supremacy of the parliament.

Immediately after independence Bangladesh established a form of government which ensured sovereignty of the parliament. The years from 1972 to 1975 were a period of parliamentary democracy. But to achieve the goals of the ‘second revolution’ in 1975 the AL government passed the fourth amendment to the Constitution. This amendment converted the parliamentary form of government to the presidential system. The governments of General Zia and General Ershad did not allow the parliaments elected during their rules, to function as a worthy and democratic institution. ‘Successive parliaments were made impotent by all-powerful chief executives. Parliamentary committees performed in perfunctory manner. Parliaments resembled social clubs rather than forums where national issues of importance had to be raised, discussed and settled’.⁴ This system continued till the re-introduction of parliamentary system through the twelfth amendment to the Constitution in 1991. The establishment of the parliamentary form of government was, in fact, the reflection of strong commitment and sacrifices of the people of Bangladesh for this system.

2. Composition of the Parliaments

During the period from 1973 to 2008 nine parliaments—from the first to the ninth⁵—were elected. The first parliamentary election of independent

present system that the Government can rarely learn how its measures will be received or how they are likely to affect even its European subjects till criticism takes the form of settled and often bitter opposition’ (Quoted in M. Rashiduzzaman, *Pakistan: A Study of Government and Politics*, Ideal Library, Dhaka 1967, pp. 1-2). The Indian Council Act of 1861 enabled the Indian members for the time to be associated with the legislative bodies.

3 Najma Chowdhury, *The Legislative Process in Bangladesh: Politics and Functioning of the East Bengal Legislature 1947-58*, Dhaka University, Dhaka 1980, p.12.

4 Mohammad Mohabbat Khan and Syed Anwar Husain, “Process of Democratization in Bangladesh”, *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1996, p. 322.

5 The elections of the sixth parliament were held on 15 February 1996. All opposition parties boycotted the elections. The result was announced and BNP was declared winner.

Bangladesh was held on 7 March 1973. The voter turnout was 54.9 per cent in this election. The ruling party AL secured overwhelming majority by winning 293 seats out of 300 seats. The remaining 7 seats were won by the Independent and other parties' candidates. The second, the third and the fourth parliamentary elections were held under rules of military dictators. The second parliament was elected under the rule of General Zia and it took place on 18 February 1979. In this election the government party BNP bagged 207 seats and the main opposition AL secured 39 seats. The third parliamentary elections were held on 7 May 1986 when the military dictatorship led by General Ershad was in the helm of power. In this election, out of 300 seats the ruling JP won 153 seats and the opposition AL secured 76 seats. The fourth parliamentary election was boycotted by all opposition parties. This election took place on 3 March 1988. As presumed, the ruling JP bagged most of the seats. Out of 300 seats JP won 250 seats and the COP (Combined Opposition Parties—a handpicked group of parties led by JSD leader A. S. M. Rab) was shown elected in 19 seats.

The fifth, the seventh, the eighth and the ninth parliaments were elected under different caretaker governments. The fifth parliamentary elections were held on 27 February 1991. 75 political parties contested in this election. The number of eligible voters for this election was 62,181,743. Nearly 55 per cent of the voters exercised their voting rights in 1991. Out of 300 seats BNP bagged 140 and AL 88 seats. Though BNP came out as a single majority party but the percentage of votes secured by the two parties was almost equal. BNP got 30.8 per cent while AL received 30.1 per cent votes. Among the other parties JP bagged 35 and JI 18 seats. With the support of JI the majority party BNP formed the government. Out of 30 reserved seats for women BNP won 27 and JI 3 seats.

The seventh parliamentary election was held on 12 June 1996. 81 political parties participated in the elections in which AL emerged as the largest party securing 146 seats. BNP, the largest opposition party, bagged 116 seats. In this election AL won 37.4 per cent and BNP secured 33.6 per cent of votes. Among the other parties JP won 32, JI 3, JSD (Rab) 1 and IOJ 1 seats. With the support of JP and JSD (Rab) AL formed the government. Out of 30 reserved seats AL

But the parliament sustained only for 12 days (from March 19 to 30, 1996) with four working days. As this parliament survived for the shortest period no detailed investigation and analysis have been made on it.

secured 27 and the remaining 3 seats were won by JP.⁶ The eighth parliamentary election was held on 1 October 2001. 54 political parties participated in the elections. In this election, BNP-led 4-party alliance won 220 seats. Among alliance partners BNP bagged 193, JI 17, JP (M) 4 and IOJ 3 seats. AL, the largest opposition party bagged 62 seats and JP (E) won 14 seats. In this election, BNP won 40.97 per cent and AL secured 40.13 per cent of votes. The 4-party alliance formed the government. The ninth parliamentary election was held on 29 December 2008. The *Mohajote* (a Grand Alliance), led by AL bagged 262 seats while the 4-party alliance led by BNP won 32 seats. The *Mohajote* formed the government on 6 January 2009.

Table 1: Parliamentary Elections in Bangladesh from 1973 to 2008.

| Parliament | Date of Election | Voters (million) | Turnout | AL | BNP | JP | JI |
|------------|------------------|------------------|---------|-----|-----|-----|--------|
| First | 7 March 1973 | 35.21 | 54.90 | 293 | n/a | n/a | banned |
| Second | 18 Feb. 1979 | 38.36 | 51.30 | 39 | 207 | n/a | 6 |
| Third | 7 May 1986 | 47.31 | 61.10 | 76 | dnp | 153 | 10 |
| Fourth | 3 March 1988 | 49.86 | 52.50 | dnp | dnp | 250 | dnp |
| Fifth | 27 Feb. 1991 | 62.18 | 55.40 | 88 | 140 | 35 | 18 |
| Sixth | 15 Feb. 1996 | 56.12 | 21.00 | dnp | 250 | dnp | dnp |
| Seventh | 12 June 1996 | 56.72 | 75.60 | 146 | 116 | 32 | 3 |
| Eighth | 1 Oct. 2001 | 75.00 | 74.90 | 62 | 193 | 14 | 17 |
| Ninth | 29 Dec. 2008 | 81.13 | 80.00 | 230 | 30 | 27 | 2 |

Source: (Firoj 2003) and EC, Dhaka

3. Trends

Over the years some changes have been evident in the background of the MPs, in their behaviour and attitudes and overall functioning of the parliament. The major changes are discussed below.

3.1 Shift in occupational Background of MPs: Domination of Businessmen

The occupation of political leaders is often considered as a sole or major indicator of both political attitudes and democratic inspirations.⁷ The social and occupational background of the leaders played important role in shaping the political course of Bangladesh and performances of various political institutions. From a study conducted on the MPs of the first parliament Jahan

6 Jalal Firoj, *Women in Bangladesh Parliament*, A H Development Publishing House, Dhaka 2007, pp. 7-8.

7 Shamsul I Khan and Others, *Political Culture, Political Parties and the Democratic Transition in Bangladesh*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka 2008, p. 135.

found that majority of the MPs of that parliament belonged to urban middle class professionals such as law, business, teaching, and medicine. Lawyers were the largest group—30 per cent of the MPs in 1970 and 27 per cent in 1973.⁸ But a major change can be noticed in occupational background of the members of the parliaments elected since 1991. Most of the members of the second, the third and the fourth parliaments were retired military and civilian officials who selected business as their new profession. The following table reveals that businessmen are the dominant occupational groups in all post-1991 parliaments. 59.4 per cent members of the fifth, 47.8 per cent of the seventh, 52.1 per cent of the eighth and 53.5 per cent of the ninth parliaments are businessmen. Historically, the professionals and the intellectuals played an important role in the politics of Bangladesh.⁹ But the domination of businessmen has marginalized the traditional social and professional groups and created imbalances which contributed to the decline of the performances of the parliaments.

One scholar observed,

Over the years the number of business people joining the ‘exclusive parliament club’ has increased. They have now outdistanced those who had traditionally controlled politics—full-time politicians and professionals...The rise to political prominence of business people risks affecting the process of parliamentary consolidation in two ways: first, by making election contests costly, thereby driving out from the election race those who are politically committed but economically disadvantaged; and second, by discouraging the members to be proactive. Because of the heavy demands of their profession, many businessmen-turned-parliamentarians are unlikely to be able to pay much attention to what happens inside the chamber or in committees.¹⁰

Though the occupational background has no direct relationship with the honesty and image of the lawmakers, it is also noticeable that public impression has changed about their representatives. Many of the MPs got elected with controversial and doubtful images. After ninth parliamentary elections it was reported that 43% of the MPs belonged to the *Mohajote*, 59% of the 4-party alliance MPs had criminal cases against them. Out of 293 MPs, at least 18 had murder charges under Section 302 of the CrPC pending against them. At least

8 Rounaq Jahan, “Members of Parliament in Bangladesh”, in Rounaq Jahan, *Bangladesh Politics: Problems and Issues*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka 2005, p. 184.

9 Shamsul I Khan and Others, *Op., cit.* p. 135.

10 Nizam Ahmed, *Aiding the Parliament of Bangladesh: Experience and Prospect*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka 2012, p. 64.

two MPs are accused of committing war crimes and several are loan defaulters.¹¹

Table 2: Occupational Background of the MPs, the first and the post-1991 parliaments.

| Parliament | Occupation | | | | | |
|------------|-------------|---------|--------------------|-----------|----------|--------|
| | Businessmen | Lawyers | Professionals | Landlords | Politics | Others |
| First | 23.7 | 26.5 | 30.7 ¹² | 2.8 | 12.7 | 3.9 |
| Fifth | 59.4 | 18.8 | 15.5 | 3.9 | 2.0 | 0.4 |
| Seventh | 47.8 | 14.8 | 8.5 | 6.9 | 3.1 | 18.9 |
| Eighth | 52.1 | 8.7 | 8.4 | 8.4 | 2.1 | 20.3 |
| Ninth | 53.5 | 13.1 | 6.4 | 7.5 | 6.1 | 13.4 |

Source: (Jahan 2005), (Ahmed 2012).

3.2 Preference to Party-interest

Party system is an integral part of the parliamentary form of government. Barring a few members who may not be attached to any party, most members of Parliament have a dual capacity: they represent a constituency and a party.¹³ As the parliament is the representative body of the total population of the country, it is expected that members of the parliament will put emphasis on their responsibilities to the nation. They will concentrate more on their constituency-related issues and on making laws for the nation. But in Bangladesh, lawmakers are seen to invest their time, energy, merit and even conscience in serving their party ignoring responsibilities to the constituency and to the nation. Many important legal, historical and political factors and considerations are contributing to shaping behaviour of the members. The Article 70 of the Constitution provides all power to a party to control a member. Even this provision prohibits a member to exercise his/her conscience to ignoring decision of the party. Historically, members of Bangladesh parliaments are completely dependent on their party chiefs for nominations, career, position and selection. Here, party loyalty means absolute allegiance to the party chief. Under this circumstance and political culture lawmakers rarely dare to speak their minds if it contradicts with their party's formal stand. The trends of results of the immediate past two parliamentary elections have also marginalized lawmakers' position in their respective parties. In the eighth and ninth

11 Badiul Alam Majumder, "Who Got Elected to the Ninth Parliament?", *Forum* (A Monthly Publication of *The Daily Star*, Dhaka), Volume 4, Issue 1, January 2009, Dhaka

12 Professionals include Farmer (14.8), Service (0.7), Teacher (9.9), Doctor (5.3). See, Jahan 2005.

13 M. N. Kaul and S. L. Shakhder, *Practice and Procedure of Parliament*, Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi 1997, p. 310.

parliamentary elections the BNP-led 4-party alliance and the AL-led *Mohajote* secured more than two-third majority of the seats respectively. This kind of majority places top party leaders in an omnipotence position. They do not need to hear or consult the backbenchers in formulating party policies regarding functioning of the parliament. On the other hand, devastating defeats of the major parties in the two elections—for AL in the eighth and for BNP in the ninth parliamentary elections—forced them to take an extreme negative position about the parliaments. The overwhelming majority encourages the ruling party to use the parliament as an extra apparatus to consolidate their position. On the other hand, because of their extreme marginalized position the opposition party tries to prove the parliament a ‘failure’ as part of their anti-government movement. As a result, from all sides parliament becomes the victim of narrow and negative party politics.

3.3 Opposition’s Walkouts and Boycotts

Walkouts and boycotts are two legal tools usually used by parliamentarians to register their protest and dissent. The word ‘walkout’ means ‘coming out’. In the parliamentary usage ‘walkout’ means walking out of the House of the parliament by the parliamentarians. The parliamentarians stage walkout for a short period. Walkout is a form of protest. Protest may be made against any decision/ruling of the Chair, any action/decision of the government or any member of the House. Usually the non-ruling party members use this tool of protest. ‘Boycott’ means ‘refusal to buy or to deal in goods from a certain country or company.’¹⁴ The *Dictionary of Political Science* has described boycott as a tool of political and economic struggle. It writes: ‘Boycott: A means of political and economic struggle consisting of the total or partial curtailment of relations with a state e.g., the imposition of an embargo on the export and import of goods, discrimination by the means of duties and tariffs.’¹⁵ The word ‘boycott’ originates from the name of a British land agent Captain Charles Cunningham Boycott (1832-1897).¹⁶ In the parliamentary terminology

14 P. H. Collin, *Dictionary of Government and Politics*, Universal Book Stall, New Delhi 1990, p. 23.

15 T. R. Nanda, *Dictionary of Political Science*, Anmol Publications, New Delhi 1993, p. 63.

16 Captain Boycott came to Ireland to work as a land agent for Lord Erne (John Crichton, 3rd Earl Erne), the local landowner in the Lough Mask area of County Mayo. In 1880, as part of its campaign for the ‘Three Fs’ (fair rent, fixity of tenure and free sale) to protect tenants from exploitation, the Irish Land League under Michael Davitt withdrew the local labour required to save the harvest on Lord Erne’s estate. When Boycott tried to undermine the campaign, the League launched a campaign of isolation against him in the

'boycott' means abstaining from the parliament. Abstaining or boycotting parliament is also a tool of protest. Usually the opposition members in the House use this tool in a protest against the decision/ruling of the Speaker or any action/decision of the government or treasury bench members. To the opposition, staging walkouts and boycotting parliamentary sittings are privileges. Both walkout and boycott affect the normal functioning of the parliament. The difference between the two tools is duration. Walkout is staged for a short time. On the other hand, boycott lasts for a longer period of time. Sometimes walkouts turn into boycotts. The occasional walkouts and boycotts are legitimate and handy as a means of protests and dissents. But daily practices of these are a serious deviation from the parliamentary norm. Frequent walkouts and boycotts bring the parliament to a naught.

The history of the Bangladesh parliament is the history of walkouts and boycotts. This is especially relevant for the fifth, the seventh, the eighth and the ninth parliaments. Walkouts and boycotts have not only spoiled the maximum working days of these four parliaments but also posed a threat to the very lively existence of them. Walkouts and boycotts are dominant features of the Bangladesh parliaments.

Table 3: Working Days Boycotted by the Opposition

| Parliament | Total Working Days | Boycotted by the Opposition | Percentage |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| First | 134 | 1 | 0.74 |
| Second | 206 | 67 | 32.52 |
| Third | 75 | 29 | 38.66 |
| Fourth | 168 | 3 | 1.78 |
| Fifth | 395 | 135 | 34.17 |
| Sixth | 4 | - | - |
| Seventh | 383 | 163 | 42.55 |
| Eighth | 373 | 223 | 59.78 |
| Ninth (till end of 15th session, 29 Nov. 2012) | 337 | 283 | 83.97 |
| Total | 2075 | 904 | 43.56 |

Source: Compiled by the Researcher.

local community. Neighbors would not talk to him. Shops would not serve him. Local labourers refused to tend his house and the postman refused to deliver his mail. The campaign against Boycott became a cause célèbre in the British press, with newspapers sending correspondents to the West of Ireland to highlight what they viewed as the victimization of a servant of a peer of the realm by Irish nationalists.... Boycott left Ireland on December 1, 1880. He died in 1897, aged 65. His name, however, became immortalized by the creation of the verb to boycott, meaning fundamentally 'to ostracize'. Visit: <http://www.answers.com/topic/charles-boycott>.

In the four parliaments the opposition parties widely applied walkouts and boycotts to register their protest and dissent. According to an estimate, the opposition parties, since the inception of the fifth parliament on 5 April 1991 to 1 March 1994¹⁷ staged either singly or jointly 57 times walkouts.¹⁸ Another estimate has figured out that the opposition in the fifth parliament staged 76 walkouts in the first thirteenth sessions, averaging nearly six walkouts per session.¹⁹ In the seventh parliament the opposition²⁰ parties staged 61 walkouts.²¹ In the eighth parliament staged 61 walkouts. In the same parliament the opposition abstained from attending the sessions for the first 8 months 28 October 2001 to 23 June 2002 and then again from 26 June 2003 to 14 June 2004 and finally for five continuous sessions from 31 January 2005 to 14 November 2005.²² The opposition boycotted 9 out of 19 sessions of the eighth parliament. In the ninth parliament the opposition attended only 54 sittings of the 337 working days till the end of the 15th session (29 November 2012). After 77-day boycott they joined on 18 March 2011 to save their membership. Then they boycotted three sessions, from the 13th to the 15th, continuously. The above table reveals that the opposition boycotted 34.18 per cent working days of the fifth, 42.56 per cent of the seventh, 59.78 per cent of the eighth and 83.97 per cent working days of the ninth (till the 15th session) parliament.

The above data and table reveal how walkouts and boycotts have dominated the functioning of the parliaments.²³ After analyzing the causes of walkouts some trends and features could be identified. (1) Most of the walkouts have been staged against the Speakers' decisions/rulings and denial of opposition's

17 On 1 March 1994 the AL-led opposition parties staged walkout to protest a comment of Information Minister Nazmul Huda. This walkout turned into a longtime boycott.

18 Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, *Op. cit.*, p. 162.

19 Nizam Ahmed, 2002, *Op. cit.*, p. 191.

20 Not only had the opposition members the treasury bench members also been seen to stage walkout. On 12 November 1998 in an unprecedented move most of the ruling party members left the House apparently to retort to their opposition colleagues who earlier staged a walkout protesting a minister's statement on the private members' day. See *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 13 November, 1998.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Moudud Ahmed, *Bangladesh: A Study of the Democratic Regimes*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka 2012, p. 86.

23 For details of walkout and boycotts see Jalal Firoj, "Walkouts and Boycotts from the Fifth and the Seventh Parliaments of Bangladesh: Trends, Causes and Impacts", *The Journal of Social Studies*, No. 135, July-September 2012, Centre for Social Studies, Dhaka.

demands. (2) The opposition parties resorted to walkouts and boycotts to register their pre-planned protests to materialize political agenda. The floor of the House and parliamentary tools like boycott and walkout were used for political purposes. (3) Some walkouts could be attributed to misunderstanding or insufficient acquaintance with parliamentary practices and rules of procedures. (4) A number of walkouts were staged for very trivial causes. Even an alleged harassment of a leader in the airport inspired MPs to stage walkout in the House.²⁴

3.4 Government's Comfort without Opposition

In a parliamentary system opposition is considered as one wheel of a two-wheeled cart. The main responsibility of the opposition is to oppose the government and 'minimize secrecy'²⁵ in government. Ideally, the opposition is entrusted with the task of criticizing the government for ensuring government's pro-people performances. But in Bangladesh, this ideal situation is not visible. Here, the opposition members prefer to abstain from the chamber and the committees. Over the years, especially since 1991, a trend has developed which encourages the government to run the parliament without any effective contribution from the opposition. The government, whether it is of BNP or of AL, feels more comfortable in the House without the opposition. The civil society organizations are seen to create pressures on the government to end opposition's absenteeism but the government rarely takes meaningful initiatives. It indicates that the government does not want to destabilize their so called comfortable zone by bringing opposition in the effective roles. This kind of attitude is not only depriving the parliament from the legitimate services of the opposition but also tarnishing the image of the legislature and raising questions about its effectiveness.

3.5 Un-parliamentary Language

Un-parliamentary utterances and behaviour of the MPs in the House are not unusual though these practices are unwanted and unexpected in parliamentary tradition. The image of Bangladesh parliament suffered very much due to un-parliamentary utterances and indecent occurrences and behaviour by MPs in the

²⁴ See Jalal Firoj, *Ibid.*

²⁵ Griffith and Ryle, *Parliament: Functions Practice and Procedure*, Sweet and Maxwell, London 1989, p. 338.

floor of the House. Some incidents were most unpleasant, derogatory and reflections of bad taste. For MPs' indecent conduct and their overall degenerated behavior the parliament has been compared with a 'monkey-house'. 'From a talking shop it (parliament) has degenerated into a bedlam where lies, unsavoury allusions, indecent insinuations, below-the-belt personal attacks and objectionable obscenities are the rule of the day. Comparing our parliament to a monkey-house is very insulting.'²⁶

Almost in all parliaments a good number of front bench and back-bencher law makers exchanged unpleasant and derogatory comments among themselves. In the first session of the fifth parliament Shipping Minister M. K. Anwar described the activities of some opposition MPs as '*goondami*' (hooliganism). Thanks to his remarks the parliament had to be edsuspend its business for 4 hours.²⁷ The opposition staged a walkout and finally the minister withdrew his word and regretted.

On 4 August 1991, during the second session of the fifth parliament, a serious pandemonium halted the function of the House. The situation arose when AL MP Sultanul Kabir Chowdhury waved his shoes pointing to the treasury bench members. Seeing his shoes the angry treasury bench members rushed to the front benches of the opposition side. The then Information Minister Nazmul Huda also made a derogatory comment on 6 July 1992. Referring to an unrest situation in the House, he said, 'This House is a House of jungles'. The minister's comment aggrieved the opposition members. They protested against him and demanded withdrawal of his derogatory remark. Finally he withdrew it and said, 'I feel sorry and I withdraw the word 'jungles'.²⁸ On 7 July 1992 the same minister said in the House, 'In this House I have never had any chance of a peaceful environment. In this House sandals were shown, files were thrown and all these I have learnt here'.²⁹ The opposition showed serious reaction against the minister and they blamed him for planting 'evil motive'. Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdus Samad Azad commented: there 'might be evil political motive' behind Huda's behaviour in the House.³⁰

26 Amir Khasru and Tarik Hasan, "Parliament or Monkey-house", *Holiday*, 2 July 1991.

27 See *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 12 May 1991.

28 *The Morning Sun*, Dhaka, 7 July 1992.

29 *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 8 August 1992.

30 *The Morning Sun*, Dhaka, 8 July 1992.

The Information Minister Nazmul Huda made an infamous comment on the floor of the House on 1 March 1994 insulting the religious sentiment of the opposition members. This comment largely influenced and determined the fate of the fifth parliament. The minister's comment created serious reaction among the opposition members. They shouted, threw files, and, as a result, a complete disorder engulfed the House. The consequences of the Minister's comment were very far-reaching. The Minister's comment pushed the opposition to opt for a long time boycott. Before this incident the opposition made a number of walkouts and boycotts but all these walkouts and boycotts lasted for short periods. The situation emerged out of the Minister's comment, and non-realization of the demand for a non-partisan caretaker government incited the opposition to boycott the parliament for almost half of its working days.

The first session of the seventh parliament was marked by a number of indecent and un-parliamentary occurrences. On 14 July 1996, a JSD MP and a partner of the newly formed AL government A. S. M. Rab showed his thumb pointing to opposition members. His 'indecent posture' angered opposition MPs.

An awful situation arose in the floor of the House on 25 August 1996. The Speaker allowed AL MP Abul Kalam Azad to deliver his speech after BNP MP Murshed Khan. Taking his microphone Azad, without mentioning any name, said, 'I have to speak after a person who is known as a 'number two'³¹ business man, who has licked the boots of Zia and Ershad. Now he is licking the boots of Khaleda Zia. Once upon a time he used to roaming wearing Mujib Coat.'³² BNP MPs protested the un-parliamentary sentences of the AL member and urged the Speaker to expunge the indecent words. The seventh parliament witnessed a serious rowdyism on 15 April 1998 in the floor of the House. Failing to get the floor the opposition BNP members went to the Speaker's rostrum. They threw files, papers and abuses at the Speaker. The opposition MPs damaged a TV camera and ransacked the reporting desk of the parliament. It was an unprecedented incident. A national daily reported: 'An opposition MP was about to throw his shoes at the Speaker. Instantly, all the BNP MPs under the leadership of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition Badrudozza Chowdhury began to throw some books, files and papers at the Speaker and the officers of the Parliament Secretariat. The Speaker ordered the Sergeant-at Arms to be alert

³¹ Meaning financially corrupted.

³² *Ajker Kagoj*, Dhaka, 26 August 1996.

to ward off any untoward situation. The anarchic situation continued for about 10 minutes.³³

Another incident occurred in the seventh parliament. While delivering her concluding speech in its fifteenth session on 9 November 1999 the Leader of the House (LoH) Sheikh Hasina made some derogatory comments on the Leader of the Opposition (LoO) Khaleda Zia. This was termed as a 'sad day' in the history of the parliament.³⁴ Castigating the politics of *hartal* of the opposition the Prime Minister said, 'The enforcing of *hartals* ... is causing loss to the students. As the leader of the opposition herself has not studied, she will not allow the nation to learn. Will she not facilitate others to sit for exams as she has failed in the examination? Where has she taken the prestige of politics?—Raising these questions to the LoO, the LoH said, 'Despite having her own house in the Dhaka City she passed night in the hotel. She was found in a closed door room of Purbani Hotel. Does a housewife of a respectable family pass night in the hotel? Why did she stay there? In what condition was she there?—Ershad knows better than her.'³⁵ The opposition BNP condemned the Prime Minister's speech very strongly. In its decision taken in an emergency meeting the party said, 'Only a perturbed person can make this kind of comment. After making this indecent, uncivil and senseless statement she has no moral right to stay in the position of the Prime Minister.'³⁶

On many occasions un-parliamentary behavior and comments contributed to derail the normal functioning of the eighth and ninth parliaments. These were responsible to bring major shifts in the priorities of the House and its members. The parliaments had to concentrate more on keeping the contending parties to the right track than discussing, taking decisions and enacting laws on the issues related to the welfare of the common people and the advancement of the country. It has been found that the MPs and leaders have not only hurled bad words on their counterparts they have also defamed the late national leaders. In one occasion an AL MP in the House called the founder of BNP and former president of the country Ziaur Rahman a 'traitor'.³⁷ In reply a BNP MP compared the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with

33 *The Bangladesh Observer*, Dhaka, 16 April 1998.

34 See Nizam Ahmed, 2002, *Op. cit.*, p. 256.

35 *Sangbad*, Dhaka, 10 November 1999.

36 *Sangbad*, Dhaka, 12 November 1999.

37 *Inquilab*, Dhaka, 5 March 1997.

the ‘Pharaohs’³⁸ of Egypt.³⁹ This kind of unscrupulous exchange of words and behaviour belittled the very standard and image of the House.

3.6 Priority Shifting: From Law Making to Administrative Jobs

An important function of parliament—although not the only function—is to make laws.⁴⁰ It is expected that MPs will concentrate more on law and policy making issues than any other activities. But in Bangladesh and also in many other developing countries, MPs are eager to be involved in executive functions. In the name of ‘constituency development’ or ‘serving the voters’ policy they create pressures on local administration. The MPs are given yearly ‘development fund’ to serve their constituencies. They are made chairmen/member of all development/administrative/law and order related bodies. In fact, they become top/center point of all activities of their localities. This kind of all-grabbing power and position of the MPs making an extreme negative impact especially on local government machineries and functionaries. In most of the areas MPs are directly at loggerheads with the elected Chairmen of the Upazilas. On the other hand, MPs’ over-enthusiasm for development and executive activities are making adverse impacts on their legislative functions. For this reason, many are of the opinion that there should be separation of the legislative and executive functions. The MPs should be left only to legislature, where executive should be given responsibility for developments.⁴¹ Referring to the development fund given to the Indian MPs one observed that it becomes a ‘breeding den for corruption.’⁴² In Bangladesh, many local government experts and the civil society organizations are opposed to MPs’ involvement with local development issues. Even they opine that there would be no local development under the local government until the MPs stop meddling in its (local government) affairs.⁴³ Over the last twenty years lawmakers of Bangladesh parliaments have developed an aggressive tendency

38 To mean Bangabandhu was most powerful and tyrant as rulers of ancient Egypt.

39 See *Inquilab*, Dhaka, 5 March 1997.

40 Quoted in Jalal Firoj, *Parliament Kibhabe Kaj Kore* (How Does Parliament Work), New Age Publications, Dhaka 2003, p. 83.

41 Arun Suri, <http://www.flonnet.com/fl2122/stories/200411050005802400.htm>. Accessed on 15 June 2009. Quoted also in Jalal Firoj, *Parliamentary Shabdakosh*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka 2010, p. 153.

42 *Ibid.*

43 See *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 11 March 2013.

of getting involved with local level government activities that certainly influence their legislative functions negatively.

3.7 Speakers' Partisan Loyalty

The Speaker is an integral part of the parliament. Speakership is not only a position but also an institution. The Speaker is one of the great offices of the state. He is the chief officer of the parliament.⁴⁴ According to Morris-Jones, the Speaker is the 'Member of Parliament No. 1'.⁴⁵ He is the most powerful person in the House. Inside the House his word is law. He derives his powers and authority from two major sources: firstly, the Constitution and the Rules of Procedure and secondly, personality and experience of the Speaker and customs and traditions developed from parliamentary practices. The Speaker performs various duties. He presides over the sittings of the House, calls members to speak, imposes discipline, enforces observance of the rules and, if needed, punishes members. He takes care of the privileges of the members. One of the important functions of the Speaker is to give rulings and decisions. Philip Laundry wrote: The Speaker sits as a judge and he is exercising his judgment all the time...Every ruling he delivers is in the nature of a judgment, and like court judgments, they are preserved as precedents for the guidance of future Speakers.⁴⁶

In parliamentary democracy the Speaker holds highly esteemed position. The Constitution and the *Rules of Procedure* of Bangladesh Parliament have vested much functions, powers and authority in the Speaker.

To accomplish all his duties and responsibilities the quality which is the most essential for the Speaker is 'strict impartiality'.⁴⁷ Eighteen different individuals served nine parliaments as Speakers and Deputy Speakers during the period from 1973 to 2012. Of them, Sheikh Razzak Ali, Humayun Rashid Chowdhury and Abdul Hamid served for the longest periods as Speakers/Deputy Speakers of different parliaments. But all of them were blamed for their partisan role. The Speakers of Bangladesh parliaments 'have never been out of their party

44 Shantanu Majumder and Zahid ul Arefin Choudhury, "Working of the Parliament of Bangladesh", *Bangladesh Political Science Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, June, Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka, Dhaka 2001, p. 161.

45 Quoted in Shamsul Huda Harun, *Parliamentary Behaviour in a Multi-National State 1947-56: Bangladesh Experience*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 1984, p. 14.

46 Quoted in Ranjit Basu, *Speaker's Rulings and Decisions*, Biswa Jnan, Kolkata, p. 2.

47 HMSO, *Aspects of Britain: Parliament*, Second Edition, London 1994, p. 36.

control'.⁴⁸ Speakers, Deputy Speakers and other presiding officers had eventful times and created much controversy and criticism by their rulings, decisions and activities in the Houses.

Table 4: Speakers and Deputy Speakers: 1973-2012

| Sl. | Name | Position | Parliament | Duration |
|-----|--------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Mohammadullah | Speaker | First | 07/04/73—27/01/74 (9 months 20 days) |
| 2 | Mohammad Baitullah | Deputy Speaker | First | 07/04/73—05/11/75 (2 yrs 6 months 28 days) |
| 3 | Abdul Malek Ukil | Speaker | First | 28/01-74—05/11/75 (1 yr 9 months 8 days) |
| 4 | Mirza Golam Hafij | Speaker | Second | 02/04/79—23/03/82 (2 yrs 11 months 21 days) |
| 5 | Sultan Ahmed Choudhury | Deputy Speaker | | 02/04/79—23/03/82 (2 yrs 11 months 21 days) |
| 6 | Shamsul Huda Choudhury | Speaker | Third | 10/07/86—24/04/88 (2 yrs 9 months 14 days) |
| 7 | M. Korban Ali | Deputy Speaker | Third | 10/07/86—24/04/88 (2 yrs 9 months 14 days) |
| 8 | Shamsul Huda Choudhury | Speaker | Fourth | 25/04/88—05/04/91 (2 yrs 11 months 10 days) |
| 9 | Riajuddin Ahmed | Deputy Speaker | Fourth | 25/04/88—05/04/91 (2 yrs 11 months 10 days) |
| 10 | Abdur Rahman Biswash | Speaker | Fifth | 05/04/91—11/10/91(190 days) |
| 11 | Sheikh Razzak Ali | Deputy Speaker | Fifth | 05/04/91—11/10/91 (190 days) |
| 12 | Sheikh Razzak Ali | Speaker | Fifth | 12/10/91—18/03/96 (4 yrs 6 months) |
| 13 | Humayun Khan Panni | Deputy Speaker | Fifth | 12/10/91—18/03/96 (4 yrs 6 months) |
| 14 | Sheikh Razzak Ali | Speaker | Sixth | 19/03-96—13/07-96 (116 days) |
| 15 | L. K. Siddiqui | Deputy Speaker | Sixth | 19/03/96—13/07/96 (116 days) |
| 16 | Humayun Rashid Chowdhury | Speaker | Seventh | 14/07/96—10/07/01 (4 yrs 11 months 26 days) |
| 17 | Abdul Hamid | Deputy Speaker | Seventh | 14/07/96—10/07/01 (4 yrs 11 months 26 days) |
| 18 | Abdul Hamid | Speaker | Seventh | 12/07/01—27/10/01 (107 days) |
| 19 | Ali Ashraf | Deputy Speaker | Seventh | 12/07/01—27/10/01 (107 days) |
| 20 | Jamir Uddin Sarker | Speaker | Eighth | 28/10/2001— 25/01/2009 (7 yrs 2 months 27 days) |
| 21 | Akter Hamid Sarker | Deputy Speaker | Eighth | 28/10/2001— 25/01/2009 (7 yrs 2 months 27 days) |
| 22 | Abdul Hamid | Speaker | Ninth (15 th session) | 25/1/09—29/11/12 (3 yrs 10 months 25 days) |
| 23 | Shawkat Ali | Deputy Speaker | Ninth (15 th session) | 25/1/09—29/11/12 (3 yrs 10 months 25 days) |

Source: Compiled by the Researcher.

48 Shantanu Majumder and Zahid ul Arefin Choudhury, *Op. cit.*, p. 161.

In all parliaments, many rulings were given by the Speakers on various issues including Bengali/English version of constitutional amendment, expunge of statements of the members, no-confidence motion, statement of the PM and the Leader of the Opposition (LoO), adjustment motions on newspaper reports, resignation of 147 MPs, relation between the legislature and the judiciary etc. Some of the rulings created serious controversies in the political arena. Of them, the most controversial was the ruling related to the resignation of 147 opposition MPs. The opposition AL termed this ruling a 'blueprint' and 'a weapon for fulfilling the wishes of the ruling party and its chief'.⁴⁹ JP blamed that 'the Speaker has given this decision not as a Speaker but as a man of the ruling party'.⁵⁰ But the Speaker's ruling allowing the motion of no-confidence against the Cabinet was highly appreciated. It was a well-thought and well-studied decision. This ruling paved, for the first time in the parliamentary history of the country, the way for bringing a no-confidence against a government. The Speaker's ruling on the vacancy of seats of two BNP MPs—Hasibur Rahman Shopon and Dr Alauddin—was criticised much. It was considered as one the most partisan and one-sided decisions. On the other hand, the Speaker of the seventh parliament gave a bold ruling on constitutional recognition of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 18 February 1997. In his ruling the Speaker said in strong terms that 'giving aspersions to the Father of the Nation is directly or indirectly tantamount to dishonoring the Constitution'.⁵¹ For this courageous ruling the Speaker was greatly appreciated.

The Speakers took a number of initiatives to reduce the gaps and establish a congenial relationship between the treasury and the opposition benches. Sheikh Razzak Ali's efforts contributed to arrange a series of meetings between the two sides during the turbulent period from 1994 to 1995. 'Mr. Razzak's credential as one of the most successful Speakers in the history of our parliament has been accepted even by the opposition bench'.⁵² Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury played a catalyst role in the signing of the historic four-point accord by the ruling and the opposition parties in January 1998. Once Deputy Leader

49 *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 24 February 1995

50 *Ibid.*

51 See Institute of Parliamentary Studies, *Rulings of the Speaker*, The Parliament of Bangladesh, Dhaka 1999.

52 Kishwar Kamal, 'BTV's parliamentary proceeding', *Holiday*, Dhaka, 23 August 1996

of the Opposition Badruddoza Chowdhury gave ‘hundred percent marks’ to the Speaker for his ‘good performance’⁵³ in the House.

Despite their hard works and positive contributions Speakers were accused of partisan roles. ‘Unlike in India, and other more developed countries, the Speakers in Bangladesh have played a blatantly partisan role. In both Parliaments (the fifth and the seventh), under the BNP and the Awami League, the Speaker functioned under the influence of the respective political governments.’⁵⁴ It was also alleged that ‘Speakers of the house have been less than neutral in the discharge of their mandate and have tended to deny enough time to the opposition to have their say in the parliament.’⁵⁵ The Speakers were ‘less than neutral’ not only in allowing ‘enough time to the opposition’ but also in providing decisions, rulings in the floor, appointing members in the committees and in case of sanctioning facilities and privileges to the members. Why did they lose neutrality in discharging their responsibilities? Why were the Speakers submissive to their respective party control? In an interview with representatives of some newspapers on 20 December 1999 Humayun Rashid Chowdhury identified some causes of the partisan roles. He pointed out two areas: The simple rule to remove Speaker from his post and the issue of Speaker’s re-election. He said that the Speaker can be removed with a simple majority in the House. For this reason, in Bangladesh, the Speaker has to work keeping in good terms with the ruling party.⁵⁶ To consolidate the power and authority of the Speaker, there should be a rule requiring two-thirds majority for removal of the Speaker. He said, in the UK when the Speaker seeks re-election no party nominates any candidate against him. This tradition helps the Speaker to keep a distance from party activities. For ensuring Speaker’s neutrality these

53 *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 11 June 1997.

54 Moudud Ahmed, *South Asia Crisis of Development: The Case of Bangladesh*, Third Impression, The University Press Limited, Dhaka 2005, p. 294.

55 Rehman Sobhan, “Bangladesh’s Confrontational Political System: Search for Solution”, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 25 August 2000.

56 Narrating his helplessness Humayun Rashid Chowdhury said, in his entire life nobody dared to abuse him. But while presiding over the House he was called ‘son of a beach’. He had nothing to do. At best he could expel him from the House for the rest of the day. He would attend the sitting of the House very next day. Suppose, if a member before adjourning the House regularly abuses him, he would not even be able to expel him. In this situation, as a Speaker he was completely helpless. See *Banglabazar Partika*, Dhaka, 21 December 1999.

norms should be established in Bangladesh.⁵⁷ Apart from weak procedural or legal footings, the Speaker's authority is also curved by repetitive challenges posed by the opposition members. In Bangladesh there is an instinctive trend in the opposition to challenge or negate the Speaker's decisions/rulings. On rare occasions the opposition members are found to accept the Speakers' decisions gracefully. This kind of situation compels the Speaker to depend on the government party. One scholar has rightly observed: The 'role of the Speaker has also been undermined by the unwillingness of the opposition to observe the rules of parliamentary procedure and their tendency to constantly challenge, often in non-parliamentary terms, the authority of the Speaker'.⁵⁸ In developed democracies the Speaker is elected on the basis of consensus. The authority of the Speaker is seldom challenged. In those countries speakership has been institutionalized after a long process of evolution. During this long journey of evolution individual Speakers have contributed immensely to the parliamentary process with their personality, integrity, courage, political honesty and commitment. The Speakers of Bangladesh Parliaments are short of enough courage, commitment and integrity and this is one of the major causes of their questionable neutrality and weak authority.

4. Achievements

It is true that many negative trends jeopardized the development process of the parliamentary system in the country. But the progresses achieved yet during the last decades are not negligible.

4.1 Consensus on the Parliamentary Form of Government

During the period from 1975 to 1990 the 'form of government' remained one of the contentious issues among the political parties. After 1975, AL pragmatically, changed its position and started advocating for the parliamentary form of government. All the leftist and progressive parties also stood for the parliamentary system. On the other hand, BNP and JP were in favor of the presidential form of government. Both sides took opposite and rigid stands. Even this issue prevented AL and its allies from reaching an understanding with BNP-led alliance several times during the anti-Ershad movement. At one point,

57 *Banglabazar Partika*, Dhaka, 21 December 1999. See also Jalal Firoj, 2003, *Op. cit.*, p. 69.

58 Rehman Sobhan, *Op. cit.*

it seemed impossible to find a solution to the question of the 'form of government issue'. When the Joint Declaration of the Three Alliances was being drafted in November 1990 the matter came to the fore. The political parties resolved the issue for the time being on the decision that the interim caretaker government would hand over power to the 'sovereign parliament' elected through free and fair elections, and the 'government will remain accountable to that parliament'. Both sides felt happy with this solution. The 8-party and the 5-party alliances viewed it as a 'victory' since it was recognized that after the election the 'sovereign parliament' would be established and the 'government will remain accountable to that parliament'. On the other hand, BNP and its allies thought that the 'sovereign parliament' did not mean parliamentary form of government; according to them, 'sovereign parliament' could also be established under a presidential form of government. During the campaign of the fifth parliamentary election AL strongly pledged for the parliamentary form of government and BNP in its manifesto re-asserted their position in favour of the presidential system. After the election, BNP came into power while the opposition parties led by AL continued to put pressure on the government to change the form of government as per the commitment made in the Joint Declaration of the Three Alliances. But the BNP leadership, by raising some arguments, opposed the idea for reversion of the form of government from the presidential to the parliamentary one.

Despite various arguments and counter-arguments, political pressure gradually increased on the BNP-led government to change the form of government. As pressure mounted the rank and file of the ruling party also got divided. In a meeting held on 18 May BNP's Parliamentary Party expressed three different opinions. Some were pledging for parliamentary government, some were favoring the presidential form of government and a third group advocated for a mix between the presidential and the parliamentary forms.⁵⁹ Then in a meeting of the BNP Central Executive Committee attended by 300 members from all over the country, out of 27 speakers 21 expressed their opinions in favor of the parliamentary system.⁶⁰ Finally, the ruling party BNP decided to switch over to the parliamentary form of government. On 2 July Prime Minister Khaleda Zia moved the Twelfth Amendment Bill 1991 in the House. On 6 August 1991 the

59 See *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 19 May 1991.

60 Muhammad A. Hakim, *Bangladesh Politics: The Shahabuddin Interregnum.*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka 1993, p. 75.

bill was passed. It was put to division vote twice. The result was that there were 306 votes in favour and none was cast against the bill on the first voting, while there were 307 votes in favour and none against in the second voting.⁶¹ The whole environment of the House was festive. Reaching a consensus to change the form of government was a rare occasion. The members were happy; in a joyous mood they were embracing each other. Changing the form of government was a turning point in the political history of the country. The political leaders were hailed for this achievement. After the turbulent period of 1971 and 1990 it was a period when the leadership of the country proved their maturity and worked unitedly.

Enactment of the twelfth amendment erased rivalry and hatred from amongst the contending party leaders at least for the time being. They were seen to come forward to praising each other. Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina thanked Leader of the House Khaleda Zia and Select Committee of the House for their 'hard work' for moving to parliamentary democracy.⁶² Unity of the politicians and turning to the parliamentary system were viewed as a positive deterrent to the rise of 'politics of bayonet'. This optimism spread across the country that 'Ballot, not bayonet, will be the source of changing power'.⁶³ The ruling party, by abandoning its avowed position on the form of government, demonstrated an accommodative attitude.⁶⁴ On the other hand, opposition parties by accepting the leadership of the ruling party in switching over to the parliamentary form projected a matured political behaviour. A unanimous adoption of the twelfth amendment bill reflected a sentiment of compromise, persuasion and maneuvering among political parties. It proved that any serious problem confronted by the nation could be overcome if the government and the opposition parties were sincere, and if they cooperated with each other.⁶⁵

61 Of 330 seats in the parliament 11 seats were vacant. 4 JP members were in prison. The Speaker and the Deputy Speaker did not participate in voting. 6 members were absent. Col. (Rtd.) Shawkat Ali of AL was absent on the first reading, but participated in the second. See Muhammad A. Hakim, *Op. cit.*, pp. 79, 85.

62 See *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 7 August 1991.

63 Leaders of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina emphasized that through the period of transition to parliamentary democracy the politics of bayonet would come to an end and the nation would experience the change of power through only ballot. See *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 7 August 1991.

64 Muhammad A. Hakim, *Op. cit.*, p. 80.

65 *Ibid.*

4.2 End of Military Authoritarianism

The people of Bangladesh fought hard against the military domination throughout the Pakistani period. The main objective of the liberation struggle of 1971 was to end military authoritarianism and to establish a democratic system in the country. But after three and a half years of independence the much-cherished democratic aspirations of the country were shattered, and with the assassination of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the military began to attain its prominence in the country. During the two subsequent martial law regimes of General Zia (1975-1980) and General Ershad (1982-1990) military domination was established in all spheres of life, be it cultural, social, economic and political. The two military rulers established their reign by showing complete disregard to human rights, constitutional rule and public consent.

To establish their hegemony, various interest groups –among them- the army got involved in controlling the political events, institutions and ideologies. Many of them became reckless. Political institutions including the parliament and the political parties were used only to consolidate power of the ruling coterie. The military rulers not only dominated the politics but also reversed the state principles. Secularism was replaced by ‘full trust in Almighty Allah’. Islam was declared the state religion. Socialism was replaced by ‘social justice’ and Bengali nationalism by Bangladeshi nationalism. But from the beginning of their reign the military rulers had to confront with various resistance movements organized by different sections of people including the students, the labourers and the political forces. While explaining withdrawal of the military from politics, Maniruzzaman commented, ‘...an army in power can be removed only when the people are more militant than the armed forces in resisting the military rule.’⁶⁶ The political movement got momentum against the military rule in late 1980s and finally, the Ershad regime was overthrown by the mass uprising culminated in December 1990.

The success of the mass movement enhanced the anti-autocracy sentiment and to end military-authoritarianism permanently the parliamentary form of democracy was re-introduced in 1991. After the re-introduction of

66 Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Military Withdrawal from Politics: A Case Study*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka 1988, p. 215.

parliamentary democracy power was peacefully transferred from a party government to another via non-party caretaker governments—first in 1991, second in 1996, third in 2001 and then in 2006. The failure of the President Iajuddin Ahmed's caretaker government⁶⁷ and stringent attitudes of the political parties resulted in the coming to power of the army backed caretaker government of Fakhruddin Ahmed for two years (2006-2008).⁶⁸ Though the constitutionality of the Fakhruddin-led caretaker government was dubious and involvement of the military with the government created much controversy, yet the government handed power to an elected government peacefully. Despite controversial roles of some army officers during the Fakhruddin-led government, the records of conspiracy, coups and killings, abrogation of the Constitution and practices of occupying state power by forceful means in Bangladesh were reduced significantly. After 1990 a national consensus was built around the point that politics, power and state affairs would be dealt not by the military coterie but by the politicians with the consent of the people. During the period from 1991 to 2006 contending political parties fought one another and many times extreme volatile situations had also been created but constitutional continuity was never disrupted. There developed a convergence among the political elites 'in favor of democracy and against involvement of any extra-constitutional forces in politics'.⁶⁹ Public opinion was also created to the point that '...any military or extra-constitutional intervention must be resisted and a law introduced to punish not only those who seek to intervene but also those who would support the illegal regime.'⁷⁰ While in 1970s and 1980s military interventions, coups and militarization were so frequent and in prominence, in 1990s the military came under political leadership and maintained professional integrity and ethics. 'This does not mean total

67 The President Iajuddin Ahmed took hold of the caretaker government as the Chief Adviser on 29 October 2006. Addressing the nation on the night of 11 January 2007 the President declared a state of emergency in the country stating, 'a grave emergency exists in which the security or economic life of Bangladesh is threatened by internal disturbances' (See A. T. Rahman, *Bangladesh Election 2008 and Beyond*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka 2008, p. xiv).

68 The Fakhruddin Ahmed-led caretaker government was entrusted with the charge of state affairs on 11 January 2007.

69 Bhuiyan Md. Monoar Kabir, *Politics of Military Rule and the Dilemmas of Democratization in Bangladesh*, Parama, Dhaka 1999, p. 252

70 Moudud Ahmed 1995, *Op. cit.*, pp. 370-371

disengagement of the military from civilian affairs'.⁷¹ But the functioning of the parliaments and development of a mechanism of peaceful transfer of power contributed to keep the military aloof from politics thereby reducing the possibility of military intervention in the democratic process. The Constitution has also included a provision through the fifteenth amendment that any attempt of imposing un-constitutional rule will be deemed as sedition.⁷² But the experiences of political chaos that prevailed before the takeover of power by the military-backed caretaker government of 2007 and the confrontation re-surfaced after enactment of the fifteenth amendment haunt many people and they believe that un-compromising attitudes of the political leaders to overcoming crisis may bring the extra-constitutional forces again into politics.

However, it can be argued that the probability of intervention by the military in politics seems to have lost its momentum thanks to Bangladesh armed forces increasing participation in international peacekeeping missions.

4.3 Acceptance of Electoral Results

None of the elections held under military regimes of President Zia and President Ershad was acceptable to the opposition political parties and people. As a result, both the regimes were confronting legitimacy crises. The intensity of the legitimacy problem became more vivid and reached its climax during the Ershad regime.⁷³

During the period from 1991 to 2008 four parliamentary elections were held under four non-partisan caretaker governments. The first caretaker government headed by Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed was established under an arrangement formulated by the Joint Declaration of the Three Alliances. The fifth parliamentary election held on 27 February 1991 was arranged by this caretaker government.⁷⁴ Unlike the previous ones this election received wider acceptance. By all standards, the 1991 election was fairest and best organized since

71 Mohammad Mohabbat Khan and Syed Anwar Husain, "Process of Democratization in Bangladesh", *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Journals Oxford Limited 1996, p. 331.

72 See the Article 7A. (Bangladesh Constitution 2011, October).

73 Rashida Khanam, *The Nature of Legitimacy and The Crisis of Bangladesh Politics 1972-1990*, A H Development Publishing House, Dhaka 2008, p. 260.

74 Details information of these elections has been given in the second section of this article.

independence.⁷⁵ All election observer groups including the Commonwealth, British Parliamentary Delegation, SAARC Group and Japanese Delegation were unanimous that polls were held peacefully and voters exercised their rights in a free and fair manner.⁷⁶ But AL President Sheikh Hasina expressed her dissatisfaction with the result and claimed that, 'it appears in a wider view that the election was fair, but in actual practice it was tactfully rigged.'⁷⁷ However, all other political parties admitted and praised the election as free and fair. This election is also considered as 'a grand success in establishing people's confidence in the sanctity of the electoral process'.⁷⁸ The constitutionally established caretaker government led by Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman made all arrangements for holding seventh parliamentary elections on 12 June 1996. Apart from thousands of local observer a total of 200 foreign observers from 35 countries came to observe the Bangladesh polls. Though some observers felt that everything was not going smoothly, the general feeling of the observers was that the election was credible, free and fair. The Japanese Delegation said, 'We have an impression that this election was conducted fairly, peacefully and in orderly manner on the whole'.⁷⁹ The immediate past ruling party BNP which conceded defeat alleged that there were widespread rigging and manipulation in the poll. But ultimately all political parties including BNP accepted the results and welcomed the AL. AL returned to state power after twenty one years. The eighth parliamentary election was arranged by the caretaker government headed by Justice Latifur Rahman. The elections were held on 1 October 2001. The 4-party alliance led by BNP won 216 seats with AL a distant second position winning only 62 seats. JP won 14 seats. The results stunned many. AL rejected the results. AL president Sheikh Hasina insisted that though apparently the election was free and fair but a deep-rooted conspiracy worked underneath. She blamed the President of the country, the caretaker government, the CEC, the military and the media for working to ensure AL's defeat.⁸⁰ However, finally AL and other parties accepted the results

75 Muhammad Yeahia Akter, *Electoral Corruption in Bangladesh*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, England 2001, p. 189.

76 Fakhruddin Ahmed, *The Caretakers: A First Hand Account of the Interim Government of Bangladesh*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka 1998, p. 91.

77 Quoted in Muhammad Yeahia Akter, *Op. cit.*, p. 190.

78 Muhammad A. Hakim, *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

79 Quoted in Fakhruddin Ahmed, *Op. cit.*, p. 140.

80 See Waresul Karim, *Election Under a Caretaker Government*, Second Impression, The University Press Limited, Dhaka 2007, pp. 42-45.

and power was transferred to the 4-party alliance. The ninth parliamentary election was held on 29 December 2008 under the Fakhruddin-led caretaker government. The *Mohajote* (a Grand Alliance) led by AL secured 262 seats and the 4-party alliance led by BNP bagged 32 seats. The 4-party alliance rejected the results and termed the election a 'grand forgery of votes'.⁸¹ However, in the end, the result was accepted and the *Mahajote* came into power.

A number of positive trends developed during the decades under study regarding the holding of elections, transfer of power and legitimacy and acceptance of the governments. The quality of the elections held under the three non-party caretaker governments was far better than that of the elections held under party governments. As the non-party governments were technically impartial, they had sufficient opportunities to treat all parties equally.⁸² The defeated parties (AL in 1991, BNP in 1996 and AL again in 2001 and BNP again in 2008) raised some questions about the fairness of the elections but finally accepted the results allowing the peaceful transfer of power. In all cases⁸³ incumbent parties/alliance lost power and the opposition parties/alliance gained majority seats and came to power. This trend proves that the impartial situation for fair electoral competition was ensured for the parties by the caretaker governments. As the elections were fairer and widely accepted, the position of the newly elected governments was far better and solid compared with the previous ones under civilian-military governments. Bangladesh came out successfully from the curse of illegal and illegitimate governments.⁸⁴

4.4 Longer Survival of Parliaments

All of the pre-1991 parliaments were dissolved before completing their tenures. On the other hand, all post-1991 parliaments, except the sixth, sustained till completion of their terms (the ninth parliament is about to complete its term). Survival is the indication of their strength. The following Table shows that out of 1037 laws passed by the parliaments since 1973, 737 (71.07%) were enacted by the post-1991 parliaments. While the first four parliaments had 583 working

81 http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-12/31/content_10583466.htm

82 Muhammad Yeahia Akter, *Op. cit.*, p. 209.

83 In 1991 the immediate past ruling party JP lost miserably and BNP came to power, in 1996 BNP was defeated by AL, in 2001 AL was defeated by the 4-party alliance and in 2008 4-party alliance was defeated by the *Mohajote*.

84 See also Jalal Firoj, *Democracy in Bangladesh: Conflicting Issues and Conflict Resolution*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka 2012, p. 262.

days with 35 sessions, the post-1991 parliaments had 1492 working days with 84 sessions. Not only in quantity, the parliaments constituted under parliamentary system fared better also in quality. Most of the laws enacted by these parliaments were scrutinized in the committee level.

Table 5: Sessions, Working Days and Laws Enacted by the Parliaments 1973-2012

| Parliament | Sessions | Working Days | Laws Enacted |
|---------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| First | 8 | 134 | 154 |
| Second | 16 | 206 | 65 |
| Third | 4 | 75 | 38 |
| Fourth | 7 | 168 | 142 |
| Fifth | 22 | 395 | 173 |
| Sixth | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| Seventh | 23 | 383 | 189 |
| Eighth | 23 | 373 | 185 |
| Ninth (till 29 Nov. 2012) | 15 | 337 | 190 |
| Total | 119 | 2075 | 1137 |

Source: Compiled by the Researcher.

4.5 Establishment of Parliamentary Offices

The legislature performs its activities with a number of functionaries. Among them the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the House (LoH), the Deputy Leader of the House, the Leader of the Opposition (LoO), the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the Chief Whip, the Chief of the Opposition, the Whips and the Chairmen of the Committees are very important. The success of a parliament mostly depends on the ability and efficiency of these parliamentary offices. Among the offices the role of the Speaker, the LoH and the LoO are critically important. As the role of the Speakers of the Bangladesh parliaments has been discussed in the previous section of this article a brief analysis on the importance and development of the other parliamentary offices including the LoH and the LoO has been made below.

The success and failure of the parliament largely depend on the capability, sincerity and performances of the LoH and the LoO. The LoH shapes the course and content of legislation. It is said the LoH is 'perhaps the most influential figure in the entire legislative processes.'⁸⁵ In all difficulties the LoH advises the House. 'For that purpose he is usually present either in the House or in the

85 M. N. Kaul and S. L. Shakhder, *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

room, and has right to address the House whenever he likes.’⁸⁶ According to a former British Prime Minister Gladstone: ...the Leader of the House ‘suggests, and in a great degree fixes, the course of all principal matters of business, supervises and keeps in harmony the actions of his colleagues, takes the initiative in matters of ceremonial procedure, and advises the House in every difficulty as it arises.’⁸⁷ The LoH is not just the leader of the treasury bench. ‘He is the guardian of the legitimate rights of the Opposition as well as those of the Government’.⁸⁸ To identify the qualities of a LoH, Herbert Morrison said, ‘The Leader of the House...should possess an intuitive instinct about what is going on in the minds of members of both sides, and in case of any trouble brewing, he should be able to assess the nature and extent of the commotion. When there is a strong parliamentary pressure on any matter, especially when it comes from both sides, he must be ready to bend to it.’⁸⁹ Herbert Morrison has also mentioned that a LoH should be conscious of five responsibilities: To the Government, to the Government’s own supporters on the back benches, to the Opposition, to the House as a whole, and to the individual minister in charge. He should, within reasons, be accessible to both sides of the House.⁹⁰

The history of the office of the LoO is not very old. The official recognition of the LoO is a twentieth century phenomenon.⁹¹ In the British House of Commons LoO was first recognized in the year 1905. ‘One of the biggest parliamentary achievements of the present century (twentieth) is that the role of the Opposition has been formally recognized and is given a due place in the parliamentary system. The Leader of the Opposition is thus an important person.’⁹² The LoO is considered as a shadow prime minister. ‘In performing his duties and obligations, the Leader of the Opposition has to take into account not only what he is today but what he hopes to be tomorrow.’⁹³ His main job is to oppose the government. But his responsibility is again to present the alternative to the government’s policies. The LoO must criticize the incumbent

86 *Ibid.*

87 Norman Wilding and Philip Laundy, *An Encyclopedia of Parliament*, Cassell and Company Ltd., London 1961, p. 355.

88 M. N. Kaul and S. L. Shakhder, *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

89 Quoted in M. N. Kaul and S. L. Shakhder, *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

90 Norman Wilding and Philip Laundy, *Op. cit.*, p. 355.

91 See Jalal Firoj, 2003, *Op. cit.*, pp. 72-81.

92 M. N. Kaul and S. L. Shakhder, *Op. cit.*, p. 131.

93 *Ibid.*

government but he will also recognize the rights of government to govern. 'If the Leader of the Opposition lets the Prime Minister govern, he in turn is permitted to oppose.'⁹⁴ The former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan termed the responsibility of the LoO very 'difficult' and 'unrewarding'. Another former Prime Minister of United Kingdom Harold Wilson considered 'being Leader of the Opposition a harder job than being Prime Minister'.⁹⁵ Earnest Barker regarded the opposition as a 'safety valve' of the political system. He held the view that the opposition cannot be utterly negative, entirely critical or totally obstructive since, in democracy, the function it performs is fundamentally positive.⁹⁶ In the conduct of the parliament the expected positive role of the opposition is reflected in the performances of the LoO.

In the pre-1991 parliaments different political leaders including the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (the First parliament) played important roles as the LoHs. Except the first and the sixth parliaments all other Houses had LoOs. But in all post-1991 parliaments two leaders, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, rotated these positions between themselves. Both of them were main leaders of their respective parties. They were the most popular leaders of the country, and especially the anti-autocracy movement of 1980s was led by them. Despite their overwhelming popularity and success as victorious leaders their performances as the LoH and the LoO are not very encouraging. It has been alleged that as the LoH and the LoO they were not very attentive, focused and meticulous. Their parliamentary roles did not get enough priority in their busy work schedules.

Despite various limitations of the leaders it is noticeable that the offices of the LoH, LoO, the Whips and the Chairmen of Committees are developing gradually. Another important point is that these offices have been recognized by constitutional and legal provisions.

4.6 Innovation of Parliamentary Devices

The Constitution of the country has incorporated all essential provisions imperative for smooth functioning of a parliament. Prominent of these provisions are the article 76 (related to the committee system), 77 (for the office

94 *Ibid.*

95 See R. K. Alderman, "The Leader of the Opposition and Prime Minister's Question Time", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 45, No. 1, January 1992, p. 75.

96 Quoted in Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

of an Ombudsman), 87 (endorsing annual budget) and 127 (for the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General) of the Constitution. The *Rules of Procedure* of the Bangladesh parliament has also provided many necessary devices. Among these the important devices are the ‘question hour’, ‘adjournment motion’, ‘half-an-hour discussion’, ‘calling attention to matters of urgent public importance’, ‘petitions by the subject’ and ‘no-confidence motion’. So, from the beginning the Bangladesh parliament has ‘provided all the essential principles of parliamentary practices through which an effective check could be put on the executive, thereby, in the process establishing a proper parliamentary form of government.’⁹⁷

During the period under review a few new devices have been introduced and some have been reformed to ensure more effectiveness of the parliament. Some laws have also been enacted with a number of decisions taken which contributed to create positive impact and instances in the running of the parliamentary affairs. The features and implications of these devices, reforms and laws/decisions have been discussed below.

4.6.1 Independent Parliament Secretariat

The Constitution of Bangladesh has a unique provision regarding the secretariat of the parliament. The Constitution has emphasized that the parliament should have its ‘own’ secretariat. The Article 79 of the Constitution has stipulated:

(1) Parliament shall have its own secretariat. (2) Parliament may, by law, regulate the recruitment and conditions of service of persons appointed to the secretariat of Parliament. (3) Until provisions are made by Parliament the President may, after consultation with the Speaker, make rules regulating the recruitment and conditions of service of persons appointed by to the secretariat of Parliament, and rules so made shall have effect subject to the provisions of any law.

The Constitution has envisaged a secretariat independent of government control and supervision. Despite constitutional mandate no law has been framed to make the parliament secretariat independent. Till 1994 the parliament secretariat was run under the Rules of Business of the Government. After re-introduction of the parliamentary system in 1991 optimism developed that necessary measures would be taken to ensure independence of the parliament secretariat as asserted in the constitution. The optimism was shattered when the

⁹⁷ Moudud Ahmed, 2005, *Op. cit.*, p. 109.

new government of Khaleda Zia issued a circular on 13 October 1991 stating that the parliament secretariat would be put under the Ministry of Law and Justice. This decision resented the MPs. A heated discussion was held in the House on 15 October. The opposition members termed it as an act of 'infringement in the sovereignty of the parliament'.⁹⁸ The government side conceded that the circular was not consistent to the concept of the sovereignty of the parliament. But they insisted that it was a temporary arrangement and a comprehensive law would be enacted to make the secretariat independent.⁹⁹ To cover the issue comprehensively the government placed the 'The Parliament Secretariat Bill' on 28 February 1994. The bill proposed a 'Jatiya Sangsad Secretariat Commission' comprising the Speaker as chairman and Leader of the House, Leader of the Opposition, the minister in charge of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and Finance Ministry or their nominees as members'.¹⁰⁰ The bill was welcomed by both the ruling and the opposition members. 'Both sides thumped tables on its placement'.¹⁰¹ But with all the opposition MPs being absent from the House, the Parliament Secretariat Bill was passed on 11 May 1994.

Though the bill was initially welcomed by the opposition members, after enactment was made it received adverse reaction from them. The opposition parties rejected the act by saying that it had lost its spirit. The bill curtailed the powers of the Speaker and empowered a minister to run the parliament secretariat.¹⁰² AL MP Tofail Ahmed said that the bill was passed to make the parliament a 'rubber stamp'. He also claimed that it was unprecedented in the history of Bangladesh that such an important bill was passed with the opposition parties remaining absent from the House.¹⁰³ JP leader Moudud Ahmed termed the enactment of the bill 'an anti-climax'. He said that the opposition struggled for the bill but it was passed in its absence.¹⁰⁴ The government defended it by saying that the discussion on the bill was deferred thrice to accommodate the views of the opposition.¹⁰⁵

98 See *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 16 October 1991.

99 *Ibid.*

100 *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 1 March 1994.

101 *Ibid.*

102 *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 13 May 1994.

103 *Ibid.*

104 *Ibid.*

105 *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 12 May 1994.

It is true that the Parliament Secretariat Act 1994 would have been a better law if the opposition could place their suggestions and recommendations on it. However, it could not be denied that the Parliament Secretariat Act 1994 is a major advancement to ensure sovereignty of the parliament. In a situation where the parliament was traditionally considered just an extension of the government machinery and run by the Rules of Business of the Government, this law facilitated a remarkable departure from the past. In fact, by and large, it reflected the mentality of the people and the lawmakers, irrespective of their political affiliation, who sincerely believed in keeping the Parliament Secretariat free from all kinds of governmental control.

4.6.2 Democratization of Committee System

Parliamentary committees have frequently been referred to as ‘mini-parliaments’ in as much as they do perform on behalf of the House, albeit in a particular manner.¹⁰⁶ In modern time the committee is an indispensable part of the parliamentary system. The functions and standards of a parliament are reflected in its committees. Morris-Jones said that a legislature may be known by the committees it keeps.¹⁰⁷ Bangladesh parliament has a long history of maintaining committee system since the British colonial period. After the independence of Bangladesh as an independent state all parliaments, from the first to the ninth, have constituted a number of committees. One of the major features of the committee system of Bangladesh is that committees enjoy constitutional mandate. The committees of the Bangladesh parliament have generally been categorized into some groups. These are: ministerial committees, committees on finance and audit, other standing committees and special committees for specific purposes. The structures, functions, authority of appointing members of different committees are different. The following two Tables show the structures and compositions of the parliamentary committees of Bangladesh. Among the committees the departmentally related committees are very important. These committees play a vital role in scrutinizing government activities and make the executive accountable to the parliament. After re-introduction of the parliamentary system in 1991 the parliament

106 Ziaur Rahman Khan, “Parliamentary Committee System of Bangladesh”, in Nizam Ahmed and A.T.M.Obaidullah (ed.), *The Working of Parliamentary Committees in Westminster Systems: Lessons for Bangladesh*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka 2007, p. 31.

107 Quoted in Shamsul Huda Harun, *Parliamentary Behaviour in a Multi-National State 1947-56 Bangladesh Experience*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 1984, p. 82.

strengthened its activities, and high expectation was built among the political circles that parliamentary committees would perform efficiently to check whether the government behaves rightly. As expected, the fifth parliament began its activities with enthusiasm and formed 46 standing committees and 63 sub-committees. But it was felt that parliamentary standing committees were not performing significantly due to some structural deficiencies. One of these deficiencies was chairing of departmental standing committees by the ministers. It was observed that chairpersonship of departmental committees by the ministers left a negative impact on the performances of the committees.

The practice of chairing parliamentary committees by the ministers was criticized by many observers. Khan said that it was impossible for the chairman of such a committee to be dispassionate when his actions and those of his senior civil servants were thoroughly scrutinized, lapses unearthed and responsibility assessed.¹⁰⁸ The opposition parties and civil society organizations were against chairpersonship of the ministers. While campaigning for the seventh parliamentary elections AL pledged to the voters that if voted to power the party would replace the minister as the chairperson of the departmental standing committee by a backbencher MP. After coming to power on 23 June 1996, the AL took initiatives to implement its electoral commitment. The Committee on *Rules of Procedure* (ROP) of the seventh parliament made a sub-committee to suggest changes in the ROP. The standing committee on the ROP and its sub-committee met in thirteen meetings from 4 August 1996 to 8 May 1997 and prepared a report recommending amendments to rule 247 of the ROP.

Finally, the House accepted the amendments on 10 June 1997 which allowed the backbencher MPs to chair the standing committees instead of the ministers. The amendment also provides that if a member after being elected as chairman is appointed as minister he shall cease to be chairperson of the committee.

Table 6: Structure of Parliamentary Committees.

| Nature of Committees | Number of Committees (Parliament-wise) | | | |
|---|--|--------|-------|---------|
| | First | Second | Fifth | Seventh |
| Standing Committee | | | | |
| Departmentally-related Committees (DPC) | - | 36 | 35 | 35 |
| Financial Committee | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Investigative Committee | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Scrutinizing Committee | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| House Committee | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Service Committee | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |

108 Quoted in Nizam Ahmed, 2002, *Op. cit.*, p. 136.

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Ad hoc Committees | | | | |
| Committee on Bills (Select & Special) | 3 | 3 | 5 | 1 |
| Special Committee | - | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 14 | 51 | 53 | 48 |

Source: Ahmed 2002, p. 132.

Table 7: Structure and Composition of Parliamentary Committees in Bangladesh.

| Types of Committees | No. of Members | Chairman | Appointing Authority | Remarks | Rule(s) |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Standing Committees | | | | | |
| Ministerial Committees | 10 | Backbencher | House | Ministers are not eligible to chair | 246-8 |
| Finance and Audit Committees | | | | | |
| Public Accounts Committees | 15 | Backbencher | House | No minister can be a member | 233-4 |
| Estimates Committees | 10 | Backbencher | House | No minister can be a member | 235-7 |
| Public Undertakings Committees | 10 | Backbencher | House | No minister can be a member | 238-9 |
| Other Standing Committees | | | | | |
| Committees on Privileges | 10 | Usually Speaker | House | To be formed in the first session | 240-3 |
| Petition Committee | 10 | Usually Speaker | Speaker | No minister can be a member | 231-2 |
| Committee on Government Assurances | 8 | Not specified | House | - | 244-5 |
| Business Advisory Committee | 15 | Speaker | Speaker | - | 219-21 |
| Committee on Private Members' Bills | 10 | Backbencher | House | - | 222-4 |
| Committee on Rules of Procedure | 12 | Speaker | House | - | 263-5 |
| House Committee | 12 | Not specified | Speaker | It performs advisory functions | 249-56 |
| Library Committee | 10 | Deputy Speaker | Speaker | - | 257-8, 262 |
| Ad hoc Committees | | | | | |
| Select Committees on Bills | | | House | - | 225-30 |
| Special Committees | | | House | - | 266 |

Source: Hasanuzzaman 2007, p. 43.

This reform created mixed reactions. Many felt that it was an important step toward democratization of the committee system. Political parties welcomed this reform. Finding its positive impact one expert commented that this reform marked the beginning of a new trend in parliament-executive relations.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, this reform has also been seen as ‘cosmetic than real.’¹¹⁰ Replacing ministers by backbencher MPs as chairpersons of the standing committees does not automatically ensure smooth functioning of the committees. But it cannot be denied that it was a major contribution of the seventh parliament toward democratization and ensuring effective functioning of the committee system of the country. Compared with the parliamentary committees of the previous parliaments the committees of the seventh parliament were more active and vibrant. Ahmed has shown that between 1991 and 1996, more than one-thirds of the bills were enacted through executive ordinances, and despite demands of the opposition bills were not submitted to the parliamentary committees. Only seven out of 173 bills passed during this time were scrutinized by the committees.¹¹¹ On the other hand, during the period from 1996 to 2001 less than three per cent of the bills were promulgated by executive ordinances, and all bills were scrutinized by the relevant parliamentary committees.¹¹² But yet it cannot be denied that ‘...the level of committee activism is very low.’¹¹³ The committees are not regular in producing their reports. If reports are produced the House rarely discusses them in elaboration. On the other hand, as the committees are dominated by the ruling party members they tend to use this parliamentary tool against the opposition party for political gain.

4.6.4 Prime Minister’s Question Time (PMQT)

‘Questions to the Prime Minister’ or ‘Prime Minister’s Question Time’ (PMQT) is one of the most effective tools to ensure accountability and parliamentary scrutiny of the Prime Minister and her/his government. It is being widely used in Australia, Canada, Britain and India. Through this, the members of

109 Nizam Ahmed, 2002, *Op. cit.*, p. 140.

110 Nizam Ahmed, *Limits of Parliamentary Control: Public Spending in Bangladesh*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka 2006, p. 90.

111 Quoted in Jalal Alamgir, ‘The Challenge of Democratic Consolidation in Bangladesh’, *The Journal of Social Studies*, No. 110, April-June, Centre for Social Studies, Dhaka 2006, p. 6.

112 *Ibid.* p. 7.

113 Nizam Ahmed, 2012, *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

parliament seek to question the Prime Minister about policy matters and day-to-day administration. In the parliamentary process, it is considered as one of the most valuable rights of the opposition members. In the British system, putting questions to the Prime Minister 'is a prime opportunity for the Leader of the Opposition to put on the political agenda the issue of the day'.¹¹⁴ One author has described the PMQT in Britain as 'the jewel in the crown of political activity at Westminster'.¹¹⁵

In Bangladesh, the PMQT was introduced in the third session of the seventh parliament. It is interesting to note that a tool to scrutinize the activities of the Prime Minister was initiated in Bangladesh by the PM herself. The decision to experiment with this innovation was essentially made by Sheikh Hasina,¹¹⁶ the PM of the AL government of 1996. In a joyful environment the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina appeared for PMQT on 25 February 1997.¹¹⁷ The introduction of the PMQT was termed 'historic' and 'epoch-making'. In his introductory speech the Speaker said such a system has been introduced only in a few countries. This process is the best example of the government's accountability to the parliament and to the people.¹¹⁸ The newspapers published special reports and editorials on the issue. Many of them praised Sheikh Hasina for fulfilling one of her election pledges. But some newspapers expressed cautious optimism about the prospect of this device.

Though the PMQT is considered as one of the best parliamentary devices, recent experiences have revealed that the impact of this device is not very impressive. Critics have identified a number of flaws, such as the gradual deterioration in the quality of questions asked and also the nature of response made by the Prime Minister.¹¹⁹ It had been alleged that the ruling party tended to use this device to attack the opposition and highlight the 'achievement' of the Prime Minister. So, in most of the time it did not ensure prime ministerial accountability it rather works as a propaganda tool of the government. Another

114 J.A.G. Griffith and Michael Ryle, *Parliament: Functions, Practice and Procedures*, Sweet & Maxwell, Reprinted, London 1990, p. 260.

115 Quoted in Nizam Ahmed, 2006, *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

116 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

117 The first question was asked to the PM by AL member Mirza Azam. Three supplementary questions were raised by Mirza Azam (AL), Saifur Rahman (BNP) and Fazle Rabbi (JP).

118 *The Independent*, Dhaka, 26 February 1997.

119 Nizam Ahmed, 2002, *Op. cit.*, p. 120.

weak point of this system in Bangladesh was that the attitude of the opposition especially the Leader of the Opposition was negative. While the Leader of the Opposition in Britain had great enthusiasm about scoring points on the government through this system, in Bangladesh the Leader of the opposition 'did not even once confront the Prime Minister'¹²⁰ during the PMQs. Despite various limitations it was considered as 'a major departure with the past'¹²¹ and an important contribution of the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the parliamentary practices of the country.

4.6.5 Live Broadcasting of the Proceedings

Some sixty countries throughout the world now allow television cameras and radio microphones to record the proceedings of their legislatures.¹²² The broadcasting of the parliamentary proceedings was first introduced in the Commonwealth countries by New Zealand.¹²³ In 1936 New Zealand began radio broadcast of the proceedings of its House of Representatives. Canada and Australia started broadcasting parliamentary proceedings in 1946. Visual recordings, with or without accompanying sound, were permitted in Australia for the first time in 1974.¹²⁴ Canada claims to be the first Commonwealth country to televise live parliamentary debates in 1977.¹²⁵ In Britain the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) attempted broadcasting the proceedings of the House of Commons in 1920s. But eventually, in Britain, permanent radio coverage was allowed in 1978.¹²⁶

The question of acceptability of the radio and television broadcasting of the proceedings of parliaments was an issue of intense debate in many countries especially in Britain for years. Those who were against broadcasting argued that continuous live broadcasting in sound and vision was impracticable and undesirable.¹²⁷ It was undesirable, because, there was a possible 'jockeying' in

120 Nizam Ahmed, 2002, *Op. cit.*, p. 122.

121 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

122 Mary Raine, "Informed Democracies: Parliamentary Broadcasts as a Public Service", See http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/18798/11144257475informed_democracies.doc/informed_democracies.doc, Accessed: November, 2010.

123 Norman Wilding and Philip Laundy, *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

124 R. C. Bhardwaj, "Televising of Parliamentary Proceedings in Australia", *The Journal of Parliamentary Information*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 3, September, Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi 1993, p. 659.

125 Mary Raine, *Op. cit.*

126 *Ibid.*

127 J.A.G. Griffith and Michael Ryle, *Op. cit.*, p. 81.

the speech time.¹²⁸ They claimed that it would trivialize and distort the work of the parliament. MPs would be tempted, by the presence of cameras, to play a role to get them on television. The equipment—the cameras, the bright lights, wires trailing everywhere, and technicians operating the equipment—would all be too intrusive.¹²⁹ But those who supported the idea of broadcasting argued that it would raise the standard of debate and increase public interest in the proceedings of the parliament.¹³⁰ It would help make the politicians more accountable and bring the MPs close to the common people. A former Conservative leader of the House of Commons told his colleagues: To televise Parliament would, at a stroke, restore any loss it has suffered to the new mass media as the political education of the nation.¹³¹ However, it was the British Upper House, the Lords, who were first to agree to let themselves be televised in 1985. Now, in Britain, there is a special channel, BBC Parliament,¹³² exclusively dedicated to the coverage of the parliamentary proceedings and related issues. The proceedings of the Indian parliament were not broadcast or photographed and televised¹³³ for a long time. India began telecasting selected parliamentary proceedings since 1989. From 1994 the question hours of both the Houses of the Indian Parliament are being broadcast live on both satellite television and All India Radio. Now the Indian Parliament has its own 24-hour TV channel named ‘Lok Sabha TV’ to broadcast proceedings live.

The selected broadcasting of the proceedings of the Bangladesh parliament started in the year 1991. The Bangladesh Betar (Betar) and Bangladesh Television (BTV) used to edit the plenary session of the parliament and selectively broadcasted them. This practice received positive response from the people. The various sections of the conscious people and many members of the parliaments raised demands to make arrangements for live broadcasting of the House. The live broadcasting of the question-answer session began at the

128 Norman Wilding and Philip Laundy, *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

129 Mary Raine, *Op. cit.*

130 Norman Wilding and Philip Laundy, *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

131 Mary Raine, *Op. cit.*

132 *Ibid.*

133 The speeches made in the House on the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi were, however, recorded and later broadcast by the All India Radio. In the Budget Session, 1946, a question was tabled by a member suggesting to the Government to consider the advisability of installing loudspeakers outside the Chamber to enable the public to hear the proceedings of the House. Speaker Mavalankar did not favour the idea (M. N.Kaul and S. L. Shakdher, *Op. cit.*, p. 920).

beginning of the seventh parliament. The ninth parliament has started a new TV channel named 'Sangsad Bangladesh Television' for broadcasting live parliament's entire proceedings. Bangladesh had to go through a process of debate about the acceptability of the live broadcasting of the proceedings. Some argued that as the parliamentary culture of the country was not very developed and the MPs were more concerned with delivering fiery speeches and putting up a good show for the public (much like a public speech), the live broadcasting would not ensure accountability; it rather would encourage chaos and unhealthy competitions. But the counter-argument was that the live broadcasting would at least acquaint the public with the activities of their representatives in the House. It would serve as an excellent mode of civic education and information for voting in the next elections.¹³⁴

The seventh parliament initiated selected live broadcasting of the parliamentary proceedings. It is true that by live broadcasting much unruly and unparliamentary behaviour of the members were brought to the surface which contributed to creating a negative image of the parliament. But broadcasting of the parliamentary proceedings created enthusiasm among the people about the parliament and the deliberations of the members in the House. It helped disseminate parliamentary information. At the end it is felt beneficial in the institutionalization of the House as the central organization of the political system.

4.6.6 Unscheduled Debates/Zero Hour

The debates are an integral part of the parliamentary proceedings. An important essence of the parliamentary government is debate. It has rightly been mentioned that the meaning of the phrase 'parliamentary government' is that it is 'not a government by Parliament, but government through Parliament. The Government may govern, but Parliament is the forum for public debate and criticism of those acts of government. Parliament is essentially a debating society.'¹³⁵The debates cover various aspects of the activities of the parliament. 'No issue is too big or too small for parliamentary consideration.'¹³⁶ The

134 The UNDP-sponsored project entitled "A Need Assessment of the Parliament of Bangladesh Private Draft 4", 29 August 1996, visit <http://mirror.undp.org/magnet/Docs/cap/asia/BGD/ZOVATTO.htm>, Accessed: November 2010.

135 J.A.G. Griffith and Michael Ryle, *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

136 *Ibid.*

parliamentary debate is a useful tool for ventilation of opinions and grievances of the members of the parliament. Usually, parliamentary debates are held under certain provisions of the rules of procedures of the parliaments. In normal circumstances, debates take place as per pre-determined date, time and agenda of the House. But unscheduled debates are those which are held outside the rules of the House. The main objective of this kind of debate is to discuss important current issues. In Indian parliament unscheduled debate has been regularized as 'zero hour'.¹³⁷ The zero hour is considered as one of the innovative contributions of the Indian parliament in the history of parliamentary devices. It has been placed in the Indian parliament since 1960s.

In the parliaments of Bangladesh a number of unscheduled debates were initiated by the members. Unscheduled debates often took precedence over the agenda set in advance. The debates dislocated the pre-fixed working schedule of the House. According to an estimate, a total of 29 unscheduled debates took place in the fifth parliament; the number increased to 51 in the seventh parliament.¹³⁸ It has been observed that the excessive trend of resorting to unscheduled debates annoyed the Speakers. The Speaker of the fifth parliament once pointed out that it became very difficult for him to run the House as it became a practice, among the MPs, of speaking outside the rules of procedure.¹³⁹

The seventh parliament took an initiative to include 'unscheduled debates' as a regular parliamentary technique. The BAC decided on 9 June 1998 that at the end of every sitting day there would be regular half-an-hour unscheduled debates. Of the 30 minutes the treasury and the opposition would have fifteen minutes each in the daily debates. The Speaker informed the House of the

137 As leader of the opposition of Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian parliament, Sonia Gandhi wrote: ...Zero Hour, that uniquely Indian Parliamentary practice, that comes naturally to us since we invented and gave the world Zero itself! This gives members a chance to raise local and national issues they consider important with the permission of the presiding officers. It is true that very often lung power is in full display between 12 noon and 1 pm but my own view is that both Question Hour and Zero Hour, if given proper structure and if managed well, have great potential to keep the executive on its toes. For details see (Jalal Firoj, *Parliamentary Shabdokosh (Dictionary of Parliamentary Terms)*, Second Edition, Bangla Academy, Dhaka 2010).

138 Nizam Ahmed, 2002, *Op. cit.*, p. 193.

139 He also mentioned that the newspapers were running stories on such discussions. He reminded the newspapers to write objectively that such discussion had been held outside the Rules of Procedures. See *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 16 February 1993.

device on 10 June. In his introductory speech the Speaker mentioned about his recent visit to the British House of Commons and hoped that the new tool would be helpful to enhance the performances of the House. As per the decision the first unscheduled debate was held on 15 June. It was viewed that the device would help the members to extract information and enforce accountability of the government. But it did not continue for long. In fact, before it could be a real beginning, the experiment was terminated in the eleventh session of the seventh parliament.¹⁴⁰ But the opposition side wanted to continue the new technique. On the last sitting of the eleventh session the Deputy Leader of the Opposition requested the Leader of the House to restore the recently scrapped zero hour device. He asked, ‘What is wrong with the opposition members’ raising some issues affecting the people, especially when the government has the opportunity to reply to the opposition contentions?’¹⁴¹ In her reply the LoH mentioned that they had no problem to restore the device but she called upon the opposition to ensure quorum during the zero hour. She said, ‘We have no problem. But why should we have to unilaterally meet the quorum of the House so that the opposition MPs can criticize us. If the opposition can make 60 of its MPs present on a regular basis, we have no objection to restore the zero hour.’¹⁴² But the device was not restored.

The seventh parliament could claim some appreciations for introducing the reform named unscheduled debates or zero hour. But regrettably it was not given enough time to institutionalize the device. Despite some limitations and the challenge of ensuring quorum it would help the opposition and the backbenchers of the ruling party to raise their constituency related and other issues in the House if it would sustain for long.

5. Challenges

5.1 Resolution of CTG Issue: By introducing the constitutionally mandated non-party caretaker system, for which the political parties fought hard and sacrificed much—Bangladesh resolved the issue of holding free and fair elections in the country. The successful application of the system helped hold

140 Nizam Ahmed, 2002, *Op. cit.*, p. 194.

141 See *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 27 November 1998.

142 *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 27 November 1998. See also Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad, *Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsader Bitarka* (Debates of the Bangladesh National Parliament), The Bangladesh Parliament, 26 November 1998 .

relatively free and fair elections thrice—in 1996, in 2001 and in 2008. As a result it received recognition from the national and the international observers. AL and its allies who once struggled to introduce the caretaker system have scrapped it by enacting fifteenth amendment to the Constitution. On the other hand, BNP, while in power during the period from 1992 to 1996, strongly opposed the idea of caretaker system has initiated political movement to restore it. Both sides are placing arguments in favour of their positions but no peaceful understanding or solution is yet to come. Rather politics of violence and confrontation has re-surfaced. To home their demands, the opposition parties led by BNP, are enforcing *hartals*, *gheraos* and other programmes of agitation. The ruling alliance led by AL is not showing any signal of coming into any consensus with the opposition. As a result, volatility is prevailing and confrontation breeding further confrontations. The contending parties, with their un-compromising attitudes, are gradually pushing the country towards a total chaotic situation. But for holding an acceptable and peaceful election the resolution of controversy on the caretaker issue is an imperative. Without a mechanism, recognized and accepted by all the stakeholders, of holding free and fair election, no parliamentary system can work. Finding a peaceful solution of the caretaker issue is the toughest challenge before the parliament and the political leaders of the country.

5.2 Bringing the Opposition in the House: While in opposition, all the parties, be it AL or BNP, prefer to abstain from the proceedings of the House. It has been established as an ill tradition. On the other hand, the ruling party, no matter whether it is BNP or AL, preaches the opposition to come into the House but feels 'comfortable' without the opposition in the chamber. The opposition members keep distance from the House but do not feel shy to receive all kinds of benefits as honourable lawmakers. In this way an unholy nexus of convenience has been developed. The opposition remains stick to their policy of enforcing agitational programmes in the street and the ruling party continues to use the parliament as one party platform. Consequently, the parliament is not getting institutionalized, losing its effectiveness, though many of the parliaments have completed their terms, huge numbers of laws have been enacted and the volume of sessions and working days are increasing. So, to make the parliament vibrant and effective measures should be taken to bring the opposition in the right track. Apart from building pressures on the ruling and the opposition sides, constitutional, legal and procedural reforms should also be

materialized. Existing constitutional provision that allows a member to abstain from the House for 90 consecutive days should be changed. On the other hand, provisions should be included so that the opposition's consideration/services are required to take parliamentary decisions.

5.3 Enforcing Executive Accountability: One of the most important functions of the parliament is to enforce accountability of the government. For parliamentary scrutiny of the government activities Bangladesh has developed various structures and techniques. These include parliamentary committees, questions to the Prime Minister, questions to the ministers, call attention motions, adjournment motions and motions for half-an-hour discussions and motions for discussions on matters of public importance. To increase effectiveness of the parliamentary committees some reform measures were made but the committees failed to deliver as per expectation. Partisan attitudes of the treasury bench members, absenteeism of the opposition lawmakers from the committee activities, dependence on the government for accomplishing committee activities and executives' reluctance to act on suggestions and recommendations made in the committees' reports are factors that contributed for poor performances of the committees. The other techniques designed to ensure the government's accountability also failed to attain desired results. The Prime Minister's question-answer hour, questions to the ministers and other parliamentary techniques have been used mainly to earn partisan political gain. As a result, ensuring the government's accountability remained a distant dream.

5.4 Strengthening Parliamentary Offices: The parliamentary offices like the Speaker, the Leader of the House, the Leader of Opposition, the Chairman of the Committee and the Whips are very weak and have gained impression that they are deviated from their mandated responsibilities. The neutrality and impartiality of the Speakers are always under questions. The leaders who bore the responsibilities of the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition in the post-1991 parliaments are the top leaders of their respective parties. They are the main policymakers of the government/opposition and their parties. They are also in charge of implementing the policies. Their extreme workload and burden of leadership positions rarely give them the opportunity to exert their roles as the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition. In practice, these positions are being used as an extension of party chairpersonships. But under far-sighted leadership these offices could be used for strengthening

parliamentary practices in the country. For a backbencher, the opportunity to become a chairperson of a committee is much wider now. Most of the committees are now chaired by the backbencher MPs. Yet the committee chairpersonship has not been institutionalized. The committee chair can hardly work without the support of the government machineries and the officials. The Bangladesh parliament also lags far behind in quality whipping. However, the importance of these offices cannot be denied. For smooth functioning of the parliament the above offices must be made equipped and efficient and the challenges of ensuring their mandated independence and neutrality should be addressed.

5.5 Establishing Parliamentary ‘Code of Conduct’

The *Rules of Procedures* of the Bangladesh parliament has certain rules by which the Speaker can regulate the behaviour of the members and enhance the dignity and image of the parliament. The Speaker can expunge any word used by a member if it is defamatory or indecent or un-parliamentary. The Speaker can also withdraw a member from the House or can suspend a member from the service of the House if he/she behaves disorderly. A special committee can also be made by the Speaker to inquire the conduct of members of the House. Despite these options to check un-parliamentary and unexpected conduct of the lawmakers, many allegations of misconduct have been brought against them. These allegations include excessive walkouts and boycott, undue intervention in local government’s affairs, misuse of parliamentary privileges, gaining personal benefits using the parliament’s membership, ignoring parliamentary responsibilities and un-parliamentary behaviour in the House. Exchange of indecent and derogatory comments between the treasury and opposition members has become a major issue of concern. Behaviour and expression of some of the MPs during rowdy incidents stooped the whole nation. After observing one of such incidents a national daily in its editorial titled ‘A matter of shame’ wrote:

We have no words to express our sense of shame at what happened in the Jatiyo Sangsad on Wednesday. That lawmakers can stoop so low as to indulge in a free and uninhibited use of obscene language and extremely objectionable gestures is something no one in any country can imagine.¹⁴³

143 *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 5 March 2010.

So, it is felt that some urgent measures should be taken to compel the 'disorderly' members to behave themselves. The Speaker will have to utilize all the legal and procedural options to restrain the members and if necessary he will punish the concerned member for his/her un-parliamentary behaviour. It is also required to bring changes in the article/provision of the Constitution/laws and *Rules of Procedures*. A private member's bill has already been placed on code of conduct of the parliamentarians. This bill should be passed after thoughtful consideration of both the treasury and the opposition members.

6. Conclusion

Over the last four decades the functioning of the Bangladesh legislature had not been very smooth. The first parliament started reasonably well. But all of its initiatives lost credibility when the form of government was changed from parliamentary to presidential by enacting the fourth amendment to the Constitution. The successive parliaments—the second, the third and the fourth—were elected merely to give a veil of civilianization to the military regimes. Under these regimes the parliament was reduced just to a loyal organization of the government. But the twelfth amendment resurrected the parliament's dignity and position in the political system of the country. The parliaments—the fifth, the seventh, the eighth and the ninth ones—elected under different caretaker governments were widely accepted by the people. Compared to the previous legislatures the legitimacy of these parliaments was beyond any question. These parliaments survived for the longest period, innovated and realized many parliamentary devices, enacted important laws including vital amendments to the Constitution and endeavoured to cultivate democratic culture in the country. Despite some strong areas, the Bangladesh parliament is well short to reach its goal cherished by the people. The opposition parties/alliances do not feel interested in attending parliamentary proceedings. Excessive walkouts, boycotts and un-parliamentary behaviour have become dominant features of the parliament. The ruling parties/alliances are more comfortable without any opposition in the house. The parliament has turned into a one party/ruling party affair and no difference of opinion or dissention is heard or allowed. Laws are passed without enough consideration from the committee level and almost with no contribution from the opposition side. The parliament's scrutiny over government is less than effective. The vital national and international issues are not discussed in the House objectively

rather issues are usually picked for discussion on the basis of party or narrow perspectives. Important issues like economic prospects and potentials of the country under the given world situation, democratic consolidation, social and demographic polarization, extremism in politics are rarely discussed in the House. The parliamentary offices and devices are being used merely to serve party interests ignoring their importance in institutionalization and development of democratic culture. The fifteenth amendment has initiated new controversy and doubt about prospects of holding next elections in a fair and peaceful environment. Against this dismal backdrop only hope is that democratic process will continue to make progress without major interruption. The parliament has been allowed to function with its true sense and position since the last two decades. Twenty years are not a very long time for establishing parliament as a vibrant and effective institution which was under full domination of military regimes for one and a half decades. But Bangladesh has no scope to be complacent rather she needs urgent initiatives from the top leadership of all responsible political parties to minimize contentions, to avoid confrontational politics and focus on parliament as the centre of all activities of democratic consolidation of the country.