



# Parliament Research Brief

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## Collaboration between Parliament and Knowledge World

Scopes for Bangladesh Institute of Parliamentary Studies (BIPS)

### 1. Background

The Bangladesh Parliament, as a primary law-making body, performs its functions according to the constitutional provision and the Rules of Procedure (RoP) of Bangladesh Parliament. It legislates new laws, the electorates, and scrutinises the executive. As the highest legislative body, it drafts, debates, and passes laws, often working through standing committees (Jahan, 2014). These standing committees play a critical role in holding ministries accountable and overseeing public spending by approving the annual budget and reviewing expenditures. Members of the Parliament (MPs) also engage with citizens' concerns, raising constituency issues at the parliamentary debates and discussions. Through these activities, the Parliament ensures horizontal accountability by examining executive actions and policies while maintaining a balance of power between different branches of government.

Although the process of law-making as well as enactment of laws are expected to be based on inclusive discussion, necessary evidence and proper justification, the functionality of the Parliament is being debated for not complying with those issues in full. A major reason behind this gap is the lack of importance on knowledge, evidence, analysis and research among the MPs in different countries (Tunyan & Goetz, 2024). Hence, the brief has identified areas of knowledge gaps in the Parliamentary debates and discussions on various regulatory issues, the possible evidence of knowledge-based discussion and debates in the Parliaments of other countries and thereby put forward the necessary suggestions for further strengthening the Parliamentary debates, discussion and decision-making process in the

Bangladesh Parliament. Bangladesh Institute of Parliamentary Studies (BIPS) – an institute recently being operationalised, has been officially entitled to take initiatives in Bangladesh Parliament. The suggestions put forward in the brief would extend new thoughts and ideas for better initiation of the operation of the BIPS.

## 2. Parliament's Legislative, Policy Debates and Scrutiny Process and Scope for Knowledge-based Inputs: Cross-Country Evidence

Parliamentary legislative, policy debates and scrutinising bills are largely driven by knowledge and input fit for parliament related exercises. For instance, the UK Parliament has a Knowledge Exchange Unit, which exists to 'facilitate and strengthen' the exchange of information and expertise between researchers and the UK Parliament (UK Parliament, n.d.). The unit's work includes connecting the parliamentary and research communities and helping researchers better understand the UK Parliament and how it utilises research. It aims to increase and diversify engagement from the research community, support parliamentary interactions with researchers, contribute to developments within the broader research-policy landscape, and share insights related to knowledge exchange.

Meanwhile, the European Parliament has its own research division known as the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS). The purpose of EPRS is to deliver independent, objective, and authoritative research and analysis on EU-related policy matters to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and relevant parliamentary committees, thereby aiding them in their legislative duties. EPRS also offers a wide array of services and products, supported by specialised internal expertise and knowledge in various policy areas (European Parliamentary Research Service, n.d.). This empowers Members and committees with information and enhances the Parliament's effectiveness and influence as an institution. Additionally, EPRS facilitates and encourages parliamentary outreach to the broader public.

In India, the Parliamentary Research and Training Institute for Democracies (PRIDE) was established as an integral part of the Lok Sabha Secretariat (PRIDE, Lok Sabha Secretariat, Indian Parliament, Delhi, India, n.d.). Its purpose is to provide MPs, parliamentary staff, and others with organised opportunities for systematic training in the different disciplines related to parliamentary institutions, processes, and procedures. However, compared to the parliaments of developed and developing countries, there was no dedicated academic entity within the parliament of Bangladesh until the 11th Bangladesh Parliament (2020-2024). Under the 12th Bangladesh Parliament, The Bangladesh Institute of Parliamentary Studies (BIPS) is established to provide knowledge support to MPs. Such an academic engagement through the Newly established BIPS would facilitate the Bangladesh Parliament to become a more informed, resourceful, and effective institution in the coming years.

## 3. Parliamentary Activities in Bangladesh and Use of Knowledge-Input

### 3.1 Use of Knowledge-based Inputs in the Parliamentary Process

Bangladesh Parliament relies heavily on various entities to gather evidence. The activities of Parliament occur through discussions, debates, exchanges of information, and votes on motions. In case of the Parliamentary activities, the following are the major evidence-sharing areas: (a) Preparing the draft bills; (b) Discussions at the standing committee meetings; and (c) Q&A sessions (Mahiuddin, 2023). In Bangladesh, these processes are observed in five key areas of parliamentary activity, where MPs utilise academic knowledge, research findings, and insights. These areas include:

- a) **Government bills** or those proposed by the opposition are raised, discussed, scrutinised, and voted on in Parliament before they become law.
- b) Various **Parliamentary Standing Committees** serve as oversight bodies for their respective ministries and related public agencies. Fifty (50) such committees operate within the Bangladesh Parliament, regularly meeting to inquire into different issues where academic knowledge is often applied.
- c) The **Prime Minister participates** in a 'question and answer' session, while ministries concerned engage in debates and discussions in Parliament. These discussions focus on government policies, institutional operations, and the election pledges of both the incumbent government and other political parties.
- d) During the **budget session**, many MPs participate in discussions and debates related to the budget, requiring the use of academic knowledge and information.
- e) At the **beginning of each year**, during the first session of Parliament, MPs discuss the Speech of the Honourable President. This discussion necessitates access to information regarding various issues based on academic research and studies.

In all aspects of parliamentary processes, from law-making to participation in question-and-answer sessions, MPs rely heavily on public documents, data, and information. In addition to official sources, the Parliament also depends significantly on data generated by researchers in various forms. In the case of Bangladesh, the Parliament's relationship with the researchers takes place in the following forms (Jahan, 2014):

- a) **Preparing Bills:** Evidence provided by experts is included in the background notes associated with the bills.
- b) **Validating arguments in draft bills:** MPs use expert information and knowledge to support their arguments.
- c) **Standing Committee Meetings:** Members refer to information during standing committee meetings.
- d) **Q&A Sessions:** MPs share, and exchange findings generated by research.
- e) **Criticising academic evidence:** During parliamentary debates and standing committee meetings, MPs critique the knowledge and findings presented by experts.

- f) **Testimony from academics in Parliamentary Standing Committees:** Experts are invited to committee meetings to provide their expertise and opinions on significant national and international issues.
- g) **Face-to-Face Interaction:** Experts are invited as guests to parliamentary standing committee meetings to share their expert opinions.
- h) **Evidence Gathering and Support from the Parliament Secretariat:** Committee offices collect evidence and information support to standing committees and MPs as needed.
- i) **Knowledge-sharing support through Parliament-based development projects:** The Parliament Secretariat implements various development programmes aimed at strengthening parliamentary activities, which include knowledge products and capacity-building initiatives for MPs and committee staff.
- j) **Disputing research arguments:** Similarly, evidence from one research study may be used to challenge findings from another research.
- k) **Understanding national and international issues:** MPs participate in various programmes to enhance their understanding of critical national and international matters.

In most cases, the evidence gathered primarily pertains to economic issues, followed by social and political topics. There is limited reference to evidence concerning institutional and operational matters across different sectors (Jahan, 2014).

### 3.2 Scope of using Knowledge-based Inputs in Engaging Outside the Parliament

The MPs take part in different types of events outside the Parliament where interaction with the knowledge world takes place. These vents may take place nationally or internationally. Following are the events in which MPs take part regularly.

- a) **Knowledge-Sharing Events:** MPs participate in research and knowledge-dissemination events organised by academics to gain valuable insights.
- b) **Media Engagement:** Attending talk shows and participating in debates on social media platforms about current social and contemporary issues helps MPs understand these topics better.
- c) **International events organised by Parliamentary Societies:** The MPs regularly take part in events organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and other parliamentary bodies as part of membership in those committees. Various technical issues are discussed with a forward-looking perspective where the MPs need to share their observations from the national context.

## 4. Bangladesh Institute of Parliamentary Studies (BIPS): Avenue for Knowledge-based Legislative, Policy Debates and Scrutiny Process

The Bangladesh Institute of Parliamentary Studies (BIPS) which was established in 1996, is the most important institutional set-up to extend support parliamentary knowledge support to the MPs. The other institutional arrangements include the International Parliamentary Association (IPA) wing, the research unit at the Parliament Library and the training unit of the Bangladesh Parliament. To meet these objectives, the Act called for the creation of an Institute where a team of experts in constitutional and parliamentary affairs would assist MPs in their parliamentary roles.

As per the BIPS Act 2001, the institute will be an independent statutory body which will be run by a governing board chaired by the Hon'ble Speaker. The Governing Board comprises 24 members representing different public, autonomous and private bodies.<sup>1</sup>

According to Section 7 of the BIPS Act 2001, the newly established institute will provide 20 different types of specialised services to the MPs. These services include:

- a) Providing specialised support on legal and parliamentary affairs;
- b) Conducting research studies on parliamentary systems, management, and affairs;
- c) Researching and gathering information on the constitutional acts of other countries;
- d) Extending support to academia, researchers, and organisations involved in research studies;
- e) Exchanging knowledge, conducting research, and providing training with Parliaments that are members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association;
- f) Sharing experiences with experts and specialists on lawmaking issues;
- g) Organising seminars, symposiums, and workshops at national and international levels to strengthen the parliamentary system;
- h) Publishing newsletters, periodicals, and reports on various parliamentary issues;
- i) Extending technical support to both government and opposition MPs;
- j) Undertaking research on issues critical to parliamentary affairs and publishing the findings;
- k) Providing basic knowledge and understanding of the parliamentary affairs of countries where MPs act as official delegates;
- l) Organising training on legal and regulatory affairs, as well as drafting bills for local and international trainees;
- m) Offering training for officials of different departments within the Bangladesh Parliament Secretariat (BPS) focused on skill development and capacity building;

<sup>1</sup>The Governing Body Includes the following: Deputy Leader of the house, Leader of the Opposition, Chief Whip, selected members of the Parliament, Law Minister, Attorney General, Chairman, Law Commission, Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University, Vice Chancellor of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, Secretary of the Bangladesh parliament Secretariat, Dean Faculty of Law, Dhaka University, President and General Secretary of the Supreme Court Bar Association, President and General Secretary of the Press Club, President and General Secretary of the Dhaka University Teachers Association, Reputed Economist, Banker, Senior Lawyer of the Bangladesh Supreme Court and Rector of the BIPS.

- n) Establishing and operating a library and study room containing key archives on parliamentary issues;
- o) Preparing an activity plan for conducting research and training;
- p) Awarding certificates to participants who complete training and workshops;
- q) Pursuing any other duties assigned by the Parliament.

Hence, the BIPS once in operation will have ample opportunities to support the members of the parliament in undertaking various knowledge-based activities.

## 5. Concluding Remarks: Towards Building BIPS-based Knowledge-Hub in Bangladesh Parliament

- a) **Need Assessment of the MPs:** In the Bangladesh Parliament, it is essential to consider the needs of MPs regarding knowledge products, evidence generation, and the sharing of analyses. Parliaments in various countries regularly conduct assessments among their members to evaluate their participation, the knowledge and evidence support they require, the quality of services needed from parliamentary staff, and the training needs of that staff. Based on this assessment, the Bangladesh Parliament Secretariat could initiate processes to gather information and address knowledge-sharing issues. The BIPS could take the necessary initiatives in this regard.
- b) **Continuation of Capacity Building and Knowledge Generation Projects:** As part of building the capacity of both MPs and parliamentary staff, several projects are currently underway. These projects include dedicated debriefing sessions for MPs on various contemporary issues and training for parliamentary staff on technical matters. The BIPS and training wing of the Parliament Secretariat could undertake capacity-building programmes on a regular basis.
- c) **Enhancing Partnership and Collaboration with Knowledge Arena:** There are opportunities to enhance partnerships and collaboration with knowledge arena. Various technical committees, such as the financial oversight committees, including the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), the Public Undertakings Committee (PUC), and the Estimates Committee (EC), if required,

may ask technical knowledge support for necessary analyses, prepare reports, and formulate inquiries to the relevant ministries. Often, parliamentary staff struggle to provide adequate assistance in these areas. It may be beneficial to hire experts or experienced people or subject specialists on a temporary or short-term basis to offer the necessary technical support. Additionally, the Bangladesh Parliament could allocate funds to support research on parliamentary affairs. The BIPS faculties could engage in short-, medium- and long-term partnerships with local and international academic/ research and government and non-government think tanks on different thematic issues.

- d) **Conducting Research on Parliamentary Affairs:** Research on parliamentary affairs is inadequate, primarily due to limited access to parliamentary information and documents. The Parliament should make all published documents more accessible to facilitate research. BIPS faculties as well as the other research staff of the Bangladesh parliament secretariat could identify tentative research topics which could be approved by the BIPS governing body and thereby necessary research initiatives could be undertaken.
- e) **Disseminating and Publishing Research Findings:** Within its resources, the Parliament should publish knowledge-based materials. In this regard, it is vital to produce research-based and knowledge-based resources for MPs. The Parliament Research Brief, set to be published by itself or with technical support from the EU or any development partners, will regularly disseminate information and knowledge related to parliamentary matters among the members. Bangladesh Parliament website could be used more efficiently for disseminating the findings of the research studies carried out by the BIPS. Besides, regular dialogues and dissemination events are to be organised based on the research studies on parliamentary affairs conducted by researchers outside the BIPS.
- f) **Taking Initiatives for Utilising BIPS's Scopes and Opportunities:** As per mandate, the BIPS is entitled to carry out 27 different types of activities related to knowledge and evidence generation for the MPs as well as for the informed stakeholders. Hence, the BIPS leadership should take necessary measures considering that.

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