

STRONG INSTITUTIONS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

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How (not) to make parliament functional

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

According to article 123 (3) (b), the lawmakers, elected in the December 30 polls, were required to wait for the expiry of the term of the 10th parliament. Article 72 (3) clearly says, "Unless sooner dissolved by the president, parliament shall stand dissolved on the expiration of the period of five years from the date of its first meeting." The first sitting of the 10th parliament was held on January 29, 2014, meaning its five-year tenure expired on January 28.

The precedent set by our lawmakers cannot be found in any other existing parliamentary democracy. Countries such as the UK, New Zealand, Australia and Canada go to general elections, dissolving their parliaments. The question of constituting a parliament while keeping the existing one in place does not arise in these countries.

Three weeks after the election, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, on January 19 at a rally in the capital organised by the ruling party to celebrate its landslide victory in the 11th parliamentary election, promised to establish political rights of all citizens. This is an immensely significant promise. It has been evident worldwide that there is no alternative to ensuring people's political rights if a country wants to develop as a democratic as well as prosperous nation. This can only happen in a vibrant democracy. And parliament must be made functional for the sake of growth of a democracy in the real sense. True democracy is needed to sustain growth and development. To make the new parliament functional, a set of sweeping reforms as discussed above are urgently required. No one should forget that a dysfunctional parliament is the symbol of a dysfunctional democracy.

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