matters including bringing amendments to Article 70 to allow members of parliament (MP) to perform their due role independently, restoring the parliament's authority provided by the original Constitution and to the caretaker government system?

SS: The basis of the Constitution of 1972 was the parliamentary form of government, that means everything arose of the parliament. The two other organs -- the executive entirely and the judiciary in certain areas were accountable to the parliament. Later, some vital changes were made to the Constitution with regard to the appointment of judges and impeachment of the judges and to other necessary laws. Executive powers were not accountable to the parliament. It became independent. During the presidential form of government, the president was not accountable to the parliament.

Now, it requires political decision to bring major changes to the Constitution. So, we will work to improve the Constitution based on consultation with our leader and instruction of the party, government and the ruling alliance. The special committee has already decided to sit with Leader of the House Sheikh Hasina, seeking her instructions on some crucial issues.

Of course, we will examine the caretaker government provisions to make it democratised. It's a midnight law introduced by the past Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government in 1996. According to the parliamentary language, midnight law means bad law. It was a result of a one-party controversial parliament. In our experience, we faced difficulties. Even the BNP is now opposing the provision for appointing immediate past chief justice as chief adviser to the caretaker government.

FORUM: *The main opposition BNP did not nominate its lawmaker to work in the special committee. Do you think absence of the main opposition in the committee will have any negative impact on the entire process of constitutional reform?*

SS: The Constitution is a fundamental document, the supreme law of the country, and it should be kept above partisan politics. Thus, the main opposition BNP too should perform its due role by shunning traditional negative politics, adjusting to modern politics and entering 21st century politics with the aim of advancing the country and its people. The door is still open for them. They can still nominate its lawmaker to the special committee. The main opposition may not agree with many possible changes to the Constitution. The BNP was born amid the constitutional misadventures following August 15, 1975 and a beneficiary of the fifth amendment.

But, those days are gone. What will the BNP gain from the confrontational political culture which prevailed in the country after 1975? The party should join the special committee to express its stance on possible changes to the Constitution. They have every right to oppose and give note of dissent to every proposal. If I were in their position, I would have joined the committee in order to voice my opinions. It is the essence of parliamentary democracy. Unfortunately, in our country, parliamentarism has not really grown. There are certain obstacles in political philosophy.

I again urge the BNP to join the special committee, shunning the politics of opposition for the sake of opposition. If they do not come eventually, they will miss the opportunity to ventilate their opinion.

FORUM: *All signs predict that the BNP may not participate in the entire process of constitutional reform. Do you think if BNP comes to power in future and gets the two-thirds majority required to amend the Constitution, it will be able to reverse the amendments to be made by the present parliament?*

SS: If they come to power and get required majority in parliament to amend the Constitution, they can bring amendments in line with their political decision. But the significant thing has been settled that the basic structure of the Constitution cannot be changed. Therefore, no overwhelming majority will help them to do so. If they do so whimsically with their majority, the amendment will be declared illegal and void.

FORUM: *Is de-communalisation possible with a Constitution which begins in the name of Allah with 'Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim'? Can a nation claim to be secular when its constitution stipulates a state religion?*

SS: 'Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim' comes before the text and even the preamble of the Constitution, thus it is not technically a part of it and does not affect the secular principle of the Constitution. As for Islam as the state religion and other such phrases, once the Constitution is reprinted in line with the apex court's verdict, we will examine and try to improve it based on consultation with our leader and instructions of the party, government and alliance. Political decision is required to address the issue.

FORUM: *There has been much activity and some controversy surrounding the constitutional developments and amendments made to it in the past. How do you view these?*