

Parliamentary Elections in Bangladesh *An Analysis*

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Abstract: Elections to the legislature should serve as barometers of political mood of a nation in a parliamentary democracy. One of the imperative characteristic of representative democracy in which the right to exercise government power is gained by success in regular and competitive elections. By the elections voters exercise their freedom of choice freely. Without this guarantee, the elections may prove meaningless. Election is the most widely accepted basis for legitimate representation. All the essential elements of democracy are present in democratic election. Elections are means of making political preferences by voting. Political preferences in a democratic society are expressed through the institutional mechanism of periodic elections. Every political system, if it is to endure, must provide ways of expressing the political preferences of the people. In the case of Bangladesh, reveals that a number of parliamentary elections held in Bangladesh after independence and restoration of democracy. Any regimes even military could not stay power for a long time without holding elections; they rather sought their legitimacy through elections. Unfortunately, it is generally claimed and accepted that most of the elections in Bangladesh have not been free, fair and impartial. Complaints about election irregularities have often been made and even independent foreign observers have corroborated these charges. Military rulers in Bangladesh resorted to deliberate and planned machinations of registering electoral verdict through rigging and manipulation of elections time and again to attain a facade of legitimacy and to perpetuate their control over state power. This became a regular feature of Bangladesh politics during the regime of military rulers since 1975 till 1990. Whether under military or democratic regime, even though after restoration of parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh political government have failed to show its effective performance in holding free, fair and impartial elections to ensure people's sovereignty over the executive. In 1991 Bangladesh backed to the parliamentary form of government and tried to restore democratic political system and responsible government by holding free, fair and impartial elections with the introduction of caretaker model. Meanwhile, Bangladesh experienced with nine parliamentary elections and government, five of them after restoration of parliamentary democracy in the country. Elections in Bangladesh generally consist of four categories: referendum, presidential election, parliamentary election and local council elections. In this article an attempt has been made to analyse the nature of parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh by analyzing various parliamentary elections in Bangladesh.

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Introduction:

The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote. (Schumpeter, 1976 p.269). Democracy thus means power of the people and it is now regarded as a form of government in which the people rule themselves either directly or indirectly through their representatives. There are two forms or ways of establishing democracy in the liberal democratic systems; one is presidential and the other is parliamentary system. In any classification and categorization of the forms of government liberal democracies are 'democratic' in the sense that government rests upon the consent of the governed. This implies a form of representative democracy in which the right to exercise government power is gained by success in regular and competitive elections. So, election is a process for representation of people's voice in state decision making through representatives. Election is the most widely accepted basis for legitimate representation (Friedrich, 1968 p.280). Elections are the central institution of democracy. All the essential elements of democracy are present in democratic election (Kirkpatrick, 1984 p.63). Elections are means of making political preferences by voting. Political preferences in a democratic society are expressed through the institutional mechanism of periodic elections. No government receives unqualified and indefinite support of the people over whom it asserts its jurisdiction. Every political system, if it is to endure, must provide ways of expressing the political preferences of the people (Enayetur Rahim, 1990 p.95). Robert Dahl says a democratic political system is one which is "completely or almost completely responsible to all its citizens" (Huntington, 1985 pp.253-279). Huntington also observed that democratic development depends on strong economy and efficient political institutions such as electoral system, political parties and bureaucracy (Huntington, 1985). A political system is defined as democratic to the extent that its most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote (Huntington, 1985).

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Bangladesh, after its independence Bangladesh started to the journey with the introduction of Westminster type of parliamentary democracy. Though the inception of the political system of Bangladesh was a democratic form with the introduction of parliamentary form of democracy where election has taken place as the most vital method of legitimizing and democratizing the polity, but it was short live and like other developing nations, the practice of parliamentary democracy faced various constraining factors and the country was thrown under army rule and depredation of authoritarianism (Hasanuzzman, 1998 p.36). Political system of Bangladesh since 1975 till 1990 worked in an authoritarian environment and as such the country developed a political culture of non-democratic character. In 1991 Bangladesh backed to the parliamentary form of government and tried to restore democratic political system and responsible government by holding free, fair and impartial elections. Meanwhile, Bangladesh experienced with nine parliamentary elections and government, five of them after restoration of parliamentary democracy in the country. Elections in Bangladesh generally consist of four categories: referendum, presidential election, parliamentary election and local council elections. In this article an endeavour would be made to analyse the nature of parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh by analyzing various parliamentary elections in Bangladesh.

Parliamentary Elections in Bangladesh: A Historical Background

The people of Indian subcontinent familiar with the electoral systems during the British colonial period. This process went on incrementally beginning with the Government of India Act, 1861 through 1892, 1909, 1919 to Act, 1935 (Emajuddin *et.al.* 2007, p.70). Though the British administrator introduced electoral system and parliamentary democracy in 1935 at provincial level in the subcontinent but since the formation of Pakistan, the people of Bangladesh regarded the inherited parliamentary system as the only legitimate form of government even though they could not live under democratic system for any significant period of time. Since its inception, Pakistan developed a 'Viceregal system' (Khalid bin Sayeed, 1968 pp. 279-300). instead of a parliamentary one. From 1947 to 1953 the Muslim League dominated parliamentary politics in both the central and provincial legislature including East Bengal Legislative Assembly. The landslide election victory of Jukto Front in the Provincial Legislatur thereby ending the monopoly of the Muslim League at least in the eastern part of the country.

The provincial level attempt of parliamentary democracy could not be institutionalized due to the machinations of the central government of Pakistan. Even parliamentary form of government as introduced in the 1956 constitution of Pakistan on British model could not attain foothold and within a short span of time 'had sunk in the lowest depth of degradation by 1958' (Rashiduzzman, 1967 p.139.) making room for a martial law government. The Bengali people of Pakistan once again rolled their deep attachment for parliamentary democracy that was enshrined in the six-point programme of Awami League through their resolute mandate in 1970 elections. But they did not get democracy. Moreover, authoritarian trends were visible in Pakistani political system. Democratic behaves and practices tended to erode from political arena at the behest of politico-bureaucratic elites. Provinces were denied their autonomies at the altar of strong central administration. Consequently, people became aspirant as alternative for parliamentary democracy. Economic disparity between two wings of Pakistan bred anger and hatred to each other. Transfer of capital and establishment of industries in the west wing crippled economy of the east wing and made it an 'internal colony' (Rounaq Jahan, 1972) of the west wing Bengali people wanted remedy of this situation through parliamentary democracy. The peoples of East Pakistan found way to consolidate their position in the power structure of Pakistan through their unflinching support to six-point programme of Awami League which provided, inter alia, a parliamentary form of government with maximum autonomy for East Pakistan. The Bengali people's (majority population of Pakistan) mandate for a parliamentary democracy was epitomized in 1970 general elections to bring an end of authoritarian rule of Pakistani rulers to establish accountability and responsibility of government by bringing an end of authoritarian rule of Pakistani rulers. But it did not happen during the Pakistani government structure. Moreover, authoritarian attitude and actions by Pakistan's political executives prevented the nurture of a free election and parliamentary political culture. Absence of elections and democracy, among others, resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state by a blood-spattered war in 1971 (Mannan, 2005 p.38).

Parliamentary Elections in Bangladesh:

After independence, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman-the main architect of Bangladesh liberation movement (later on called Father of the nation) returned to the country on January 10, 1972, and turned his attention to the formation of government and framing of a constitution for

the new born Bangladesh. It was easy for him to retain the presidential system of government and concentrate all powers in his hands. But instead of this, he introduced a full-fledged parliamentary form of government (Chakrabarti, 1978 p.221). The Bangladesh Constituent Assembly Order, which was promulgated on March 23, 1972, brought into existence a Constituent Assembly with 430 members who were earlier elected to the Pakistan National and Provincial Assembly. A 34 member Constitution Drafting Committee with Dr. Kamal Hossain as the chairman was set up on April 11, 1972. And finally, Bangladesh has got a Constitution which was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 4, 1972, and came into force on December 16, 1972. The constitution envisaged a Westminster type of parliamentary system reflecting the aspirations and wishes of the people. All the necessary preconditions of parliamentary systems of government were provided in the constitution (Mahiuddin, 2007 pp.17-28.). Thus a dream was brought into reality and the aspirations of the people who struggled to achieve such a democratic system during the days of united Pakistan were adhered to. Immediately after the constitution had come into force, Sheikh Mujib decided to seek fresh mandate from the people. Accordingly, election was held on March 7, 1973. The Awami League again secured massive majority, capturing 291 out of 300 seats. The hope for parliamentary democracy was generated by the constitution and the election. But unfortunately, Bangladesh switched over to one-party presidential system of monolithic character. The system, as designed, concentrated total power to the presidency held by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. After independence in 1971, Bangladesh started its career with parliamentary democracy and continued its commitment to the Westminster system till 1975. Within three years of independence, Bangladesh became a one-party state in early 1975 (January 25, 1975) with complete authoritarian character which proved Rupert Emerson's thesis that new states starting with parliamentary democracy soon lost their way and settled back into authoritarian or dictatorial regimes (Emerson, 1960 p. 273). As a result, parliamentary democracy was not workable due to a number of impeding factors like inability on the part of political leadership in institutionalizing the party system, factionalism within politics and administration, non existence of any official opposition within the legislature, presence of multi-farious socio-economic and political crises (Hasanuzzman, 1999 pp.55-62). The constitutional arrangement of totalitarian control was soon replaced (August 15, 1975) by an army coup spearheaded by a few discontented

army officers. The army putsch assassinated Sheikh Mujib and his family members, overthrew the government and installed a military dominated civilian regime. Military rulers in Bangladesh continued to dominate the politics for three-fourth of the period since independence in 1971- six years under General Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and nine years under General Ershad (1982-1990). The authoritarian character of Bangladesh political system was later modified, revised and extended to the convenience of military rulers. Ziaur Rahman attempted to give his military regime a semblance of civilian rule, what the political analysts called 'civilianization' (Craig Baxter and Syedur Rahman, 1982 pp. 254-255) through the development of civilian institutions particularly a political party - Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in late 1978 - to articulate people's support for his policies. The military rulers used to rig and manipulate elections to attain legitimacy to their regimes. Election as a method of expressing people's mandate lost its virginity to the machinations of military rulers. After two successive electoral exercises (referendum in 1977 and presidential election in 1978) Zia attempted, as further step to resolve the legitimacy crisis and civilianize his military rule, by a parliamentary election in February 1979. The reason of parliamentary election 1979 was seeking legislative approval for Zia's military actions so far undertaken for state governance. The 1979 parliamentary election was also intended to give a legal cover and constitutional confirmation to the dictatorship through parliamentary ornament. 29 political parties and 2125 candidates contested for 300 seats in this election. Zia's self-made political platform - Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) won in the election more than two-thirds of the seats (207 out of the 300 seats) of Bangladesh's unicameral legislature. In fact the election, it is believed, was rigged in favour of BNP candidates: Corrupt and irregular practices had been perpetrated by BNP candidates, their supporters and polling agents and assigned government officials when things turned difficult for the ruling party candidates. Electoral voice was turned by manipulation in favour of BNP candidates. Opposition leaders alleged that the rigging of the elections was a pre-planned affair and the ruling party had already decided much ahead of the polls as to the number of opposition members it wanted to have in the parliament (Dainik Sangbad, February 21, 1979). This parliamentary election had been under the presidential system. The process through which Zia endeavoured to obtain his personal as well as institutional legitimacy suffered a slow down when second martial law was promulgated and General Ershad took over on March 24, 1982. There

was a short civilian government of ten months, after the assassination of Ziaur Rahman on May 30, 1981, headed by President Sattar who was forced to "hand over power at gunpoint" Ershad resorted to follow the same process, as his military predecessor Ziaur Rahman did, to return to civilian rule. He started his returning to electoral politics through seeking referendum which proved 'meaningless' as observers claimed. The voter turn out was not more than 15-20 percent (Bertocci, 1986 p. 229) against 72 percent as claimed by the government controlled election commission. The regime's claim of 94 percent voters' support to Ershad's regime in the plebiscite testified how ridiculously Ershad started to manipulate electoral verdict to complete the ritual of political legitimisation. Ershad's repeated attempt of electoral practices-Upazilla elections in 1985 (local government district), Parliamentary and Presidential elections in 1986 and another Parliamentary elections in 1988 - proved instrumental in destroying the acceptability of election to obtain people's mandate. In every stage Ershad implemented the blueprint of farcical election. The practice of rigging and tampering of votes, and hijacking of ballot boxes which featured in the Upazilla elections recurred in massive and wide scale in the parliamentary polls of May 7, 1986. The turnouts, contrary to official reports, have been estimated by the local press varying between 10 and 30 percent, the lowest in the political history of the country. Ershad's party men coerced the voters to vote for their candidates captured polling booths or conveniently lost entire ballot boxes in hostile centres. The oppositions termed the election results again as 'fraudulent'. The opposition, in the country, accused the government of 'vote piracy' through 'media coup'. Thus right of people to vote freely, fairly, fearlessly and judiciously was undermined by the coercion and terrorism perpetuated by the ruling party. The mainstream oppositions boycotted the election. They criticised the election as a farce and claimed that the voter turn out was less than 3 percent (S. S. Islam, 1987 p. 118). The overt practice of 'managing' votes in support of the regime as well as to elect facade legislature devoid of electoral support proved futile when Ershad had to dissolve the parliament on December 6, 1987 and to try for another electoral attempt to elect a new parliament. The major opposition parties and alliances did not participate in the elections on March 3, 1988 to elect a new legislative body, as they were convinced that fair elections were impossible under the regime. The ruling Jatiya Party (JP) won almost all the seats (251 of 300 seats and 68.44 percent of votes) with the claim of the Election Commission that the voter turn out was 52.48 percent while the oppositions were reluctant to believe that more than 1 percent of the

voters exercised their rights. People neither participated nor accepted the electoral process under the military regime. The electoral process lost confidence of the voters. The opposition parties accused the government of various electoral irregularities and misdeeds, and thus, the military regime relegated electoral practices to shamble to elect a 'tame parliament' (A. Hakim, 1991, p. 188). Through out his nine years of military rule Ershad proved his best ability to manipulate the democratic process through rigged elections by stuffing ballot boxes, intimidation of voters, casting of false votes and lastly to 'vote piracy' by 'media coup'. As a result, the anti-autocracy movement of the oppositions and mass upsurge of 1990 paved the way for reestablishing fair election and parliamentary democratic set up in the country in 1991.

Table -1 : A Profile of First Four Parliamentary Elections (Under Quasi-Democracy and Military Rules)

Events	1 st Parliament	2 nd Parliament	3 rd Parliament	4 th Parliament
Date of Election	March 7, 1973	Feb, 18, 1979	May 7, 1986	March 3, 1988
No of Contesting Parties	14	29	28	08
Total No of Candidates	1091	2125	1527	977
No of Independent Candidates	120	422	453	214
No. of Voters	3,52,05,642	3,83,63,858	4,78,76,979	4,98,63,829
No of Casting Votes	1,93,29,683	1,96,76,128	2,88,73,540	2,61,69,071
% of Casting Votes	55.61	50.24	60.31	54.93
Winning Party	AL	BNP	JP	JP
No of Seats Won	293	207	153	251
No of Votes Won	1,37,93,717	79,34,236	1,20,79,259	1,76,80,133
% of Votes Won	73.16	41.17	42.34	68.44
2 nd Largest Party	Independent	AL	AL	COP
No of Seats Won	5	39	76	19
No of Votes Won	9,89,884	47,34,277	74,62,157	32,63,340
% of Votes Won	5.26	24.56	26.16	12.63
No of Parties Winning at least One Seat	3	11	11	4
% of Parties that failed to Win Any Seats	78.57	62.67	60.71	50.00
Independent Won	5	16	32	25
No of Votes Won	9,89,884	19,63,345	46,19,025	34,87,457
% Of Votes Won	5.25	10.19	16.19	13.50

Source: Muhammad A. Hakim, *Bangladesh Politics: The Shuhabuddin Interregnum*, Dhaka: UPL, 1993, Pp.43-44.

After 90's, Restoration of Parliamentary Democracy and Elections in Bangladesh: A Care-taker Model

Since assumption of state power General Ershad faced continuous and sometimes severe movements organized by the opposition parties and alliances. But it shaped a final phase in 1990. After a mass movement in 1990 the mainstream opposition alliances and parties issued a joint

declaration that Ershad should resign and hand over power to a care-taker government for holding a free and fair parliamentary election within three months. The three alliances determined not to participate in any election under the present government of President Ershad. They have decided not only to boycott the elections under the present regime but also to resist all elections under President Ershad. Lastly, Ershad resigned and appointed Shahabuddin Ahmed, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court as the Vice-President (consensus of all political parties), and handed over power to him as the Acting President. Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed formed a care-taker government and holds the election of Parliament on February 27, 1991. The election was generally hailed as 'the most free and fair' not only by local observers but foreign observers too were unanimous about it (The Daily Star, April 1, April 24, 1991). This election generated unexpected enthusiasm among the voters. The caretaker government was not a party to the election; as such by fairness and neutrality the government could create trust among the voters. The voters exercised their voting rights in the election, unlike the all past elections, in an unfettered way to sense a 'revival of democracy'. The election was contested and participated fully and freely by all political parties and alliances. 75 political parties and 2,787 candidates contested in this election. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) emerged victorious with single majority (140 seats of 300) in the parliament. AL was relegated to the second position with a tally of 88. BNP with the support of Jamat-e-Islami (18 seats) best known for anti-liberation plank-formed the government to establish 'sovereign parliament'. Cabinet formed by the leadership of Khaleda Zia as Prime Minister. Fifth legislature formed. It held a total of 22 sessions and during its 400 working days passed 172 laws. The political parties in the Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) in their post-election maneuver rose to the occasion unanimously to honour their pledge made in the joint declaration which though did not "bear any constitutional validity" but had "sufficient political significance" amendment to the constitution of Bangladesh to switch over from presidential to parliamentary form of government which was ratified by a nation-wide referendum on September 15, 1991 (<http://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/SAPOL/HPSACP.htm>). Within one year of the elections, the Awami League and six other opposition parties moved a no-confidence motion in parliament against the ruling BNP. On the other hand, the leader of the house would frequently remain absent from attending parliamentary sessions. This encouraged the leader of the opposition too to ignore parliament. As a result, parliament failed to be an appropriate

forum for discussion of national issues as well as a training platform of democratic norms. The ruling party made the parliament more a place for pushing through ordinances rather than making it a legislative house for the nation. Due to the absence of institutional compromise, conflict between AL and the ruling BNP eventually appeared soon on the issue of by-election. Opposition alleged rigging of votes by the ruling party in Magura by-elections held on March 20, 1994. The government failed to maintain neutrality and to attain trustworthiness for restoring vote rigging in the by-elections in Mirpur and Magura.

BNP Government adopted same method of polluting electoral process of the country as the military dictators did in the recent past. As a result, the oppositions demanded the resignation of the ruling party and the formation of a neutral care-taker interim government to hold the next parliamentary elections. The demand was backed by the widespread belief that it was not possible to hold free and fair election under a partisan government. The uncompromising stands of both the ruling party and the opposition resulted in the boycott of parliament by the oppositions. Since the first quarter of 1994, the oppositions kept themselves out of parliament, throwing the country into a deep political crisis. In December of the same year, all the opposition members (149 MPs) resigned from the parliament. As such the parliament became dysfunctional because of the absence of opposition participation. In this milieu, the fifth parliament was dissolved prematurely on November 24, 2005 (<http://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/SAPOL/HPSACP.htm>). Alternatively, the ruling BNP government held the parliamentary election on February, 1996 without the participation of major opposition parties. The February election reinforced opposition's demand of care-taker government. With rising pressure from all quarters of society, the government in the first session of the new parliament passed the 13th amendment bill to the constitution on March 26, 1996 incorporating the provisions of care-taker government, resigned on March 30, 1996 and the President formed a care-taker government with former Chief Justice Muhammed Habibur Rahman as Chief Adviser on the same day to hold the next general election. A free and fair election was held on June 12, 1996. 81 political parties and alliances contested in the election and voters participated enthusiastically, peacefully and fearlessly in the elections. The voters turn out registered a new record of 74.81 percent including 40 percent female votes. The caretaker government successfully conducted a free and fair election with unanimous appreciation from international observers.

Bangladesh Awami League won in the election bagging 146 seats while Bangladesh Nationalist Party-BNP appeared as strong opposition with 116 seats. Awami League, in understanding with Jatiya Party, formed the government and termed it as the government of national consensus after 21 years. The new government with Sheikh Hasina as the Prime Minister took over on June 23, 1996. We observed some change in the seventh parliament. Parliamentary Standing Committees are being chaired, instead of concerned minister, by members of parliament along with this; question-hours of the Prime Minister to answer the queries of the members of the parliament on fixed days during parliament session have tended to ensure transparency and accountability of the government to the parliament. For the first time in the country's parliamentary history this parliament provided a numerically strong opposition in the House and fulfilled its tenure. This parliament enacted 189 laws by holding 23 sessions during its 382 working days. At one stage, BNP boycotted the parliament and launched anti-government movement on various issues and finally demanded resignation of the government. But disregarding all such demands from the opposition, AL handed over the state power on July 15, 2001 after completing its five years' tenure. Another caretaker government headed by Justice Latifur Rahman took over power and held the 8th Jatiya Sangsad election on October 1, 2001. In this election, 50 political parties and 1,935 candidates including 486 independent candidates contested for 300 general seats of Parliament. 74.5% voters cast their votes to elect the 8th parliament of Bangladesh. BNP led four-party alliance secured two-third majority in the parliament. BNP won a massive victory sweeping 193 seats while 216 seats along with its allies. AL worked as opposition securing 62 seats in the parliament though the leader of AL termed the election "rigged under the blue print jointly prepared by the BNP led alliance, caretaker government and the election commission" (Bangladesh Observer, October 4, 2001). However, the first session of 8th parliament commenced on October 28, 2001. AL boycott the first session but joined in the second session. It held a total of 23 sessions and during its 373 working days passed 185 laws. The special character of this parliament was; dominated by the ruling party. Opposition was very weak. As a result, opposition did not able to perform their role as like a watchdog of democracy in the parliament. Opposition posed their demand in the street rather than parliament. We observed the same hortal culture in Bangladesh again and dysfunctional parliament. In this circumstance, eighth parliament dissolved on October 28, 2006 after ending its full five years tenure. The BNP government in its ending days

encountered the opposition political movements in truly cruel ways. It seemed that it was not a democracy at all. It was rather a monarchy. In the same way, opposition played authoritarianism in their political strategy and course of action in political movements. The opposition did not have substantive support of the people. In fact, the people lost faith in both the parties and the political system (Mushrafi and Rahman, 2009 p.179). Democracy of Bangladesh graved with a critical crisis and intolerance, lack of consensus observed among the political parties in regarding caretaker government. Notwithstanding the tiny shortcomings, the adhoc institution of caretaker government has taken shape and has attained constitutional sanction as a new concept as well as a new model in Bangladesh but it did not institutionalized during 1991-2006. Meanwhile, as mandated under Bangladesh's constitution, a caretaker government headed by the existing president Iajuddin Ahmed came to power in October 2006 when the five-year tenure of the Bangladesh National Party-led government concluded. The caretaker government then had 90 days to hold free and fair elections, and Bangladesh's Election Commission designated January 22 as the election date. However, an increasing and serious number of electoral irregularities since 2005 raised suspicions about the neutrality of the Election Commission and cast increasing doubt about the legitimacy of the pending elections. In early January 2007, the Awami League-led fourteen party alliance announced it would boycott the elections, claiming that free and fair elections would not be possible. The Election Commission published a voter list rife with inaccuracies and ignored a ruling by the Bangladesh High Court to repair the list. The Commission also ruled Hussain Muhammad Ershad, a major ally of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League, ineligible to participate in the election. Most observers credit these two events with triggering the Awami League-led boycott. Following the pullout of the Awami League alliance, international election monitoring missions cancelled their observation programs and the United Nations withdrew its electoral support (The Daily Star, January 2, 2007). In early January, in a surprising turn of events, the head of Bangladesh's caretaker government, Iajuddin Ahmed, stepped down under military pressure. As he did so, he declared a state of emergency, suspended civil liberties, and indefinitely postponed Bangladesh's elections, which had been scheduled for January 22, 2007. Fakhruddin Ahmed replaced him as head of the caretaker government. Most of these events have taken place with relatively little attention from the international community. The head of the caretaker government, Fakhruddin Ahmed, has promised to get tough on corruption and violence

and to hold free and fair elections as soon as possible. His claims notwithstanding, most observers doubt that elections will happen any time soon because the stated pre-conditions for rescheduling elections are difficult to attain. Among them: a restructured Election Commission; a clear and accurate voter registration list; and most problematic, the promulgation of a voter registration card process. Since Fakhruddin Ahmed took over, tens of thousands have been arrested and several dozen people have died. Many political leaders and ministers have been detained in a much-lauded "anti-corruption" campaign. The developments that have unfolded during this crisis likely will have numerous consequences for the future of Bangladesh's democracy and political fabric. The two mainstream political parties, the Bangladesh National Party and the Awami League, faced a critical challenge under the sustained efforts to arrest political party activists and minus two formula. While the public appears to support the military backed care-taker government but it did not last long. Roundtable participants laid out several benchmarks to establish Bangladesh's course back to a democratically elected government, specifically: Lift the state of emergency and re-establish civil liberties. These steps need to take place notwithstanding any public support the current military-backed government enjoys. At last, army backed care-taker government express their deep intension to hold a parliamentary election within the timeframe of December 2008. In the meantime, this government introduced a large scale of reforms initiatives in political process. According to the declaration 9th parliamentary election held on December 29, 2008. 32 registered political parties and 1538 candidates including 141 independent candidates participated in the election. Voter turnout was 85.26%. Al led grand alliance won in the election (see the detail result as following table) and formed the government. This parliament started its journey on January 25, 2009. Meanwhile, it has completed one year of its journey without participation of opposition.

Table - 2: Summary of the 9th Bangladeshi Jatiyo Sangshad (parliament) election-2008

Alliance	Party	Votes	%	Seats	Change
Grand Alliance	Bangladesh Awami League	33,887,451	49.0%	230	+168
	Jatiya Party	4,867,377	7.0%	27	+16
	Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal	429,773	0.6%	3	+2
	Workers Party of Bangladesh	214,440	0.3%	2	+1
	Liberal Democratic Party	161,372	0.2%	1	±0
Four Party Alliance	Bangladesh Nationalist Party	22,963,836	33.2%	30	-163
	Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh	3,186,384	4.6%	2	-15
	Bangladesh Jatiya Party-BJP	95,158	0.1%	1	-4
Independents and others		3,366,858	4.9%	4	-2
Total		69,172,649	99.99%	300	

Source: Electoral Commission of Bangladesh seat-wise tally Election commission homepage

Table-3: A Summary of Five Parliamentary Elections (After Restoration of Parliamentary Democracy)

Events	5 th Parliament	6 nd Parliament	7 th Parliament	8 th Parliament	9 th Parliament
Date of Election	Feb, 27, 1991	Feb, 15, 1996	June 12, 1996	Oct, 01, 2001	Dec, 29, 2008
No of Contesting Parties	75	**	81	50	32(Registered)
Total No of Candidates	2,787		2,574	1,935	1,538
No of Independent Candidates	424	-	281	486	141
No. of Voters	6,20,81,793		5,67,16,936	7,52,26,722	8,11,30,973
No of Casting Votes	3,41,03,777		4,24,18,262	5,58,37,974	6,91,72,649
% of Casting Votes	55.35		74.81	74.5	85.26
Winning Party	BNP	-	AL	BNP+ Alliance	AL+ Alliance
No of Seats Won	140		146	193	230
No of Votes Won	1,05,07,549		1,58,82,790	2,27,17,548	3,38,87,451
% of Votes Won	30.81		37.44	40.86	49.02
2 nd Largest Party	AL	-	BNP	AL	BNP
No of Seats Won	88		116	62	30
No of Votes Won	1,02,59,866		1,42,55,92	2,23,60,194	2,29,63,836
% of Votes Won	30.08		33.61	40.21	33.02
3 rd Largest Party	JP	-	JP	JJ	JP
No of Seats Won	35		32	17	27
No of Votes Won	40,63,537		69,54,981	23,85,907	48,67,377
% of Votes Won	11.92		16.4	4.29	7.00
4 th Largest Party	JJ	-	JJ	JP	JJ
No of Seats Won	18		03	14	02
No of Votes Won	41,36,661		36,53,013	40,37,992	31,86,384
% of Votes Won	12.13		8.61	7.26	4.06
Independent & Others Party	-	-	-	-	-
No of Seats Won	19		03	10	11
No of Votes Won	51,36,164		16,71,496	43,46,333	42,67,601
% of Votes Won	15.06		3.94	7.38	6.01

Source: Compiled by the author from The Results of Bangladesh Election Commission.

** Data of February Election not compiled because of controversial election.

Concluding Remarks:

Elections to the legislature should serve as barometers of political mood of a nation in a parliamentary democracy. It is through these elections that changes in government, or policy, may take place. By the elections voters exercise their freedom of choice freely. Without this guarantee, the elections may prove meaningless (Enayetur Rahim, 1990 p.105). In the case of Bangladesh, from the above analysis reveals that a number of parliamentary elections held in Bangladesh after independence and restoration of democracy. Any regimes even military could not stay power for a long time without holding elections; they rather sought their legitimacy through elections. Unfortunately, it is generally accepted that most of the elections in Bangladesh have not been free, fair and impartial. Complaints about election irregularities have often been made and even independent foreign observers have corroborated these charges. Military rulers in Bangladesh resorted to deliberate and planned machinations of registering electoral verdict through rigging and manipulation of elections time and again to attain a facade of legitimacy and to perpetuate their control over state power. This became a regular feature of Bangladesh politics during the regime of military rulers since the fall of Sheikh Mujib in August 1975.

Whether under military or democratic regime, even though after restoration of parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh political government have failed to show its effective performance in holding free, fair and impartial elections to ensure people's sovereignty over the executive. If we see our experience in Bangladesh, where the vast majority of the people are desperately poor and have low level of literacy, thus are vulnerable to all forms of manipulation. At the same time, people want peace and justice, and have rightly indicated which party can deliver. For instance, the people had voted for Awami League in 1970, which was promoting six-point, essentially to earn full economic autonomy and emancipation. In 2001 BNP got 2/3rd majority in the parliament but did not perform well leading to 1/11. This time in 2008 people gave AL 2/3rd majority, again seeking justice. In both cases, 2/3rd majority did not perhaps indicate popularity or competence of the BNP or AL, it indicated people's degree of frustration with the previous government and its strong desire for justice. And the 2/3rd majority do not reflect 2/3rd votes in favor of the government taking over power. This

is perhaps the phenomenon of immaturity of the voters and lack of parliamentary culture. Therefore, elections in Bangladesh, in most cases, have been used as an aura of legitimacy instead of making room for people choices. But one thing is notable that parliamentary election has reached in a stage for promoting democracy in last two parliamentary elections but parliamentary democratic culture has yet been developed in the polity. To assume parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh it will take more time as thus Britain took three centuries.

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