

# 'The way parliament is run these days is detrimental to holding the government accountable'

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Jatiya Sangsad, five-time lawmaker and president of the ruling alliance partner Workers' Party, Rashed Khan Menon, talks about what an effective parliament should be like in an interview with Mohiuddin Alamgir of The Daily Star.

**You recently said at the House that the standard of Jatiya Sangsad was on a continuous decline. Why do you think so?**

Not only is the standard of Jatiya Sangsad on a decline, but its character is changing too. In the past, mainly active politicians would become members of parliament (MPs), but now businessmen are becoming MPs. It's not like we didn't have businessmen in our parliament before, but they were primarily politicians – they took part in movements and went to jail. In fact, now businessmen are the majority in the House. As a result, no substantive discussions take place in parliament.

A researcher once said that during a one-hour session in parliament, people's issues are discussed for three minutes, while the rest of the time is spent praising the ruling party, its leader and others. This wasn't the case in the past. In the past, even during the Pakistan period, parliamentarians including Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman used parliament to talk about people's issues. These days, we speak about some development work to please the local constituency, but that is not done in the proper way, in my opinion.

Recently, the government increased the prices of fertilisers. Ideally, questions would have been raised about the decision to raise fertiliser prices. In reality, although the government is saying that the price hike was done in accordance with the international market, we know the decision was made in line with the IMF conditionalities.

Is there any discussion on the growing income inequality in parliament these days? Some of us are trying to raise these issues, but the rest are saying nothing.

Be it Bangabandhu or other politicians of that era – they all spoke of these issues. Even the parliaments that were dominated by Awami League members featured these discussions. But now, these issues are not discussed.

Article 70 of the constitution, which deals with vacating the seat on resignation or voting against a political party, has become a big barrier to freedom of expression, which is another reason why the parliament's

character has changed. Even though the prime minister has said that this is a tool to curb floor-crossing in parliament, has it been able to stop that from happening? We have seen in the recent past how members have moved from BNP to Awami League and have even become ministers.

**Do you think Article 70 should be scrapped?**

No, we are talking about a reform of the system. There should be three kinds of whips in parliament. For general topics, the discussion will be open, and when the government thinks some issue is important, the second whip will be called upon. The third and final whip will be that an MP will not be able to vote against the party in the cases of defence, budget, and votes of no confidence.

**This year marks the 50th anniversary of Jatiya Sangsad. How has its journey been?**

The journey of our parliament has been turbulent. The framers of our constitution introduced a parliamentary democracy. But we first stumbled during the 4th amendment of the constitution, when a presidential system was put in place. The parliament became paralysed during the regime of Ziaur Rahman, who made amendments and an anti-Liberation War individual was made the leader of the House. It failed to play an effective role then. The parliament of 1979, even though it had no power, was lively.

After parliamentary democracy was restored in 1991, the sessions of parliament became lively again; we even put forth a proposal of no confidence against the agriculture minister. We tabled a proposal of no confidence against the government. We put forward a demand for the ban of Jamaat. Even the parliament of 2008 was quite lively, because it had a substantial presence of the opposition.

Our parliamentary culture did not grow due to the tradition of boycotting the parliament.

**The parliament is at the centre of institutionalising democracy. It holds**



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**public opinion and expectations. How far has this principle been upheld?**

It is written in our constitution that the people will yield authority over the country through their representatives. Theoretically, this seems okay. But practically all laws and budgets are formulated by the bureaucrats, and the MPs' role is very little. MPs can't change even 0.1 percent of the budget if the government is not willing.

Then what is the role of parliament? In India, after the budget is proposed, it goes to the standing committee, where it is discussed and examined thoroughly, a report is produced, and that creates the basis of discussion over the budget. These practices are non-existent in our parliament.

The question-answer sessions faced by the ministers of the government have also become futile as well. On many occasions, the relevant ministers are absent.

**Many MPs show a lack of interest in the process of law enactment, although it is their primary role.**

**What is your take on that?**

MPs' involvement in legislation faces hindrance because of the existence of Article 70. I have not seen any difference of opinion from the treasury bench when a law is passed. It has turned into a majoritarian system, which is why discussions don't take place when it comes to enacting laws. Barring a few exceptions, discussion does not take place even in parliamentary committees, which have the power to change laws.

As the majority of the MPs are businessmen, it is also a reason for not having discussions during the process of law passage. Regarding the matter, I want to quote President Abdul Hamid, who symbolically said the number of lawyers in parliament decreased to such a level that we might need to hire experts to enact laws.

**For issues such as the soaring prices of essentials, gas, electricity are soaring, widespread corruption, allegations of breach of rights and even extrajudicial killings against law enforcement personnel, etc, our parliament has a role to play in making the executive branch accountable. How far has it been successful to this end?**

The process of making the executive branch accountable was present in the past, but now it has reduced significantly. There are various ways to hold the executive branch to account, such as point of order, question-answer segment, different kinds of motions, and having discussions on matters of urgent public importance. But, other than the question-answer segment, which itself is often tabled, none of these are in practice. The way parliament is conducted these days is detrimental to holding the government accountable for its actions.

**The opposition in the House has a role in making parliament effective. Many say the current opposition is a "friendly opposition." How do you evaluate the current opposition?**

It is not possible to make the parliament effective with such an opposition. Being a treasury bench member, I try to speak on

public interest issues. If anyone tries to talk, they still can discuss.

**You have participated in the last two elections as part of an alliance. It seems that the Awami League leaders have already started seeking votes in favour of the party symbol. What is your thought on that as an alliance partner?**

Regarding the next election, we have spoken with the prime minister and she has said she wants to participate in the election as a coalition. She has already been asking for votes for the Awami League, but as the leader of the alliance, she will also need to seek votes for the Workers' Party or for JASAD.

**Is there any crack in the alliance?**

There could be some struggle in the politics of alliance. But I think that alliances have become marginalised over time.

**There is a saying in the political circuit that whenever the Awami League falls in trouble, it seeks refuge in the 14-party alliance, but at other times, it does not listen to the opinions of the alliance partners.**

Look, when we formed the 14-party coalition, it was decided that we would move together, go to the polls together, and form the government together. I think they did not act accordingly. Giving importance to the partners only in times of one's need is not the right approach.

**Another election is approaching. What should an effective parliament be like?**

We proposed for a parliament based on proportional representation. If that is not possible, then some space should be offered to the opposition and other parties so they can organise among themselves and come to parliament. A parliament should be a mixture; it can't be dominated by majoritarianism. A parliament is formed by the speaker, the government, and the opposition. If that pyramid is followed, then it can become a proper parliament.

Transcribed and translated by Azmin Azran.

## PM'S JAPAN VISIT

# A new turning point in Bangladesh-Japan ties?

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## SABERA CHOWDHURY

Being one of the most open and trade-oriented economies in South Asia, Bangladesh is slowly becoming a promising and lucrative business destination in the region. Japan, Bangladesh's long-standing development partner, is eager to strengthen the bilateral connections due to the latter's 170-million-strong consumer base, an expanding middle class, improved purchasing power, local demands, easily accessible labour, and economic development. Due to worries about overdependence and supply chain disruptions in the wake of the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, Bangladesh can be an alluring alternative location for Japanese businesses that are looking to pivot away from China. The East Asian country is making significant investments in Bangladesh. As a result, Bangladesh's success in the near future may be greatly influenced by its economic relations with Japan.

The two countries have had friendly ties ever since Tokyo recognised the People's Republic of Bangladesh on February 10, 1972. Japan has generously contributed to Bangladesh through Official Development Assistance (ODA) since 1972, and has advanced to become the country's leading bilateral donor. Bangladesh receives the most ODA from Japan, according to Ito Naoki, former Japanese ambassador to the country. In 2014, Bangladesh and Japan began a comprehensive partnership, which resulted in an increase in financial assistance.

Japan provided Bangladesh with \$2.63 billion in aid, more than any other country, for the 2020-21 fiscal year. Since Bangladesh's independence, Japan has made

a contribution of \$24.72 billion, roughly split between grants and loans. Japan provides assistance to Bangladesh in a number of fields, including energy production, social and economic development, and the development of both real and intangible infrastructure.

Investment links between Bangladesh and Japan are expanding in sectors like gas and coal, the blue economy, health, and human resource development. Japanese businesses are considering Bangladesh as a potential new investment location. Only 82 Japanese companies had stakes in Bangladesh 10 years ago. Over the past decade, that number

from Japan. In actuality, the only country that has been allowed to make significant investments in northeast India because of the area's strategic location is Japan. Northeast India is landlocked by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, and Myanmar. All of these factors played a role in the development of the "free and open Indo-Pacific" idea, one of Japan's most important foreign policy initiatives. Although former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe initially proposed this idea, it has been continued by the succeeding administrations. Japan has been working to uphold a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region as part of this.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, while announcing Japan's new "free and open Indo-Pacific" strategy, said northeast India still has unrealised economic potential. In order to assist the growth of the entire region, Japan wants to construct the Bengal-Northeast India industrial value chain concept in partnership with Bangladesh and India, treating Bangladesh and the other South Asian countries as a single economic zone. An "Act East" conference was previously held by India and Japan to investigate business opportunities in Bangladesh and elsewhere. The plan calls for it to be a component of Tokyo's larger Bay of Bengal and Northeast India infrastructure development plans, with a focus on multilayer connectivity. Japan has unveiled its new vision for the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), which calls for the integrated development of Bangladesh and northeast India as parts of a wider Bay of Bengal community.

Bangladesh's primary Asian export market is Japan. Although Bangladesh's exports to Japan have nearly doubled over the past 10 years, there is still a lot of unrealised trade potential in the country. According to a 2014 Pew Research survey, 71 percent of Bangladeshis support Japan, making it one of Asia's most pro-Japanese nations.

In favour of Japan, Bangladesh withdrew its candidacy for non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2014.

Bangladesh plays a significant role in Japan's strategic and diplomatic agenda in South Asia. But Bangladesh must enhance its economic climate, for instance by implementing fast-track projects, in order to become an investment-friendly hub for Japan. Additionally, the transfer of technological know-how will be crucial for Bangladesh, who will profit for years to come if it can advance technologically through its partnership with Japan. Japan ought to permit Bangladeshi goods to be imported duty-free to establish a level

playing field. The removal of current barriers to their bilateral interactions, such as protracted customs clearance processes, double taxation, and foreign exchange concerns, requires coordinated efforts from both sides.

Aside from economic considerations, improving ties with Dhaka will give Tokyo the opportunity to reconsider its South Asian power structure beyond New Delhi. On the other hand, a close relationship with Japan will help Bangladesh realise its full economic potential, face challenges that may appear after it becomes a developing country in 2026, and diversify its diplomatic relations with major powers. By looking for

new avenues for collaboration in the development of vaccines, healthcare, the blue economy, high-tech industries, shipbuilding, automobile manufacture, and other fields, both parties may enhance their bonds.

The innovative leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has helped Bangladesh become a development model. A crucial component of her outstanding leadership is how well she and her government handled interactions with local communities and other international organisations. We anticipate that the prime minister's upcoming Japan visit, scheduled for April 25-28, will create new economic prospects for both countries.

**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**

Chattogram City Corporation

Tigerpass, Chattogram

[www.ccc.gov.bd](http://www.ccc.gov.bd)

Date: 18.04.2023

**e-Tender Notice-DRIIDARP/2022-23/06**

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following works:

Package/Lot No.	Tender ID	Identification of lot	Tender document last selling date and time	Tender closing & opening date and time
DRIIDARP/2022-23/CCC/W16/L2/A	821437	Development of Habib Lane, Arakan H/S Road, Al Madani Road & bylane and Alfallah H/S Mosque Road at 8 No. Ward	14-May-2023 11:00	14-May-2023 14:00

The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders.

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and offline hard copies will not be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branches up to particular date and time specified on the tender notice.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)).

**Md. Jashim Uddin**  
Deputy Project Director  
"Different Roads and Important  
Infrastructural Development including  
Airport Road under  
Chattogram City Corporation"  
Executive Engineer  
Chattogram City Corporation

CCC/PRD-149/22-23  
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