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GOOD GOVERNANCE IN BANGLADESH: ISSUES AND OBSTACLES (A Study of Good Governance Retention in Bangladesh)

Abdullah-Al-Monzur Hussain*

Abstract: The concept of Good governance has become much talked issue of the day and principal concern of aid agencies, governments, academicians especially in the developing countries like Bangladesh. It is comparatively a recent phenomenon of discussion which draws upon the concepts from several disciplines such as politics, economics, public administration, law and so on. Good governance is now understood to include a wide range of ways in which the whole structure of a society affecting the access of its members to basic opportunities and capabilities. As elsewhere in the Third World, in the recent times, issues of governance, good governance and poor governance have drawn the attention from all the quarters of people in Bangladesh. Our country has been facing virus of poor or mal-governance which is visible in every arena of public life. Against this backdrop, this study attempts to analyze the issues of good governance and will explore the bottlenecks in the path of ensuring good governance in Bangladesh. Finally, this study will suggest a set of measures that should be undertaken to establish good governance in Bangladesh.

Key Words

Governance, good governance, accountability, transparency, World Bank, WGI.

1. Introduction

Good Governance plays a very significant role for the achievement of overall development of a country. It has now become a catchy phrase in the contemporary global politics and economy that ensure goodness and quality in governance and raise its level. In the recent times, quality of governance is being considered as the principal prerequisite for solving many problems and for the socio- economic development in the developing countries. That's why, several international organizations like World Bank, UNDP, IMF and a good number of NGO's have started emphasizing good governance as a precondition of delivery of their services and funds. Bangladesh like other developing countries has been marked with the failure of public sector to

meet the demand of its citizens, ineffective public services, and unfavourable environment for the proper growth of private sector, leadership crisis, lack of transparency and accountability in administration, ineffective political institutions and so on. For such poor performance in governance mechanisms, effective democratic governance continued to be the elusive golden deer that the nation doggedly sought but could not find. Against this backdrop, it is essential to examine how far Bangladesh behind the good governance. In this context, the focus of the present article is to critically analyze the current state of governance and also to sketch out the impediments on the way of good governance in Bangladesh.

2. Methodology

The study is a social sample survey and respondents of this study have been selected from those who are currently living at the Dhaka city. Respondents have been selected purposively from five strata of the society, namely, teachers, civil society members, civil servants, politicians and students.

3. Good Governance: A Conceptual Voyage

The concept of good governance is as old as the concept of governance itself. In the recent times particularly during the last decade of the twentieth century, widespread poverty, rampant corruption and other socio-economic problems prevailing in the Sub-Saharan African countries and its linkage with the quality of governance has brought about an interest in the discussion of good governance. Since 1978, due to un-international standardized management i.e. especially of some countries in Latin America and Africa the super state World Bank proposed the term of good governance.¹ Governance has three major components, such as, process, contents and deliverables. The process of governance includes factors such as, transparency and accountability. Content includes values such as, justice and equality. Governance cannot be all processes and values. It must ensure the basic needs and security of its citizens. In this sense, it is only when all these three conditions are fulfilled that governance becomes good governance. Good governance implies an administration that is sensitive and responsive to the needs of the people, and effective in coping with emerging problems in society by framing and implementing appropriate laws and policies.

Definitions of Good Governance

'Good governance is epitomized by predictable, open and enlighten policy making; a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos; an executive arm of the government accountable for its action; and a strong civil society participating in the public affairs; and all behaving under rule of law'²

'Good governance involves the self-organizing and inter-organizational networks characterized by interdependence, resource-exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state'³

* Lecturer and Coordinator, Department of Law, City University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Good governance æ... among other things participatory, transparent and accountable. It is also effective and equitable. And it promotes the rule of law.”⁴

‘Good governance means the effective management of a country’s social and economic resource in a manner that is open, transparent, accountable equitable’⁵

4. Current State of Governance in Bangladesh

The constitution of Bangladesh provides most of the essential elements for good governance though the country is yet to fully develop right policies, environment, institutions, capacity and practices of good governance. Despite return to parliamentary democracy following a mass movement for democracy in 1990, and subsequent free and fair elections under neutral caretaker governments, establishment of democratic norms and practices has not been smooth in the country. Democratic governance which alone can safeguard the constitutional rights and interests of the common citizens and ensure better performance of the state functionaries is still missing.

Accountability of the parliament to the people and that of the executive to the parliament could not yet to be institutionalized. Evident lack of institutional capacity and other maladies continue to impede social and economic development, and peaceful democratic process. Weak performance of state institutions resulting in failure to reform state structures, make progressive policy decisions, create enabling environment and provide leadership of different levels of government and society meant that people’s desire for democratic governance is far from being fulfilled. Lack of adequate accountability and transparency resulting in widespread corrupt practices and deteriorating law and other situation have become endemic features of political, social and administrative culture, dampening the spirit of development. The maladies thwart justice and fairness, restrict outreach and quality of public service delivery and inhibit vibrancy of market forces. Scope of compromise and consensus on the major national issues is constrained, thereby obstructing democratic process and further escalating confrontational politics manifested in president parliamentary boycott, frequent hartal and widespread violence. According to the World Bank estimate, the revenue loss of the government due to corruption and inefficiency exceeds US\$500 million, US\$1 billion is lost due to poor management, and power sector loss amounts to over US\$100 million per year staggering amounts of losses for a nation gripped by poverty. In addition to these, lack of human security and social disorder persist due to improper law enforcement, as revealed in a recent UNDP report systematic violation of human rights goes unabated in a growing culture of impunity. Independent watchdog institutions such as, an ombudsman could not yet be established. There are missing links in the chain of accountability between

the public, the legislature, the judiciary and the executive. Despite many well documented reports of waste, fraud, and abuse of public funds, little action has been taken, encouraging further corrupt practices.

Therefore, despite remarkable progress in some areas, there is still along way to go before the desired momentum in economic growth, poverty reduction, and improvement in quality of life and overall social development is created to realize national aspirations and global commitment like Millennium Development Goals. Problems of leadership in governance loom large in every sector. A substantial gap exists in the nation’s ability to generate sound understanding of the situation, to identify problems and constraints and implement best policy-making, managerial and leadership practices and to measure progress towards good governance. Bangladesh has the basic infrastructure for good governance, but they are not well utilized. Zarina R. Khan aptly remarks, ‘Effective democratic governance continued to be the elusive golden deer that our nation doggedly sought but could not find.’⁶

5. Problems of Good Governance in Bangladesh

Governance constitutes a major challenge for Bangladesh now-a-days. It’s under performance is evident in many areas of national life. In fact, it is crystal clear from evidence as well as pronouncement of our policy makers and international donors that Bangladesh’s improvement in the governance realm are not keeping pace with the progress achieved in some areas economic and social policies. Such a gap in the country’s governance efforts implies that political regime management has become a central constraint to further consolidation of democracy as well as improvement of the quality of governance in Bangladesh. That’s why, despite having been lapsed forty years of its independence, Bangladesh is still remained far from the path of good governance.

Hossain Zillur Rahman identifies four major problems on the path of good governance in Bangladesh.⁷ These are:

- i. A tendency towards encyclopaedic wish list in agenda formulation;
- ii. An insufficient appreciation of the institutional and political realities through which reform initiatives have to be carried forward;
- iii. Over focusing on what does not work while ignoring which does work; and
- iv. A lack of clarity as to where the governance agenda best interface with poverty reduction goals.

Bangladesh has been facing a number of problems in the path of good governance. These are:

- Lack of Free and Fair Election
- Problem of Consensus Building

- Ineffectiveness of Parliament
- Lack of Accountability and Transparency
- Absence of Rule of law
- Absence of real Independence of Judiciary
- Lack of Institutionalization of Political Parties
- Fierce Elite Competition
- Absence of worthy Leadership
- Confrontational Political Culture
- Inefficient Bureaucracy and Public Administration
- Biased Press and Media
- Fragile Local Government System
- Social inequalities and cleavages
- Political violence
- Rampant Corruption

6. Data and Findings of the Study

For the study purpose, we have collected data from 60 respondents through face to face interview using questionnaires. Among the respondents 25% were drawn from teachers and 25% from civil society members. The rest 50% were selected from civil servants, politicians and student (16% from each category). As to sex, 50% of the respondents are male and remaining 50% respondents are female. As to age, 25% have been drawn from 30-40, 25% from 40-50, 16% from 20-30, 17% from 50-60 and 17% from 60-70 years age group. Respondent's opinions on different issues of governance in Bangladesh have been quoted below:

i) Meanings of Good Governance

About the basic theme of good governance, the majority of the respondents (26.67%) think that good governance implies the enforcement of rule of law, accountability and transparency at all levels of public life; 20% meant good governance as the fulfilment of people's needs and expectation; more than 18% regarded good governance as equal distribution of the state's resource; 11.67% supposed that good governance means the efficient management of national resource towards development; and more than 23% of the respondents answered that good governance subsumes the establishment of participatory political culture.

ii) Institutionalization of Political Parties

Regarding the nature of existing political parties of Bangladesh, most of the respondents (43.33%) viewed that almost all the political parties in Bangladesh are less institutionalized and a very few of them (10%) considered the political parties are institutionalized; 20% respondents think that the political parties are moderately institutionalized and more than 26% of them opined the parties as un-institutionalized.

iii) Role of Political Parties

The role of political parties in the establishment of good governance is very significant. In this regard, a majority of the respondents (28.33%) viewed that political parties can help to establish good governance through institutionalizing the political parties; 25% of them emphasized practicing democracy within parties; more than 16% of the respondents focused on ensuring accountability and transparency at all levels of the state life and a few of them (6.67%) stressed on increasing people's participation.

iv) Role of Election Commission (EC) in Good Governance

An independent and impartial EC contribute greatly to ensure good governance in Bangladesh. The respondent's view on the role of EC in this regard is that 65% of the respondents think that if the EC is allowed to discharge its assigned duties freely, it could be able to establish good governance through arranging free and fair election. And the rest of the respondents (35%) viewed that only an independent EC cannot establish good governance. In response to, how an independent EC ensure good governance in Bangladesh, most of the respondents (63.33%) viewed that the independent EC can ensure good governance through holding free and fair election and 36% emphasized on making political parties accountable and transparent.

v) Necessity of Political Culture

In response to the necessity of political culture for establishing good governance in Bangladesh, majority of the respondents (70%) reply that participatory political culture is imperative for the establishment of good governance in the country; more than 23% of them emphasized on the subjective political culture and a very few of them (6.67%) emphasized on the need of parochial political culture.

vi) Way of Ensuring Participatory Political Culture

About the way of ensuring participatory political culture for the better practice of good governance in Bangladesh, 30% respondents think that through practicing democracy within political parties, participatory political culture can be ensured in the country; more than 28% of them prioritized on institutionalizing the political parties and 20% respondents reply that participatory political culture can be ensured through facilitating mass participation at all levels of the public life.

vii) Establishment of Rule of Law

Establishment of rule of law is very vital to ensure good governance in any country. Of the respondents, more than 76% viewed that rule of law is very much essential for the establishment of good governance in Bangladesh. In response to question about how rule of law can be ensured in the country, many of the respondents (38.33%) answered it can be ensured through the

independence of judiciary; more than 23% emphasized on the separation of power; and about 18% stressed the need of the good willingness of the government.

viii) Role of Local Self Government

Respondents were asked about the role of local self government in ensuring good governance in Bangladesh. Most of them (55%) answered that it can be ensured through decentralization of power. More than 21% respondents emphasized on the mass participation, a few of them (6.67%) mentioned to utilize the local resources and wealth in order to get the reap of good governance.

ix) Importance of Qualified and Efficient Leadership

In response to the question about the importance of qualified and efficient leadership in the establishment of good governance, more than 86% of the respondents believed that efficient and qualified leadership is imperative for the establishment of good governance in Bangladesh and more than 13% of them are in view that only efficient leadership cannot establishment of good governance in the country. On the reply of the question whether our political leaders play desired role to ensure good governance in Bangladesh or not, 75% of the respondent replied negatively. On the other hand, 20% answered positively and 5% remained neutral.

x) Reasons of Negative Role of Our Political Leaders

In response to the question about the reasons of negative role of our political leaders, 38.33% respondents blamed the inefficiency of the leaders and 28.33% blamed unwillingness of the leaders. 20% respondents blamed political instability, 10% blamed the external pressure and rest 3.33% blamed some other causes.

xi) Performance of Parliament

Respondents were asked about the performance of the parliament in Bangladesh. Most of them (88.33%) answered that parliament is ineffective. On the other hand, 11.67% respondents viewed it as effective. In response to, how ineffectiveness of parliament create obstacles on the way of good governance in Bangladesh, respondents almost closely expressed different types of opinions. The highest 31.67% respondents have pointed that ineffectiveness of parliament persuades to the dictatorial decision making. The second highest 23.33% have indicated that ineffective parliament ignores the public opinion and 18.33% told that it interrupts participatory political system.

xii) Corruption in Good Governance

In the response of the question, how does corruption affect the quality of governance in Bangladesh, 40% of the respondents articulated that corruption hinders the development processes. 28.33% uttered that

corruption limits the public access to the state service. On the other hand, 20% articulated to degradation of social norms and values and 11.67% expressed corruption degrades the social norms and values.

xiii) Access to the State Services and Welfare

In the response of the question about whether general people have equitable access to the state services and welfare in Bangladesh, 75% of the respondents answer negatively, 18.33% positively and 6.67% answered that they are not much aware of this matter.

7. Analysis of Findings of the Study:

The study has been conducted to understand the concept of good governance theoretically in general, and particularly the current state of governance in Bangladesh. The Study also gave much effort to diagnose the major hindrances in the way of good governance of Bangladesh. To make this study in depth, theory and concepts related to the study have been analyzed from different angles which made the endeavour more effective as well as practical. The major findings of the study have been summarized the below:

The study found that majority of the respondents thought that good governance means the enforcement of rule of law, accountability and transparency at all levels of public life. Most of the respondents viewed that almost all the political parties existing in Bangladesh are less institutionalized. Among the respondents majority expressed that the existing political parties can contribute towards good governance in the country through institutionalizing their parties and minority of the respondents emphasized on practicing democracy within political parties.

The study also reveals that, most of the respondents thought along with the EC of Bangladesh, some other factors like efficient leadership, responsive political parties, accountability and transparency, rule of law are equally necessary for the establishment of good governance in the country. The Study also found that there has been prevailing the confrontational political culture in our country. Most of the respondents suggested for institutionalization of political parties and emphasized on the practicing of internal democracy within the parties. It is found that for having good governance in the country, rule of law must be established at all levels of the state's life, and rule of law can be established through making completely independent judiciary through the separation of power. It is also revealed that the number of qualified and efficient leadership is very limited in our country which creates a great obstacle in the way of establishment of good governance. Our existing parliament is ineffective due to obstinacy of both government and opposition parties. Respondents opined that this ineffectiveness of parliament hinders the quality of governance in the country

through making unpopular or dictatorial decisions without accommodating the opposition's views. It is also found from the study that rampant corruption is prevailing in the society that severely hinders the good governance of the country through posing a great stumbling block on the development process.

8. Some Suggestions to Overcome

Bangladesh has been facing with a plethora of challenges on the path of good governance. On the basis of the findings of this research study, the following policies and institutional measures have been recommended to be undertaken on urgent basis to overcome these massive challenges and thereby to establish good governance in Bangladesh.

(a) Policy Measures

1. Responsibility for policy making should entirely be in the hands of political leadership of the ruling party who are elected for this purpose. The ministers should be assisted in this work by a small group of political appointees who will substitute the senior civil servants of the secretariat. This will make the policy makers more responsible and responsive.
2. The system of allowing Ministers to act as Chairmen of Standing Committees of their respective Ministers has to go. Instead, the Standing Committee on each Ministry ought to be comprised of several members drawn from political party in proportion to their respective strength.
3. The Public Accounts Committee and Public Undertaking Committee must always be chaired by senior members of opposition. The proceeding of such committee meetings should be open to public and media unless the committee itself decides to meet in camera on any particular matter.
4. Accountability and transparency should be established at all levels of both administration and elected officials by applying the institutional mechanism.
5. The rule of law should be established within the society for the protection of fundamental human rights and ensuring social justice and equity. To that end, the judiciary should be separated from the executive and all courts of law, both civil and criminal, under the control and supervision of the Supreme Court.
6. The political will of the government must be demonstrated in a way so that the bureaucrats cannot dare to defy Ministers' order. The constitutional independence and autonomy for CAG must be ensured so that it can independently work in the way to make bureaucrats accountable in respect of financial matters and monitor their financial responsibilities.
7. The power to issue ordinance under Article 93 of the constitution is being regularly misused. Except in an emergency, such as, war or total

breakdown of law and order which calls for proclamation of emergency, any ordinance of the government intends to make under Article 93 of the constitution must go through the scrutiny of the relevant Standing Committee and obtain its approval before its promulgation.

8. Democratic practice within the parties must be gradually strengthened so that leadership from the grass root level can develop and leaders can gradually gather knowledge over administrative accountability and that they should not depend on bureaucrats.
9. Hereditary nature of leadership should be abolished and the party constitution should be amended to allow change in the leadership after each specific term. The party structure and committees should be filed only by election and this will encourage as well as develop leadership from grass-root level.
10. For the transparency within the government fabrics radio and television should immediately be given autonomy. Operation of private TV channels should be allowed. All restrictive laws concerning press and should be allowed to be self regulated by them through a code of ethical practice.
11. Corruption has to be minimized at the tolerable within the society. To that end, the Anti-Corruption Commission and other law enforcing agencies should be strengthened with adequate personnel and finance and should be allowed to discharge their assigned duties freely and fairly.

(b) Institutional Measures

1. The Election Commission should be independent enough so that it could hold the election both at the local and national level freely and fairly without any fear and intimidation.
2. The national parliament has to be made effective with the participation of all political parties and relevant as a forum for political discourse and decision making. The oppositions should be given due opportunity to utter their voice on decision making process at the parliament.
3. The bureaucracy, both civil and military must function under the control of the elected representatives of the people.
4. The judiciary should be made independent and efficient in real sense, by removing all sorts of challenges that are still remained on the path of its independence.
5. Local government should be made autonomous with adequate financial power and maximum devolution of power to be made to the local government. Local government has to be made free from government interference.
6. A department of Ombudsman should immediately be created which will work as all time watchdogs against misadministration, red-tapism and inefficiency in the bureaucracy.

9. Concluding Remarks

Good governance is an umbrella and elusive concept. It includes a variety of factors which are inter-related to each other. Of these, political and social factors seem to be the dominant ones behind the process of good governance. Good governance has been an elusive and invisible golden deer in the developing and underdeveloped countries like Bangladesh. The research study findings reveal the current state of good governance in Bangladesh. On the basis of the findings comes from the field, it might be remarked that the current state of governance of Bangladesh is poor as almost all the aspects of good governance are severely absent in the country. At present, Bangladesh has been facing a number of challenges in the path of democratic or good governance like un-institutionalized political parties, lack of accountability and transparency, lack of rule of law, inefficient leadership, ineffective political institutions, rampant corruption, and widespread poverty and so on. Professor Emajuddin Ahmed aptly remarks that ægovernance, as we observe all round, has not changed for the betterment of the vast majority of people in Bangladesh during the rule of successive regimes since independence. Those at the helm of affairs at various levels have barring a few exceptions continued their daily routine of intrigue, corruption, theft, and plunder ignoring the rising demands for transparency, accountability, fairness and equity. What is more this trend is likely to continue because the cancer of poor governance has penetrated deep in the soul of the nation.”⁸

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