

Strengthening Democracy in Bangladesh: Reality or Myth

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Abstract: It is apparent that, Bangladesh is striving hard towards attaining democratic governance. The increasing effectiveness of the civil society organizations remain as complementary force towards realizing the people's aspiration for democratic governance into reality. Moreover, people's participation in the democratic process is exerting growing influence over public policy on a variety of issues. Even, as one of the lower middle income countries, Bangladesh keeps up its persistent efforts to consolidate democracy. However, despite many high profile successes in recent past an embedded political culture prone to confrontation, widespread perceptions of corruption, disturbed judicial system, ineffective parliament, lack of national consensus, less accountable public service delivery, and few well-established protections for the basic rights of citizens remain problematic. The government is struggling harder to overcome the colonial legacy of a highly centralized and pervasive bureaucracy, but law and order still leftovers as a growing problem. The paper emphasizes on analyzing the current state of democracy in Bangladesh. Furthermore, the study figures out challenges and impediments of consolidating democracy in Bangladesh. Suggestions are made at the end for consolidating democracy in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Democracy, Authoritarianism, Democratic Governance, Polyarchy, Political Parties.

Introduction

Democracy has been started as the popular form of government since 1974 and it underscored by S.P. Huntington's seminal study "The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century" (Huntington, 1991). Democracy has been expanded rapidly up to 2006 (Diamond, 2006). He also states that in the beginning of the third wave of global democratization, most of the democratic countries were western and rich countries but in the decade of 1980's democracy was expanded in other parts of the world. The most notable thing is the numbers of these new democracies were quite illiberal which is called competitive authoritarian regime (Levitsky & Way. 2010). The levels of freedom was increasing up to 2005 but around 2006 the expansion of freedom and democracy in the world came to a prolonged halt. Huntington shows that out of 49 sub Saharan African countries, 29 counties declined its freedom. Moreover 20 states in this region observe a decline in political rights and civil liberties. The freedom house which published a report on political rights and civil liberties shows that in the year of 2006 to 2013, most of the countries curtailed political rights and freedom of speech. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way find it as a gloomy picture of democracy (Levitsky & Way., 2015). They explained that the democracy in the world has remained steady over the last decades and it has revamped largely relative to the 1990s. They compared the scores of four influential world democracy

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indices and proved that the world is more democratic today than it was in 2000. Levitsky states that authoritarian breakdown has not brought democratization. Whenever dictatorships fell and opposition groups ascended to power most observers considered it as democratization and subsequent regimes were labeled new democracies. How to define and measure democracy? Actually it is one of the major and probably inescapable ironies of scholarly research that significant disagreement over how to define and measure democracy.

Although it has no one right and consensual answer but most of the scholars have agreed that it can be a way to segregate regimes categorically. Larry Diamond states that democracy has many continuous variables through which, someone can measure whether the government is democratic or not. These variables are- freedom of multiple parties, candidates to campaign and contest, Opposition access to mass media, campaign finance, fairness and neutrality of electoral administration, civil liberties, rule of law, control of corruption, vigor of civil societies and so on. However Robert Dahl points out in polyarchy. He argued that a regime can be considered as a democracy while the following institutional guarantees are extended to all citizens: freedom to form and join organization, freedom of expression, right to vote. Larry Diamond stated that sometimes it is difficult to classify regimes that fall into the gray zone. He also stated that no system of multiparty competition is perfectly fair and open. Some multiparty electoral systems clearly do not meet the test of democracy.

Most approaching to divide regimes depends on continuous measurement of key variables such as political rights and civil liberties. In this case Larry Diamond prefers Freedom House coding decisions. Another question was why democracy breakdown? Larry Diamond stated that the quality or stability of democracy is declining in swing states (emerging market countries) due to the lack of improvement in democracy and freedom. Since 2000 democracy has broken down not only for blatant military or executive coups but also through subtle and incremental degradation of democratic rights and procedures that finally push a democratic system over the threshold into competitive authoritarianism. Basically, strangulation of political rights, civil liberties and the rule of law are the causes of breaking down democracy. Larry stated that most of the scholars do not consider Russia as a democratic state rather they consider it as an electoral democracy. In the parliamentary election held in 2000 in Russia, fell below the minimum conditions of electoral democracy and same process is continuing in Turkey.

Why have freedom and democracy been regressing in many countries? Larry Diamond in his article "Facing up to the democratic recession" states that the most important and pervasive answer is due to bad governance, democracy is regressing. The major problem for democracy in Africa is controlling corruption and abuse of power. Resurgence of new patrimonial system is another reason for democratic recession. Not only in Africa but also every region in the world is facing resurgence trend which is called neo patrimonial system by Francis Fukuyama. In this system patrons use state resources in order to get

loyalty of clients. It undermines the political institutions and rule of law. In this system, only those with connections have the real power. In the process they demonize, intimidate and victimize opponents who get in their way. Civil liberty, freedom of media and freedom of speech is shrined.

For developing nations like Bangladesh, in many instances, people do not see democracy as delivering material benefits, but often the contrary is true. The challenge for emerging democracies for developing countries like Bangladesh is how to internalize them and shape them to reflect regional realities while respecting universal values. In this fashion people can take ownership of them so that they are not seen simply as being imposed. There is a crucial issue of state-civil relations in many nascent democracies. Bangladesh started its journey through parliamentary form of government. Despite of some impediments still now Bangladesh has great opportunity to establish human rights and fundamental rights through democratic process. The above problems can be solved through improving norms and values and practicing democratic culture. Tolerance and coherence can improve the quality of democracy. Political institutions can play pivotal role in establishing democracy. The success of democracy depends on strong political party, sound education system, freedom of speech and media as well as establishing participatory society with the spirit of inclusiveness. Overdeveloped bureaucracy Party centered politics, Corruption and terrorism should be abolished to restore and consolidate democracy. The study attempts to find out the challenges to consolidate democracy in Bangladesh and suggests some doable recommendations to resolve the challenges towards strengthening democracy.

Methodology

The paper attempts to answer the research questions through qualitative analytical approach by reviewing sources such as international organization's reports and index as well as government reports. The study also uses secondary data, specifically books, journals, research reports, newspaper, and various websites on the internet. This paper uses Robert A. Dahl and Diamond's characteristics of democracy and then compare with the present features of Bangladesh democracy.

Conceptual framework of Democracy

The term democracy is derived from the Greek words, demos and Kratos, the former meaning the people and the later meaning power. Democracy thus means power of the people. It is now regarded as a form of government in which the people rule themselves either directly or indirectly through their representatives. Scholars have different view to define democracy. Some requirements for a democracy among a large number of people (Dahl, 1971)

- Freedom to form and join organizations
- Freedom of expression

- Right to vote
- Right of political leaders to compete for support
- Right of political leaders to compete for votes
- Alternative sources of information
- Eligibility for public office
- Free and fair elections and
- Institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expression of preference.

Samuel P. Huntington states a system will be democratic when collective decision makers will be selected through free, fair and credible elections. A country will be democratic if it can fulfill these criteria. Joseph Schumpeter measures democracy through minimalist standard such as government will be formed through getting peoples vote. A system cannot be democratic, unless it ensures the following attributes (Diamond, 2008):

- Substantial individual freedom of belief, opinion, discussion, speech, publication, broadcast, assembly, demonstration, petition, and the internet.
- Freedom of ethnic, religious, racial, and other minority groups (as well as historically excluded majorities) to practice their religion and culture and to participate equally in political and social life.
- The right of all adult citizens to vote and to run for office (if they meet certain minimum age and competency requirements).
- Genuine openness and competition in the electoral arena, enabling any group that adheres to constitutional principles to form a party and contest for office.
- Legal equality of all citizens under a rule of law, in which the laws are clear, publicly known, universal, stable and nonradioactive.
- An independent judiciary to neutrality and consistently apply the law and protect individual and group rights
- Thus, due process of law and freedom of individuals from torture, terror, and unjustified detention, exile, or interference in their personal lives- by the state or non-state actors.
- Institutional checks on the power of elected officials, by an independent legislature, court system, and other autonomous agencies.
- Real pluralism in sources of information and forms of organization independent of the state; and thus, a vibrant civil society.
- Control over the military and state security apparatus by civilians who are ultimately accountable to the people through elections.

Democracy's guiding principle is that of citizenship. This involves both the right to be

treated by fellow human beings as equal with respect to the making of collective choices and the obligation of those implementing such choices to be equally accountable and accessible to all members of the polity (C.Schmitter, 1986). Democracy is a form of government where people have access to share their views, opinion as well as to contest in election. This election will be free, fair and credible. All government institutions will act as freely, without any interference of government. Political party will control military and it will be under the government. The military force will protect external threat of a country. All citizens will be equal according to law.

Electoral Authoritarianism and Democracy

Democratic system turns into electoral authoritarian when government creates an uneven playing field between government and opposition. Lijphart (2011) shows five categories of world regime and another ambiguous regime:

- Liberal democracy
- Electoral democracy
- Ambiguous regime
- Competitive authoritarianism
- Electoral authoritarianism
- Politically closed authoritarianism.

Jason Brownlee(2007) found authoritarian system reflects some features of democracy such as elections and parliaments. In authoritarian regime elections held regularly but it is not free, fair and credible. He mentions some factors for promoting authoritarianism that is electoral fraud, police repression, gerrymandering and clientalism. Larry Diamond called it hybrid regime. When multi-party elections held with some degrees of competition then it will be electoral authoritarianism. Autocrats use the election as the latest fashion and in the guise of election they continue their rule. This system doesn't meet the test of democracy.

Svolic(2009) shows why dictators would tolerate or benefit from a regime party. He argues that regime parties strengthen autocratic control via the hierarchical assignment of service and benefits, political control over appointments, and selective recruitment and repressions. Authoritarian become durable due to unrestrained or arbitrary use of power by capricious individual and rulers manage elite conflict (Brownly.2007).

Megaloni (2006) identifies some characteristics of authoritarian government and these are:

Authoritarian rulers use their relation to justify their rule, hegemonic party, election fraud, Elite cooperation with electoral party

Svolik (2012) suggest a country will be autocratic when it will not fulfill these two criteria; such as: 1.free and competitive legislative elections 2. an executive that is elected either directly in free and competitive presidential elections or indirectly by a legislature in parliamentary system.

Major features of existing democracy in Bangladesh

From the very beginning, Bangladesh is following parliamentary form of democracy. Though, the level of democracy was not up to the mark. After the assassination of the Father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, democracy got a gloomy picture. Bangladesh experienced almost 16 years of military rule. In 1991, democratic government came into power but the level of democracy was questionable. Last two parliamentary elections produced a parliament with no opposition party (Riaz, 2015). He also mentioned that despite conducting several free and fair elections between 1991 and 2013 and being ruled by elected civilian regimes, Bangladesh has witnessed serious shortcomings in governance. First of all, the paper analyses major characteristics of existing political system and previous features of government and then explain whether it fulfill the characteristics of democracy or not.

Absence of free and fair election

Bangladesh got independence in 1971 from Pakistan and its first election was held in 1973. The first parliament was durable only two years and six months. Bangladesh Awami League won the election and got 293 seats out of 300 seats. It was a great victory after election. Awami League was leading the liberation war and that was the major factor for landslide victory. It was the starting of electoral parliamentary form of democracy in Bangladesh. In 1975 the former prime minister has changed the constitution and introduces one party system and presidential form of government. It includes running prime minister will continue his tenure for next five years. This was the starting of authoritarian government. Jahan (1980) shows the major criteria of fourth amendment of Bangladesh is the control of civil liberty, presidential form of government, introduced one party system and controlled the judiciary department.

In 1975 the ruling party leader was assassinated in his house and military took the power. They declare after restoration of political stability they will restore the democracy. Jahan (1980) suggest after military intervention military leader take two steps: one is civilization process and another is party formation. The military leader took the same process in Bangladesh. The second parliamentary election was held in 1979. The military leader forms Bangladesh Nationalist Party and participates in national election. This party won the election. They won 207 seats out of 300 seats. Voter turnout was 50.94 %.(Mohabbat, 1979). Voter turnout and contesting parties in different elections of Bangladesh is shown in the table:

National Parliamentary Election	Contesting party	Voter Turnout	Winning party
1st election March 7, 1973	14	54.91	Awami League 293 Seats
2ND election February 18, 1979	29	50.94	BNP-207 Seats
3rd election March 7, 1986	28	61.07	Jatiya Party-153 Seats
4th election March 3, 1988	8	57.90	Jatiya Party-251 Seats
5th election February 27, 1991	75	55.45	BNP-140 Awami league-88
6th election February 15, 1996	43	20.97	BNP-278
7th election June 12, 1996	81	74.96	Awami league-146 BNP-116
8th election October 1, 2001	54	75.59	BNP-195
9th election December 29, 2008	38	87.13	Awami League-230
10th election January 05, 2014	12	40.04	Awami League-234
11th election December 30, 2018	22	80.00	Awami League- 288

Source: Elections in Asia and the Pacific: A Data Handbook Vol-1, Oxford University Press and Retrieved from the Daily Star, December 18, 2018.

The Journey in Pictures and Facts: Road to the 11th Parliamentary Election The first parliamentary election was very participatory. The above data shows that most of the time incumbent party won the election and their influence in election. From 1975 to 1990, it was presidential form of government and again came back in parliamentary form of government in 1991. In 1988 election, most of the opposition party boycotted the election and some parties like Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party called strike all over the country to cancel the result and demand for new election under non- partisan government. Due to the pressure of major opposition party ruling party leader Hossain Mohammad Ershad dissolved the parliament and hand over the power to caretaker government. For first time care taker government formed for free fair and credible national election. BNP won the election and after their tenure they arrange an election under incumbent government

and it was very partial election. The turnout was only 20.97. On the eve of political turmoil government amended the constitution and set a rule of caretaker government system. Previous parliament was dissolved and again held national parliamentary election under caretaker government.

10th parliamentary election was the most violent election in the history of Bangladesh. It was marred by street fighting, low turnout and a boycott by the opposition which made the result questionable. At least 18 people were died by political clash before Election Day. The ruling party won 232 seats out of 300 seats. Dhaka's Daily Star newspaper described the polls as the deadliest in the country's history, and said in an editorial that the Awami league won a predictable and hollow victory, which gives it neither a mandate nor an ethical standing to govern successfully (Independent,2014). Out of 300 seats 154 constituencies were uncontested and the ruling party won 127 uncounted seats. Ruling party just needs 73 more seats to form a government. There are allegations that returning officers in different districts forced many candidates to withdraw their nomination paper (The Guradian, 2013). BBC News (2018) shows the 11th parliamentary election was farcical election and claimed for vote rigging and BBC reporter find filled ballot boxes at a polling center before polls open. A spokesman of opposition party of Bangladesh Nationalist party claimed there were irregularities in 221 of the 300 seats being contested. Only ruling party agents were present in polling center (BBC News, 2018)

Freedom of choice

According to Bangladesh Constitution freedom of thought and conscience is guaranteed [article 39(1)]. Subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence-(a) the right of every citizen of freedom of speech and expression; and freedom of the press, are guaranteed [(article 39(2)]. Freedom House in their report on Bangladesh shows internet service in Bangladesh is partly free and press is not free (Freedom house, 2019). Freedom house and sixteen human rights organizations jointly released a paper and urge the government to make inquiry commission to investigate the murder of writers, bloggers, publishers, academicians and human rights activists in Bangladesh since February 2015. They also argued that some other prominent writers and bloggers are facing threat for their lives and livelihoods. Many of them are hiding themselves or censoring their speech. They mention that Islamic activist groups have killed them due to their views, expressions and writings of open society (Freedom House, 2016).

Although in the constitution of Bangladesh in article 41 ensures the freedom of speech and conscience and freedom of religion. In constitution it is stated that subject to law, public order and morality-(a) every citizen has the right to profess, practice or propagate any religion, (b) every religious community or denomination has the right to establish,

maintain and manage its religious institutions. (2) No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious ceremony or worship, if that instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own. Though, the state religion of Bangladesh is Islam but it allows the practice of other religions with peace and harmony. Daniel Calingaert, executive vice president states “the government of Bangladesh should ensure that activists and Journalists are free to express their views without fear of violence and bring to justice those responsible for the attacks (Freedom house, 2015). Government introduced Information communication and technology Act 2006 amended in 2013 to regulate the speech. According to Freedom House report-2018, in compare to other countries Bangladesh freedom rating is-

Country	Freedom status	PR	Civil liberty	Freedom rating
Abkhazia	Partly free	4	5	4.5
Afghanistan	Not free	5	6	5.5
Albania	Partly free	3	3	3.0
Australia	Free	1	1	1.0
Austria	Free	1	1	1.0
Argentina	Free	2	2	2.0
Armenia	Partly free	5	4	4.5
Belgium	Free	1	1	1.0
Bangladesh	Partly free	4	4	4.0

Source: Freedom House (2018)

Controlled media

Media is called the fourth organ of the government. It can act as the watchdog of government functions. Media can investigate and oversight the irregularities of government functions. The role of media in democratic governance has been recognized since the late 17th century and remains a fundamental principle of modern day democratic theory and practice. It plays a pivotal role in shaping a sound democracy. A truly democratic society requires citizen participation. If they do their jobs well the media keep citizens engaged in the business of governance and prompt them to take action. As a tool for information dissemination the media aid the public in making informed choices such as whom to vote for and which policy should be endorsed and which opposed.

In Bangladesh media's role is very controversial. In 1975 under the fourth amendment of constitution, government curtailed the liberty of media and stopped all media except four newspapers. When Awami league government came back in power they established the freedom of media and press but after 2013 freedom of press is declining. Freedom House (2016, 2017) shows that in Bangladesh the trend of freedom of speech is declining.

Freedom in different sector	2016	2017
Press freedom	64/100	62/100
Legal environment	18/30	19/30
Political environment	27/30	27/30
Economic environment	16/30	16/30

The media can promote democracy by educating voters, protecting human rights, promoting tolerance among various social groups and ensuring that governments are transparent and accountable. But in due to some restrictions provided by the government media cannot play the proper role to make transparent the government functions. Government introduced the digital security act in 2018. Most of the media takes it as a serious concern for freedom of press and media. According to article 43 of digital security act, police can arrest anyone if they believe he or she has been committed an offence. Amnesty International's South Asia Campaigners, Saad Hammadi states "this law imposes dangerous restrictions on freedom of expression. Instead of learning from the lessons of the past, it seeks to repeat them. Given how the authorities have arbitrarily arrested hundreds of people in the past six years under the Information and Communication Technology Act, there are serious concerns that the new act will be used against people who speaks out. (Amnesty international, 2018)

Each year 'Reporters Without Borders' published world press freedom index and it is showing that press freedom in Bangladesh is problematic. The index ranges from 0-110, where 0 indicates the top rating (e.g. no hindrances in freedom of press) and 110 is the worst rating. Countries having scores above 20, indicates the problem of press freedom. The rating scores is showing that average score of Bangladesh is above 40 and it is implying that freedom of presses in problematic here.

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011-12	2013
Rank	118	143	151	151	137	134	136	121	126	129	144
Score	43.75	46.50	62.50	61.25	48.00	53.71	42.70	37.33	42.50	57.00	42.01

Source: Reporters Without Borders, World Press Freedom Index, Various years, <http://rsf.org/en/world-press-freedom-index-20112012>

Censorship of internet-based content has become increasingly common in Bangladesh, with periodic blocking of YouTube, Facebook, other social-media and messaging applications, and high-profile Bengali blogs in recent years. Before 2015 the freedom of press status was partly free but due to chaotic situation in November 2015, the government temporarily blocked the social-media platforms Facebook, Viber, and WhatsApp, allegedly to maintain public order at the time of the controversial sentencing of opposition leaders for war crimes murders of bloggers and online activists. Even during the national parliamentary election of 2018, government stopped the internet connection for three days.

Civil liberties

It comprises of freedom of expression, freedom of choice and freedom of action. In the case of Bangladesh, freedom house scores in civil liberties shows that the average score is 4 out of 10, where 10 indicates no obstacles in civil liberties. Even in the case of political rights the average score of Bangladesh is 3 out of 10. It implies that the political rights is not ensuring here.

Year	Political rights	Civil liberties
1991	2	3
1992	2	3
1993	2	4
1994	2	4
1995	3	4
1996	2	4
1997	2	4
1998	2	4
1999	3	4
2000	3	4
2001	3	4
2002	4	4
2003	4	4
2004	4	4
2005	4	4
2006	4	4
2007	5	4
2008	4	4
2009	3	4
2010	3	4
2011	3	4
2012	3	4
2013	3	4

Source: Freedom House, Freedom in the World, Various Years adopted from Riaz. A. 2015. The Nature and Quality of Democracy in Bangladesh (1991-2013): An Assessment.

Absence of strong civil society

In absence of strong political party, civil society can play the role of opposition party. A strong civil society may oversight the functions of government. For an example, Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD), SUJON (Citizen for good governance/ Sushashoner Jonno Nagorik

and Transparency International of Bangladesh (TIB) are playing pivotal role to make the government transparent. On October 25, Transparency International of Bangladesh has published a report on the participation of Member of Parliament in question-answer session and discussion on important notice and mentioned only six percent of 388 working hours were spent on policy formulation and passage of the 30 laws. It also condemned the role of opposition party for their failure of playing proper role as opposition party. They also argue that the opposition party in parliament is working as B team of government. The parliament criticizes the report of TIB and member of parliaments urge to suspend the registration of TIB as a NGO. (The Daily Star, 2015).

Rule of law Scenario

According to the constitution of Bangladesh the state shall endeavor to ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens. The state shall adopt effective measures to remove social and economic inequality between man and woman and to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth among citizens, and of opportunities in order to attain a uniform level of economic development throughout the republic (article -19). Judiciary is responsible for establishing justice but they can't play their rule due to the interference of executive branch. In the case of Bangladesh, excessive powers have been vested in the hands of executive branch (Rahman, 2008).

Confrontational politics

Political conflict is very common feature in Bangladesh politics. Even, internal party conflict also affects the democracy in Bangladesh. Jahan (2014) shows leadership selection, candidate nomination, policy setting, social diversity of leadership, transparency and accountability of party towards election funding and intra party violence is the trigger of political conflict. Basically, political confrontation has been started since the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 and till now it is obstructing the peaceful political movement.

Absence of strong opposition in parliament

Hasanuzzaman (1998) explained that the most important characteristics of democratic system are the existence of opposition both as alternative government and as critic of the party in power. He also argues that opposition assumes an important role in parliamentary democracy along with its formal functions inside the legislature to constantly monitor the Treasury. The absence of ineffectiveness of an opposition thus allows the executive power to become authoritarian. In first parliament ruling party won 293 seats and opposition party was very inactive from the very beginning. In fourth election, ninth election, 10th election and 11th election ruling party got two third majorities in parliament. Even in 10th parliament and 11th parliament some party leaders of different parties compete in election with the same symbol of ruling party. At the same time the opposition party participates in cabinet system and plays the role as opposition party. It is very contradictory with the principle of democracy.

Ineffective parliament

Parliament is the most important organ of the state. In a parliamentary form of government, cabinet body is responsible to the legislature. Cabinet body is found uncontrolled when the legislature become ineffective. Parliaments in post-independence countries that struggle to assert supremacy over the executive are constrained by power, resources and a lack of independence. This weakness is further intensified due to lack of democratic culture and values.; a consensual politics between the treasury and opposition benches and proper use of the existing accountability mechanism- both horizontal and vertical under the constitutional and legal system (Jahan, R 2015). Bangladesh is no more exceptional. In Bangladesh, as ruling party won the two third majorities in parliament such as; first parliament, fourth parliament, ninth, tenth and eleventh parliament, ruling party controlled the legislature. Opposition party was very weak in nature.

All of the members of parliament have equal right to participate in the legislative and oversight duties of parliament (Lindley, 1991). Article 76 of the constitution of Bangladesh discusses the provision of parliamentary committee system. Bangladesh held its first parliamentary election in 1973 and framed its ROP in 1974 (Ahmed, 1998). According to the article 76 of Bangladesh constitution, parliaments can form the following standing committees:

- A public accounts committee
- Committee of privileges
- Such other standing committees as the rules of procedure of parliament.

Standing committees at Bangladesh parliament are following:

Name of committees	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Seventh	Eights	Ninth	Tenth
Ministerial committees	-	36	-	35	35	35	35	39	39
Finance and audit committees	3	3	-	3	3	3	3	3	3
Other standing committees	8	8	4	8	8	8	8	8	8
Special or select committees	3	4	2	2	7	2	-	3	-
Total	14	51	6	48	53	48	48	53	50

Source: Adopted from Nizam Ahmed (2002) and the Bangladesh Parliament Secretariat. Retrieved from Obaidullah (2019).

The data shows that Bangladesh has the familiarity in committee system since the beginning of first parliament. Though, each parliament; some committees are absent. Moreover, the

number of committee was insufficient to deal with the pressure of oversight functions. Ahmed (2001) shows that parliamentary committee system in Bangladesh failed to perform as a watchdog properly; though, committee system works as a training ground for the parliamentary members to make them familiar and efficient in parliamentary procedure. The data also shows that the present parliamentary committees comparatively vibrant and active than the past.

Loyal election commission

The super intendence, direction and control of the preparation of the elections to the office or president and to parliament and the conduct of such elections shall vest in the election commission (Bangladesh Constitution, 1972). The major task of election commission is a) hold elections to the office of president; b) hold elections to the member of parliaments; c) delimit the constituencies for the purpose of elections to parliament (article-119). During the national parliamentary election in 1988 and 2014, major opposition party boycotted the election on the demand of restructuring election commission.

Impediments for consolidating democracy in Bangladesh

From the very beginning, Bangladesh is struggling for consolidating democracy. Democracy thwarted by different factors such as low political culture, confrontation of politics and military intervention in different times. Obaidullah (2019) discusses that the most fundamental challenge was successfully holding free, fair and participatory election under nonpartisan election commission. He also finds some impediments for establishing democracy such as:

- Lack of continuity in constitutional rule
- Lack of enforcement of the rule of law
- Absence of good governance
- Lack of resources to make parliament independent from the executive
- Unwillingness of the chief executive to be accountable to the legislature
- Weak political opposition
- Article 70, which includes that ruling party member, cannot cast their vote against their own party.
- Lack of assertion from parliament to hold the powerful executive to account
- Overdeveloped bureaucracy
- Party centered politics
- Problems in local government (Obaidullah, 2008)

Bangladesh started its journey through parliamentary form of government. Despite of some impediments still now Bangladesh has great opportunity to establish human rights and fundamental rights through democratic process. The above problems can be solved through improving norms and values and practicing democratic culture. Tolerance and coherence can improve the quality of democracy. Political institutions can play pivotal role in

establishing democracy. The success of democracy depends on strong political party, sound education system, freedom of speech and media as well as establishing good governance Political morality and norms and values of mass people. Overdeveloped bureaucracy, Party centered politics, Corruption and terrorism should be abolished to restore democracy.

Conclusion

Bangladesh keeps its consistent efforts to meet the criteria of democracy. Though, due to lack of institutionalization of political organization, it experienced more than 15 years of military rule. Moreover, national parliamentary elections are holding after a certain period and sometimes election becomes participatory but major opposition parties denied the result of election. In the parliamentary election in 2018 incumbent party use the state machinery to subjugate the opposition virtually ensures the rolling parties electoral victory (The Daily Star, 2018). Most of the international election observers do not recognize the election of 2018. Even prior to the Election Day government completely shut down the internet connection to control the media and earlier in the day, BTRC had blocked 3G and 4G services for the second time ahead of the polls. Considering the entire issue one can conclude that Bangladesh government need to take a lot of steps to ensure the fundamental rights, civil rights as well as good governance. Developing countries like Bangladesh should direct sincere efforts towards accelerating the following stakes to give democratic governance in institutional shape for protection of the development already achieved as well as to brand the development viable:

- 1) All men and women should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests. Such broad participation is built on freedom of association and speech, as well as capabilities to participate constructively;
- 2) Legal frameworks should be fair and enforced impartially, particularly laws on human rights;
- 3) Transparency is built on the free flow of information. Processes, institutions and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them, and enough information is provided to understand and monitor them;
- 4) Institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders. Consensus orientation-good governance mediates differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the group, and where possible, on policies and procedures;
- 5) All men and women have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being;
- 6) Processes and institutions produce results that meet needs while making the best use of resources;
- 7) Decision makers in government, the private sector and civil society organizations are accountable to the public, as well as to institutional stakeholders. This accountability differs depending on the organization and whether the decision is internal or external to an organization; and

- 8) Leaders and the public have a broad and long-term perspective on good governance and human development, along with a sense of what is needed for such development. There is also an understanding of the historical, cultural and social complexities in which that perspective is grounded.

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