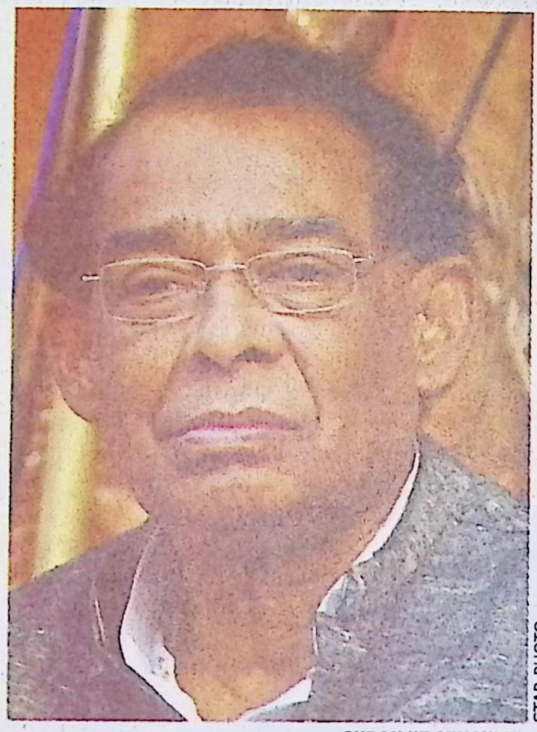
Where does the power lie?

Seasoned politician **SURANJIT SENGUPTA**, *co-chair of the parliamentary special committee for constitutional amendment, and also chief of the parliamentary standing committee on the law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry, talks about the role of the 15-member strong Jatiya Sangsad (JS) body led by deputy leader of the House Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury in bringing necessary changes to the Constitution in an effort to restore the spirit of the original Constitution of 1972. He also speaks about the implications of the recent landmark judgement on the Constitution's fifth amendment case and constitutional development following the August 15, 1975 bloody changeover to* **SHAKHAWAT LITON** *and* **KAJALIE SHEHREEN ISLAM**.



STAR PHOTO

SURANJIT SENGUPTA

FORUM: *For the first time in the parliamentary history of independent Bangladesh, the JS has formed a parliamentary special committee assigning it to review the Constitution and come up with proposals for bringing necessary changes to the country's supreme charter. Do you think the committee will be able to come up with the necessary proposals for some major changes to the Constitution to restore the spirit of the Constitution of 1972?*

Suranjit Sengupta (SS): It is true that such a committee has been formed for the first time in the history of our parliament. Of the total of 14 amendments made to the Constitution since 1973, only the eleventh and twelfth amendments were brought with the consensus of both ruling and opposition parties in parliament.

Of the two amendments, the twelfth amendment restored the parliamentary form of government in 1991. At that time, the twelfth amendment bill was placed in parliament first and then it was sent to the select committee constituted by the parliament for scrutiny. The committee, comprising of ruling and opposition lawmakers, examined the bill and placed its report in parliament with some recommendations. But this time, the parliament has formed the special committee to draft proposals for bringing necessary changes to the Constitution. On reviewing the Constitution thoroughly, the special committee will place its report in the House. On the basis of the committee's recommendations, the government will place a bill to this effect.

After cancellation of the Fifth Amendment Act, the law ministry is working to print the Constitution, restoring the articles which were either repealed or amended through martial law proclamations during the first martial law regime. The Constitution's fifth amendment ratified and validated all the changes. On receiving the re-printed copy of the Constitution, we will start examining it thoroughly and to identify inconsistencies, if any.

We will be working for further democratisation, liberalisation and decommunalisation of the constitution. We want to democratise the Constitution more, opening it up for all backward communities and to remove other impediments and hindrances, which stand in the way of constitutional development.

FORUM: *Since its formation last July, the special committee has already held six meetings, so far. What is the position of the committee on some other crucial*