



Transparency International Bangladesh

Parliament Watch **8th Parliament, Sessions 15-19, 2005** *Report Released on 27 June 2006*

Summary Findings & Recommendations

Objectives of the Parliament Watch series are to

- Inform the public about the Parliament at work;
- Examine if and to what extent the Parliament has been able to ensure accountability of the Government;
- Examine the role of parliamentary standing committees; and
- Recommend measures to make the Parliament more effective.

Source of Information

- Live broadcast of parliamentary proceedings on radio, daily and weekly Bulletins and Summary of the Sessions published by the Parliament Secretariat.

Number of reports published in this series before this: 4

Date of publishing the fourth report: 1 March 2005

General Information

- During the reviewed period the parliament was in session for a total of 62 days – the total time spent in work being 184 hours 8 minutes. Out of the total 62 days, the 15th session was at work for 22 days, 16th session for 4 days, the 17th session for 22 working days, the 18th session for 9 working days, while in the 19th the parliament was in session for 5 days.
- Three sessions (16th, 18th and 19th) were convened simply to meet constitutional obligation.
- The main opposition party boycotted the parliament for the whole period except for the opening day of the 15th session.

Questions to the Prime Minister

- During the period 11 days (Wednesdays) were earmarked for Prime Minister's question-answer. However, only 6 days were used for the purpose.
- The main opposition having boycotted the sessions, more than 89% of the principal questions were asked by the treasury bench members.

Questions to the Ministers

- 78% of the principal questions and 84% of the supplementary questions were raised by the treasury bench members
- As many as 15 supplementary questions were rejected by the Speaker, because the questions didn't fall into this category, which indicates MPs lack of understanding of this key concept in parliamentary practice.

Law Making

- Number of bills passed: 28 – all moved by the treasury bench.
- Only 8.3% of the amendment raised by non-boycotting opposition bench was accepted partially.
- 100 percent amendments raised by treasury bench members were accepted

Irrelevant Discussion

- Undue praising own party leaders: 202 occasions.
- Undue criticism of the opponent party: 128 occasions.
- Raising irrelevant issues: 147 times.

Quorum problem & absenteeism

- Of the 62 working days of the Parliament in 2005, because of lack of quorum, proceedings could commence on time only on one day.
- Quorum crisis has become chronic – average daily loss of time for lack of quorum was more than 31 minutes. Total loss of time for quorum crisis: 32 hours 23 minutes
- Financial loss for quorum crisis alone - Taka 2 crore 91 lakh and 45 thousand, at the rate of Taka 15,000 per minute needed for running the sessions
- 6.9% MPs from the treasury bench and 14.28% MP's from the non-boycotting opposition parties remained absent from 100 percent working days.
- Only 40 percent MPs from the treasury bench and 42.85 percent MPs from non-boycotting opposition parties attended 76-100% of working days.
- On an average nearly 70 percent of MPs (from treasury and non-boycotting opposition) who were absent for 100 percent working days are business persons by profession.

Standing Committees

Ministers were present only in 69.68% meeting of the standing committees on different ministries. Other members of the standing committees were present in only 58 percent meetings of standing committee on different ministries.

- As many as 27 out of the 37 standing committees could not meet the Rule 248 of the Rules of Procedure which requires that each committee shall meet at least once a month.
- The committees did not play any significant role in investigating allegations of corruption and other irregularities within the ministries concerned.

- Public Accounts Committee met once a month. But the pace of discussing and resolving audit objections remains slow. During 2003-5 the PAC were able to discuss only 149 out of more than 800 pending audit objections.
- The amount of money involved in audit objections in those 149 cases of objections was over Taka 13,154 crores, of which only Taka 63.76 crores were realized whereas the unrealized amount was Taka 12,581 crores, of which over 95 percent were with the communications ministry.

Recommendations

- The number of working days in sessions should be increased.
- The Leader of the House should attend the sessions regularly. The problem of quorum and absenteeism can then be expected to reduce to considerably.
- The main opposition party must attend the sessions unconditionally.
- Standing Committees should be formed in the very 1st session.
- 50 percent of the chairmen of the committees should be come from the opposition.
- Institutional, technical and human resource capacity of the Committees should be enhanced.
- Committees must meet at least once in a month. Because of large number of pending audit objections, the PAC should meet more frequently.
- Committees should open themselves up to suggestions of outside experts/professionals.
- Facilitate greater role and participation of backbenchers.
- More time should be allocated for question-answer sessions.
- Political parties should practice democracy within the party. Absenteeism amongst the MPs who are business persons deserves consideration of all concerned.
