The Daily Star



time this must be borne in mind that

Sheikh Hasina's government did

offer standing committee chairman

position to BNP which was not taken

by them. Yet Awami League did give

one chairman position to the opposi-

tion and thus has set into motion the

tradition of offering chairman posi-

tion to the opposition. On the recom-

mendation of Jatiya Party Parlia-

mentary Committee, Dr TIM Fazle

Rabbi Chowdhury, Gaibanda-3 was

appointed chairman of Standing

Committee on Agriculture, who had

held the position till last day of 7th

parliament and was respected for

towards the last years of the 7

parliament move was taken by the

Awami League government to

ensure greater role of the opposition

in the parliament. Accordingly, to put

in writing rights and status of the

opposition, a committee composed

of senior leaders and MPs of the

government and opposition set

under the auspices of UNDP and

worked out number of recommen-

dations including proportional

allotment of chairman position of

parliamentary committees, holding

of "Opposition Day", allotment of

proportionate discussion time to

opposition on "President's

Address", call attentions, ministerial

statements, etc. which were

accepted by Sheikh Hasina, then

I hope, the present BNP-Jamaat

government would further consoli-

date the tradition set in motion by

Awami League, implement the

recommendations of the committee

as given in para 15 and offer 13

chairman positions to the opposition

and thereby make their move to

make the present parliament

great potential to become an effec-

tive one if government and opposi-

tion want; however, the government

has to take the initiative. The people

of Bangladesh are eagerly looking

forward to the BNP-Jamaat govern-

The Bangladesh parliament has

responsive and effective.

ment taking this initiative.

Faruk Khan is an opposition MP and whip.

Prime Minister

It may be also mentioned that

his positive contributions.

Strengthening parliamentary committees

FARUK KHAN

HE British Parliament is known as the mother of all system

parliaments. In their system, the Prime Minister is the head of the executive and is a member of the parliament. Parliament thus besides being the legislature and the lawmaking body also creates the executive head viz. the Prime Minister. Committee system is very strong in the British Parliament and Parliamentary Committees monitor the activities of the Executive Branch of the Governmen In the United States, executive

branch of the government and the legislature are completely separate. The legislature (Congress) comprising of the House of Representatives and the Senate besides law-making has strong control over the executive functions. The House of Representatives and the Senate have their own sets of Committees to monitor the activities of the executive branch. Executive branch is headed by the President who is elected directly by the people through a complex electoral college and is not a member of the Congress. The Vice President who is also elected along with the President as running mate acts as the head of Senate In Bangladesh, we follow the

British system of parliamentary democracy. Immediately after the liberation of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had established a committee to frame a Constitution for the nation. The framers of the Constitution created a unicameral parliament and had intended the parliament (Jativa Sangsad) to be very effective through its committees. Our committee system is theoretically one of the strongest in the world, although in practice it has not been so. This is because of long period of martial law and governments mostly used the parliament as a "rubber stamp". The country also swung between parliamentary and presidential forms. During this period many committees never functioned and others also hardly held meetings. Absence of effective referred to it by parliament as a parliament has contributed to the lack of practice in the committee However, efforts to strengthen

the parliament through committees were initiated during the Awami League government (1996-2001). Immediately after taking office, Sheikh Hasina's government decided to bring necessary changes in the Rules of Procedure to make the parliament effective. The amendments to the Rules of Procedure were brought within one and half years. The following were the

outcome: (1) Instead of ministers, members of parliament were appointed as chairmen of all committees to ensure accountability and transpar ency of the government.

(2) Regular meetings of commit tees took place every month.

(3) Post of committee chairman was given to the opposition. (4) Posts of members in commit

tees were given in proportion. (5) Opposition members actively took part in the committee meetings,

although they did not take part in the parliament sessions in the last two ears. This ensured participation of the opposition and their views in the running of the government. Committee system in Bangla-

desh owes its origin and legitimacy to Articles 76 and 78 of the Constituon which read as follows: (1) 76(1) Parliament shall appoint

from among its members the following Standing Committees, that is to (a) a public accounts committee (b) committee of privileges; and

(c) such other standing committees as the rules of procedure of parliament require (2) In addition to the committees referred in clause (1), parliament shall appoint other standing com-

mittees, and a committee so appointed may subject to this Constitution and any other law: (a) examine draft bills and other

legislative proposals; (b) review the enforcement of laws and propose measures for such enforcement: (c) in relation to any other matter

matter of public importance, investibers Bills and Resolutions gate or inquire into the activities or (3) Select Committee on Bills administration of a Ministry and may (4) Committee on Petitions require it to furnish, through an authorised representative, relevant information and answer questions orally or in writing; (d) Perform any other function Privileges assigned to it by parliament.

(3) Parliament may by law confer on committees appointed under this article powers for:

(a) Enforcing the attendance of witnesses and examining them on oath, affirmation or otherwise; (b) Compelling the production of

(5) Public Accounts Committee (6) Committee on Estimates (7) Public Undertaking Committee (PUC) (8) Standing Committee on

(9) Committee on Government Assurances (10) House Committee

(11) Library Committee (12) Standing Committee on Rules of Procedure

(2) Committee on Private Mem-

(13) Special Committee

as may fall within its jurisdiction and to make recommendations.

Parliamentary Committees in Bangladesh formally enjoy important status and extensive powers. A committee can regulate its sittings and can conduct its business. It can ask for cooperation and advice from any expert, if deems necessary. A committee may appoint as many subcommittees as it considers necessary and each subcommittee has the power of the main committee. The Rules, however, require that the terms of reference to a subcommittee be clearly given. A committee has the power to send for

Towards the last years of the 7th parliament, move was taken by the Awami League government to ensure greater role of the opposition in the parliament... I hope, the present BNP-Jamaat government would further consolidate the tradition set in motion by Awami League... The Bangladesh parliament has great potential to become an effective one if government and opposition want; however, the government has to take the initiative. The people of Bangladesh are eagerly looking forward to the BNP-Jamaat government taking this initiative.

document

(2) 78(3) A member of parliament shall not be liable to proceedings in any court in respect of anything said, or any vote given, by him in parliament or in any committee thereof.

(3) 78 (5) Subject to this article, the privileges of parliament and its committees and members may be determined by Acts of parliament.

Provisions of the Constitution enumerated above are supplemented by Rules of Procedure of the parliament. Chapter XXVII, Rule 187 to Rule 266 of the Rules of Procedure elaborate the rules regulating various committees. Rule 187 to Rule 218 deal with general provisions regulating the appointment, term, quorum etc. of the committees, whereas Rule 219 to Rule 266 deal with specific committees, their composition, functions,

The Bangladesh parliament can have 37 Standing Committees on Ministries and 13 more committees on various others subjects as under: (1) Business Advisory Committee

Standing Committees on 37 persons, papers and records. Ministries (Rule 246-248): Document submitted to a committee Appointed by the House each cannot be withdrawn or altered without its knowledge. The Consti-Standing Committee consists of not tution also authorises the parliamore than 10 members including its ment to confer on committees Chairman. The Seventh Parliament made a significant change in the power for enforcing the attendance Rules of Procedure. Instead of of witness, examining them on oath minister concerned, members of and compelling the production of documents. Committee members parliament were made chairmen of Ministerial Standing Committee, enjoy immunity for whatever they however the ministers remained exsay and the way they vote. These officio members of these commitprovisions make the committees tees. The Committee met at least powerful enough to be effective once a month. Functions of the provided they function regularly, Standing Committees on Ministries seriously and government respects their recommendations. (1) To examine any Bill and other

Recommendations: If we study legislative proposals or any other the functioning of various committees in the past parliaments, we will matter referred to it by parliament under article 76 of the Constitution: see that there are a lot of misunder-(2) To review the enforcement of standings with regard to functions of law and propose measures for such the committees. Some committees enforcement in respect of the minishave in the past failed to perform well and some have overstepped (3) To review the activities and their mark for lack of understanding enquire into any action or irregularor quest for authority. Problems also ity and serious complaint in respect arose out of the misunderstanding of the Rules of Procedure. Execu-

of the ministry concerned; (4) To examine any such matter tive branch of the government often

concerned may then take the matter to the House.

(1) Recommendations of the

committees must be implemented.

If ministries have any observation

within three months. The committee

(2) Chairmen of various commit tees should be made in proportion to the seats of various parties in the parliament. Chairmen for important committees i.e. Public Accounts Committee, Public Undertaking Committee. Petition Committee. Standing Committee on Finance etc. should be made from opposition to ensure greater accountability and transparency of the government.

(3) A committee formed by members from government and opposition should be set up to select persons for appointment in constitutional posts, i.e. Chief Election Commissioner, Controller and Auditor General, Cabinet Secretary, Chiefs of Armed Forces, BDR, Police, Chairman of Sector Corporation, Bangladesh Bank Governor, etc. This will reduce the friction that we see between the government and the opposition.

(4) The meeting of the committees should be open to the public and the press, which will make them transparent and effective

did not see the virtues of the effec-(5) There are no Standing Comtive functioning of the Standing nittees to oversee the following Committees on the Ministries and executive offices of the government they more often than not took it as where spending from public exchean interference in their activities. quer and public functions are Recommendations of the commitnvolved. Provisions for constitution tees often went unimplemented. of Standing Committees for these offices should be incorporated in the The following recommendations are made to make the committees in Rules of Procedure : Bangladesh parliament more effec-

(a) President's Secretariat. (b) Parliament Secretariat. (c) Prime Minister's office includ-

ng all offices under it. (6) Rules regarding the committee system as laid down in the Rules on the recommendations, they of Procedure should be reviewed should intimate the committees and revised with a view to making them easily understandable and applicable.

(7) The committees and committee chairmen should be provided with proper offices, office equipment including computers and sufficient staff, so that they can function effectively

It may be mentioned that in the last one year, the BNP-Jamaat government has failed to form most of the committees of the parliament. To make the parliament effective, responsive to the people's need and to put into effect the recommendations given above, the parliamentary committees need to be formed immediately

The members in the committees are allocated in proportion to the seats obtained by various parties in the election. In the present parlia ment the opposition had demanded that post of chairman in various committees be also allocated in proportion. The present parliament can have a total of 37+13 = 50committees. Out of 300 seats, government alliance has 220 seats i.e. 73.33 per cent of seats and opposition has 80 seats i.e. 26.67 per cent. Accordingly, out of 50 chairman positions government may fill 37 positions and opposition may fill 13 positions if proportionately allocated. I do understand that government may not be willing to give so many chairman positions to the opposition with the plea that this was not done in the last (7th) parlia-

While this is true, at the same

The life, problems and potential of Muslims in Britain

ABDUL QAYYUM

EOPLE of various race and religion live in Britain. Though the Muslims are religious minority there, they are not lagging behind in business, various professions and service. Many are studying. Towards the end of last month 12 journalists of 10 countries were invited to London to see how the Muslims in Britain are doing, to see and understand their society and their lives. I was fortunate to go there from Bangladesh as the Prothom Alo representative. Other correspondents from Malaysia,

western countries, there was hardly any Islamophobia in Britain. That doesn't mean that there are no problems at all. There are problems but not very serious. After the September 11 incident in the US last vear, the situation had deteriorated at certain places in Britain. However, that is hardly there now. Muslim representatives are being elected to the councils all over Britain, Two Bangladeshis have been elected councillors at the Westminster City Council. Bangladeshi Muslims have been elected councillors at Tower Ham-

summer azan for the fazr and esha circumstances may be in other pravers can't be called over mike. During this time, as an alternative. azan is called over radio on our own frequency. Azan can be heard over radio in the people's houses. Azan of the other wagts are also broadcast over radio." There is a good system for Islamic religious studies in Britain. There are not only madrasas, there are many renowned Islamic centres too. We visited one such centre, the

research.

families are seen to practice ultraconservative mannerisms and dress code. In normal circumstances this perhaps wouldn't have been so. An example may be cited here. A

try concerned;

businessman applied to the city council for a licence to set up a nightclub at Cowley Road in Oxford. But there were two mosques on either end of the area. There was a dense Muslim population there. The Muslim community voiced their Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. objection. There would be 'lap dances' in the night club. The young Various aspects of Islam are boys and girls may be affected by researched there. Alems and Ulema cultural degeneration. The Muslims

differences in colour, in reliaion have a deep impact and this won't be washed away so easily. **Religious harmony**

But there is another side to reality. There is a Council of Faith in Leicester aimed at maintaining peace and understanding between people of various religions and race. Interfaith Dialogue is an organization with the same aims. Their efforts have led to the people of various religions and cultures getting to know each other, understand each other and stand by each other's sides. The Umar mosque and St. Philips Church stand oppo-



Indonesia, Pakistan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Morocco, Lebanon, Nigeria and Kazakhstan also took part in this programme to gain an insight into the life of Muslims in Britain.

Recognised as a religion

ofpeace

About two million Muslims live in Britain. This is about three per cent of the population. They have mostly come from India, Pakistan, Africa, Bangladesh and other Muslim countries. The Muslims live in peace and harmony over there. They are used to obeying the law. There are about one thousand mosques in Britain. The mussullis say their prayers five times a day at the mosques. There are madrasas in many of the mosques. There is no obstruction to practicing religion. Principal of London's Muslim College, Zaki Badwai said "Islam is recognised as a religion of peace in Britain.

We saw a reflection of the principal's remark not only in London, bur also in Oxford and Leicester. By speaking to the Muslims living there we understood that whatever the

lets and this includes the Mayor there. Four elected councillors of the Oxford City Council are Muslims. These are strong proof that Muslims in Britain have been absorbed in the British society.

Mosques and madrasas

We visited several mosques and madrasas in Britain, as part of the media delegation. The Muslims of the localities constructed these mosques with their own funds. In many cases during Jumma pravers there is hardly enough room for all the mussullis.

Only a few years ago azan couldn't be called from the mosques over loudspeaker in Britain. The local authorities wouldn't permit the use of mikes in consideration of the inconvenience it many cause for the local people. But after discussion with the government and the administration, now mikes are permitted for azan to be called from the mosques. The Imam of Alfalah mosque in Leicester said "azan can be called at the various *waats* from eight in the morning till eight at night This is all right for the winter, but in

of various countries go there for There are about 107 Islamic schools in Britain. The boys and girls of these schools study Islamic religious studies alongside the

British syllabus. Four of these schools get government grant on

condition that they follow the national curriculum fully. The remaining schools run on their own funds. The standard of education at these schools is good. Many of the students passing from these schools qualify in competitive exams to go on for higher studies.

The challenge ahead

I asked Masud Ahmed, an enthusiastic young man at the underconstruction central mosque in Oxford, what challenges were ahead for the Muslims living in Britain. He said that they were concerned about the future of their children. Many Muslim families in Britain were concerned as to whether their children would be able to properly absorb Islamic values, teachings, manners in the liberal society of Britain. As a reaction to this, the children of some Muslim

of the area feared this. The city site each on the same road in council, under these circumstances. Leicester. There is a strong sense of held up the licence and decided to weigh all aspects before reaching a between them. decision on the matter. This shows that the city councils are attentive

regarding sensitive Muslim issues. The psychological wall

While we didn't notice any Islamophobia in Britain, that doesn't mean that there weren't any other problems. We met a distraught voung man in Leicester, someone who had come to Britain with a lot of dreams, who had even begun to live there permanently. But he broke down after the September 11 incident last year. Nothing had happened in Leicester. But if one wore a cap and had a beard, passers-by would make remarks like. "There goes a descendant of Laden". Girls in *burgas* would hear remarks like. "There goes Laden's sister." Such remarks and some negative behaviour have broken the young Ibrahim Ali's spirit.

This psychological barrier didn't build up in one day in Britain, it won't disappear overnight either. The

religious tolerance and cooperation The National Front wanted to bring out an anti-Islam procession in Leicester towards the end of last month. But the Leicester police didn't give them the permission. The Home Ministry too didn't want any such procession that could create

religious clashes. The Council of Faith took active measures against this provocative moves of the racist National Front. We were speaking about this to Nick Carter, Chief Editor of Leicester's influential daily Leicester

Mercury. This newspaper didn't publish the news that the National Front was trying to bring out an anti-Islam procession. He said that they hadn't printed that news because they didn't support any move aimed at creating religious clashes. That showed how conscious Britain's media are about maintaining religious harmony. That is why there hadn't been any extreme anti-Islam publicity in Britain after September

An NGO for Bengalis There is an organisation in Leicester known as the Bangladesh Youth and Cultural Association, Bangladesh youths are given technical training here so that they gain employment and business opportunities. Project Coordinator Shafig Chowdhury worked hard to set up this NGO. He is aetting help from the administration. He even hopes to be able to help meritorious students in Bangladesh. He spares no pains to help the young Bengalis in Leicester

Journalists' delegation visiting an Islamic institute in Britain.

to stand on their own feet. He said that over the ages links have grown between the people of all races religions and cultures in Britain. Even if there were some problems for Muslims here, that wasn't very large. In fact, there had been positive response to Islam in the British society.

Britain is a modern country. developed in science and technology. Whoever lives here has the opportunity to come into contact with modern knowledge and culture.

The Muslims living there maintain their religious identity and can go ahead, absorbed in the stream of life in Britain. It will be very beneficial if the Muslims there can grasp this opportunity. Our fellow visitor journalist Kamel bin Yunus of Tunis repeated this again and again. There is huge potential in front of the Muslims of Britain. It is an important responsibility of the Muslims of Britain to utilise this potential.

Abdul Qayyum is the joint editor of Prothom Alo

Ramadan – the month of blessings and training

MD MOSHIUR RAHMAN

HE Islamic community worldwide has welcomed Ramadan again. It is the month of blessings, forgiveness, patience, steadfastness, mercy and consolation; a month which grants the Muslims the opportunity at an individual and social level through spiritual training and wherein they have the chance to refresh, revive and renew their spirits and take stock of themselves. Our Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) once declared, "During the month of Ramadan, the gates of Paradise are open, the gates of Hell-fire are closed and the Shaytans are chained." (Bukhari, Muslim)

It is the first month when Allah began revealing His Message to the Blessed Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Allah announced, "Ramadan is the (month) in which the Qur'an was sent down as a guide to humanity, and (to provide) clear signs for guidance and judge ment. So every one of you who is present during that month should spend it in fasting." (Al-Baqara:

We know that the institution of Fasting (As-Sawm) is unique and yet a shared experience in human history. From the very beginning of time, humans have been involved with the great struggle to master there bodies, feelings and emotion. As the Qur'an points out, fasting has been widely practised at all times of man's religious history. Allah clearly stated and declared the objective of fasting in the Qur'an: O you believe! Observing As-Sawm (the fasting) is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you might remain conscious of God. (Surah Al-Baqarah: 183).

As-Sawm is an Arabic word that means fasting. It literally means to abstain 'completely' from foods, drinks, and smoking before the break of the dawn or from the Azan of the Fair (early morning) prayer till sunset, during the entire month of Ramadan. Fasting (Sawm) is an obligatory and compulsory lbadat. When the new crescent moon is

sighted signaling the beginning of the Ramadan on the next day, the blessed Prophet taught us to say:

"Allah is Greater, Allah is Greater, Allah is Greater. Praise be to Allah Who created me and you and Who decreed for you the phases (of the moon) and made you the sign for the universe."

As Muslims we fast for the sake of Allah. We want to achieve the quality of 'Taqwa'. Taqwa is one of the numerous words whose synonym is rarely seen in English. In Arabic, the word is derived from the verb 'to protect' oneself from something harmful. Literally 'Taqwa' means godliness, devotedness, piety, consciousness and awareness of Allah's presence and the desire to mould one's existence in the light of this 'Tagwa'. A pious man is, therefore, the one who protects himself from punishment and hellfire by good deeds. Ibn Abbas explains its meaning further as the person, who fears Allah and His punishment by turning away from committing all prohibited, illegal acts and by doing all what He has obliged to do. Umar Ibn al-Khattab asked Ubay Ibn Ka'ab regarding Taqwa; Ubay said: Have you not gone through a road that has

thorns? Umar answered in the affirmative. Uday asked how he had fared in such difficult circumstances. Umar said. 'I summoned my strength, strove and struggled. Udav said. 'That is Tagwa'.

Fasting (Sawm), the fourth pillar of Islam has been designed in the second year after the migration of the Noble Prophet to Madina to help us to develop these things. Fasting is an annual training programme to refresh us for carrying out our duties towards Allah, the Creator and Sustainer. This is a month of highintensity training. We have to get up early before dawn for Suhur, stop all eating and drinking accurately at a certain time. do certain activities and abstain from certain activities during the day, break our Fast (Iftar) in the evening at exactly a certain time. Then, for a few moments only we relax before we hurry for long late evening prayers (Tarawih). Every year for one full month from dawn to sunset and from sunset to dawn, we lead a training-life like the soldiers. Indeed we enjoy a disciplined life following certain rules. We are then told to continue our

normal duties for eleven months so that the training we have received for one month may reflect in our private, family, social, political, international and every sphere of life. And if any deficiency and shortage are found it may be made up in the next year. We train ourselves not only to remain without food, drink and smoking, but also, more importantly, to continue in that spirit after the month of fasting. What we learn in Ramadan must afterwards be implemented during the remaining eleven months. Otherwise, the main lesson and spirit of fasting would be meaningless and absurd. Our fasting in Ramadan is a duty to Allah, and we learn that any sins may spoil our record of fasting with Allah. So, we take great pains to go on with our best behaviour. These

forms of training are designed to help us avoid crimes and sins throughout the rest of the year. The Blessed Prophet once remarked. "Whoever doesn't give up lying and acting on lies during fasting, there is no need of him aiving up food and drink". (Bukkari). On another occasion he warned, "There are many

people who get nothing from fasting except hunger and thirst". Clearly the moral dimension is as important as the physical aspects of fasting. Ramadan has such a wondrous impact on our morals and behaviour that it has been described as the month of forgiveness. Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (pbuh) as saying, "If one does not abandon falsehood and action in accordance with it. Allah has no need that he should abandon his food and his drink".

Fasting makes us remember Allah and remain conscious of Him. While fasting, we feel hunger and thirsty, but we cannot stop our hungry or thirst by eating or drinking anything. We fast about for 360 hours for one full month only because of our deep belief on the reward and punishment of the Day of Judgment. If we doubted slightly in that we have to meet our Creator we would not complete such a fast. With doubts in hearts, no such resolves can be fulfilled. The reason we cannot is that we know Allah is with us. Allah sees us all the time, We cannot deceive Allah, or hide any of our deeds from Him. So we

are avoiding fighting, cursing, arguing, lying and all bad things and evil acts forbidden in Islam. We don't quarrel with others and misbehave in any way.

The blessed messenger of Allah once said, "Five things break a person's fast: Lying backbiting, spreading rumours, false testimony and a lustful gaze. (Jabir related from Anas). In addition, we experience hunger, so we feel more sympathy and kindness for the poor. We know our life is uncertain, and we understand how close we are to leaving this world at any moment and how much we depend on food and drink. We learn to control our demands and passions and to clear our minds and thoughts for the sake of Allah. Fasting strengthens our character. Through fasting, we learn to resist temptation and achieve self-control. Fasting makes us disciplined. It increases our will force. It prepares us for the sufferings we may have to endure in Islam. We know the battle of Badr occurred on 17th Ramadan (2nd Hijrah) where the Muslims got the flag of victory in their hands with the

mercy of Allah. Fasting also makes

us obedient to Allah. In obeying Allah we should control our thoughts and actions and become good and kind to the poor.

At the end of Ramadan we celebrate Idul Fitr or the Festival of the Fast breaking. We give the poor Sadaqatul Fitr, or Charity of the Fast breaking so that they get the opportunity to enjoy and share the happiness with us. It is a day of thanksgiving and pleasure. We thank Allah for His great blessing and gift in bestowing on us the Qur'an as well as the Lailatul Qadr in the month of Ramadan. We thank Allah for enabling us to fast and to receive His mercy and help in order to follow His guidance. We repeat our resolve to understand and follow the Qur'an to seek Allah's pleasure. It is one of the great occasions for us. On this day we offer special prayers in congregation and thank Allah for his blessings.

Md. Moshiur Rahman is a teacher of Al-Qur'an and Islamic Studies, Islami Bank International School and College, Dhaka.