The Parliament over the last one and a half decades has passed a number of good laws the foremost being the restoration from Presidential to Parliamentary form of government; it took place in 1991. In the recent past laws have been passed, including paving the way for incorporating women in the lowest tier of the government, that is union parishad, making laws against environment pollutants such as polythene and banning two stroke three wheelers. While framing laws is the principal task of the parliament, it is also supposed to be the centre of all activities. Issues of all national importance that directly or indirectly concern the common people of the country are supposed to be discussed and debated here. But there are many such crucial issues that have been continuously ignored in parliamentary debates: education, population growth, corruption in general or upsurge in religious militancy, the near simultaneous bomb attacks in some 500 spots all over the country, the gruesome grenade attack on the AL on August 21 that killed 22 AL leaders and activist including Ivy Rahman and maimed scores, the murder of former finance minister SASM Kibria along with four others in Sylhet, price hike of essentials, acute fertiliser crisis, electricity, gas and water crisis, Monga. The list is endless. We would be hard-pressed to identify an important topic of genuine public interest that has been debated in parliament.

The opposition's absence does not let the parliament perform its role as a watchdog, allowing the government to run the house according to their whim.

Representation of women has always been a sore issue. The thirty reserved seats have been increased to forty-five reserved seats for women and they are merely ornamental; women MPs are candidates chosen by their respective parties and have little significance politically besides adding to the party's number of seats in parliament.

In a parliamentary democracy, the three main organs-- the executive, the parliament and the judiciary-- are supposed to be independent and maintain a kind of check and balance. While the government works through its executive branch, the parliament mainly oversees the actions of the executive and the judiciary is the final arbiter that explains the constitution if a conflict arises between the other two.

But the parliament is apparently failing to do this balancing act. Mahfuz Anam Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star, believes that the constitution itself has made the executive branch overly powerful.

Jatya Party (Ershad) MP G M Quader could not agree more. "There is a big contradiction in our constitution; Article 55 (3) says that the cabinet will be collectively responsible or accountable to the parliament. So the two functions of the parliament are law making and making the government accountable to the people." Article 70 (1), however, stipulates that no parliament member, once elected from a party can vote against the decision of the party. If this is done the Member of Parliament will lose his or her membership. Explains Quader: "A government is formed by majority vote; first the prime minister is elected by the members and the party which has the maximum number of members will decide who will be prime minister who will then form the government. So the treasury bench members have to support government actions in the parliament all the time unless they want to risk their membership. So the parliament loses the strength to control the government."

"Similarly if there is any law that has been drafted by the government", says Quader, "the MPs belonging to that party are bound to support it."

According to Quader the passing of laws in the parliament is just a formality. This is because it is ultimately the government MPs (who hold the majority seats) who decide on what bill will be passed and the parliament cannot stop any law or even make correction. In fact many bills brought from the Treasury Bench and Opposition that would have benefited the public, are ultimately squashed by the government simply because the government does not want it.

This article puts the parliament in a catch-22 situation says Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, a BNP MP and Advisor to the Prime Minister on Parliamentary Affairs.

"In the absence of this rule, democracy is at the risk of being jeopardised; if the threat of this article was not there, vested quarters might have hatched conspiracies by buying MPs. But the article, at the same time, hinders the parliament's growth as an institution independent of petty party interests," remarks Chowdhury. He thinks, as this article does not let the members speak their heart, many MPs, fearful of their leaders' wrath, follow party decisions blindly. "Some of them are in an obscene competition to please the leadership," he says.

The constitution, on the other hand, holds the government collectively responsible to the parliament, which