Missed Opportunity

According to Center for Policy Dialogue the National Parliament is seen as the most ineffective organisation in the country. Data derived by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) in its research on Parliament also endorses this discouraging picture.

Unscheduled Discussion

In the 11th session of the 8th national assembly, a total of 7 hours 52 minutes 59 seconds were spent in point of order and discussion of unscheduled issues, which accounts for 6.3% of the total work time. 10.08 hours or 11.9% of the total work time during the 12th session, and 23 minutes or for 4.2% of the total time in the 13th session, 2.36 hours or 9.4 percent was lost during the 14th session.

Meetings of Parliamentary Standing Committees on Different Ministries

Rule 248 of the working rules says "... each standing committee will meet at least once a month...". From 2001 to the 13th session, which means up to 16th September, 2004 only four committees have had more than 10 meetings. Among them, the standing committee for the Ministry of Law has performed best with 31 meetings during the period. Standing committees on four ministries have had five meetings. During January-August 2004, standing committees on six ministries have had only one meeting and those on eight ministries have had no meetings at all.

Time wasted for Quorum

During the 11th session of the 8th national assembly, on an average, a little more than 43 minutes was wasted every day. During the 12th session a total of 19 hours 15 minutes were wasted in 25 working days, that is 46.2 minutes per day. 1.33 hours was wasted in four working days during the 13th session, that is 23.25 minutes a day. A total of 4.02 hours or 22 minutes per day was lost in the 14th session.

Financial Loss for lack of Quorum

It costs Tk 15,000 per minute when the House is in session. At this rate, the money wasted for the lack of quorum during the 11th session was Tk 2 crore 77 lakh 65 thousand. Tk 1 crore 73 lakh 25 thousand during the 12th session, Tk 13 lakh 95 thousand during the 13th session and Tk 36 lakh 30 thousand was wasted during the 14th session. A total of Tk 5 crore 1 lakh 15 thousand was wasted from the 11th to the 14th session for the lack of quorum.

Cost of Party Praise, Criticism of the Opposition Party and Irrelevant Discussions

A member can utter a maximum of 160 words on an average in the national assembly per minute. This means that the cost of each word uttered is Tk 100. During the eighth National Assembly of 2004, party praise, criticism of the opposition party, and irrelevant discussions were done 1,565 times. To speak so many times, if the speaker used only one word each time, it would cost Tk 1 lakh 56 thousand 500 at the rate deduced above.

Source: Transparency International Bangladesh

He says that most development work is carried out this way with hefty paybacks to various quarters. That is why, he thinks, these types of governments are always talking about development.

The members should not involve themselves in any activities other than legislative agrees Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury. "Because the MPs have got involved in extra-legislative activities the entire local governance is falling apart. 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.

But according to GM Quader, many government MPs interfere with other official procedures such as promotions, transfers and appointments: "They are openly making money; if you want to be a primary teacher even if you are not qualified or if you want to be qualified just give money and it is done. There are different rates for police constable, peon, school teacher etc. This is true of dealerships too. Why do you think there is a fertilizer crisis? Because all distributors and everybody concerned are being controlled by government party people."

"Unless and until MPs' legislative prowess is developed they are bound to be involved in the business of wheat and rice. People, on the other hand, are not aware that an MP's job is to make laws, not to solve the problems that they face in their everyday life," Chowdhury says. He believes that even many MPs are not aware of their own duties and responsibilities; "One will not find even a dozen MPs in the parliament library."

GM Quader says, "MPs like myself, who are in the opposition, we don't have anything to do in our constituencies. At most we will discuss certain issues with the local officials about people's sufferings...When I come to the parliament I try to project everything I have seen wrong and what needs to be done," says Quader.

"Political leadership of this country," says Chowdhury, "has to take serious decision to decentralise the government otherwise charges of centralised corruption and nepotism will increase."

Quader adds that since the respective government departments have all the logistics to carry out all development work and therefore there is little for MPs or ministers to do, "they should just see that the rules and procedures are followed or not."

"Before democracy has been established power used to be centre on one individual; now that power has been taken hostage by 300 people is not a healthy sign," says Chowdhury. He admits that there is a big gap between what he calls the expectations and reality.

Though in all the presidential speeches, the heads of the state have always called the MPs to make the parlia-