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THE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNANCE IN BANGLADESH: CHANGES AND CONTINUITY

Abstract

Political institutions are important to explain the performance of governance. Explicating the quality and structure of political institutions helps us understanding the role of governance in modern democracies. This study attempts to explore the relationship between political institutions and governance. The core assumption of the paper is that political institutions matter for the quality of governance in a country. It suggests that there are explicit and implicit linkages among the variables of political institutions and governance mechanisms. The paper takes Bangladesh-widely known as a governance deficit country- a case to understand these linkages focusing on two historical phases - 1971-1990 and the post-1990 era. In the context of Bangladesh, political governance characteristics demonstrate three critical aspects (i) the absence of balance of power between the three formal political institutions – executive, legislature and judiciary; (ii) inability of the state institutions and agencies to deliver services to the people; and (iii) absence of democracy model in different political institutions. The general

pattern of changes is conceptualized in relation to speed and reflexivity in the processes and functions of political institutions and their agentive roles. In the post-1990 period, the programmes for political liberalization are undertaken at a faster pace and the scope of the activity has been broadened to a considerable degree. But the governance attributes of Bangladesh in the political domain remain almost unchanged although new institutions are created. Political centre of gravity towards making more accountable and effective governance institutions is missing humanly in the country's political framework. The paper further argues that the post-1990 era has been marked by changes more in the context of national policies, organizations and ideological orientation than to improve the quality and structure of political institutions.

1. Introduction

Political scientists, development thinkers, and social activists in Bangladesh are increasingly turning their attention to the problems of governance. Most notably, the donors community took the leading role in popularizing this phenomenon, albeit with their poor conceptions and narrow focus. Ironically, the issue of governance remained a neglected area in the 1970s and 1980s when the paramount focus was mainly placed on planning, control and the policy environment. It was widely held that the distorted policy environment was the fundamental cause behind the economic backwardness of Bangladesh. 'Good' policies were deemed necessary to ensure effective functioning of national organizations. In reality, this has not resulted in generating desired socio-economic development in the country and consequently, it has led to the dysfunctional institutions and poor governance as the major bottlenecks for national development. The political institutions as a major component of overall institutional arrangements of a country are closely linked with governance. In fact, political institutions shape governance around the world by setting limits on the ability of the state to exercise its power arbitrarily. As *the World Governance Survey* recognizes, political institutions have the most

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critical link in the governance chain.¹ It has significant economic and non-economic consequences. In this paper, I would attempt to explain political institutional arrangements and governance mechanisms in Bangladesh in two historical phases - 1971-1990 and the post-1990 era - with a view to understand their nature and linkages in the changed context of domestic and global politics. This is also an attempt to distinguish the issues of changes and continuity in governance as well as institutional context between the two historical phases. Analysis is based on identifying two broad dimensions involving diverse issues in the national context that include (i) identifying the political institutional arrangements as governance is systematically related to the characteristics of these institutions with specific focus on the rules, norms and policies that balance cooperation and competition between and among the governing organizations and agencies, and (ii) understanding the governance mechanisms at various levels of national activities. These dimensions are interdependent in their relations with each other although there is a degree of autonomy at individual level. In fact, the institutional factors in their formal and informal manifestations have guided the directions and outcomes of the governance mechanisms in Bangladesh. The core assumption of this paper is that political institutions matter for the quality of governance in a country.

2. Conceptualizing Governance: The Context of Bangladesh

2.1 Concept of Governance

The term 'governance' originally derives from the Greek word *kybernetes*, which means navigation or helmsmanship. Like many concepts, governance is a term with multiple interpretations. Due to its multi-dimensional and multi-layered nature, the concept of governance faces the problem of clarity both in its conceptualization and operationalisation. Nevertheless, the literature on governance continues to proliferate and the concept itself occupies a central position in the development debate particularly in the South. Broadly, governance comprises the traditions, institutions and processes that

¹ See, for details, Goran Hyden, Julius Court and Ken Mease, "Political Society and Governance in 16 Developing Countries", *the World Governance Survey Discussion Paper 5*, London: Overseas Development Institute, (July 2003).

determine how power is exercised, how citizens are given voice, and how decisions are made on issues of public concern²; the ways or types of using power in the process of management of national economic/social resources³; and regimes of laws, rules, judicial decisions, and administrative practices that constrain, prescribe, and enable the provision of publicly supported goods and services.⁴ The *World Bank Report of 1994* stated, "Good governance is epitomized by predictable, open, and enlightened policymaking; a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos; an executive arm of government accountable for its actions; and a strong civil society participating in public affairs; and all behaving under the rule of law."⁵ According to the political scientist R.A.W. Rhodes, the concept of governance is currently used in contemporary social sciences with at least six different meanings: the minimal State, corporate governance, new public management, good governance, socio-cybernetic systems and self-organised networks.⁶

Governance can also be understood in different levels, modes and patterns. Peters (1996), Pierre (1999), S. J. Kim (2000), Considine and Lewis (1999) all have identified different multiple and shifting models of governance, like; market model, participatory model, flexible model, corporatist model, pro-growth model, welfare model, state-centric model, market-centric model, procedural model, network model etc.⁷ With the change of perspective, the shifting trends of

² See, for details, John Graham, Bruce Amos and Tim Plumptre, "Principles for Good Governance in the 21st Century", *Policy Brief*, No.15, The Institute on Governance (IOG), Canada, (August 2003).

<<http://www.iog.ca/publications/policybrief15.pdf>> (accessed on 23 May 2005)

³ See, "Governance and Development", (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 1992), p.1.

⁴ See, Laurence E. Lynn, Carolyn J. Heinrich and Carolyn J. Hill, *Improving Governance: A New Logic for Empirical Research*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001) p.7.

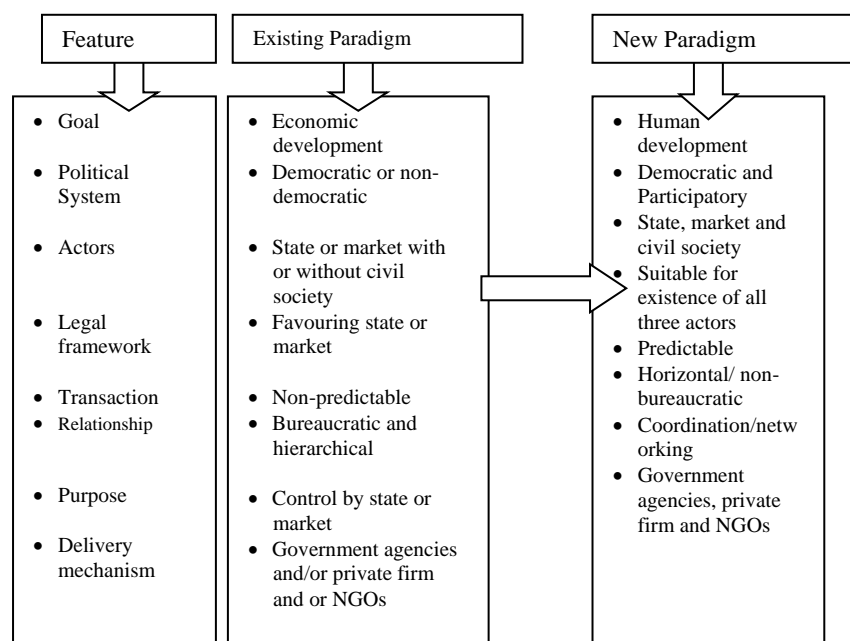
⁵ See, for details, "Governance: The World Bank's Experience", (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 1994).

⁶ See, for details, R.A.W. Rhodes, *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003), pp.46-47; Roderick Rhodes, "The New Governance: Governing Without Government", *Political Studies*, Vol. 44, (1996), p. 652.

⁷ See, for details, G. Peters, "Models of Governance for the 1990s", in D. Kettl and H. Milward, eds., *The State of Public Management*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996); G. Peters, *The Future of Governing: Four Emerging Models*, (Lawrence:

governance are well noticed everywhere. The objectives, frameworks, systems, actors, transaction and delivery mechanisms of governance are rapidly changing. Figure-1 illustrates that in the new paradigm of governance, market, civil society, and NGOs participation are more important than state domination. The approach and methods are much more horizontal and coordinated/networked. Thus the new characteristics demonstrate that the 'old governance' was state-centric and the 'new governance' is society-centric.⁸

Figure-1: The Shifting Paradigm of Governance⁹



The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) also treats good governance as the existence of a network of institutions of

The University Press of Kansas, 1996); Considine, M. and J. Lewis, "Governance at Ground Level: The Frontline Bureaucrat in the Age of Markets and Networks", *The Public Administration Review*, Vol. 59, No. 6, (1999), pp. 467-80.

⁸ See, Jon Pierre, ed., *Debating Governance: Authority, Steering and Democracy*, (Oxford: the Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁹ See, for details, H.S. Shylendra, "The Emerging Governance Paradigm and Its Implications for Poverty Alleviation and Equity", *Working Paper*, The Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA), India, No. 182, (March 2004).

government.¹⁰ It explains three critical relationships among citizens and policymakers, policymakers and bureaucrats, and, bureaucrats and citizens. It is also a process involving the interactions of three key institutions: the State, society and market. In sum, governance is a fusion of diverse modes and stratum of coordination. It is an institutional framework of synchronization based on the sense of co-steering and networking whether it is political or economic or societal. In the neo-liberal discourse, governance implies the escalation of market to maximize individual choice and participation and to enhance the role of democracy and networking in decision-making and control over the sphere of political power.

2.2 The Governance Debate in Bangladesh

The governance literature in Bangladesh demonstrates a clear dominance of International Donors Community (IDC) perspective. The fundamental concern of the IDC involves restructuring the public administration in order to facilitate wider role of markets in the society. It is only recently that the World Bank (WB) has turned its focus to institutions and brought the concept into development discourse.¹¹ As Mahmud pointed out, "unfortunately, the proponents of the 'Washington consensus' discovered the facts only after some damage had already been done."¹² Some studies also focus on

¹⁰ See, for details, *The Shrinking State: Governance and Sustainable Human Development- A UNDP Policy Document*, (New York: UNDP, 1997); *Reconceptualising Governance-A UNDP Discussion Paper 2*, (New York: UNDP, 1997).

¹¹ The World Bank's experience of disintegration of its economic policies in African countries led to attribute the failure of governance which includes administrative inefficiency, absence of rule of law and accountability, rampant corruption, and lack of transparency, etc. The Bank, however, did not relate these traits with any particular political regime. This link between governance and democracy is dynamically pressed into the development discourse by the international organizations. See, for details, *Managing Development: The Governance Dimension*, (Washington D.C The World Bank, 1991); *Governance and Development*, (Washington D.C: The World Bank, 1992); *Governance: The World Bank's Experience*, (Washington D.C, The World Bank, 1994); *Sub-Sahara Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), The World Bank.

¹² See, Wahiduddin Mahmud, "Bangladesh Economy into the 21st Century", keynote paper for the 13th Biennial Conference of Bangladesh Economic Association, Dhaka, (10-12 August 2000), p.2.

democratic governance and local governance. Zarina R. Khan pointed out, “effective democratic governance continued to be the elusive ‘golden deer’ that the nation doggedly sought but could not find.”¹³ In Bangladesh, it is more often referred to ‘good governance’, signifying the reality that there is a failure of governance or mis-governance. Sobhan extends the scope of governance as he argues that “the study of governance problem is, in essence, a search for ways and means of managing affairs of the state, taking into account the obstacles inherent in changes taking place in South Asian countries”.¹⁴ Khan and Ahmed conceived it as a notion of accountability from political and bureaucratic sense in Bangladesh context.¹⁵ Whatever the focus of their studies, the central concern remains to identify the quality of governance whether it is ‘good’ or ‘bad’. As a result, it misses two overriding issues of ‘harmonization’ in relation to institutional transformation in a society and scope and agency of governance. Governance cannot be conceived properly just by understanding its qualitative level. Why is governance in Bangladesh ‘poor’ or ‘bad’? It is related to institutional framework and the absence of effective harmonization and coordination of economic, political and social activities. The problem with the scope and agency, as highlighted in the IDC perspective, is that governance in Bangladesh is generally limited to public sector management and market reforms. There are other studies which focus on political dimensions of governance like democracy or electoral system. Again, like the study of markets or the public sector, it avoids critical linkages with rules, norms and policies. Governance, in a broader sense, refers to the rules and norms that guide the internal relationships among various “stakeholders” in a society including the state, political society, business community, and civil society.¹⁶ It is not reflected in the wider dimensions of society

¹³ See, Zarina Rahman Khan, “Decentralized Governance: Trials and Triumphs”, in *Bangladesh: Promise and Performance*, ed. Rounaq Jahan. (Dhaka: The University Press Ltd. 2002), p. 107.

¹⁴ See, for further details, Rehman Sobhan, *Problems of Governance in Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 1992), p. viii; *The Independent Review of Bangladesh’s Development* (IRBD), Vol. 3, (Dhaka: The Center for Policy Dialogue, 1996).

¹⁵ See, Mohammad Mohabbat Khan, and AK. Monwaruddin Ahmed, “Dimensions of Governance’ in M G Quibria, ed., *The Bangladesh Economy in Transition*, (Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 1997), p. 323.

¹⁶ Partly, this is drawn on the ideas of Pauly and Reich. See, for details, Louis Pauly and Simon Reich, “National Structures and Multinational Corporate Behavior:

covering economic, political and societal issues. For the purpose of this paper, governance is understood as a process of harmonization to manage diverse nature of human activities through establishing appropriate institutions with a view to achieve national development. It emphasizes the formal and informal rules and norms shaping the behaviour and capacity of governing actors to create an enabling environment for national activities.

3. Phase I: 1971-1990

3.1 A Brief Background

The structure and quality of political institutions can affect whether the government facilitates or inhibits economic development.¹⁷ From institutional perspective, Bangladesh State is an amalgam of authoritarian and pseudo bureaucratic democracy and centralized systems. Before analyzing the political institutional arrangements I would like to trace briefly the political background of Bangladesh during this period. This would help us to conceptualize how the formal and informal sources of rules and norms have shaped the institutional arrangements in different times.

Bangladesh emerged as a democratic country with a parliamentary system of government in 1971 deriving its political legitimacy from the electoral victory of the Awami League (AL) in the 1970 National Assembly elections during the Pakistan era. Based on the newly framed constitution the AL went to the polls in 1973 to elect a new parliament for five-year term. Despite the criticism of election irregularities, the ruling party won almost all the general seats (291 out of 300).¹⁸ A strong government was set in motion to build the war-torn

Enduring Differences in the Age of Globalization”, *International Organization*, No. 51, (Winter 1997), pp. 1-30.

¹⁷ See, “Economic Development and the Quality of Legal Institutions”, -A Brief Note Prepared by Matthew Stephenson of Harvard University. < <http://www.worldbank.org/publication/legal/institutional.htm>> (accessed on 26 January 2005.; For further details, See, Bo Rothstein & Jan Teorell, “What Is Quality of Government? A Theory of Impartial Political Institutions”, paper presented to the conference on “*Quality of Government: What it is, How to get it, Why it matters*”, in Göteborg, November 17–19, 2005.

¹⁸ See, Rounaq Jahan, “Bangladesh: Promise and Performance” in Rounaq Jahan, ed., *Bangladesh: Promise and Performance*, (Dhaka: University Press Ltd. 2002), p.11;

country. But very soon, an overhauling of the political system took place in January 1975 when Mujib introduced a one-party system under the banner of Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL) marking a radical change in the form of government from parliamentary to presidential style.

Amid such abrupt political changes and a persistently declining economy, a *coup d'état* was staged on 15 August 1975 in which Mujib and most of his family members were killed. This was immediately followed by martial law that caused the first entry of the military in Bangladesh politics. As Imtiaz Ahmed argued that this new development enormously influenced the political system in Bangladesh in two ways: forging a military-civilian alliance in ruling the country and the inception of the 'Islamic content' in political life.¹⁹ Amid a volatile political environment, General Zia had been put at the helm of power in November 1975 following a series of coup and counter-coup attempts. However, General Zia introduced a political regime first under the garb of military rule and then restored electoral politics in 1978 followed by the presidential and general elections in 1979 in which Zia and his newly instituted political party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) won landslide victory. Ironically, Zia's tenure (1975-1981) witnessed several *coup* attempts before finally falling victim to assassination that was carried out on 30 May 1981. Later General Ershad seized power in a bloodless *coup* and sacked the then BNP regime led by Sattar in March 1982. This established a long spell of military rule for about nine years that effectively consolidated military intervention in every sphere of organizational setting of the State what some call 'the process of militarizing the civilian authority'. Although, Ershad used all kinds of tactics including religion to cling to power, but the united movement of the opposition political parties²⁰ ended the authoritarian rule on 6 December 1990 when the dictator transferred power to a civilian authority.

Craig Baxter et al., *Government and Politics in South Asia*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), p. 264.

¹⁹ See, Imtiaz Ahmed, "A Short History of Bangladesh," in Jevan Thiagarajah, ed., *Governance and Electoral Process in Bangladesh*, (New Delhi: Vikash Publishing House, 1997), p. 7.

²⁰ This movement is popularly known as 'mass upsurge' in Bangladesh to celebrate the victory of people. At the final point of the movement, the military withdrew their support from the Ershad regime that played a catalyst role in ousting Ershad regime.

3.2 Institutional Arrangements

Enforcement of contract, the structure of incentives and organizational performance largely depend on the institutional arrangements of a country, which are manifested in rules, norms and policies in a particular social context. Like many of the developing countries, there are three distinct but interdependent spheres of institutional arrangements in Bangladesh – political, economic and societal. Political institutions could help determining the limits on the arbitrary exercise of power by politicians and bureaucrats.²¹ As noted earlier, being considered the rules of game, institutions have diverse sources of constituting elements from formal legislations, rules and norms to informal traditions and customs. Likewise, the basis of the institutional arrangements in Bangladesh lies in both formal and informal sources of rules, norms and policies.

Having hinted on the brief history of political life in Bangladesh I would identify the formal institutional arrangements in Bangladesh. The formal political institutional arrangements are composed of several key institutions, which include the executive, legislature, judiciary, administrative system, local government, military and the political party.

The first and foremost political institution is the executive, represented by the President, Prime Minister and Cabinet members, which always remains at the apex of running the affairs of the state. Unlike the multiparty political system or relatively democratic or even the benevolent dictatorship, the executive in Bangladesh enjoyed unparalleled power in the hierarchy of governing organizations virtually with no accountability and minimum concern for public goods. The public sector based economic system also contributed to a further expansion of the role of executive. The predominance of the executive has been exercised through frequent amendments of the national constitution and the public administration more recently known as 'development administration'. During a span of 20 years, i.e., 1971-1990, the country's constitution remained suspended for over eight years due to military takeover of state power. The

²¹ See, *The World Development Report 2002*, (Washington D.C.: The World Bank), Part III, Chapter 5, p. 100.

constitutional amendments were mostly utilized to legitimize one-party rule, validate all actions under martial law, and to legalize highly controversial issues.²² Besides, the President or Prime Minister as the head of the government or chief executive established a personality cult phenomenon in running the country.

Second, the legislature is another political institution known as the *Jatiya Sangshad* in Bangladesh, which is the only house with the law-making power. It is a 300-member body with directly elected representatives for five years term. There are also another 45 additional reserved seats for women making the total number 345.²³ Except for a brief period during 1972-1975, Bangladesh followed a presidential form of government under which the legislature appeared to be a grossly ineffective organization, if not a rubber stamp. Despite the limitations of its power under the presidential system, the legislature is supposed to create a dynamic environment for law making, the enforcement of accountability of the government to the legislature, and general discussion on group interests or common welfare. But in Bangladesh it has failed to generate such environment. In addition, one common feature was the frequent termination of the national parliaments. None of the four parliaments were allowed to complete their stipulated 5-year terms. The first parliament elected in 1973 could serve for two years and seven months only to facilitate one-party rule in 1975. The third and fourth parliaments groomed under the military ruler Ershad during his nine-year tenure witnessed rather worse conditions than its predecessors.²⁴ The frequent dissolution of the national parliaments was precipitated by authoritarian political rule in the country. For instance, while the first and second parliaments (1973 and 1979) were dissolved because of military coups in 1975 and 1982, the Ershad regime terminated the third and fourth parliaments under severe pressures from opposition political movements.

²² See, Khan and Ahmed, p. 304.

²³ With the 14th Amendment of Bangladesh Constitution, the number reserved seats to the Parliament for women was increased to 45 from 30 and the total number of seats was increased from 330 to 345.

²⁴ See, Syed Anwar Husain, "Challenges of Democratic Governance in Bangladesh." in SR Chakravarty, ed., *Society, Polity and Economy of Bangladesh*. (New Delhi: Har Anand Publications, 1994), p. 119.

Third, judiciary as a political institution is entrusted to establish the rule of law (i) by ensuring compliance of the executive and legislature with constitutional provisions for which it is regarded as the custodian of the Constitution and (ii) by protecting the rights of individuals to live, work and enjoy without fear. Rule of law begins with the laws framed to protect lives of citizens, their right to property, for enforcement of contracts and enjoyment of fundamental rights.²⁵ But in Bangladesh the executive heavily influences the judiciary as the enforcing agency of rules and law. The judiciary appears to be largely subservient to the government in relation to other political organizations such as executive, legislature and bureaucracy. Particularly the appointment processes of Justices in the higher courts were not made in line of the spirit of establishing rule of law in the society.

Under the presidential form of government during 1975-1990, the bureaucracy emerged as a powerful organ with increasing influence over the decision-making process from the top to bottom of public administration. It may be argued that the political leadership in the executive appeared to be overwhelmingly dependent on the bureaucrats for running the country. In fact, because of the colonial experiences of centuries only this organization inherited a system and practical skills in collecting revenue, maintaining law and order and pursuing external relations. The public servants recruited by the state exerted a tremendous power and influence in society. Their role has been strongly institutionalized at various tiers of public administration. Political chaos and unrests on many occasions, legitimacy crisis of leadership, and lack of commitment and vision of the political leaders helped the bureaucracy becoming an associate of mis-governance in the society and thereby eroded public sector capability.

Since the transfer of political power is fundamentally based on multiparty elections in Bangladesh, the electoral system has a crucial role for facilitating the democratic process. According to the Constitution of Bangladesh, the electoral system is composed with the Election Commission—an independent national statutory body that has a chief election commissioner and members at the apex. In reality,

²⁵ See, Hasnat Abdul Hye, ed., *Governance: South Asian Perspectives*. (Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 2000), p. 12.

the election commission worked at the behest of the executive that eroded the image of this institution as regards to its capacity to arrange free and fair elections in Bangladesh. It is often alleged that the elections at various level in Bangladesh are marked with 'vote rigging', "vote piracy", "media coup", etc. As Khan and Ahmed argue, all the elections (local and national) held between 1973 and 1990 were manipulated and rigged with the knowledge and blessings of the governments in power. The Ershad regime that ruled for nine years did the maximum damage in destroying the credibility of electoral system in Bangladesh.²⁶

The institutions for local government in Bangladesh are traditionally not very autonomous due to the strong control by the state that derives its authority from the unitary structure. Both financially and administratively they are largely dependent on the central government. However, the major institutions for local government include Divisions, Districts, *Upazila* Council²⁷ and Union *Parishad* (council). In addition, there are two mechanisms called City Corporation and *Pourashava* for the urban regions. Since the country is basically rural based, the district, *Upazila Parishad* and Union *Parishad* play the significant role in the local government. Among them Union *Parishad* and *Pourashava* are directly elected by the people.

Apart from the above-mentioned constitutional organs, there are other vital political institutions such as the military and the political parties, which have enormous influence on national activities. As may be understood from the historical background mentioned earlier, the military is a powerful political institution. The country was ruled by martial law on three occasions – 1975, 1977 and 1982. To quote Husain, "The military ruled Bangladesh for about eight years; and rest of the time a mix of populism-pseudo-democracy-authoritarianism dominated the polity. Democracy was thus never allowed to function."²⁸ The military leaders dominated the political scene in Bangladesh from 1975 to 1990 (except for a brief interlude in 1979 and 1986). Their involvement in politics is often justified as a

²⁶ See, Khan and Ahmed, *Op. Cit.*, p. 311

²⁷ The *Upazila* council system was introduced for a brief period (1985-1990).

²⁸ See, Husain, p. 115.

historical necessity of the state because of extreme political chaos or massive corruption. No military ruler was able to bring political stability and to create a corruption free society.

Another institution is the political party system, which has an important role in a democratic system. The role of the party system lies in the forms of the leadership selection, the aggregation and articulation of societal interests, healthy political competition, citizens' expression of choices and political socialisation remains neglected. However, the party system in Bangladesh is exemplified by a number of negative factors: lack of democratic practice, excessive fragmentation, the promotion and perpetuation of a personality cult, the lack of organizational discipline, weak nature of leadership, and absence of clear and cohesive programs. Another feature of this party system is the emergence of family domination in politics for more than two decades, creating a dynastic rule in Bangladesh. This largely hinders the institutional development of the political parties in Bangladesh. In particular, the ruling political party exerts tremendous influence in national life.

It may be noted that the above-mentioned institutional arrangements are based on formal rules of the state embodied in the constitutional provisions, legislative acts and judicial code. But there have also been informal sources of institutional arrangements that enormously influenced the functions of different organizations and agencies in the political arena. Informal norms that dominated in this period in organizing the political and legal nature of the Bangladesh state stem from informal sources of the behaviour of the political and the bureaucratic elite, which presided over the state organizations at different times. For example, we observe different traditions and customs in the political arena of Bangladesh such as the despotic nature of the leadership, intolerance of the opponents in politics, massive politicization, upholding of narrow interests at every stage as well as democratization etc. It may be observed that many of these norms are typically negative, while norms like democratization are positive primarily upheld by the people. Quite paradoxically, although democratization has gained wider recognition in the society, non-compliance of law is widespread among the citizens. Judicial interference is the common practice of the state.

Thus, we observe that the political institutional arrangements during 1971-1990 were clearly based on both formal and informal rules and norms. It is also evident that the informal rules and norms have been very powerful to guide the relationships between or among different organizations and agencies..

3.3 Governance Mechanisms

There are several types of governance mechanisms in a country whether it is a developed or developing one. Lindberg *et al.* divide them into six specific types, which include market, obligational network, hierarchy, monitoring, promotional network and association.²⁹ But the problem with their typology is that these are constructed from the experiences of highly market-oriented and industrialized countries in the North America and Europe. More so, these are particularly framed in the industrial context of a developed country. So, they miss the realities in many of the developing countries where state plays a leading role and industry is not much developed.

During the phase under review, Bangladesh was not only a developing country but also possessed an agro-based and low industrialized economy with a dominant public sector. While recognizing the relevance of these mechanisms to some extent, we find that the state emerges as the most powerful mechanism of governance in Bangladesh. Avoiding such an extensive splitting up of governance mechanisms, we argue that primarily, there have been observed two broad mechanisms of governance in Bangladesh during this period – state and non-state, involving a wide range of differing organizations and agencies for the delivery of public goods to the people. By the state type of governance mechanism we understand different hierarchical ways and means employed to deliver services to the people. Non-state type of governance includes many different ways such as market, hierarchy, networks and association etc. that have not developed in this trajectory of national developments. So, the

²⁹ See, for details, L. N. Lindberg, J.C. Campbell, and R. Hollingsworth, “Economic Governance and the Analysis of Structural Change in the American Economy”, in J.L. Campbell, L.N. Lindberg, and R. Hollingsworth, eds., *Governance of the US Economy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 3-34

analysis is confine mainly to state type of governance in political sphere.

Political governance in Bangladesh is mostly dominated by the state. In fact, the extensive and monopolistic control of the state was embodied in the formal institutional arrangements in the country that were indicated earlier. It maintained dominance in national life through its various formal organs of the government such as executive, bureaucracy, legislature, judiciary and the party system. Since the beginning of independence in 1971 the state has exerted its overarching control in policy formulation and implementation in Bangladesh. To quote a World Bank report, “Government is seen as: preoccupied with process; too pervasive; highly centralized; overly bureaucratic; too discretionary in governance; unaccountable and unresponsive and wasteful”.³⁰ The political and bureaucratic elite took a predominant role in setting goals and priorities for the state and society. As Hye argues, “after independence, three constituents of ‘state’ monopolized or nearly monopolized ‘governance’ because the informal organs viz. the private sector or the community based organizations were weak or non-existent.”³¹

Box 1
Rules and Norms for Governance in Bangladesh: The Political and Legal Dimension, 1971-1990
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality cult • Centralization of authority • Corruption, rent-seeking and patronage • Military interference • Bureaucratization • Technocracy • Vote-rigging • Party dominance

Source: Prepared by the author

³⁰ See, for details, “Bangladesh-Government that Works: Reforming the Public Sector” The World Bank Report, No. 15182 BD, (10 July 2006), p. ii; World Bank, Bangladesh: Government that Works (Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 1996), p. 67.

³¹ See, Hasnat Abdul Hye, “Good Governance: A Social Contract”, in Hasnat Abdul Hye, ed., p. 4.

Now the question is: in what ways the state type of governance has been maintained over the years? Although there is a formal way of exercising governance mechanisms, which is clearly incorporated in the political institutions, the state goes beyond those stated forms of governance, rather guided by informal set of rules and norms as highlighted in box 1. The extra constitutional and extra legal forms of governance were widely used in Bangladesh during this phase. Taking stock of the whole array of formal and informal rules and norms, we observe that there are seven major ways for the state type of governance.

First, although a Westminster type of multiparty political system was introduced in the early days of independence that clearly identified democracy as the central mechanism of governance, centralization of authority was common feature in running the affairs of the country. In many cases, particularly under the military rule, it was rather the personalization of authority that subordinated other means of exercising authority. Power is largely vested on the chief executive with the phenomenon of personality cult. As mentioned earlier, the legislature and judiciary were subservient to the will of the executive.

Second, state regulations in the forms of presidential orders, ordinance and legislative acts took the upper hand in the formulation and implementation of national policies and decisions. It is true that regulations are not always undemocratic or unacceptable in political process, but the problem in Bangladesh is that the political elite overwhelmingly relied on them in running the country. The normal institutional process was often bypassed by the state. As the country was run under a presidential form of government, it provided ample opportunities to abuse the political system through frequent regulations. The government used the parliament as a rubber stamp and interfered in the judicial process whenever it was felt necessary. Some of the regulations may be mentioned here that influenced national life enormously. In 1972 a single presidential order of the Mujib regime nationalized almost all industries, financial and banking institutions, educational institutions, and health institutions in Bangladesh. Later the same regime introduced a Special Powers Act in 1974 that considerably curtailed many of the fundamental principles of human rights like freedom of movement and freedom of expression.

The one party rule was also introduced in 1975 through such kind of state regulation. The regimes that came to power in the post 1975 period resorted to similar mechanisms. The Government of Zia reintroduced electoral politics in 1978 through a state regulation. The Ershad regime (1982-1990) virtually ruled the country through regulations that largely prevented the dynamic functioning of political institutions in Bangladesh.

The third powerful mechanism of governance employed by the state was military role in politics. To put it differently, the entry of military in running the country on three occasions for about nine years as part of direct military rule and about seven years as the civilianized military rule introduced a new mechanism of governance. The military role in Bangladesh politics was not an exception as it was widely seen in many Third World countries during the Cold War era. For better or worse, military intervention is closely linked with the rise of technocracy in Bangladesh. Thus military intervention combined with technocracy constituted a powerful means of political governance.

Fourth, another traditional way of governance is the political leadership, which has not been groomed in Bangladesh under the shadow of the long spell of civilian and military rule. In its place what we here observed is a tyranny of a few political leaders who misused the political system. Despite the rhetoric of national development, it is the party interests that prevailed as the central concern of the political leadership in power or opposition.

The fifth instrument of political governance was the widespread use of corruption, rent seeking and patronage in different sectors of national activities. The personalized style of rule, centralization of state power and heavy reliance on bureaucracy increases the tendency to high degree of corruption in the society. Several studies on political economy and sociology of corruption reinforce the view that accountability and transparency through the democratic political order and the rational-legal model of bureaucracy do not exist in the real life situation of Bangladesh.³² It is alleged that there was rampant

³² There might be several types of corruption such as political, administrative at different levels from national to village. Extensive works are done on this issue, while few of them are cited here. See, for details, Moudud Ahmed, *Bangladesh: Era of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*, (Dhaka: University Press Ltd, 1983); Saadat Hussain, *Corruption in Public Offices: Some Conceptual Issues in the Context of Bangladesh*,

corruption of the ruling party especially in connection with the food crisis of 1974, as well as with the misappropriation of relief goods immediately after Independence. Patronage becomes "an instrument of sharing power", and corruption a tool of political survival.³³ Wood argues that it is the predominant of the development state and quasi-state, which places Bangladesh at the "absolute rent seeking" end of the continuum.³⁴

The sixth mechanism of organizing political governance is the establishment of the rule of law. The legal framework inherited from the British colonial rule was not enforced properly by enforcing agencies such as the police, judicial administration due to widespread non-compliance of laws from the top to bottom of the society. Government interference in judicial activity is a common phenomenon.

Finally, there is a unique type of governance mechanism that involves the dominance of party officials in the political life during this period. Although it is not a communist country or a one party regime, the party cadres and officials enjoy informal power to the extent that often paralyzes the administrative operations from central to local governments. The party people have access to influence and alter the decisions in legal, economic and administrative agencies. Particularly, their influence in law and order situation is prominent. The enduring factionalism and the absence of democratic practices further strengthen the trend of illegal influence by the party officials in the activity of formal organs.

(Comilla: Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, 1990); Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, *Bangladesh Punargathon O Jatiya Oikamatta* (Bangladesh Reconstruction and National Consensus), (Dhaka: University Press Ltd, 1991); Geoffrey D. Wood, *Bangladesh: Whose Ideas, Whose Interests?*, (Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 1994); Kamal Siddiqui, *Towards Good Governance in Bangladesh: Fifty Unpleasant Essays*, (Dhaka: University Press Ltd, 1996); Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, "Bangladesher Samaj: Ashir Dashaker Nirikhe" (Society in Bangladesh in the Eighties), *Samaj Nirikkhon*, No 15, (February 1985), pp 46 –95; Erik G. Jansen, "Interest Groups and Development Assistance: The Case of Bangladesh", *Journal of Social Studies*, No. 59 (January 1993), pp 55 – 66.

³³ See, Moudud Ahmed, *Bangladesh: Era of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*, (Dhaka: University Press Ltd, 1983), p. 34.

³⁴ See, Geoffrey D. Wood, *Bangladesh: Whose Ideas, Whose Interests?*, (Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 1994), p. 35.

Thus we observe that the state dominated governance mechanism in the political sphere has considerably failed to ensure better performance of various political and legal organizations. The consequence is the vicious cycle of poverty with continuous aid dependence and the poor performance in many critical sectors of state and society. Above all, this has enormous implications for the accountability and transparency of the organizations that drastically reduces their credibility of political organizations either as implementing agencies or rule-making bodies. This has largely created a basic tendency of authoritarian and anarchical rule in the society in which money, power and arms maintain their strong control with minimum resistance from the state and the people.

To summarize, the preceding analysis demonstrates a number of important points. First, generally, the government takes a central role in organizing national activities in different sectors from economy to politics. The government obtained the instruments to direct and control of national economies through autarchy and state planning while it managed the socio-political system through a centralized and personalized political regime. Second, there have been both formal and informal institutional arrangements in Bangladesh even though the formal institutions are far more established and consolidated. However, both types of institutions are dominated by the state. Third, the governance mechanisms are exceedingly dominated by state regulations and agencies. The dominant rules and norms of governance have been highly power and state-centric. It is interesting enough that the rules and norms of governance are not well connected with the underlying institutional arrangements in society. Fourth, political governance characteristics demonstrate two critical aspects (i) the absence of balance of power between the three formal institutions – executive, legislature and judiciary and (ii) the inability of the state organizations and agencies to deliver services to the people. Finally and more importantly, there is a lack of harmonization of governance mechanisms in various fields of national activities – political, economic and societal.

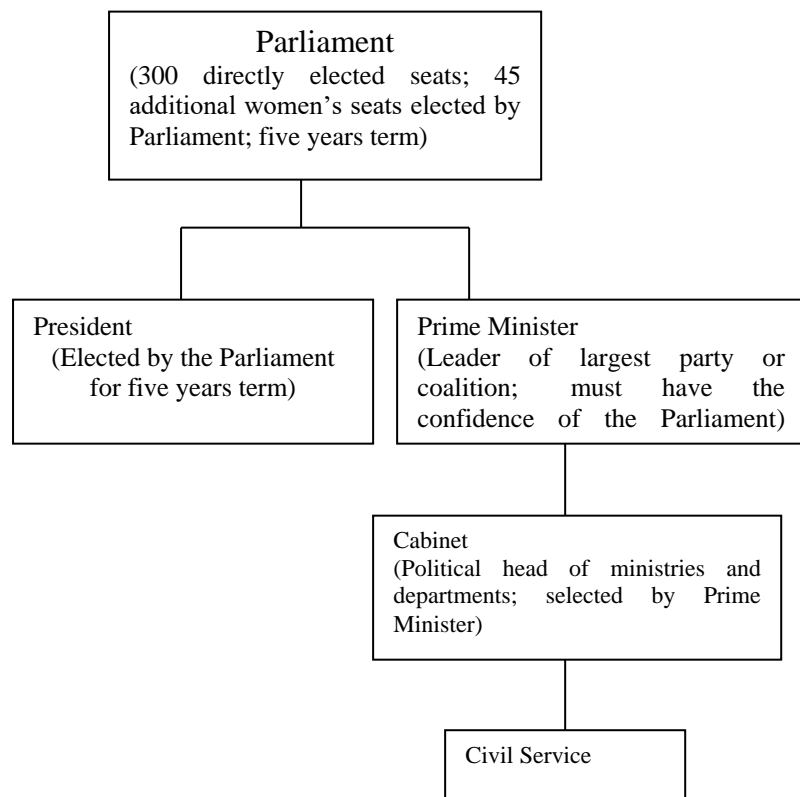
4. Phase II: The Post 1990 Era

4.1 Governance and Institutional Arrangements

After a long struggle against the autocratic regime, the general elections were held in February 1991 with the participation of all political parties. This election marked the significant transition from authoritarianism to a renewed beginning of democracy in Bangladesh. Although this political transformation has not caused fundamental changes in the existing institutional arrangements as we noted earlier, it marks some adjustments that deserve mentioning.

First, historically the presidential form of government in Bangladesh is associated with excessive concentration of power without any concern for checks and balances in the authority of different organs of the government. Fifteen years of presidential rule has ended with the reestablishment of the parliamentary form of government in Bangladesh following the 1991 general elections.

Figure 2: Structure of Central Government in Bangladesh



Source: Based on Craig Baxter et al. (1993), p. 234.

Figure 2 highlights the major features of the current structure of central government in parliamentary form. This change of the form of government has implications for the authority and role of political institutions – the legislature, executive, the political party and the bureaucracy. The legislature that was highly ineffective during the 1971-1990 period is now placed at the centre stage of political power.

Second, the end of military intervention into domestic politics was a major change. This resulted from the military's lost of their support from Ershad during the fag end of his regime. Later they expressed their intention to keep aloof from politics and their behaviour during the last three political regimes demonstrates that they clearly opted for civilian rule in the country. It is too early to predict whether there was an end to the institutionalization of the military in the bureaucracy. Nevertheless, certainly, the withdrawal of military from political power signals the beginning of an era of constructive role of the military in Bangladesh politics.

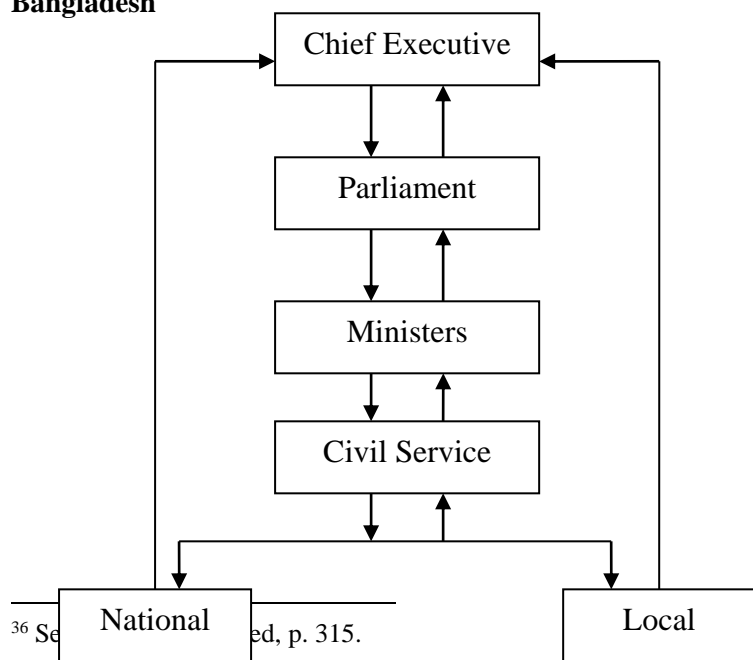
Third, electoral system is the most powerful instrument available in constitutional engineering in any democratic country.³⁵ This unique political device was improvised during the long anti-autocracy movement to ensure smooth and peaceful transition of power from military to civilian authority. It was known as a Non-party Caretaker Government under which the 1991 general elections took place and is regarded as the freest and fairest elections in the history of Bangladesh. Subsequently, through the 13th Amendment Act, 1996 of the Constitution, it was established as a permanent political structure of the state. In addition, electoral reorganization has taken place to ensure the effectiveness and credibility of the Election Commission as a critically important political institution. As per Constitution (article 118 (4) and 126) the Election Commission (EC) is an independent constitutional body in the exercise of its functions and subject only to the constitution and any other law. With the fall of the Ershad regime and the subsequent emergence of the Caretaker government system,

³⁵ See, for details, Giovanni Sartori, "Political Development and Political Engineering", in J.D. Montgomery and A. O. Hirschman, eds., *Public Policy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968)

the EC has become an effective organization to discharge its constitutional functions. In addition, some new rules and laws were incorporated to strengthen the power of electoral system in Bangladesh. For instance, in 1994, the 1972 RPO was amended to empower the EC to withdraw an officer from election duty if he obstructs or attempts to obstruct or prevents the conduct of free and fair election. Most importantly, the supervision of the Caretaker government during the elections is an effective deterrence to the any attempt for vote rigging. The new role of the electoral system in Bangladesh has already been tested in three successfully completed general elections in 1991, 1996 and 2001 respectively.

Fourth, an important change occurred in the role of bureaucracy. Since bureaucratic reform was a long-held desire during all the regimes in Bangladesh, a significant initiative was taken in November 1991 when a new business rule was introduced in which the minister was vested with more power and authority vis-à-vis the secretary in running the ministry.³⁶ This has considerable significance for relations between the executive and bureaucracy in dispensing service to the people.

Figure 3: A Two-Way Executive-Bureaucracy Relationship in Bangladesh



³⁶ See ... ed, p. 315.

Source: Prepared by the author

Figure 3 demonstrates that the relationship between the executive and bureaucracy can be a two-way process in which the bureaucrats are directly accountable to the chief executive, on the one hand, they are accountable to the chief executive through the stages of accountability, on the other. During the 1971-1990 phase, an alliance between the chief executive (in the most cases, the President of the state), bureaucracy and the military have resulted in a one-way process of linkage. The consequence of such relationship is that the central concern of the civil servants is to satisfy the chief executive without taking the interests of the state into account. However, since 1991 the situation has been improved through ensuring the linkages among the four tiers of relationship.

Finally, some minor changes have taken place in strengthening legal institutions and the human rights regime in the country. For example, different initiatives were taken with funding from the UNDP and World Bank for ensuring the expeditious trial of cases in Bangladesh. Besides, the post-1991 political regimes have promised to undertake necessary measures to establish the independence of the judiciary and a bill called Independence of Judiciary has already been floated in the national parliament. But there is no sign for its proper implementation in the near future. Such a delay would continue to hinder the establishment of the rule of law in society. In the case of human rights protection, the previous Awami League government introduced a proposal for establishing a new institution called independent national human rights commission. In the case of combating corruption, the current government established Independent Anti-Corruption Commission (IACC) in May 2004. The creation of the Independent Anti-Corruption Commission is a positive advancement, but it would be very challenging for the IACC to combat corruption inside the government as well as political institutions as it is dependent on the government for its financial support.³⁷ On the other hand, the absence of a complaints mechanism

³⁷ See, Monzur Hossain , “Good Enough Governance, PRSP and Reform”, *The Daily Star*, 30 March 2005.

for the general public to look for rectifying of any malpractice in the administration is seriously hampering the performance of governance. As a Constitutional commitment (Article 77 of the Bangladesh Constitution), the appointment of an Ombudsman is urgently needed for ensuring public accountability which is not yet materialized.

However, the central issue of legal reforms and human rights protection in Bangladesh lies with the separation of Judiciary from the Executive, which is yet to be established. Thus we observe that there have not been far reaching developments in political and legal contexts that could significantly improve the old institutional arrangements and traditional governance mechanisms.

5. Changes and Continuity in Governance

Having provided an interpretative framework for understanding the institutional arrangements and governance mechanisms in the 1971-1990 phase and having highlighted the policy and organizational changes in post-1990 era, a comparative analysis of these two phases will follow in this section. In the first place, there has not been a complete transformation of institutional arrangements and governance mechanisms from the phase I to II, although some major changes have occurred at policy and functional levels. While comparing these two phases, some elements of change and continuity in institutional arrangements as well as governance mechanisms in Bangladesh are visible. It must be noted that the general pattern of changes can be conceptualized in relation to speed and reflexivity in the processes and functions of political institutions and their agentive roles. In the post-1990 period, the programmes for political liberalization are undertaken at a faster pace and the scope of the activity has been broadened to a considerable degree. The agency for delivering public and private goods has witnessed changes in structure, functions, and authority. Previously, whether it was the economic or political realm, the state enjoyed unchallenged monopolistic power through its various organs. Now the state had to relinquish its power from some sectors that redefined its structure, functions, and authority. The non-state actors, particularly private firms and the civil society tend to fill this newly created space. Stopford and Strange argue that, the relationship between the governing actors at domestic level assumed a trilateral

pattern to operate in both political and economic realms.³⁸ This is the result of a transformation from the old bipolar relations where national boundaries defined the rules of the game to trilateral terms where the national governments have been joined by members of other domestic ministries and by the executives of firms, both local and foreign. With this general observation in mind, I shall focus on the changes and continuity in institutional arrangements and governance mechanisms of Bangladesh in the following section.

Influenced by the western liberal ideology, the political institutions in Bangladesh contemplate some changes towards the diminishing role of the state. Barring any structural overhaul, the most significant aspect of these changes is that the power and functions of the political institutions have been reconstituted with the introduction of parliamentary democracy. Most importantly, the demise of authoritarianism through military oligarchy has created a favourable environment for such changes. While the judiciary and the legislature as political institutions were very ineffective and weak during 1971-1990, in the post-1990 era, they started to play a relatively stronger role in society. On the other hand, the discretionary power of the executive and bureaucracy has been reduced in the present period compared to the past. This has generated some positive changes in the overall socio-political environment in Bangladesh. The electoral system, for example, has achieved notable success in conducting free and fair polls because of its relative independence and impartiality that was established in the post-1990 period.

Political development in the country moves towards two major trends: democratization and decentralization with far reaching implications for institutional arrangements. First, after the fall of Ershad in 1990, the process of democratization took shape. The increasing salience of the 'democracy project' in Bangladesh may also be attributed to the consequence of the changing global environment. In the post Cold War era, the political and bureaucratic elite in many developing countries find it difficult to maintain their traditional dominance in society and more to the point, the military has been

³⁸ See, for further details, John Stopford, Susan Strange, and John S. Henley, *Rival States, Rival Firms: Competition for World Market Shares*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

discouraged from capturing state power.³⁹ The introduction of a Caretaker Government system, the reversion to parliamentary form of government, the ongoing process of electoral and judicial independence have brightened the prospects of further democratization in Bangladesh. The holding of three successive parliamentary elections in 1991, 1996 and 2001 is remarkable in the history of Bangladesh. The country is experiencing democracy through representative governments for the longest period of its thirty four years history. Second, the devolution of power in the form of the transferring major functional responsibilities from the centre to sub-national level has taken place at the present time to a large extent. Although some changes were introduced during the later period of autocratic Ershad regime, fundamental reorganization took place in the mid 1990s, when the AL government revived the *Upazila Parishad* system. The local government in Bangladesh has three significant tiers – district, *upazila* and union *parishad*. Apart from this, there are other tiers such as City Corporation, division, *pourashava*, and *Gramsarker*. Formerly, only union *parishad* and *pourashava* used to be elected by the people directly. Now, the city corporation and *upazila parishad* are added to the electoral process. In addition, several initiatives are taken to expand representative power to village level. The introduction of the *Gram Parishad* (Village council), the Village Court and reorganization of the Union *Parishad* are significant attempts to strengthen local government organizations.⁴⁰ Another aspect of this process of decentralization is the empowerment of women through creating opportunities to represent their interests from village to national level. Under the present structure of Union *Parishad*, the provision for the election of three female members has been incorporated. Therefore, in the current phase, the level of decentralization has improved compared to the earlier phase.

Despite the recent orientation towards democratization and decentralization, the fundamental structure and functions of the formal political institutions remain the same. Most notably, the political party

³⁹ The cases of Pakistan and Myanmar are exceptions to this trend.

⁴⁰ See, Mohammad Anisuzzaman, "Democratic versus Bureaucratic: A Quarter Century of Experimentation in Bangladesh", *Perspectives in Social Science*, No. 5, The Centre for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences, University of Dhaka, (1998), p. 11.

system has not changed to accommodate democratic culture in its structure and functions. It is still marked by the negative factors such as family domination, lack of democratic practice, excessive fragmentation, the promotion and perpetuation of personality cults, lack of organizational discipline, weak nature of leadership, and absence of clear and cohesive programs. The intervention of the ruling political party in the governmental process is a regular phenomenon. The Judiciary is yet to be independent to establish the rule of law without interference by the state and the powerful people in the society. The legislature remains ineffective for the long-standing boycott of opposition members and for the high-handed attitude of the ruling party. Interestingly enough, after around fourteen years of democratic rule, the bureaucracy stands as the most powerful institution in the national decision-making process. In a recent study to identify the dominant actors in the making of public policy it is observed that bureaucracy emerges as the dominant actor in the policy-making arena in Bangladesh while the Prime Minister along with the Cabinet members and the Members of Parliament (MPs) coming as the second and third respectively.⁴¹ On the other hand, norms that dominated the political realm during the 1971-1990 remained unchanged. The authoritarian nature of leadership at the top level, intolerance of the political opponents, non-compliance of law and politicization of the government administration have not changed much. All these are illustrated in the existing confrontational politics, personality clashes among the politicians, frequent calls of *hartal* paralyzing the whole country and widespread political violence in the country.

⁴¹ The study was conducted by a private think-tank Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD); see, "Bureaucracy Dominates over Policy Making", *The Bangladesh Observer* (Dhaka), 25 February 2001. According to this study, among the seven actors the bureaucracy is the first. The Prime Minister along with her Cabinet members took the second place and the Members of Parliament (MPs) came third. Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) held the fourth most important position in policy-formulation and it was becoming more influential, the study said. The local government and the private sector leaders were in the fifth and sixth position respectively while ruling party leaders and workers took the queue at the rear. Oppositions were included in the least influential group besides the members of the civil society. The study observed that common people did not get the opportunity to participate in the national policy framing process. But donors were one of the "core actors" in this regard.

Paradoxically, while coming to the issue of the governance mechanism in the current phase we observe that significant changes have not taken place except the withdrawal of military from politics and creation of caretaker government. The fall of the autocratic regime in 1990 was itself an outcome of the historic decision of the military to stop interference in national politics. Later, the three successfully held multiparty elections have completed the process of military withdrawal from Bangladesh politics. A caretaker government emerged as an effective mechanism for electoral functions, but it is limited only with the general elections. It has no role in ensuring the free and fair elections at the level of local government. Therefore, it is the old pattern of governance that dominates political activities in Bangladesh. The centralization of authority and the personality cult remain as the overriding norms of the political governance. Bureaucratization continues unabated while corruption, rent seeking and patronage in various forms such as administrative and political etc. are pervasive in the society. Political leadership as a powerful mechanism of governance in a democratic society survives as a hindrance for the same in Bangladesh even after a democratic change of the government. State regulation still dominates in running the country. Though apparently justified to maintain law and order situation in the country, the introduction of an Anti-Terrorist Act 1994 and the Public Safety Act 2000 by the respective regimes has considerably suppressed the opposition political activists making them instrument of mis-governance. Judicial interference continues as an informal norm of the government to influence the legal process in the country.

The immediate impact of the current state of political governance in Bangladesh is the continuation of political instability and lawlessness in society. Although as per globalization rules and norms, the value orientation of the government is supposed to shift from monopoly and discretion to accountability, transparency and representativeness, the reality is different. Coupled with high level of corruption and rent seeking there is general absence of accountability and transparency in the operations of state controlled organizations. Most of the political and legal organizations from the executive to bureaucracy to local government remain considerably unaccountable. Consequently, the political system survives, in a great deal, as stagnant, inefficient and often unresponsive to the need of the society leading to create political inertia in the country.

6. Concluding Remarks

Political institutions are potential instruments with explicit political orientation to ease the movement towards more liberal or commonly more efficient and growth friendly political and economic regime. The role of political institutions in a democratic polity, in essence, befalls a process of steering through the stream of common public good. The relationship between political institutions and governance is apparent and reciprocally reinforcing, not automatic. The preceding analysis demonstrates that the post-1990 era has been marked by changes more in the context of national policies, organizations and ideological orientation than the institutional settings and governance mechanisms of the country. The changes in political institutional arrangements have been exceedingly slow. The under-institutionalized party system,⁴² the nature of representation to the Legislature the mode of political competition, the aggregation of public preferences⁴³, the role of legislative functions, the pattern of accountability of elected representatives⁴⁴, the prototype of leadership etc. lack the public reliability which undermine the principle of good governance in Bangladesh. On the other hand, the new trends of governance in development discourse exclusively refer to networking, interaction and institutional perspectives. But the governance attributes of Bangladesh in the political domain remain almost unchanged in the present era although new institutions are created. Political centre of gravity towards making more accountable and effective governance institutions is missing humanly in the country's political framework. Due to the absence of dynamic institutional arrangements based on both formal and informal rules and norms in the society there has not been effective harmonization and coordination of economic, political

⁴² Larry Diamond borrows the concepts of under-institutionalized party system and over-institutionalized party system from Andreas Schedler. The under-institutionalized party system is common pattern especially in transitional societies where the political parties are weak, fragmented entities and many depend on single individual for leadership and guidance. See, for details, Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1999), pp. 96-98.

⁴³ This indicates how effectively and fairly public preferences are aggregated into the public policy making process.

⁴⁴ This indicates how far elected officials are viewed as accountable to their constituents.

and social activities in the country. The full-scale devolution with resources and meaningful power to democratically represented institutions, an empowered complaint and regulatory mechanism, functional and coordinated programmes can generate comparative advantage and steer the better performance of governance in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, despite the conflicting scenarios marked by the diverse elements of changes and continuity, the overall trend is towards further change.