

ROAD MARCH: SEARCHING A BETTER ALTERNATIVE WAY OF HARTAL CULTURE IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT: *The political parties introduced various kinds of political cultures in the political avenue after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. Hartal is one of the most indispensable measures that political parties use to achieve their goals as well as to ensure the desire and demand of mass people. It was vastly used to overthrow autocratic regime to retain the Parliamentary form of democracy and to introduce a Non-party Caretaker Government system in Bangladesh. However, hartal is losing popularity due to its destructive features. In recent years, people expect that political Parties should maneuver new programs which will not make any negative impact on their daily life and country's dynamics. In response to people's demand, political Parties have been complied to precede new features in Bangladesh politics. Thus, Road March has been emerged as an in-offensive, non-violent and a peaceful way of protest of political parties. The paper depends on secondary materials including books, journal articles and contemporary newspapers. The study revealed that road March is a peaceful and non violent way of achieving goals of political parties rather than hartal with popular supports.*

KEYWORDS: Political Culture, Hartal, Changing View, Alternative Way and Road March.

INTRODUCTION

The political parties introduced diverse political cultures in political arena after the independence of Bangladesh. The dominant political culture of Bangladesh has been expanded by various ways. Centralism, fission, fusion and proliferation of political parties, confrontation and conflicts, political violence, strikes/*hartal*, parliament boycott, bomb blast, corruption, assassination of political leaders, patrimonial politics, and personality cult are the major political features in Bangladesh (Khan, Islam and Haque, 2008; Rahaman, 2007; Islam 2005). Among the political cultures, *hartal* is one of the most significant ways of securing the demand of political parties with huge public supports. By using *hartal*, political parties secured their demand including restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1990 from authoritarian government as well as introducing new concept of Non-party Caretaker Government system in Bangladesh. Over last forty years, major political parties called equal numbers of *hartals* to fulfill their desire, especially when they were in terms of their oppositions. Previously, hartal was used as a peaceful way. However, political parties used it as a destructive way to secure their demand. The vicious activity of hartal is making negative impact on people's daily life as well country's economy. As a result, Bangladeshi people have expressed their strong opinions against *hartal* and convoked political parties to re-invent new mechanisms as an instrument of protest against ruling party. The demand of people against *hartal* is increasing sharply day by day. Thus, the opposition Parties have changed their attitudes to call road march, peaceful discussion, and parliamentary discussion and to

arrange dialogue among the political Parties. Among the other forms of political protest, road march is getting enormous support of mass people of Bangladesh.

Political Culture

Political culture can be defined as a set of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments within the political process which provide the underlying assumptions and rule to govern the behavior in political system. It is regarded as a linchpin phenomenon which encompasses political ideas and the commencing rule of polity. The term “political culture” was first introduced by Lenin (White, 1979). Thus “Political Culture”, it has been observed, “is one of the most popular seductive concepts in political science; it is also one of the most controversial and confused” (Simon and Erikson, 1979: 127). Political culture is the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations toward politics among the members of political system (Almond and Powell, 2002). In 1956, the initial definition of “political culture” was formed by Almond that refers to “particular pattern of orientations to political action.” Few years later, Almond and Verba (1963) reshuffled this definition to the “distribution of patterns of orientation” -a more individual-level definition (Chilton, 1988). The Civic Culture is considered as a landmark in the study of political culture which was published in 1963. Although Almond and Verba (1963) depicted the nature of political culture by surveying data based on five nations, they were little bit conscious of its relevance to the developing countries. In addition, Almond and Verba also clarified political culture in terms of “... the political system as internalized in the cognition, dealings, and evaluations of its population” (Khan, Islam and Haque, 2008). Sidney Verba, delineates political culture as a “system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values, which defines the situation in which political action takes Place” (Rahman, 2010). Political cultures are essential factors to bring success of democracy of any country.

Definition of *Hartal*

In Indian society, we found so many evidences that there were agitations for securing different types of demand. The history of Indian society tells us that protestation is an old phenomenon in India. The industrial workers of India who were influenced by European trade unionist movements had witnessed occasional strike or *dharmaghat* from first quarter of the twentieth century. Consequently, this industrial strike came into political parameter within extending form and placed the name *hartal* (Islam Z, 2005). *Hartal* can be described as a term in many Indian languages for strike action which was often used during the independence movement of India. It refers to mass agitation while involving a total shutdown of workplaces, offices, shops, courts of law as a form of civil disobedience. Even, it includes the voluntary closing of schools and places of business. *Hartal* changes decision of government when it consider as an unpopular or unacceptable to the people (<http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definitions/Hartal>). The word *hartal* derived from *Gujarati* which refers to “closing down shops” or “locking doors”. However, opposition Parties used *hartal* in Bangladesh as an instrument of injecting agitation on a given period of time by closing markets, shops and offices and stopping traffic (Enamul Haq, 1992). *Hartal* means complete stoppage of all activities such as public, private, commercial and transport and conveyance movement. The opposition parties have used *hartal* as a political tool in securing their demand (Rahman R, 2006). Islam summarized the definition in the context of present situation of Bangladesh. As he described:

“The temporary suspension of work in business premises, offices and educational institutions and movement of vehicular traffic nationally, regionally or locally as a mark of protest against actual or perceived grievances called by a political party or parties or other demand groups” (Islam 2005;15).

Hartal has been adopted and so standardized in our political culture that it has been frequently used by our opposition political Parties as the weapon of choice in response to any type of political crisis in the country. It is considered only one option to our opposition Parties that they use it in a particular situation of the country. To our political Parties, *hartal* becomes as a tool to reinforce their agendas and to express their claims to votes in the forefront (Rahman, 2006).

Historical Background of *Hartal*

The democracy in South Asia has been strengthening from protest movements as it was regarded as the part of historical process. During the colonial rule in India, *hartals* mushroomed as a key weapon of political protest and have been a dominant political characteristic of anti-colonial struggle and pro-democracy movements (Islam 2005). British government observed many *hartals* during 1920s and 1950s (Islam Z, 2005). *Hartals* are mobilized within broader arena of protest movements that boomed during British period. Boycott was a common form of protest in this period. When Bengal was separated by Lord Curzon¹, a boycott was called on 7 August in 1905. That boycott was considered as a historical movement in the history of colonial rule (Tripathy and Bharater, 2000).

India nurtured protest culture over the British period. K. Mohandas Gandhi² led a full-blown nationalist movement, who contrived “*satyagraha*” (non-violence resistance), as a unique form of political protest against the Black Act in South Africa in September 1906 (Erikson H, 1969). India used this type of protest in 1918 and the following year a day of fasting and *hartals* were called by Gandhi in protesting against the Rowlatt Act³ that was passed by the Imperial Legislative Council in 1919 to control terrorism (Hardgrave, 1980). Perhaps, this was the first use of *hartals* in modern India that considered major political steps of Gandhi (Maclin, 2007). Likewise *hartal*, Gandhi called a total boycott program of British goods and institutions. In addition, in 1921, he called another boycott program on the issue of visiting of the Prince of Wales (Bose and Jalal, 1999). Gandhi used *hartal* as a key instrument for making a resistance in India against British rule. Due to an offensive incidence that was held in *Chauri Chaura* where people of the Indian subcontinent attacked police station and killed policemen, Gandhi called off the non-co-operation movement. However, he again started a civil disobedience movement on 12 March 1930 to refuse to comply with the Salt Law⁴ and owing to achieve independence but the movement was dissuaded for escalating violence in the middle of movement (Majumdar, 1996).

***Hartal* in South Asia**

¹ Lord Curzon was the Governor General and Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905. He had successive two terms to preside over the Indian empire.

² Mohandas Gandhi is considered the father of the Indian independence movement. He created his concept of Satyagraha, a non-violent way of protest against injustices.

³ Rowlatt Act passed by the Imperial Legislative Council in London on March 10 in 1919. The act authorized the government to arrest and imprison any person without trial in a court of law.

⁴ The first laws to regulate the salt tax were made by the British East India Company.

Hartals were available and pervasive in most countries in South Asia during post-colonial period. The phenomenon is also known as *bandhs* in some areas. *Hartals* are considered as a perpetual part of political culture in South Asia. Strikes, *hartals*, and student unrest spread out in India over the first three successive decades. During the period of 1952 to 1963, under Nehru regime⁵, work days lost to strikes and *hartals* amounted to 5.26 million a year. During the rule of Shastri⁶ and Indhira Gandhi⁷, strikes and *bandhs* were increased dramatically. Thus, about 18.16 million days were considered as workdays lost per year during this period. This figure dipped a little to 17.35 million days per year during two years of emergency rule under Indira Gandhi, but total amount of lost workdays increased into double, to 33.06 million days each year on average during the eight years period of Desai⁸ and Indira Gandhi. In recent years, comparable data are not available, but *bandhs* are still an important characteristic of Indian political life which is found from various reports. In West Bengal, Left Front called *hartal* frequently. In 2002, three *bandhs* were called in the province within the first six months of this year (Bandh Blues, 2002).

Bandhs are “spreading like wildlife”, pointed out in a report in 2002. In recent times, the state-sponsored *bandh* is being increased which is considered as an inauspicious development. If the trend does not prevent for political well-being, we must have to fall in serious trouble (Nadkarni, 2002). The police of India did not free from calling *bandhs*. Myron Weiner, an authoritative source in Indian politics, described the best situation of *bandh* in India:

“Indians have the perfect art of protest, and as one journalist wrote, there are many similar vocabularies of protest for Indians as Eskimos have for snow. These similar words can be *Satyagraha*, or civil disobedience; *gherao*, or forcibly locking an official in his office, *dharna*, or general strike, *morcha*, or march, and there can be fasts, black flag demonstrations, work stoppages across the state...” (Weiner, 1987:53, Cited in Islam, 2005). According to *Kathmandu* post (2000), about 50 *bandhs* were observed in Nepal over the period of 1990 and 2000 (Kathandu Post, 2000)

Historical Context of *Hartal* in Bangladesh

Hartal was first seen in the then Bangladesh⁹ (East Pakistan, as a part of Pakistan) in 1948 when *Tamuddun Majlish*¹⁰ and East Pakistan Muslim Student League¹¹ called upon *hartal* as they demanded *Bangla* as a state language in Pakistan on 11 March. It should be noted here that though *hartal* was supposed to carry out all over the country, it was seen only major

⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru was an Indian Politician and Statesman, a leader in the Indian Independent Movement, and the first Prime Minister of Independent India.

⁶ Lal Bahadur Shastri was also an Indian Statesman and Prime Minister of India (1964-1966) after Jawaharlal Nehru. He was a member of Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement against British rule in India.

⁷ Indhira Gandhi was an Indian politician who served as the third Prime Minister of India for three consecutive terms (1966-1977) and a fourth term (1980-1984).

⁸ Morarji Ranchhodji Desai was an Indian Independent activist and fourth Prime Minister of India (1977-1979).

⁹ Bangladesh is a South Asian Country, achieved independence in 1971 through a armed struggle against Pakistan, which lasted for nine months. More than 150 millions of people live in its land area.

¹⁰ *Tamuddun Majlish* in an Islamic Cultural organization in erstwhile Bangladesh established on September 1 in 1947 by Principal Abul Kashem, a professor in the physics department of Dhaka University. The organization played a vital role at the start of the Bengali Language Movement.

¹¹ The East Pakistan Muslim Student League was founded following the independence of Pakistan to support the political activities and campaigns of the Muslim League in electoral politics. One of its founders was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

towns and cities. Thus, it was proved that *hartals* were yet to become popular mode of protest to the people. A number of *hartals* were first introduced in Bangladesh (East Pakistan as a part of united Pakistan) during the Language Movement¹² in February 1952. The countrymen witnessed a long three days *hartal* in 1952, carried out from 22 February to 24 February. During two decades of Pakistan's regime, people witnessed only 29 *hartals* where most of them took place in 1969 during mass movements. Unexpectedly, the numbers of *hartals* did not dip even after the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. Prior to independence in March 1971, people of this region saw subsequent *hartals* for the demand of the independent Bangladesh. People observed a few number of *hartals* immediately after the emergence of Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the trends of *hartal* reached in a climax after 1979. In the period of Ershad¹³, number of *hartals* had soared drastically. The countrymen observed another 345 *hartals* from 1979 to 1990 to oust the autocratic regime for establishing democracy in the country. Trends of calling frequent *hartal* were continued after restoring parliamentary form of democracy in 1990. From 1991 to 2002, the number of *hartals* increased gradually. There were 216 *hartals* were observed in the years of 1991-1994, 279 in 1995-1998 and 332 in 1999-2002 (Islam, 2005).

Now a day, *harat* has become an instrument for political Parties to achieve their goals and to take over power to govern the state. Frequent *hartal* is not good for congenial democracy of Bangladesh. A research performed by UNDP, in 2005, stated that 1276 *hartals* were seen in the country from 1947 to 2002. In addition, observing Daily Sangbad and Prothom Alo, it has been seen that countrymen witnessed 353 *hartals* over the period of 2003 and 2011.

Table : Hartal in Bangladesh (Pre and Post Independence), 1947-2011

Year	Type of Regime	Number of Hartals
1947-1950	Democratic	1
1951-1954	Democratic	5
1955-1958	Military	16
1959-1962	Military	1
1963-1966	Military	6
1967-1970	Military	38
1971-1974	Democratic	36
1975-1978	Military	1
1979-1982	Democratic	48
1983-1986	Military	52
1987-1990	Democratic(Quasi-Military)	245
1991-1994	Democratic	216
1995-1998	Democratic	279
1999-2002	Democratic	332
2003-2006	Democratic	316
2009-2011	Democratic	37
1947-2011 (Except	Military- Democratic Period	1629

¹² The Bengali Language Movement was a political movement in erstwhile Pakistan advocating the recognition of the Bengali language as an official language of the then dominion-Pakistan.

¹³ Lieutenant General Muhammad Ershad (Retired) is a politician who was President of Bangladesh from 1983 to 1990. Previously, he was Chief of Army Staff of the Bangladesh Army and then Chief Martial Law Administrator in 1982.

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Prepared by author based on Islam 2005, *Daily Sangbad* '04 & '05, and *Daily Prothom Alo*, '06, '09, '10 & 2011.

From table, it is clearly seen that only one *hartal* was called during 1947-1950, followed by five in 1951-1954, sixteen in 1955-1958, one in 1959-1962, six in 1963-1966, thirty eight in 1967-1970, thirty six in 1971-1974, one in 1975-1978, forty eight in 1979-1982, fifty two in 1983-1986, and two hundred and forty five in 1987-1990.

The notion of calling *hartal* increased during the democratic period when the parliamentary form of democracy was restored in 1991. According to UNDP report, the country suffered a total of 827 days *hartal* over the period of 1999 and 2002. Most of them were called by two major political Parties, named *Awami League (AL)*¹⁴ and *Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)*¹⁵. Data collected from *Daily Prothom Alo* and *Daily Sangbad*, indicated that trends of calling *hartal* increased dramatically from 2003 to 2006. Surprisingly, calling of *hartal* by different political Parties dropped drastically. The countrymen observed only 37 *hartals* in Bangladesh during the period of 2009-2011. These numbers goes to favor of lowest position after falling Ershad's regime. Recently, political Parties have introduced different political programs as different organizations, civil society and the masses demanded for alternative programs of *hartal*.

Impact of *Hartals*

Today, we observe that the masses are dissuaded from their daily works during *hartals*. The traders have to close their shops or be desisting from carrying on their business activities. Industrial workers are turned back from attending to work in the factories which causes nations loss as productions can not reach up to mark (Islam Z, 2005). Farmers are prevented to get their supplies or to sell their products. The foremost impact of *hartals* is reflected on manufactures than the farmers. The manufacturers suffer most as their workers departed from the contract of foreign buyer's. The businessmen also suffer as their business activities become blockaded as they have to pay salary without getting economic benefits and also pay bank interest on their capital (Rahman R, 2006). After every *hartal*, our painful eyes and heartbreaking sighs find in the newspapers the pictures of wanton acts of vandalism like destruction of government and private properties, transport vehicles, private cars and three wheelers as well as rickshaws. In the name of *hartal*, these illegal acts cannot be recognized as political rights protected by the Constitution (Islam Z, 2005).

Hartal has negative impact on economy, transport and education sector and so on. According to the report of World Bank, around five percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was lost annually due to *hartals* during the 1990s. The estimate of BGMEA states that approximately US\$18 million losses a day during *hartals*. Nasreen Khundker estimated, average cost of *hartals* to the economy is about 4.5% during the period of 1990 to 2000 (Khaundker, 2005). Moreover, *hartal* not only makes impact on economy but also affects the students, teachers and parents. The institutions and their authorities are also not free from bad impact of *hartal*. Due to *hartal*, classes are missed and disrupted examinations as well as security concerns, career prospects and financial situations (Dewan, 2005).

¹⁴ Awame League is one of the largest and oldest political parties in Bangladesh.

¹⁵ Bangladesh Nationalist Party is also another largest political party in Bangladesh.

Yearly Costs of Hartals in Bangladesh, millions taka

	GDP1	GDP/Day	Hartals Days	GDP loss of hartals	GDP loss %
90/91	1,325,226	4,477	1	4,477	0.3
91/92	1,392,005	4,703	5	23,514	1.6
92/93	1,455,680	4,918	7	34,425	0.2
93/94	1,515,139	5,119	13	66,543	4.4
94/95	1,589,762.5	5,371	27	145,012	9.1
95/96	1,663,241	5,619	28	157,334	9.5
96/97	1,762,847	5,956	7	41,689	2.4
97/98	1,844,436	6,231	8	49,850	2.7
98/99	1,934,370	6,535	28	182,981	9.5
99/2000	1,934,291	6,535	15	98,022	5.1
Average	1,641,700	5,546	14	80,385	4.5

Source: UNDP 2005, *Beyond Hartal*, p-32.

Changing View of Calling *Hartal*

In recent years, the scenario of *hartal* has been changed as mass people, various organizations and civil society have expressed their strong opinions to change the culture of calling *hartal*. *Hartal* is observed as a destructive method although it was used against autocracy and unpopular decision to democratic transitions. Thus, countrymen are demanding to introduce a new culture in Bangladesh politics. People from all walks of life support Road March as a best alternative way of protest instead of *hartal*.

The Daily *Bhorer Kagaj* conducted a survey on *hartal* which published on 9 March in 1995, found that 51% of respondents did not support *hartal* called at that time. There were no opinion went to favor of 13% of respondents (*Bhorer Kagaj*, March 9, 1995). On 23 September 1999, another survey was published in Daily *Prothom Alo* that 63% of respondents did not support *hartal* as the opposition demanded the resignation of government through using this instrument. More than 11% of respondents had no any opinion. The survey was maneuvered on 7370 people from all walks of life (*Prothom Alo*, September 23, 1999). News Network arranged an opinion poll in 2000, According to the poll, over 80% of respondents thought that it was not necessary to call *hartal* considering the socio-economic condition of the country. In addition, more than 88% of respondents thought that the law and order situations were downfallen for calling frequent *hartal* (*News Network*, 2000). In 2003, an opinion pooling carried out by UNDP Bangladesh found, 70 of % respondents thought there should have been constructive alternatives of *hartal* and decided to go for peaceful means of protest (*Bhorer Kagaj*, March 9, 1995).

There are so many letters to the editorial page have published that referred the tidal opinion against *hartals*. An editorial in The Daily *Sangbad* in 1998 pointed out: "Now a day, *hartal* means bullet, bomb, clash and death....once *hartal* was considered as systematic highest point of excellence/ acme during political movement. Generally, *hartal* was called to compel government for securing their demand when agitation was climbed at apex. *Hartal* was called by political parties on the basis of public support, by connecting people and bringing with them. As political activists and leaders were in street, in many occasions masses also came into street. Earlier days, lots of practices were needed to accomplish *hartal* successfully, thus politicians could not call *hatal* frequently. At present, political parties do not take into

account if there is any public support, public participation or people connection. Now, it is one of the easiest ways to call *hartal*. There is no need for preparation or public support. There is no need to connect masses also. The preparation for the *hartal* is taken by simply announcing program, giving press statement and sending news to the BBC *Hartal* is carried out by throwing bombs at main points before the day of *hartal* and on the morning of *hartal*....During *hartal* days, all parties come on the street with their arms and bombs. Now, *hartal* means getting involved in bloody clashes with each others. Is there any relation between *hartal* and good politics? Or, is it [*hartal*] supporting hand of good politics?...We convene to the political parties to quit this bloody violent path of *hartal*. If there is need to call *hartal* then call it by democratically and politically....Calling *hartal* by using arms and bombs can bring damages instead of benefits of politics. The economy of democratic society is destroyed and results in the death of innocent people” (*Daily sangbad*, Editorial, November 12, 1998). Similarly, A.K. Azad Chowdhury, the former Vice-Chancellor of *Dhaka University* raised his voice against *hartal* in a seminar which was held on 10 November 1997. “*We must free ourselves from renegefulness and intolerance. The lack of tolerance has created the tendency for calling hartals. The distance between being in power and not being in power has been the cause of hartals. These activities are due to the psychologically conditioned conflicts of our political parties*” (*Hannan*, 2000). *Hartal* can never be expected for civilized nation, because economy is being destroyed owing to call *hartal* and jeopardize situations are called upon by calling *hartal*. Nation should not accept such kind of functions which can bring deleterious situation for country. Auspicious mark of politician’s should be arisen. We are mass people and we think that *hartal* should not be called (*Daily Sangbad*, Editorial, March 16, 2004). *Hartal* is harmful to the people rather than useful. Moreover, frequent use of this tool of achieving democratic rights has been edgeless. So, the value of *hartal* is decreasing as tools of political protest. The mass people do not like *hartal* too (*Daily Sangbad*, Editorial, July 22, 2004). Calling *hartal* of the opposition Parties against diverse activities of government is a democratic right and a natural process in a democratic country. But, when there is seen lack of spontaneous support of masses and *hartal* refers to vandalize of traffics and destroys public properties, support does not come from mind on behalf of *hartal*...As *hartal* does not work more as tonic against protesting anything, so there should be any alternatives (*Prothom Alo*, Editorial, September 26, 2005). There are many ways to secure demand and agitation except *hartal*. Demand can be achieved through procession, meeting and human chain. When people are failed to exert their rights then come to road by self motivated. *Hartal* makes people bother rather than stimulate them...At present, there is no more examples that demand is achieved owing to call *hartals* rather *hartal* enhances anguish of people. There is no clash. So, *hartal* is deserted (*Prothom Alo*, January 21, 2006). *Hartal* has negative influence on human life and it decrepits the wheel of economy. For these reasons, we are opposing such kind of destructive and tyrannical programs. Why do political parties take those programs which increase suffering of people and give a push the economy into suspense /uncertainty? ... Thus, we hope that political parties will find out alternative protesting language instead of calling destructive programs like as *hartal* and obstruction/hindrance (*Prothom Alo*, Noveber16, 2010).

In recent years, people from all of walks of life have shown their strong protest against calling frequent *hartals* of political parties. The main opposition BNP called *hartal* on 7 February 2011 on the issue of filing case against Khaleda Zia¹⁶. Sohrab Hossian who is a prominent columnist wrote an article against *hartal*. He wrote... The opening ceremony of

¹⁶ She is the chief of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

world cup cricket will be held on 17 February. Why was this *hartal* called before the opening ceremony of world cup cricket? ... This *hartal* is totally unrealistic and illegal. Before the great ceremony of world cup cricket such kind of programs not only goes inimical to public interest but also harmful for the image of the nation (Prothom Alo February 5, 2011). The major opposition and its allies, *Jammat*¹⁷, called countrywide *hartal* on 5 June, 2011 on the issue of caretaker government. However, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), country's apex body, requested the oppositions to withdraw the *hartal* considering negative impacts on economy (*Daily Star*, June 4, 2011). Dr. Sultana Kamal, former adviser of Caretaker Government¹⁸ said that *hartal* had lost its rationality (*Prothom Alo*, June 15, 2011). There were one thousand and one teachers of public university gave a statement against calling *hartal*.

Another editorial in daily Prothom Alo pointed out in 2011, "*Hartal* is not a new dimension in Bangladesh politics. In most cases, it has been tolerable. A number of *hartal* were called prior and post period of independence of Bangladesh. The most successful *hartals* have been observed during 1969-1970. It is too difficult to make understand new generations how successive *hartals* were being carried out without vandalizing a rickshaw with absolute 100 percent support of masses. *Hartals* against Ershad or on the issue of caretaker government in 1995-1996 got mass people supports due to national issues. It does not mean that there are no national issues focusing on BNP's *hartal*. The difference is that BNP is failed to make it national issue to mass people (*Prothom Alo*, June 16, 2011).

Movements on Road March

Hartals are considered economically damaging to the country as well as an ineffective tool of achieving goals of politics and politicians. People do not support political parties to call frequent *hartal*. New generation are demanding for ending of *hartals*. It is believed that ending *hartals* can improve the commitment of political elite. Increasing public pressure is a dominant factor in achieving this goal. It should be noted here that ending of *hartals* can decrease the killings, conflicts, and violence which are frequently seen in both local and national level. Dasgupta found from newspaper reports that 250 people were died during *hartals* over the period of 1947 to 2001. The number of injured people were near about 13,000 and 10,000 people were arrested and most of them were very poor who were victims of these conflicts. In this backdrop, S. Aminul Islam noticed that "will Bangladesh continue to take this destructive path, or it is the time for someone to change the course of history?" (Islam, 2005). We need new cultures and trends which can rejuvenate the people. Otherwise, it will be very difficult task for newly elected government who are already adopted with *hartal* culture to run economically feeble country through *hartal* (Kaykobad, 2011).

Now a day, we observe that *hartal* culture is going to be demolished as road march or long march has already enjoyed tremendous support of the masses. In 2011, countrymen enjoyed some successive road marches all over the country. There is a dramatic increase of popular support of road march in one hand; *hartal* is losing its popularity gradually on other hand. Although, road march is considered as successful alternative way of *hartal*, it is not a new

¹⁷ Bangladesh Jammata-i-Islami is the fourth largest political party in Bangladesh in terms of obtaining votes in Parliamentary election in Bangladesh.

¹⁸ The Caretaker Government is a Non-Party Caretaker Government led by the immediate past the chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The unique form was introduced in Bangladesh through Thirteen Amendment of the Constitution on March 26 1996. President appoints a ten-member NCG, with a chief adviser as its head, within fifteen days of the dissolution of the parliament.

concept in Bangladesh politics. Similar kind of program was seen in Bangladesh soon after the independence in 1971. It should be noted here that the first peaceful and in-offensive / non-violent long march was held on 16 May 1976 led by Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. The long march was started from *madrassa maydan* (field) in Rajshahi and stopped near to the border of India at *Shivganj*. About four lakh people joined that long march and they also journeyed about six miles (*Daily Azad*, May 16 & 17, 1976). After 33 years of Bangladesh's independence, people witnessed a different program in political history, named "Mass No-Confidence Human Wall" was organized by opposition party AL. The Mass Human Wall was organized by AL, claiming that the government failed to run the country in every sector. It was formed from *pallabi* to *Bahadur Shah Park* in Dhaka and was about 20 kilometer long. Besides AL's front organizations, so many pro-liberation professional bodies participated in the Human Wall program. The new initiative was observed as a peaceful demonstration in any part of the city (*Bangladesh Observer*, March 31, 2004). The longest "Mass No-confidence Human Wall" was formed on 11 December in 2004. AL led oppositions organized the program demanding an immediate step-down of BNP-led alliance government. The Human Wall was about 1000 km long and expected that 50 lakh people joined the hour long demonstration. It began at the south tip of the country, *Teknaf*, and cut through 18 districts and two metropolitan cities...Dhaka and Chittagong...ending at *Tetulia* in the extreme north. The program was regarded as stunning success as the desire of mass people reflected on that program. The Human Wall was one of the longest peaceful and in-offensive programs in the history of Bangladesh politics as well as in the world (*Daily Star*, December 12, 2004). According to online encyclopedia, the longest human wall in the world was 595 km which was formed on August 23, 1989 through Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in which 20 lakh people participated for the demand of independence (Ibid). Likewise, AL led oppositions organized some separate human walls in the capital and all districts and divisional headquarters, demanding immediate resignation of four party alliance government to pave the way for an early election. Thousands of people joined spontaneously the program (*Daily Star*, March 14, 2005). In 2006, AL and like minded political parties organized three days long march program on the issue of reforming caretaker government and the election commission. A huge number of people came to Dhaka from different parts of the country to join the long march (*Daily Star*, February 6 and Prothom Alo, February 6, 2006).

At present, another new political culture has been introduced in Bangladesh politics, called Road March. In 2011, BNP organized three consecutive road marches across the country demanding for the restoration of caretaker Government system. The road marches took place in Syhlet, Chapinawabganj, Khulna and Jossore roads. Thousands of people joined these road marches. On 12 January, 2012, another road march was reached at chittagong led by BNP. Masses gave their spontaneous support to new culture as they did not like *hartal* for securing their demand. This culture could be an everlasting alternative and peaceful political culture in Bangladesh (Rehman, 2012). Some of the editorials appreciated oppositions for taking the different steps to express opinion in offensively. An editorial pointed out in Samakal in 2011, "There is no alternative way of democratic programs to secure the political demand. However, it could be taken under jurisdiction that the programs which were considered as democratic and popular tools to achieve demand, have already lost its application considering new reality...as a results, when any political party calls *hartal* then rigorous criticism comes from businessmen, investors, civil society and mass media etc. On the backdrop of tidal opinion of general people against *hartal* opposition has already commenced road march across the country. As a peaceful and democratic programs Road March should be praised. We think that Road March will be more acceptable as an alternative political program than

hartal. It will be also appreciated if there is any attempt to create mass opinion on behalf of it to secure political demand....Citizen expects the success of peaceful political programs”(Daily Samakal, Editorial, October 10, 2011). Another editorial in Daily Star pointed out road march has already shown different features of violence-ridden hartal. It has proved that it is a non-violent and peaceful options to express opinion, where as *hartal* is considered as harmful for economy and the people.... opposition’s can get appreciation for their peaceful expression of dissent as well as we praise the government for its good sense for not showing negative approach to road marches. We hope that oppositions will never call *hartal* and government must handle opposition’s demonstrations peacefully to make democracy effective (Daily Star, Editorial, January 11, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Hartal emerged in the political arena of Bangladesh to secure the demand of political party’s interest in the name of people’s demand. It was vastly used to overthrow autocratic regime during Ershad’s period. A series of *hartals* were carried out by the political parties to achieve the goal of parliamentary democracy. It also contributed to bring a unique form of Non-Party Caretaker Government in 1996. Although people supported *hartals* to overthrow dictator Ershad, it became more violent after the restoration of parliamentary democracy. The number of *hartals* was raised sharply over the periods of 1991 and 2006. .It became the tools of political parties only. They used *hartal* for their own interests. Political activists vandalize public properties during *hartal*. They also create chaotic situation which is really harmful for our economy. Businessmen and farmers suffer more as they fail to sell or buy their products. Thus, *hartal* has become as an agony to the people. On the backdrop, various organizations, civil society and people from all walks of life have raised their voice to ban the culture of *hartal* and to induce new culture such as long march, human wall and road march etc. According to the survey report of ORG-Quest Research Limited (2009), around 59% of respondents believed that the culture of *hartal* would not come back again in Bangladesh politics. The opinion slightly decreased in 2010. Almost 53% of respondents believed that the culture of *hartal* would not return in future (Prothom Alo, January 6, 2012).People’s tidal opinion against *hartal* made political parties to think about their destructive programs. After the bitter experience of political parties as well as masses on January 11 in 2007, offensive programs like *hartal* lost its popularity completely. During the present regime, the opposition called number of *hartals* which have been failed to attract support of people. Consequently, the oppositions organized some road marches which have got overwhelming support of masses. This kind of concept was vehemently supported by the people from every nooks and corner. The expectation comes from all classes that new culture will be more effective to demonstrate protest against mal-activities of government as well as to secure the demand of political Parties by a non-violent way.

Notes

1. Lord Curzon was the Governor General and Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905. He had successive two terms to preside over the Indian empire.
2. Mohandas Gandhi is considered the father of the Indian independence movement. He created his concept of Satyagraha, a non-violent way of protest against injustices.

3. Rowlatt Act passed by the Imperial Legislative Council in London on March 10 in 1919. The act authorized the government to arrest and imprisons any person without trial in a court of law.

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