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Flow of 'Public Goods' and Nature of the State: A Study on Bangladesh

Dr. Kazi Shahdat Kabir¹

Abstract

The nature of state (strong, weak or failed) depends on its capacity to deliver the public goods. The important and necessary public goods are security of the people, rule of law, citizens' participations, education, healthcare facilities, building critical infrastructure, water and waste management etc. According to contemporary definition of state if any state fail to provide most of its public goods it is considered weak while the availability of public goods in any state indicates that the state is strong and the failed state means if full or part of a state is not under the control of government. However, the study finds that government of Bangladesh has failed to provide most of the public goods. As result, in the line with the indicators Bangladesh fall under the category of weak state not failed or strong.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Whether a nation state is strong, weak or failed depends on its capacity to deliver public goods.¹

Security is one of the important public goods, and a state's primary function is to provide security to its citizens internally as well as externally. The second important public good for a state is to ensure citizens' political participation. Other necessary public goods are: enhancement of the rule of law; provision of adequate medical and health care, establishing schools and other educational institutions, building critical infrastructures such as roads, highways, waterways, and providing efficient power, gas and telecommunication systems, supplying water and establishing waste management systems etc.

According to Robert I. Rotberg, this bundle of public goods, establishes a set of criteria according to which a modern nation state may be judged strong, weak or failed.² If the state provides all or most of the public goods it is considered strong, while its failure to provide most of the public goods are indications that the state is weak. However, a weak state may show a mixed profile, fulfilling expectations in some areas and performing poorly in others. Failed state according to Robert I. Rothberg, are tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous and contested bitterly by worrying fractions. In most failed states, government troop's battle armed revolts let by one or more rivals. In fail state much of the violence is directed against the existing government or regime.³ Therefore, failed state means a state's full or part/s is not under the control of government.

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Weak states may also be categorised into different types. Some states are inherently weak due to geographical, physical or fundamental economic constraints; on the other hand, some are basically strong, but temporarily or situationally weak because of internal antagonism, management flaws, greed, despotism, external attacks, or a mixture of all of these. In the case of Bangladesh the problems are more internal than external such as political instability, corruption, lack of education and healthcare services, weak infrastructure and the scarcity of necessary resources. It is argued here that these contribute to the state's weakness. This contention is well-supported by a World Trade Organization (WTO) report, which states that Bangladesh's main problems include civil unrest, political instability, natural disasters, and inadequate infrastructure.⁴ The general opinion about Bangladesh is that it is not a failed but a weak state.⁵

This chapter analyses the factors that contribute towards identifying Bangladesh as a weak state. They include the following, lack of institutionalised democratic institutions, partisan rivalry and bickering among the political elites, military interference in politics, weak nature of the rule of law, corruption, lack of civil rights as well as fragile economic infrastructures, inability to meet the demands of electricity and the deterioration of the quality of life etc.

1.2. METHODOLOGY

It is a qualitative study and it is based upon observation and secondary sources. The study collects data from documents only. Particularly newspapers and magazines published in home and abroad, conference papers, numerous books and articles published in scholarly journals have been used to concrete the study. Furthermore research report on this subject published by research think tank and other relevant centres and institutions have been utilised to enhance the research.

2.1. BANGLADESH'S WEAK POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS: A FRAGILE DEMOCRACY

Since the independence in 1971, it seems that the successive Bangladeshi governments have used national resources to build their political support base instead of looking at people's needs. Apart from its own resources, Bangladesh has received billions of dollars in grants, aid and loans from foreign donors since its independence, but the country still remains poor.⁶ Beside foreign aid the country's economy mostly depends on exporting garments and remittances from Bangladeshi workers abroad.

After independence, from 1971 to 1975 Bangladesh was ruled by the Awami League, the pioneer of the independence movement. After the 1973 election, parliamentary democracy was established in the country, but in 1975 the government introduced the one party system in the name of Bangladesh *Krishok Sramik* (Peasants Workers) Awami League (BAKSAL). The leader of the Awami League, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who had become the President, following the introduction of one-party state, was assassinated with his family members in a military coup on 15 August 1975.

Since then the country was ruled by the military either under the autocratic or semi-democratic form until 1990.⁷

However, after the 1991 general election⁸ when popular democracy was introduced, it was expected that the parliament would be the focal point for national politics and all matters of national interest in Bangladesh. But, things did not develop as expected. Even though, Bangladesh ranked 4th among Asian democracies,⁹ political instability persisted and has become a common phenomenon in the case of Bangladesh. By rejecting the notion of the fundamental principles of democracy, that is tolerance between the two main political parties, the AL and BNP always engaged in a poisonous political war mainly through either of them boycotting parliament or declaring general strikes. Both parties seem to keep the nation perpetually on the verge of chaos, alternating between state repressions or crippling national strikes aimed at toppling the government, depending on who is in power.¹⁰ The parliament has remained virtually non-functional because of the absence of opposition parties in most of the parliamentary sessions and parliamentary committee meetings.¹¹

The BNP came to power following the general elections held on February 27, 1991, under the caretaker government.¹² Instead of providing political stability, the rule of the BNP government led to more strife in the country.¹³ A major row broke out between the BNP government and the opposition political parties over the question of amending the constitution to incorporate a caretaker government to hold free and fair elections. Although BNP came to power in the election held in 1991 under the caretaker government, it was not ready to institutionalise the system, since BNP did not want to take the risk of losing the elections. So the opposition resorted to *hartals* and boycotted the parliament. This meant that for two years the parliament was run without any opposition, and laws were made and budgets passed without any scrutiny and debate. However, ultimately the government had to agree to the opposition demands and elections were held in 1996 under a caretaker government.

After that, when the AL formed the government on the basis of the results of the 1996 general election, it received the same treatment from the BNP. It resorted to boycotting the parliament frequently on a number of allegations such as the absence of neutrality on the part of the speaker of the parliament, instituting false cases against opposition leaders and workers, violating human rights, corruption, misusing of power etc. The incident that marked the beginning of the deterioration of the relationship was when Khaleda Zia, leader of the opposition, was denied the opportunity to speak as the speaker turned off the microphone on three occasions in the first session. Within a short period, the relationship between the ruling AL and the main opposition BNP deteriorated to the point of no return and led to a long boycott of the parliament by the BNP. Two agreements signed between the ruling AL and the opposition BNP failed to resolve the problem. This led to the boycott of parliament by the opposition for two years from April 1999. The irony of the above incident is that the ruling party¹⁴ did not take any serious initiative to bring back the

opposition to the parliament. Here again perhaps like BNP the ruling AL thought that it was easier to run the parliament without the participation of the main opposition.

The BNP-led four-party alliance won the general election held on October 1, 2001, and formed the government.¹⁵ The main opposition AL, resorted to a long boycott of parliament on allegations that were almost similar to those brought by the BNP during the previous AL rule. Laws were made and budgets passed without the participation of the main opposition AL. The accusation against the ruling party by AL was that the ruling party did not allow any serious debate to take place and pointed out the partisan role of the speaker.¹⁶ However, AL returned to the parliament in 2004, ending an 11 month boycott and joined parliamentary standing committees on various ministries; 14 months after they were constituted but did not stay in the parliament for long. Again, in mid-February 2006 AL returned to parliament after 13 months of parliament boycott in order to save the membership, complaining that it was not being given enough opportunity to participate in parliamentary debates.

The BNP and AL have had between them 15 years of people's support to stabilise the country. The people have shown their respect for the leadership of both leading ladies. People's respect for them has been sincere and given with just one hope, that between them, they will help achieve the country's goals, for which millions were sacrificed in 1971. But after 15 years of support and respect Bangladesh hovers closer to being a failed state because of its national politics and politicians who cannot find a single national agenda for bipartisan cooperation. Instead, so extreme is their partisanship, each is more interested in damaging the other than taking the country forward.

The former US ambassador to Bangladesh John Holzman¹⁷ echoed the sentiments of foreign investors and local businessmen when he said: "I think major political parties should establish sufficient common ground to work together and achieve reforms to make more progress in Bangladesh."¹⁸ However, attitude of both parties (BNP and AL) crippled the emergence of democratic institutions and led to a 'state of emergency,' instead of scheduled parliamentary election. In an attempt to cleanse the country of two main rival leaders' influence, the caretaker government first went on a massive anti-corruption drive, arrested many senior politicians including chairpersons of the two main political parties, then banned all political activities, that as perceived by many as the source of all the country's problems.¹⁹

However, at least theoretically Bangladesh has been functioning as a parliamentary democracy since 1991. But the main two parties have destroyed the moral fabrics of the society. Adoption of laws will not guarantee restoration of sanity in the political sphere of the country. The fundamental institution of any parliamentary democracy is the parliament itself which can not function without active participation of opposition parties. In the context of Bangladesh that is virtually absent and it becomes the fundamental cause of state weakness.

2.2. RULE OF LAW

The rule of law emphasises the principle that law is supreme. In operational terms, it envisages that a government in power must act according to law, and that by implication it gives every citizen remedies if his/her rights are infringed upon. The rule of law may, therefore, be said to prevail when the exercise of all forms of public authority is subject to review by the ordinary courts of law to which all citizens have equal access.

However, all the three governments Bangladesh has had in the last 15 years of democratic rule have used law enforcing agencies to tackle political opposition in a manner where fundamental rights of individuals have been violated. Generally, in Bangladesh whenever a party comes to power, it tries to take revenge against the opposition parties. On some occasions criminals belonging to the ruling party or alliance were freed despite their criminal activity, while leaders/workers belonging to the opposition parties faced severe consequence even if they were found engaged in similar activities.

One of the best examples of the implication of the above rule of law, is the issue of court cases against Lt. General Ershad, the former military ruler who ruled Bangladesh from 1982 to 1990. In 1990 following the ouster of Ershad by a mass movement more than 25 cases were brought against him. He was convicted in some of those cases and served jail terms between 1990 and 1996. But in 1996 when Ershad supported AL to form the government he got bail from all of his cases simultaneously. In fact before bail Ershad was brought to the parliament premises and put into deputy speaker's house by declaring that house as sub-jail. However, later Ershad switched side and joined the BNP-led opposition alliance. Once again, the cases against him were made "active" and within a short period of time Ershad had to go to jail." But he was there for a short time and was released when he announced that he was no longer with the 'four party alliance.' The above incident shows how ruling party controls the rule of law in Bangladesh. A former director general of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, Badi-ud-Zaman, said there was not a single instance where the bureau had filed a corruption case against any politician or minister of the governing party. Mr Zaman said corruption charges were brought against politicians only when they were out of power.²⁰ This culture of impunity goes against the very grain of democracy. In order to establish a functioning democracy in Bangladesh, it is imperative to establish the rule of law.

The quality and impartiality of the highest courts in Bangladesh has remained generally high and consistent since 1991. Access-to-justice, cost and delay are difficulties as they are in many other countries. Greater challenges to the rule of law exist in the lower courts as they are not separated from government administration. The politicization of the lower courts remains a concern despite 18 High Court

rulings to separate the courts from the administration. Of the 26 known cases filed alleging election fraud, none has ever reached open court.

2.3. POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CORRUPTION

The two main political parties of the country – the AL and the BNP – remain extremely hierarchical and the leadership is exceedingly personalised.²¹ The World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) report launched on 15 April, 2006 says: "the state of political competition is unhealthy. Political power is concentrated in two major parties, led by rival families that have dominated Bangladesh's politics since independence. This has discouraged the emergence of intra-party democracy."²² The political process is dominated by criminals and remains fractious in the absence of true democratic practices. Political leaders are guided more by personal and inter-party rivalry than meeting socio-economic issues. Money is also another determining factor for the popularity of political leaders. Without looking at their party loyalty, during the elections, the party candidates are nominated on the basis of their influence in the constituencies. Generally, it seems that the aim of major political parties is not to maintain or establish their political ideologies and work for the welfare of the people, rather to win the elections only. Politics in Bangladesh is thus becoming a 'rich man's game' where huge sums of money are spent to seek election. Therefore, parties have to establish links to the business community in order to get financial support during the elections, on the other hand business circles also like to keep relationship with the parties to get nomination in some cases or get loans as rewards for supporting the party in most of the cases.

As a result, it has become obvious that Bangladesh has given rise to a small group of 'political profiteers.'²³ For example, in 2000, the banking sector lent TK. 380, 833 billion (US \$ 6347.21 Million), 41 percent of which were considered bad loans.²⁴ Generally, a large group of business people with so called proper political connections get loans, without the intention of paying them back. Besides, the corrupt power elite waste foreign governments' donations as well. People in general, particularly the poor and the needy, get little help from either the government or the market. Therefore, despite averaging an annual economic growth rate of 6.5 percent, Bangladesh is considered a weak state.

The above scenario shows that the main political parties in Bangladesh fail to respect the essential elements of political participation, i.e., the right to compete for office, respect and support for the legislature and courts and tolerance of opposing views. Therefore, it is now widely accepted that Bangladesh is facing a crisis of governance which originated in a malfunctioning of the democratic process. Scholars generally agree that in order to increase the accountability, transparency and efficiency of the government, the reduction of the size of the government, closure of unnecessary departments and directories and transfer of maximum power to district level authorities are necessary. A conference held in 2000 on public administration reinforced that as a way to reduce corrupt practices and increase transparency in

government, the strict implementation of the assets and properties by government officials and politicians are needed.²⁵

2.4. QUALITY OF LIFE AND SECURITY OF THE PEOPLE

In any civilised society the two most important indicators of the quality of life are first, the protection of life and property or internal security and second, the dispensing of justice.²⁶ According to a TI report, security exists when a man enjoys walking the streets during day and at night, the assurance he has of the safety of his house and property.²⁷ Justice is a wide concept, but here we will look at justice in terms of decisions made by the court and appointments to public offices on merit basis rather than inscriptive basis. Pennock suggests that "a polity that sources the application of this principle throughout the society and not just in administrative and political circles has achieved significant public goods."²⁸

In Bangladesh according to reports, these factors are largely absent. The government of Bangladesh in most cases has failed to promote the security of the people. In May 2004, the police headquarters report stated that a total 17,448 persons were murdered across the country during the five years between 1999 and 2003. The report specifically mentioned that across the country some 3,710 persons were murdered in 1999, 3,386 in 2000, 3,378 in 2001, 3,503 in 2002 and 3,471 in 2003.²⁹ This shows that there is no significant improvement in terms of preventing crime for the past four years. The BNP finance Minister M. Saifur Rahman acknowledges that this is due to lack of mobility and training of the law enforcers. He also sought technical support from neighbouring countries.³⁰ This shows that government does not have the capacity to contain criminal activities.

Secondly, another important sector is the transport sector. In the last five years, according to government records over 20,000 travellers were killed and no less than 50,000 others maimed in road, train, and river boat accidents. Prof M. Mazharul Hoque, says, "Media channels do not cover all the accidents and casualties, while the police also do not record them all. The real number of accidents is almost double the official one."³¹ According to police records, every year 4,000 people are killed and 5,000 others are injured in transport accidents, marking a fatality rate at least 50 times higher than the rates in western countries. Prof Hoque says, in total, 21,288 accidents were recorded by the research cell in six years that killed some 17,825 people and injured more than 20,000 others. The ARC director, names reckless driving, over-speeding, over-loading, ignorance of road users, vehicular defects, hazardous roads and road environment, inadequate training, and poor enforcement of traffic rules and regulations as the main causes of road accidents.

Moreover, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) sources say, most of the pilots of passenger vessels do not have proper training and licences. Experts say violation of rules is the main cause of *launch* (motorised vessels that ply rivers) accidents. But the rule violators are rarely brought to book. A total of 354 people

were killed and 2,485 injured in 4,968 train accidents in the decade from 1995-96 to 2004-05.³² Amazingly, despite the bad condition of rail tracks, which is the main reason for so many accidents, the railway department does not allocate any fund for repairs and maintenance of the tracks in its annual budget. This shows that the government is too weak in terms of maintaining the transport sector despite the fact that it causes thousands of peoples' deaths.

2.5. IMPROVEMENT OF POVERTY LEVEL

It is estimated that 47% of Bangladesh's population live below the poverty line.³³ However, the number of rural people (head-count index) living in poverty declined by 1.8% from 1995 to 1999. Poverty is still pervasive in the country with 44.9% of the rural population and 43.3% of the urban population living in poverty. But the benefit of the poverty alleviation programmes has not been seen due to income inequality among the people. The income disparity between the poor and the richest five percent has increased from 18 times in 1990 to 84 times in 2004. The rich-poor gap in the country keeps widening as growth benefits have been unequally distributed. As a result, more and more people continue to be rendered landless due to various reasons, including erosion of rivers, crop damage caused by frequent floods and droughts and extreme poverty. According to available statistics, the number of landless people has recorded a rise by 22 percent over the last 35 years. In 1972 only 28 percent of the country's total population was landless, but at present as many as 50 percent are landless.

Successive governments since independence have sanctioned huge sums of money in the budget for poverty alleviation. A major portion of the money allocated for poverty alleviation has been obtained from foreign aid and grants. But according to some research 75% of this allocation has been siphoned off, thus the desired level of poverty reduction has not yet been attained. A World Bank report on 'Country Procurement Assessment' states: Files do not move in a government office without bribe. Bribery has reached such a level that it has become a part of the salary.³⁴ During a meeting of the donor community in Paris,³⁵ 'lack of good governance and an all-pervasive corruption' has been raised as the major issues in Bangladesh.³⁶

The educational infrastructure expanded and the gross primary enrolment ratio increased from 76% in 1991 to 97% in 1999. Admission of pupils at the primary stage has increased enormously and there has been a rise in the numbers of schools, colleges, and universities. But despite this progress, questions remain over the quality of education. Most of the government primary schools do not have enough teaching materials in the classroom. In each school, the ratio of teachers to students is huge, with many finding that the only way to tackle the imbalance is by running two shifts. The *Education Watch* research revealed that in 1998 only 29 percent of students at primary level achieved the principal competencies such as writing, reading, and general mathematical skills. Another survey carried out in 2001 revealed that only 1.6 percent of pupils reached the required standard in 27 competencies.³⁷

Like other areas of the society, the education sector is also not beyond corruption. In terms of education, the survey shows that 74% of the households used extra regular methods for admission of their children into school. Among the extra regular methods used, payment of donation was most prominent and used by about 41% of the households, followed by political influence (28%) and through private tutors (10%) and 3.6% of the households surveyed reported that they paid money³⁸ for admission of their children.³⁹ Furthermore, lack of qualified teachers,⁴⁰ poor infrastructure and facilities, lack of updated curriculum and research facilities, bias in teachers' promotion and growing confidence in private and overseas institutions, testify to the alarming situation of education in Bangladesh. In education, low attendance, high drop out and repetition rates are major problems in the public schools

2.6. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

Soon after independence in 1971, the government took many important steps to improve public health conditions of the country. Maximum emphasis was given to certain activities such as primary health care, maternal and child health, and family planning. Along with these, due attention was also given to develop adequate manpower related to health technology and medicine.

However, the capacity of the health services of Bangladesh government is significantly low. Therefore, in order to fill the vacuum 'healthcare programmes' are one of the prime projects of NGOs in Bangladesh. Professor Abul Barkat of Dhaka University presented a research paper titled 'Barriers in Poor People's Access to Public Healthcare Facilities in Bangladesh' at a discussion titled 'Poor People's Access to Health Services' in Dhaka. The study conducted on 266 poor families in six divisions in the country, revealed that 23 percent of the poor who badly need healthcare services do not go to healthcare centres for lack of money. The alarming information about healthcare is that poor people receive only three percent of their required health services from public hospitals.⁴¹ Consequently, people look for alternative services in private clinics as well as neighbouring countries, especially India. As a result, 1998 Nobel Prize winning economist Amartya Sen warned Bangladesh against relying too heavily on private rather than public health care services, as lessons from other countries suggest privatisation limits the majority of people's access to even basic health care. He finally suggests that "the private sector can never deliver public health care."⁴²

2.7. POWER CRISIS

Bangladesh has a large and unsatisfied demand for commercial energy with most of the supply limited to urban areas. The country's economy operates at low levels of commercial energy consumption, which is a crucial hindrance to economic development. The rural electrification programme connects on average 200,000 new consumers every year.

Problems in the power system in Bangladesh include shortfall of generation, load-shedding and low voltage, largely due to excess pressure on the supply network, dilapidated transformers and transmission lines and management failures in the distribution systems. In June 2001, the country had 23 power stations and 7 out of their 58 power generation units were out of operation. By the year 2006 it was obvious that the government of Bangladesh had failed to fulfil one of the most essential public goods that is power supply. The French Telecoms Experts said in a meeting organised by France-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce & Industry (CCIFB) that better performance of energy and telecommunications sectors can push Bangladesh's GDP growth up to 8.5% from the present level of 6.5 percent.⁴³ Bangladesh has been facing the worst power crisis for the last eight years, although the problem started from 1979. It has led to increasing public suspicion and distrust about the efficiency of the government. In the winter of 2005 the electricity shortage rose to 1,000 megawatt, although the Ministry of Energy claimed load-shedding of between 600 to 700 megawatt per day.

The highest load shedding of the year 2006 was 449.04 megawatt in February followed by the January's 402.45 megawatt shortage of power against the daily demand of 3800 megawatt. The average power shortage was 231.54 megawatt in 1998, 157.52 megawatt in 1999, 113.74 megawatt in 2000, 79.19 megawatt in 2001, 72.85 megawatt in 2002, 28.65 megawatt in 2003, 174.21 megawatt in 2004 and average power shortage of the last eight months of the current year was 272.59 megawatt.⁴⁴ Even the former ruling BNP lawmaker Abul Khayer Bhuiyan said in a parliamentary session that power failure after sunset was a regular event in almost all areas of his constituency. He said it was tarnishing the government's image. A similar power crisis was witnessed in mid-1996 due to the non-fulfilment of megawatt targets in the fourth five-year plan period (1991-96). The 590 megawatt shortage was created during the period against a forecasted demand of an additional 1000 megawatt (200 megawatt annually).⁴⁵ Illegal electric connections and bill defaulters might be another reason for power shortage in Bangladesh. According to a 2002 report, the Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) had found 3,940 illegal electric connections, arrested 141 people and lodged 1945 cases regarding illegal connection and non-payment of its dues.⁴⁶

At the same time, Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB)'s 8 (eight) highly expensive diesel-fuelled small power plants located at remote places and islands have become liabilities because of the unusually high per unit cost of electricity generation and production at levels far below the installed capacity. According to a report, BPDB feels it is urgent to overhaul a large number of its existing power plants but it can not go for such a move systematically as there is no reserve margin of power generation capacity at this moment.

Furthermore, 30% of the electricity produced by BPDB is distributed by the organisation itself, 50% is distributed by DESA and the remaining 20% by Rural

Electrification Board (REB). As a result, BPDB is now on the verge of bankruptcy due to its current distribution mechanism.⁴⁷ According to some estimates, about US \$1 billion worth of industrial output is lost annually as a result of power outages. The government has created some new organisations and also allowed the formation of some in the private sector with the objective of solving problems in the transmission of electricity and reducing the 'system loss.'

However, due to the power crisis, the textile industry manufacturers, the prime foreign currency earner, has to keep their factories idle sometimes for five hours in a ten-hour working day. The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in a press conference said production in RMG industry might fall by 50 percent and production cost might go up by about 25 percent due to the crises.⁴⁸ Regarding electricity crisis, the former State Minister for Power of the BNP-led government Iqbal Hassan Mahmud⁴⁹ said, "If the power policy is not reformed alongside checking the irregularities in power distribution, it would be very tough to avoid the system loss, which is mainly responsible for crisis." Dil Afroz Begum of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology said that the so-called 37 to 40 percent system loss is not the result of mechanical faults only rather it includes misuse, corruption and illegal connection.⁵⁰

However, people wanted uninterrupted power supply, but the level of load-shedding exceeded all limits of tolerance. Even in the capital city people had to live less than six to seven hours load-shedding and in the rural area the situation was worse. This state of affairs, demonstrates the government's failure and inefficiency providing power supply to the people.

3.1. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The political process in Bangladesh has failed to establish a consensus based on the economic development policy cutting across party lines, a truly bipartisan policy. That is why the development process while delivering a reasonable growth rate, has been unable to deliver a fair and equitable economic order in the society, it has failed to supply the needs to major sections of the population and to unlock their potential based on a participatory process.⁵¹ Secondly, it is obvious that the bureaucracy in itself compromises its neutrality in order to serve the ruling party's interests and its leaders. Bureaucrats are more loyal to the ruling party than to the public for their career development. In general all government agencies are politically factionalised and dominated by a group of 'opportunists' who resist all forms of accountability since they enjoy political patronage. Thirdly, the pursuit of private finance for underwriting party activity makes both parties and their leaders' hostage to special interest groups. Much of the corruption in decision-making originates in the need to do favour to such political financiers. Those financiers are now directly entering politics whilst political activists are gradually evolving into businessmen. Such political culture largely excludes the more productive sectors of society and public welfare. Finally, we have already observed the poor quality of public educational

institutions and health care facilities. Every public institution providing public services such as electricity, gas, water supply, transport service etc. remains extremely poor.

The independence movement of Bangladesh was carried in the name of creating *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal). It was the vision of a society economically prosperous, free of exploitation, democratically governed, tolerant of pluralism and respectful of people's rights. But the successive regimes have fallen far short on their promises to promote economic prosperity, social justice and people's welfare. Undeniably, there has been some progress in the last three and half decades including reducing poverty, but it does not reflect the quality of people's life in general. Income disparities and access to opportunities and services between the rich and the poor have widened. Many of the economic and social changes e.g. growth of readymade garments industries, expansion of micro-credit and international migration were brought about not so much by public policy initiatives but by individual economic and social entrepreneurs. Therefore, for the last two decades the donors, as a matter of policy have been increasingly using the NGOs to replace governments in Bangladesh as development contractors, for delivering their aid, particularly to the poorer section of the population. In the area of educational training, healthcare, immunization services or family planning, NGOs are being promoted as the alternative to the perceived failures of the state in the social sector. All the above factors make the state dysfunctional and so the state fails in the provision of most of the public goods. Therefore, Bangladesh goes under the category of weak state not failed or strong one.

4.1. NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ The concept of 'Political goods, is extensively discussed by J. Ronald Pennock. Hereinafter 'political goods, is referred to as 'public goods' For Pennock's discussion please see J. Ronald Pennock "Political Development, political systems and political goods," World Politics, Vol. 18, No. 3 (April 1966): 415-34

² Robert I. Rotberg, "Failed states, collapsed states, weak states: causes and indicators," cited in Robert I Rotberg, *State failure and State weakness in a time of terror*, (New Jersey: World Peace Foundation , 2003), 4

³ Ibid. 5

⁴ Country Analysis Report, <<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/bangla.html>> (accessed 16 July, 2004).

⁵ *Foreign Policy* listed Bangladesh as the 17th failed state. But it is argued here that in the case of Bangladesh the *Foreign Policy's* study is based on one indicator only. Whereas, a CIA report published during the Clinton administration identified 33 'weak' states in the world and Bangladesh was not included in that list. The report, done on the directive of Vice President Al Gore, was published in 1995. The CIA report identified genocide, revolution, ethnic conflict, change of political power through violent means, and serious deterioration of internal law and order as the prime indicators of a weak state. But, none of the characteristics identified in that report for a 'weak state' exists in

Bangladesh now. Moinul Hossain Chowdhury, a former adviser to the caretaker government said in an interview that all the machinery, which are supposed to be operative in a sovereign state such as a unitary government and a sovereign parliament, people paying regular taxes to the government, a foreign policy and external trade remained fully functional in Bangladesh. Moin, however, acknowledged that there were problems in the state functionalities. The people have complaints about the quality of governance. "But these limitations can never be attributed as the failure of the state or the nation." For Moinul Hossain Chowdhury's interview please see *News From Bangladesh*, Sunday, 11 July, 2004,

<<http://www.bangladesh-web.com/view.php?hidDate=2004-07->11&hidType=TOP&hidRecord=0000000000000000000014062>> (accessed 22 January, 2005).

⁶ Although the World Bank and other agencies and organisations consider Bangladesh as one of the poorest countries in the world, this is not the opinion of Mawdudur Rahman. According to Rahman per capita GDP measures the distribution of Gross Domestic Products (GDP) over the population. Therefore, GDP per capita is not the only measure of economic performance of the country. He also stated that if we look at the GDP and Purchasing Power parity (PPP) the PPP adjusted GDP for Bangladesh is US \$ 299.9 billion (estimated). World Fact Book ranked 232 countries on PPP adjusted GDP where Bangladesh ranks 34th. Besides, by looking at other data and analysis Rahman argues that Bangladesh is not one of the poorest countries as is generally conceived. But he also acknowledges that the state has failed to bring benefits to the poor because of the inefficient and ineffective government as well as incongruent external influence. Goldman Sachs has rated Bangladesh as one of the 11 developing countries that in the long term, could emulate the success of China, India, Brazil and Russia. Alex Perry also mentions that the country now scores higher than neighbouring India on several key barometers of social development. See Dr. Mawdudur Rahman, "Bangladesh is not one of the World's poorest countries," *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh Daily), March 16, 2006; Andy Mukherjee, "Goldman Sachs on Bangladesh," *International Herald Tribune*, January 24 2006; and Alex Perry, "Rebuilding Bangladesh," *Time Asia*, April 03, 2006).

⁷ Although popular democracy was introduced during the parliamentary elections that were held under General Zia in 1979, the fairness of the election has been questioned by many. However, after the assassination of Zia in 1981, an election was held under the civilian government. In that election Justice Abdus Sattar, the incumbent Vice President was elected as President But it was short lived, within a year the chief of the army, Lt. General Hussain Mohammad Ershad took power in a bloodless coup. Ershad rule started in 1982 and ended in 1990 by the people's movement.

⁸ When Ershad was forced to resign as the President, the incumbent Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed became the chief of Caretaker government with the consensus of all political parties. After that in 1991 under the supervision of the caretaker government free and fair election was held. The BNP under the leadership of Khaleda Zia won the elections. As a result, a parliamentary system was established with the consensus of all respective parties.

⁹ *The Dawn* (Pakistan Daily) published a news item in its 27th September 2005 issue under the headline "BD ranked 4th among Asian Democracies" saying that Bangladesh

secured the fourth position out of 16 Asian countries in the Asia Democracy Index, prepared by the Singapore based Alliance for Reform and Democracy in Asia. In the overall ranking, Japan topped the list, followed by Hong Kong, Taiwan and Bangladesh. See *Foreign Press of Bangladesh*, <<http://www.bdpressinform.org/foreign.htm>> (accessed February 21 2006).

¹⁰ Alex Perry, "Rebuilding Bangladesh," *Time Asia*, April 03, 2006.

¹¹ While BNP was in opposition frequently boycotted parliament claiming a lack of "congenial atmosphere" in the parliament and embarked on a series of one-day strikes which brought the country to a halt. Similarly, after 2001 parliamentary election, AL has responded to its landslide election defeat by announcing a boycott of parliament since the first parliament session unless fresh elections are held. Although, international monitors have said the voting was mostly free and fair.

¹² Bangladesh's Caretaker Government is a unique institution in the development of democracy. Bangladeshis have reason to take pride in this innovation. The Caretaker Government arose out of the specific conditions of the 1991 and 1996 elections. Its purpose is to ensure no one party has access to state resources, physical and human, in such a way as to influence the outcome of the election. The Caretaker Government model in the past has succeeded in instilling public confidence in the electoral process and results.

¹³ For details see Ishtiaq Hossain, "Bangladesh: a nation adrift", *Asian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (June, 1995): 32-48.

¹⁴ Whoever is in power.

¹⁵ The four party alliance consists of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), *Jama'at-e-Islami* Bangladesh (JIB), Jatiya Party (JP-Naziur) and Islami Okkoya Jote (IOJ-Islami United Force). In the beginning the main faction of JP under the leadership of former autocratic ruler Ershad was part of the alliance but sometime in the middle of AL rule he left the alliance leading to the emergence of another faction of JP under the leadership of Naziur Rahman Manju which joined the alliance.

¹⁶ Ali Riaz, "Bangladesh in 2004: The politics of vengeance and the erosion of democracy," *Asian Survey*, vol. 45, no. 1: 115.

¹⁷ November 1999.

¹⁸ Nishanthi Priyangika, "Bitter political feud between the government and opposition in Bangladesh," *World Socialists Website*, <<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/mar2000/bang-m09.shtml>> (accessed 25 January, 2005).

¹⁹ On January 11, 2007, the military backed caretaker government took power, cancelled the 23rd January's scheduled but highly contentious general election and imposed a state of emergency. On April 22nd 2007, in London the former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the leader of the AL was humiliated when she was turned back from Heathrow Airport trying to board a flight home as the military stated they would refuse to let her re-enter the country. Her bitter rival Khaleda Zia, the leader of BNP and the most recent Prime Minister, is desperately fighting against exile to Saudi Arabia with her family. For a good analysis of the background to the assumption of power by the military-backed care-taker government see William B. Milam, "Bangladesh and the burden of history," *Current History*, vol. 106, no. 699 (April, 2007): 153-160.

- ²⁰ Moazzem Hossain, "Bangladesh corruption targeted," *The BBC News*, Sunday, 30 December, 2001.
- ²¹ The leader of AL, Sheikh Hasina is the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of independence movement of Bangladesh. While Khaleda Zia, the widow of General Ziaur Rahman, the former president of the country. Ziaur Rahman's eldest son Tareq Rahman was appointed as Senior Joint Secretary General of the party by his mother and was tipped to become the Chairperson of the BNP. Similarly, Sheikh Hasina's son Sajib Wajed Joy who currently resides in the U.S. once came to Bangladesh to demonstrate his interest in entering politics. There was wide-spread belief that like Tareq, Joy would play a key role in his mother's party the AL.
- ²² *The Bangladesh Observer* (Bangladesh Daily), May 16, 2006, *The Daily Star* ((Bangladesh Daily), May 16, 2006.
- ²³ Kenichi Nobusue, "Bangladesh: A large sector supported by foreign donors," Shichi Shigetomi, *The state and NGOs: perspective from Asia* (Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 2002), 35.
- ²⁴ *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh Daily), June 15, 2000.
- ²⁵ Ishtiaq Hossain, "Micro-credit and good governance: models of poverty alleviation," *South Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2000): 201.
- ²⁶ "Corruption in Bangladesh Surveys: An Overview," *Transparency International-Bangladesh Chapter*, Dhaka, <<http://www.transparency.ca/Readings/TI-F01.htm>> (accessed 20 April, 2005).
- ²⁷ J. Ronald Pennock, "Political Development, Political Systems and Political Goods," *World Politics*, vol. 18, no. 3 : 423
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ *The New Light of Myanmar*, 31 May 2004.
- ³⁰ *The Bangladesh Observer* (Bangladesh Daily), 29 May 2004.
- ³¹ Prof. Mazharul Haque is the director of Accident Research Centre (ARC) of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). See the report in *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh Daily), May 6, 2006.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed, Governor, Bangladesh Bank mentions the above in a speech as the Convocation Speaker in the First Convocation Ceremony, Northern University Bangladesh, Dhaka, 24th April; 2007. It was 49% in year 2000. According to 'CIA fact book' 2nd May, 2006, see <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/fields/2046.html>> (accessed 2 May 2006).
- ³⁴ *The Daily Jugantar* (Bangladesh Daily), 9 January, 2001.
- ³⁵ 13-15th March 2002.
- ³⁶ *The Daily Protham Alo* (Bangladesh Daily), 14 March, 2002.
- ³⁷ *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh Daily), December 8, 2005.
- ³⁸ In most cases money given to the educational institutions is in the name of 'donation.'
- ³⁹ See "Corruption in Bangladesh Surveys: An Overview," *Transparency International-Bangladesh Chapter*, Dhaka, <http://www.transparency.ca/Readings/TI-F01.htm>, (accessed 20 April 2005).
- ⁴⁰ In Bangladesh, the salary and incentives of the teachers in public schools/institutions are very low. Therefore, apart from few exceptions, people who do not get job in other

places only choose the teaching profession. However, in the private institutions situation is different in general. They pay high salary to attract the qualified candidates.

⁴¹ *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh Daily), April 17, 2006.

⁴² Amartya Sen made this comment in a keynote address on the occasion of the launching of Bangladesh Health Watch's *The state of health in Bangladesh report 2006*. See *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh Daily), 27 December, 2006.

⁴³ *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh Daily), April 28, 2006.

⁴⁴ *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh Daily), September 22, 2005.

⁴⁵ *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh Daily), April 26, 2006

⁴⁶ Ghulam Ahad, "Power crisis: load management programme in offing," *The Weekly Holiday* (Bangladesh Weekly), 12 April, 2002.

⁴⁷ The transmission cost at the distribution level is a little more than TK. 2/kWh but BPDB supplies to DESA at TK. 1.91/kWh and at TK. 1.84/kWh to REB. BPDB earns a revenue of less than TK. 250 million per month from DESA and although BPDB's official retail price for its consumers is more than TK. 3/kWh, its average realisation limit per unit is only TK. 1.75/kWh.

⁴⁸ *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh Daily), May 3, 2006.

⁴⁹ Iqbal Hasan Mahmud was arrested by the interim government and is being prosecuted for massive corruption.

⁵⁰ *New Age* (Bangladesh Daily), November 1, 2005.

⁵¹ M. Syeduzzaman, "Civil society movement, the citizens' group and the context," *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh Daily) April 07, 2006. M. Syeduzzaman is a former Finance Minister, People's Republic of Bangladesh.