

## THOUGHTS ON GOOD GOVERNANCE: BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVE

---

Md. Mostafijur Rahman\*

### ABSTRACT

*The issue of good governance has emerged at the forefront of global agenda for overall socio-economic development of a country nowadays. But in Bangladesh it is being hampered by unsatisfactory political instability in many ways. Political instability is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh since its independence in 1971. The latest episode of political volatility in Bangladesh began on January 3, 2015 when police banned proposed protests in the capital Dhaka called by opposition parties. In the recent years due to domestic political instability caused by hartals, strike and violence, the economic growth was affected in many ways. The main purpose of this study is to examine to what extent the political instability affects the good governance in Bangladesh. This paper is based on the study of political thought of the general people of Bangladesh. People's perception on the reasons of the political instability to hamper the good governance is also addressed in the study. While the Bangladeshi economy is very resilient, with a record of sustaining a GDP growth rate of around 6 percent in 2015, the ratio of people below the poverty line has come down to 31.5 percent in 2010 from 56.6 percent in 1992. This paper aims at showing whether it can sustain such a position to good governance due to political instability.*

**Keywords:** *Good governance, Political instability, Bangladesh.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Governance ordinarily means power of governing or running of government. Quality of governance is being considered as the principal pre-requisite for solving many problems with regard to socio-economic development in the developing countries. But it has not been taking place in Bangladesh due to frequent political instability. "During the 1980s political violence became commonplace in the move to unseat the Ershad regime. From the beginning of the 1990s, political violence became further institutionalized through inter-party conflict. Eventually, violence became a legitimate

---

\* Md. Mostafijur Rahman is a Senior Lecturer at Department of Law, Prime University, Dhaka and M.Phil. Fellow of Law at Rajshahi University; E-mail: [mostafij.mithu@yahoo.com](mailto:mostafij.mithu@yahoo.com)

means of securing political demands. Violence, disturbances and interruption of normalcy in public life become part of the political landscape overshadowing the role and importance of parliament” (Moniruzzaman, M., 2009:122). The overall situation in Bangladesh was alarming in 2013, amid continuous political violence throughout the year, which appears at an annual report published by Ain O Salish Kendra on 01.01.2014. The report mentioned that political violence and the deteriorating law and order situation created panic among the people. Centering rows among political parties over the demand of general election in 2014 as many as 848 political clashes took place last year. The clashes left 507 people dead and 22,407 injured. Since the announcement of the polls scheduled on 25 November 2014, over 100 people died across the country, out of which 75 died during *hartals* and blockades from 25 November to 15 December in 2014 (Daily Star, 01.01.2014). Under the circumstances, Bangladesh has been marked as failure of promoting good governance. So, the present study will try to focus the hidden causes as to why political instability occurs in politics that intervenes the governance process. The study tries to justify the acceptability of political instability caused by the political parties among the general people and to find out the factors that led the government failure to restore the continuing good governance in Bangladesh. For this very reason, the author has given attention to the bad impact of political instability in attaining good governance in Bangladesh.

### **1.1. Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to find out the main barriers for ensuring good governance and to justify whether political instability led the government failure to restore the continuing good governance in Bangladesh

### **1.2. Literature Review**

Vries (2013) in his article “**The Challenge of Good Governance**” reveals that good enough governance is seen as governance that scores high on those factors that do matter for the reduction of societal problems, although it may fail on other indicators of good governance which are less relevant in a specific situation. According to him one of the crucial factors that matters in good enough governance is a well-functioning public sector.

Rouf (2007), in his paper “**A Pragmatic Model for Good Governance in Bangladesh**” points out that government functions everywhere – order in the area of governance permeates through all areas of society, polity and economy. Bureaucracy, private sector and civil society are the major catalysts for making changes in all spheres. In our country, private sector is to function under the auspices of bureaucracy. He mentions that civil society has not yet been adequately developed to take the lead. He further mentions that the practice of managerialism and partial formalization of informal income could have been extremely prospective to bring good governance.

Momen and Begum (2005) in their research paper “**Good Governance in Bangladesh: Present Situation and Future Challenges**” examined that that good governance initiatives need to recognize the importance of a conducive political economy and domestic ownership to sustainable reforms. According to them Bangladesh achieved nothing because of political instability. In this situation the spirit of the concept of Good governance will require a fundamental change in mentality and social expectations that will change only gradually. The present study will try to focus the hidden causes as to why political instability occurs in politics that intervene the governance process in Bangladesh.

### **1.3. Methodology of the Study**

In this study both primary and secondary data have been used. Secondary data have been collected from concerned books, periodicals, published journals, daily newspapers, internet and other materials. Primary data have been collected through an open interview with a standardized and structured questionnaire. A purposive sampling was considered initially while selecting 90 respondents belonging to six different occupational groups.

## **3. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

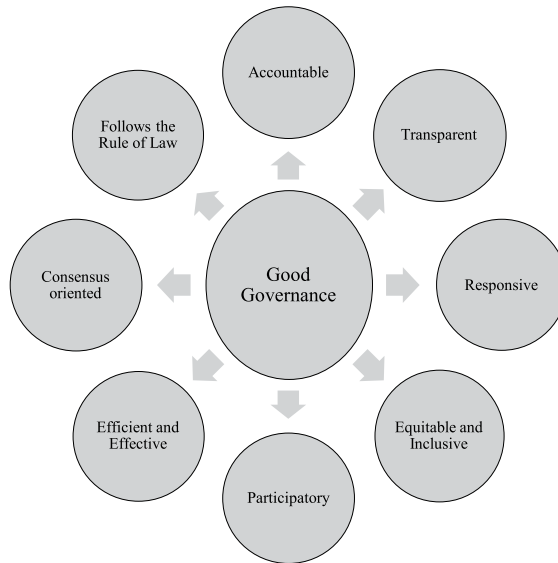
### **3.1 Concept of Governance**

The word ‘governance’ derives from the Greek verb *Kubernao* which means to steer and was used for the first time in a metaphorical sense by Plato (Kajer, A. M., 2005). It then passed on to Latin and then on to many other languages. Since the days of Plato and Aristotle, governance has been meant for the task of running government and administration. The 1992 Commission of Global Governance defines the term “as the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs.” Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan defined good governance as ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law, strengthening democracy, promoting transparency and capacity in public administration. Bilney (1994:17) said “good governance means the effective management of a country’s social and economic resource in a manner that is open, transparent, accountable and equitable.” According to the Worldwide Governance Indicators governance consists of the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them. (The WJI, 2015)

### **3.2 Eight Elements of Good Governance**

According to Dhiraj Kumar Nath (Nath, D. K., 2004) there are eight parameters of good governance. The parameters are shown in the following diagram:

**Figure-1: Parameters of Good Governance**

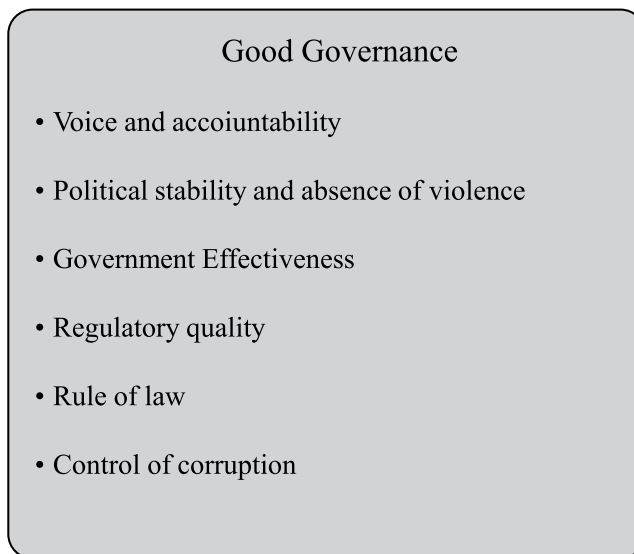


Source: Nath D. K., (2004)

### 3.3 Major Dimensions of Good Governance

The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) project reports aggregate an individual governance indicator for 215 countries over the period 1996-2013, for six dimensions of governance:

**Figure: 2: Major Dimension of Good Governance**



Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), 2015 accessible at: <http://info.worldwide.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home>

### 3.4 Current State of Good Governance in Bangladesh

Table: Governance score of Bangladesh among 213 countries by governance indicators:

Governance Indicator	Year	Governance Score (-2.5 to +2.5)
Voice and Accountability	2010	-0.28
	2006	-0.45
	1996	-0.15
Political Stability	2010	-1.42
	2006	-1.49
	1996	-0.65
Government Effectiveness	2010	-0.84
	2006	-0.78
	1996	-0.73
Regulatory Quality	2010	-0.86
	2006	-0.93
	1996	-1.05
Rule of Law	2010	-0.77
	2006	-0.89
	1996	-0.96
Control of Corruption	2010	-0.99
	2006	-1.41
	1996	-0.74

Source: (Kaufmann, D. A. Kraay and Mastruzzi, M., 2010 quoted from Miazi and Islam, 2012:78)

According to a report of the WJP Open Government Index, 2015 (produced by the World Justice Project, an independent organization working to advance the rule of law around the world) the position of Bangladesh in good governance among South Asian Countries is 73, India is topped the regional ranking, Nepal (40), Sri Lanka (52), Pakistan (83) and Afghanistan (89). The WJP Open Government Index uses four dimensions to measure government openness. Publicized laws and government data, right to information, civic participation and complaint mechanisms (The WJP, 2015).

### 3.5. Problems of Establishing Good Governance in Bangladesh

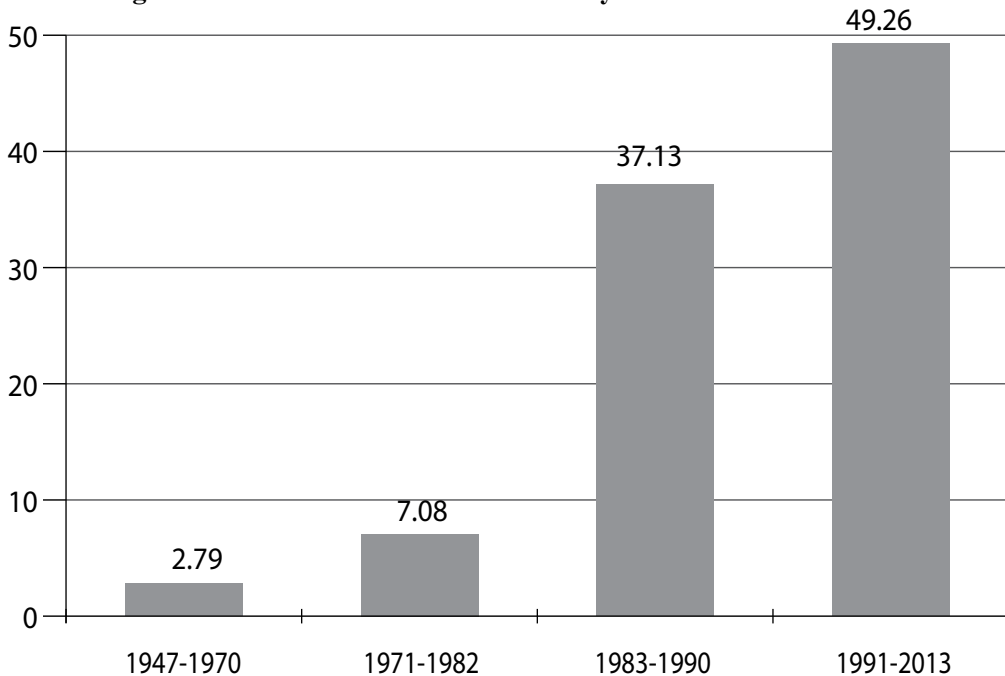
Hossain Zillur Rahman identifies four major problems on the path of good governance in Bangladesh. These are as follows:

1. A tendency towards encyclopedic wish list in agenda formulation;
2. An insufficient appreciation of the institutional and political realities through which reform initiatives have to be carried forward;
3. Over focusing on what does not work while ignoring which does work; and
4. A lack of clarity as to where the governance agenda best interface with poverty reduction goals (Rahman, Z. H., 2005).

### 3.6. Good Governance and Political Volatility

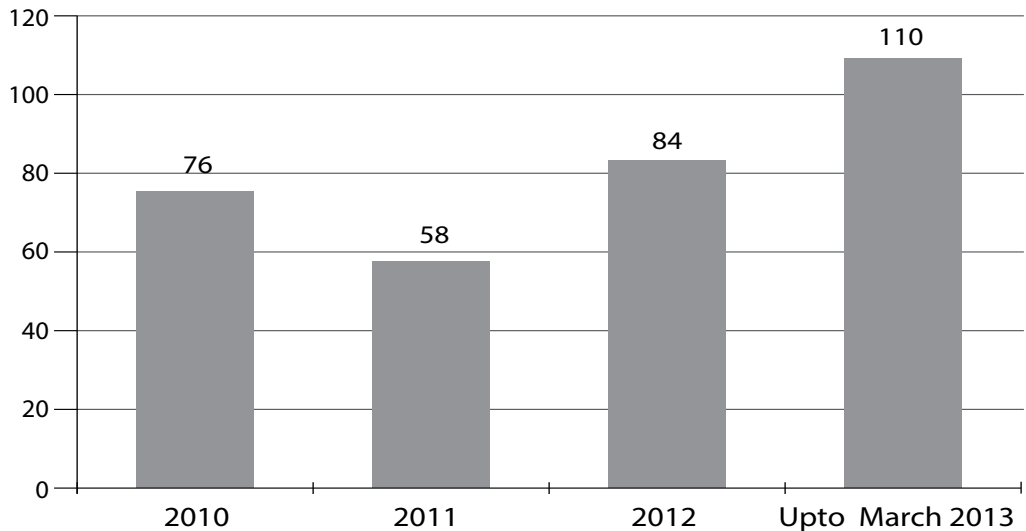
Almost all political instability causes *hartal*, *oborodh*, strike and deadly violence. Since the advent of parliamentary democracy in 1990, the number of *hartals* reached at all-time high. “Since the restoration of democracy in 1991, both the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party led oppositions have been using *hartal* as a mechanism to put pressure on the government” (Biswas, Z. I., 2013:172). It is also evident from the following figure that the average occurrence of *hartals* from 1947-1990 (Pre-liberation) was 2.79%, from 1971-1982 (Post-liberation) was 7.08%, from 1983-1990 (The Presidential Regime) was 37.13% and from 1991-2013 (The Democratic Regime) was 49.26%. It is also evident from the figure that the *hartals* per year have been significantly higher (49.26) during the present democratic system in comparison to that of the previous autocratic regime and the periods before independence. Thus, *hartals* have become a concurrent phenomenon in Bangladesh politics. See the following figure:

**Figure-3: Average of *Hartal* Due to Political Instability**



Source: Sangbadpatre Hartalchitra by Ajoy Dasgupta; Ahmed, Imtiaz (2011); Odhikar; ASK and CPD

From the beginning of the 1990s, political violence became further institutionalized through inter-party conflict. Eventually, violence became a legitimate means of securing political demands. The number of political violence is threatening the congenial political atmosphere in Bangladesh, which is a great challenge for good governance. The following figure is to be seen as an example:

**Figure-4: Annual Average Political Violence in Bangladesh**

Source: ASK and CPD (Quoted from Textile Today, 2013)

The Figure shows that the number of people killed in political violence kept to below 100 persons in the years 2010, 2011 and 2012; but in 2013, it shows the figure 110 compared to 84 in 2012 and 58 in 2011 (including blockades). 236 people were killed in political clashes not involving *hartals*, 86 people were killed as a result of blockades and 185 died as a result of the occurrence of *hartals*. From 5 January 2015 to 5 February 2015, the total 72 general people died during the *hartals*, among them 35 died by petrol bomb and 200 burnt also. During this time, the total economic loss was 70620 crores tk. The experts say, if this situation goes on, the rate of economic loss will increase (Bangladesh Pratidin, 2015)

### 3.7. Good Governance and Corruption

At present Bangladesh is seen under poor-governance, because of the rampant corruption that exacerbates the crisis more. In a corrupted country there is no possibility of good governance. It is said that “Corruption is behavior of public officials which deviates from accepted norms in order to serve private ends” (Huntington, 1968). Bangladesh’s position was worsened in 2014 than 2013 as it scored 25 out of 100, in the global ranking from 136 in 2014 to 145 in 2013. Bangladesh is the second worst performer in South Asia, better than only Afghanistan, which scored 12 and ranked 172, the third lowest position in the global list of 175 countries. Iftekharuzzaman (2015) said that, politically stable states are more successful in controlling corruption, but concern can be genuinely raised whether the on-going cauldron of political violence exposes Bangladesh to join the ranks of such countries.

**Table-1: Sample Design of the Study**

Types of Respondents	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Students	10	10	20
Teachers	10	5	15
Civil Society	10	5	15
Civil Servants	10	5	15
Politicians	10	5	15
Businessmen	10	0	10
Total	60	30	90

### 3.8. Characteristics of the Respondents

A total of 90 people from six occupations are interviewed for this study. The study involves male respondents 66.67% and female respondents 33.37%. The status of respondents is Muslim 80% and Hindu 20%.

**Table-2: Respondents thoughts on good governance**

Items of Response	Yes%	No%	To Some Extent	Total
Ensuring of people’s basic needs and expectations	60	20	20	100
Ensuring transparency, accountability, rule of law and fundamental human rights	55	35	10	100
Equal distribution of wealth and national resources	45	25	30	100
Establishment of participation in politics	50	20	30	100
Economic growth and sustainable development is not possible without improving governance	55	30	20	100

The table shows that 60% of the respondents considered good governance as the condition for fulfillment of the people’s basic needs and expectation, 55% thought good governance implies the enforcement of transparency, accountability, fundamental human rights and rule of law, more than 45% believed in a good governance there shall have equal distribution of wealth and national resources, and 55% supposed that for good governance, economic growth and sustainable development is a must.

**Table-3: Good Governance and Political Instability in Bangladesh**

In the study it is found that, 65% of the respondents thought that if political instability goes on, good governance is not possible. It is evident that 55% supposed it the duty of political parties to improve governance.



Items of Response	Yes%	No%	To Some Extent	Total
Good governance is not possible if political instability is going on	65	15	20	100
Political parties should improve governance	55	25	20	100
Due to political instability good governance could not sustain	45	25	30	100
Good governance is impossible without good, effective and independent institutions	50	30	20	100
Necessity of democratic practice without political instability	45	25		100
Necessity of political instability in political crisis	55		30	100

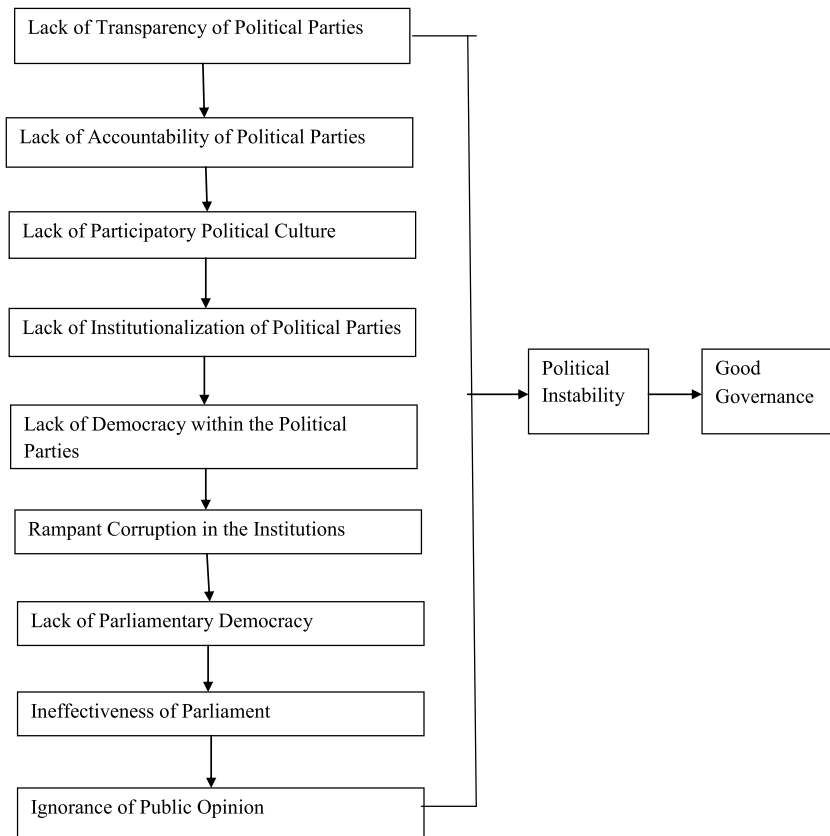
A significant number of the respondents (50%) opined that good governance is impossible without good, effective and independent institutions. 45% opined that democratic practice should be ensured among the political parties without political instability. 55% do not expect political instability in politics of Bangladesh.

**Table-4: Necessity of Political Culture for Establishing Good Governance in Bangladesh:**

Items of Response	Yes%	No%	To Some Extent	Total
Politics should be free from hereditary process within parties	55	25	20	100
Democracy is needed within the parties	50	20	30	100
Political parties should be institutionalized	60	35	15	100
People's participation in every sphere should be enhanced	55	15	30	100
Opposition should be given access to policy making	60	20	20	100
Institutionalizing the party	45	25	30	100
Avoiding confrontational politics	65	25	10	100

The above table indicates the respondents' opinion on the role of political parties in the establishment of good governance. Here, a majority (60%) viewed that political parties can help to establish good governance through institutionalizing the political parties, 50% of them emphasized practicing democracy within the parties, more than 55% focused on increasing people's participation.

### 3.9. Findings



### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After analyzing the data gathered from the questionnaire, the researcher has got some results that indicate the relationship between political instability and good governance. It has been clearly understood that, there are various reasons behind political instability in a country like Bangladesh and political stability is one of the dominant factors behind the process of good governance. Although Bangladesh came into the process of political stability in 1990, the country is yet to achieve it because, Bangladesh has been facing a number of challenges like un-institutionalized political parties, lack of accountability and rule of law, inefficient leadership, ineffective political institutions, corruption, widespread poverty and so on which are the main causes of political instability. The struggling situation between the two major political parties, i.e., Bangladesh Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Parties created a situation excessive in the country. Under the circumstances, Bangladesh is now in a challenge on the way to good governance. It is also clear from the study that for good governance in the country no one wants political instability. A significant number of the respondents (65%) do not like political instability in politics. On the basis of the above discussion it is evident that the current state of governance of Bangladesh is poor

and to overcome this bad situation the following policy have been recommended to establish good governance in Bangladesh.

1. The major weaknesses that tend the political parties to political instability should be diminished soon. The ruling party should not adopt any instigating act so that the opposition can take part in violence in the name of politics.
2. Majority of population thinks that *hartal* is a package of destruction and ineffective tool in the present time. Violence in the name of *hartal* should be stopped immediately and all the political parties should abide by the decision of the Apex Court in *Khondaker Moderresh Elahi v. State*, 21 BLD (2000) regarding *hartal*.
3. Accountability and transparency of the political parties, the government and the people at large should be ensured. The rule of law should be established within the country for ensuring justice and equity.
4. Corruption is the main restraint for the implementation of good governance in Bangladesh. It should be minimized through the process of institutionalization soonest as possible for good governance.
5. Democracy within the party should be established in Bangladesh. Due to the absence of internal party democracy, the parties suffer from dominance of personality rather than rules, and it made the party leadership autocratic.
6. Parliamentary democracy should be strengthened. After coming into power, the ruling party in Bangladesh turns itself into a dictatorial one and almost all times the parliament is dominated by the ruling party. The opposition should be given chance to utter their voice in the parliament, otherwise, they will go to the street and will occur political violence frequently.
7. Civil society can play a vital role in creating consciousness among the people regarding good governance and the bad impact of political instability on socio-economy as well as democracy in Bangladesh.
8. Politics in Bangladesh is dominated mostly by those persons who earned money by illegal means and people with little academic background. The rich persons should render their services for the better development of economy first and then politics.
9. Good governance nowadays depends on the smooth working of the local government. The local government should be made autonomous with maximum decentralization of power and it is to be made free from government interference.
10. A talented and constructive political leader always tries with a sacrificing sentiment to settle all political problems in a democratic and compromising way (Halim, 1998). But instead of adopting democratic methods and techniques, the leaders of Bangladesh deal with the opposition forces in a dictatorial way. For this very reason, people of higher background and efficient leaders should be engaged in politics, and the hereditary nature of leadership in Bangladesh politics should be abolished.

## REFERENCES

- Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK) and Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) quoted from Textile Today, 2013. available at: <http://www.textiletoday.com.bd/magazine/619>
- Ain O Shalish Kendra, (2013) and (2014). *Human Rights in Bangladesh*. Dhaka, Bangladesh Bangladesh Pratidin (2015), 5 February, 2015.
- Bilney, Q. (1994). *Good Governance and Participatory Development in Australia's Aid Program*, Sydney, Development Bulletin.
- Biswas, Z. I. (2013). Law, Culture and Politics of hartal, *Counsel Law Journal*, Volume-1, Issue-1, Oct. 2013, pp.163-178.
- Centre for Policy Dialogue. (2013). *Analytical Review of Bangladesh's Macro Economic Performance in Fiscal Year 2013* (First Reading), Dhaka.
- Daily Star, (2014) 01 January, 2014.
- Dasgupta, A. (2001). *Sangbadpatre Hartalchitra*, Dhaka: Press Institute of Bangladesh, Ahmed, Imtiaz (2011). Odhikar, ASK and CPD (2013).
- Halim, M. A. (1998). *Constitution, Constitutional Law and Politics: Bangladesh Perspective*, Khan, M. Yusuf Ali Ed.; Rico printers: Dhaka-1205.
- Huntington, S. P. (1968). *Political Order in Changing Society*, London: Yale University Press <http://info.worldwide.org/governance/wgi/index.asp#home> accessible on 30.03.2015.
- Iftexharuzzaman, (2015). Corruption and Political Instability-A Threat to Security, *Daily Star*, 12 March, 2015.
- Imtiaz, A. (2011). Preserving Bangladesh's Democratic Future, *South-Asian Journal*.
- Kajer, A. M. (2005). *Governance*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Kaufman D.A, Kraay & Mastruzzi, M. (2010). *The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and Analytical Issue*.
- Miazi, A.N. and Islam N. (2012). Prospect of Good Governance in Bangladesh: A Review, *Prime University Journal*, Volume-6, Number-2, July-December, 2012 pp 69-96.
- Momen, N. and Begum, M. (2005). Good Governance in Bangladesh: Present Situation and Future Challenges UDK: 321.6/.8 (549.3) Biblid 0025-8555,57(2005) Vol. LVII, br. 1-2, pp. 159-176.
- Moniruzzaman, M. (2009). Parliamentary Democracy in Bangladesh: An Evaluation of the Parliament during 1991-2006, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 47, No. 1, 100-126, Feb-2009.
- Nath, D. K. (2004). *Guide Lines for Good Governance*, Dhaka, CIRDAP.
- Odhikar, (2013), *Human Rights Monitoring Report*, 2013.
- Rahman, Z. H. (2005). Engaging on Good Governance: A Search for Entry Points, *the Weekly Holiday*, Dhaka, February 25.
- Rouf, M. A. (2007). "A Pragmatic Model for Good Governance in Bangladesh" *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 5-21, April – June.
- Vries, M. de (2013), "The Challenge of Good Governance" *The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector Innovation Journal*, 18(1), 2013, article 2.
- Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), 2015.
- World Justice Project (WJP), 2015, *Open Government Index*.