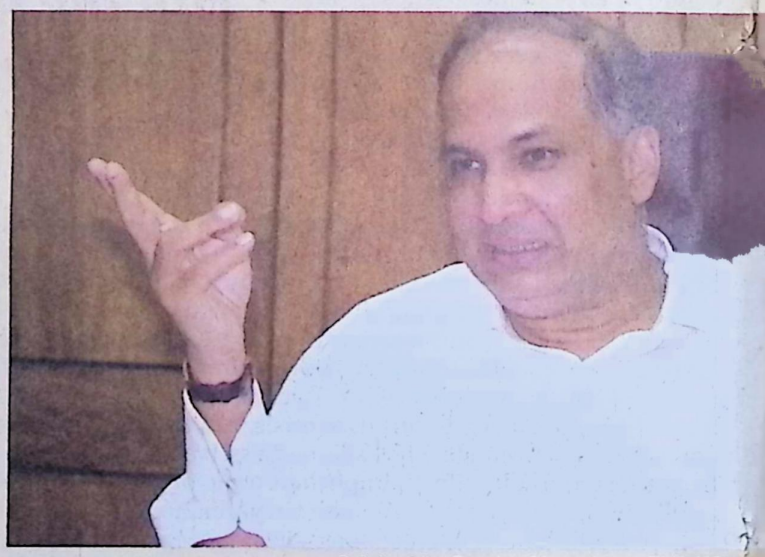
consists of MPs from both side of the floor. "Thus government party members are also given the responsibility by the constitution to shoulder the responsibility of making the government accountable-- they have to ask questions or even name and shame the party in power. That is how it is in all developed democracies," Quader says. He cites the example of when Prime Minister Tony Blair declared war in Iraq many of his party members in parliament voted against him. "Sometimes the opposition members supports the decision of the government," he says, "this is the way our parliament should have been working."

There is a serious lacuna in our system: Development has become too Dhaka-centric; Union Parishad buildings have turned into places where people tie up their goats as most UP chairmen live in the nearby town and do not care to attend the office.

-Salahuddin Quader Choudhury



Salahuddin Quader Choudhury, BNP MP

Veteran AL parliamentarian Suranjit Sen Gupta feels that democracy is more of a faith than a compulsion. "It is the highest form of political culture where tolerance and mutual respect is the norm," he elaborates. As for the reason why the parliament--the epicenter of democracy -- is not functioning the way it should. He believes that it is the lack of commitment to the system by the concerned political parties that is playing havoc with the political culture. "The system has to be placed over the political leadership. It is the partisan attitude that mars the overall political culture. In Bangladesh politicians are committed to power rather than the system. What we need is a political practice over a long period of time that will eventually lead to such commitment to the system," he argues. He feels that there are few sacred tenets that are prerequisite for such democratic mindset. "The commitment to the 'rule of law', 'sovereignty of the people', 'sanctity of the constitution', and 'respect for the democratic institutions' such as parliament, judiciary, press, etc. The political parties too need to function democratically. All these come into play towards having a functional parliament, which we do not have in this country," concludes Suranjit.

He traces back to the root of all evils. He points out the fact that many of the country's political parties came into being only when the subsequent army generals wanted a launch-pad for their political career. "The country is sharply divided into two factions, one that stands for democratic tradition and the other that consists of the parties that sprouted under the unconstitutional, unethical umbrella of dictatorships," he argues. He hastens to add that the only way to ensure a functional parliament would be to ensure free and fair election, participation of all political parties, adopting an electoral system on the basis of consensus. "Only than the party that bags the majority of votes will be able to occupy the treasury bench and the party that failed to gain majority will hold the place of the opposition and will play their respective roles," he says.

What compounds the imbalance of power is the culture of boycott of the parliament by the opposition; in fact both the major parties, when they sit on the left side indulge in this bad habit of boycotting the parliament.

While the opposition is supposed to make the government answer for its action in the parliament their absence, Mahfuz Anam says, allows the government to get away virtually with anything.

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.

The constitution ensures that the executive is very strong structurally as it is; the continuous boycott of the opposition serves only to strengthen the executive.

"The opposition has undermined its voters by boycotting the parliament for so long" says Salahuddin