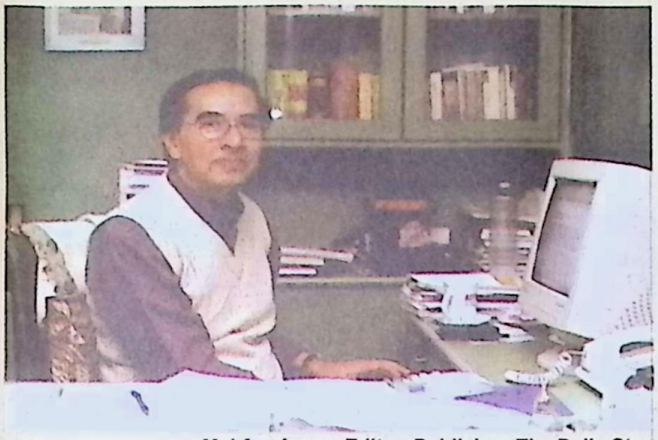


Mahfuz Anam, Editor, Publisher, The Daily Star.

The opposition, no matter how many MPs they have got, must never boycott the parliament. The speaker, moreover, will have to run the parliament neutrally.

ment the centre of all political activities, Chowdhury does not think the MPs have paid any heed to it. He laid the parliament's failure in becoming the centre of all political activities on the MPs: "Our ministers announce government policies at press conferences, whereas it should be done in the floor. Opposition does the same. Parliament should be the epicentre of democracy"

"Had the treasury and opposition members done otherwise, the parliament's importance would have rocketed. PROs, not ministers, should give press briefing. Parliament has to be informed about policy decisions first." Without naming anyone he says, There are a minister and an adviser who cannot sleep at night if they do not deliver a sermon (Khutba) on each day on television. Ministership is not a Talukdari system that the Mughal ruler has given you a few bighas of land and after that it is all yours.

"We have got a minister who carries only three things in his briefcase: letters of appreciation from the World Bank, IMF and ADB. World Bank or IMF is not my voter, who the hell cares if the World Bank praises you or not. It is more important to know if our farmers are getting the right prices for their crops or not, or whether the supply of diesel and fertiliser is adequate," he says.

What is the way out then? First and foremost, Mahfuz Anam says emphatically, the opposition, no matter how many MPs they have got, must never boycott the parliament. The speaker, moreover, will have to run the parliament neutrally. "Chairmanship of the very crucial committees and standing committees on different ministries, should go to the opposition," he says. "The recommendations of the standing committees should be discussed in the full house. A minimum number of opposition notices must be discussed in the house. Opposition members should be given away at least 50 percent time if not 100 percent of the PM's question-answer session."

"The parliament is a place to talk so we should be allowed to talk in whatever subject we think is relevant," says GM Quader. "We are people's representatives and are in parliament to vent their grievances."

"Media should have full access to all parliamentary activities, standing committee meetings included," says Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury; he terms the ban on television camera as a stupid decision. He thinks the parliament should have its own multimedia unit and a committee consisting members from both sides of the floor should administer its activities.

"Rule of procedure has to be amended," says Suranjit Sengupta. "It should be made into a rule that no legislation should be made without any public debate. Order of the day has to be fixed by mutual consent of the two chief whips. And lastly a ban on the boycott of parliament which would never be considered to be an optional institution," he says.

Quader who once advocated an amendment to Article 70 (1) so that in some cases members can vote against a party decision if he or she wants to, now feels that this article should be abolished altogether. "Parliamentary members should be allowed to move around freely and say what they want to say"

The culture of politics itself has developed in an unsavoury way. "Politics is controlled by black money," says Quader. "Money and muscle determine election results which is why we are rehabilitating hoodlums and smugglers; in our election system a good, honest person can never win elections."

Our leaders who hold the highest seats of power are morally bound to serve the people who have entrusted them with this privilege. The parliament is the most important institution that can bring about real change in the quality of life of the people of this country, most of whom are denied basic human rights. The parliament must be allowed to function as a neutral body that holds the government accountable to the people and allows all voices to be heard. Only then can it claim to be a house that represents the people. After 35 years of independence it is the least we the ordinary citizens of the country can expect from our leaders.