

Essay on Good Governance in Bangladesh: Attributes and Challenges

Good Governance aims to contribute to the overall development of a country. Since independence, the attainment of good governance has been a far cry. A number of constraints and challenges stand as barriers for establishing good governance. But the political and bureaucratic segments of society can play an effective role. Governance has become a popular, concept in much of the political, developmental and academic debate.

Good Governance: Good governance means an ideal governing system that is inevitable for the political, economic, social and cultural development of a country. It is the ideal orientation of a state that works best to achieve self-reliance, sustainable development, and social justice.

Governance in Bangladesh: Ever since Bangladesh achieved its independence, it has had eight broad regimes with the present Sheikh Hasina's regime. Since 1971 Bangladesh has experienced eight major regimes having a variety of political systems with different styles of governance. It is interesting to note that with the changes in regime, all new governance deliberately opted to bring about modifications, alteration or abolishment of policy, both state and public.

Bangladesh: Attributes of Good Governance: scholars present a number of attributes of good governance in the literature. Some popular and widely accepted elements are:

- People's Participation

- Participation of Civil Society Organizations

- Predictability

Transparency

Promotion of Democracy & Political pluralism

Rule of Law & Human Right

Decentralization

Women's participation in the development process

These attributes are discussed below relating to Bangladesh context:

1. Political and Executive Accountability: In Bangladesh, accountability has been largely shaped by the influence of a number of factors. These are a dominant executive, weak legislature, distorted growth and low levels of development of political parties, lack of independence of the judiciary, and lack of credibility of the electoral system. Due to the continued absence of opposition in the 6th to the 9th Parliament, the door of political accountability got almost traumatized. The internal and external mechanisms (e.g. , The Rules of Business, and Warrant of Precedence) of executive accountability also remain procedurally weak, which reinforces the pervasiveness of corruption several times in Bangladesh. The credit of Bangladesh's being first in corruption reflects how weak the institutional mechanism of political and executive accountability in Bangladesh. There is evidence of the ex-Presidents or ex-Ministers being corrupt e.g. Hussain M. Ershad and lots of ministers of last BNP led four parties and present Awami League-led grand alliance government. Bangladesh seems to be a safe abode for the warped politicians. Nothing has happened to one recently accused secretary for an allegation of corruption raised by U.S state department. Thus, all these weakness altogether turn the accountability system into a mere farce in Bangladesh.

2. People's Participation: Participation culture in Bangladesh remains a myth since independence. Although there were some efforts to ensure people's participation through Gram Sarkar or Upazila

decentralization, these efforts were impaired in the course of time by the ill political motives. Involvement of people at the grassroots level has been considered the most effective means through which economic development can meet the aspirations of the people. But the participation of people in government is always missing in Bangladesh

3. Participation of Civil Society Organizations: Good governance requires vibrant, strong and active civil society organizations- for example, neighborhood associations, trade unions, women's organizations, and consistency groups. Civil society organizations in Bangladesh have increasingly taken forms of NGOs. They have been active in Bangladesh since independence and grown in size and number in response to new needs and a massive increase in donor funding.

4. Predictability: Predictability status in Bangladesh is highly unsatisfactory; one of its manifestations might be cited to the frequent Amendment Bills passed by the Parliament. Almost in all aspects of government, there is no certainty in Bangladesh. Lack of predictability makes it difficult for public officials to plan for the provision of services. Predictability of government economic actions is also needed as an indicator on which the private sector can rely to make its own production, marketing, and investment decisions. Starting from monetary and fiscal policy to prices, exchange rate and employment level everywhere consistency turns to be a far cry. Executive control over judiciary – all harmfully affect the governance capacity of Bangladesh.

5. Transparency: Access to accurate and timely information about the economy and government policies can be vital for economic decision-making and as well as other issues, which is deplorably missing in Bangladesh. Bureaucrats in Bangladesh are seen to be obsessed with secrets and are unwilling to divulge any information to the public. To some extent, bureaucrats can legitimately plead that they are

hemmed in by official restrictions. Transparency of government implies its responsiveness to the changing needs of the people and the emerging problems, they confront with. Transparency and democracy are complementary to each other. Only through the development of a sound democratic system, it is possible to practice transparency both in politics and government administration.

6. Promotion of Democracy & Political Pluralism: Democratization emphasizes that the people shall elect the governing body and there should not be any restriction in the movement of diversified political parties. Bangladesh returned to the parliamentary democracy the 12th Amendment of the Constitution in 1991, but in these nineteen years, the ideals of democracy could not explore a firm foundation in Bangladesh. The periodic fair election, which is an essential ingredient of democracy, always remains a matter of dispute in Bangladesh. Lack of an independent Election Commission was one of the main reasons for not being able to arrange a free, fair and credible election

7. Rule of Law & Human Rights: Perhaps, the most essential element of governance in the context of Bangladesh is the rule of law and human rights. Rule of law implies the absence of arbitrariness in the governance of a country. Law is considered supreme and none can claim exemption or immunity from it. Article 32 of the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees fundamental rights, a person's rights to life and liberty. But in reality, the situation of rule of law in Bangladesh is unquestionably terrible. There are thousands of examples of the deteriorated image of rule of law currently occurring in Bangladesh. The most dangerous thing is that even the law enforcing agencies or defense officials get involved in various forms of crime. Law is being violated with the sponsorship of ruling political party or parties. In October 2006 world the witnessed a black chapter of the political history of Bangladesh. The donors

expressed their utter disappointment for the deterioration of rule of law and for violating human rights. Besides, the foreign investors also showed their unwillingness in investment for the downfall of an effective rule of law in Bangladesh. The rule of law is a cardinal phenomenon to good governance, which has been tainted with the increasing number of extrajudicial killings by the RAB, police and other law enforcing agencies.

8. Decentralization: Decentralization of decision-making is an important requirement of good governance. For governance to be effective decision-making process must be straightforward and fast. But, in Bangladesh due to huge hierarchical chain and bureaucratic red-tapism, decision-making is a very sluggish and lengthy process. Besides, the dependency of local government on the central government for various administrative and financial decisions is hindering good governance in Bangladesh.

9. Women's participation in the development process: The issue of women in sustainable development is still very large because of their role in resource management in the country and also because of their role in grooming a new generation of people. Any shortcomings in their access to information, opportunities, and decision-making processes would mean that the whole community suffers in the long run. The present situation with regards to sustainable development is a clear indicator of depriving women of equal opportunities in all aspects.

Challenges and Constraints of Good Governance in Bangladesh: As a country of the third world, Governance in Bangladesh is very poor due to lots of challenges and constraints. Some Challenges and Constraints of Good Governance in Bangladesh are discussed below:

1. Corruption: Corruption is one of the most dominant components of

bureaucratic and political culture in Bangladesh. Corruption has been institutionalized in the public service and as well as in the private sector. The credit of Bangladesh's being first in the ranking of most corrupted countries in the world several times shows the extent and pervasiveness of corruption in the bureaucracy of Bangladesh published in service. Almost all forms of corruption can be noticed among bureaucrats and politicians in Bangladesh. These include; abuse of authority, bribery, favoritism, extortion, fraud, patronage, theft, deceit, malfeasance and illegality. Much of the response to corruption is in the form of developing systems and skills, which enable corruption to be discouraged or exposed and punished.

2. Centralization of Authority: The tendency to concentrate power at the top of the hierarchy in fewer officials is a legacy from the colonial past. In Bangladesh, all policy-making power is concentrated at the secretariat. The official work manual, i.e. the Rules of Business gives considerable power to the Secretary. He is the chief advisor to the Minister in Policymaking, acts as the financial head of the Ministry and assumes the role of the sole custodian of relevant information on which policies are based.

3. Politicization: The biggest threat to our democracy as an institution comes from the politicization of governance. The ruling government tries to get the bureaucratic class as their loyal supporter through serving their interests and providing various facilities and privilege to them. Politicization of the governance process is still going on at a great speed. Each and every government declares in their manifest about not politicize governance process for the betterment of the country, but after coming to the power, they forget all about it and do whatever they want. This tendency has reached its acme during the regime of Ershad, Khaleda and also Hasina.

4. Violation of Human Rights: For massive human rights violation Bangladesh has attracted global attention. Child abuses, women rights violation, child labor, suppression of freedom of expression are a day to day issues of human rights violation. Each and every government takes initiatives to stop terrorism by horrifying 'cross-fire'. They legitimize it. This is a way of human rights violation backed by the government. The global community also expressed their disappointment about it.

5. Lack of Freedom: Freedom of the press, of speech and of writing is violated in many ways. Radios, TV are used as the means of propagating government activities rather than focusing on the needs of the nation. Journalists and writers sometimes fall victim of the terrorists or of the government action. We have seen that declaration of a 24 hour news-based TV channel named 'CSB NEWS' was permanently canceled during the last military-backed emergency/ caretaker government due to its broadcasting of news about 22nd August 2007. Access to information is another vital factor for achieving the goals of good governance, which promote transparency and public accountability in the working of government functionaries.

7. Weak Legislature: Our legislature is very much weak, because of less experience, low level of education, low level of understanding. The policies only serve the interest of a particular political party. We saw that when the ruling party changes through the election, a great change also occurs in the legislative branch. The supporter lawyers of the ruling class come to the position. This process was started after independence.

8. Poorly Performing Institutions: Poorly performing government institutions is also another issue in Bangladesh. Performance of Public Sector institutions like the Public Service Commission and other public service sector institutions are very poor and these

sectors are highly corrupted.

9. Volatile political culture: Volatile political culture and politically-sponsored violence in national and international level, especially at the local level is another challenge for good governance in Bangladesh. This volatile political culture often may result in uncertainty in politics.

10. Lack of people's participation: Lack of people's participation in decision making and implementation process directly or indirectly is a great challenge for attaining good governance in Bangladesh.

Concluding comments: There is a general consensus that the governance is in crisis. A quick glance at the realities within the constitutional arms and the management of economic, administrative and the political affairs further strengthens the statement on the crisis in governance. Good governance is not easy to achieve in Bangladesh. This is mainly because a host of social, cultural, economic, administrative and legal variables affect nature and consequently determine the shape of governance in our country. In Bangladesh, it is evident that the present condition of governance is not satisfactory. Many issues and problems are the barriers to ensure good governance, equity, and social justice. Corruption, political interference in administration, nepotism, misuse of power, the absence of rule of law, non-accountable and non-transparent government and administration etc. are the common features of our governance. Although a lot of measures may be taken for ensuring good governance, it is high time to make our autocratic parliament a democratic one and re-engineer the role of the dictatorial Prime Minister to a democratic one. In the interest of good governance, time has come for us to think about amending the black law (Article 70 of the constitution) to curb its abuse and free the public representatives to voice people's aspiration in the parliament.

Public opinion should be mobilized to discourage boycotting of Parliament and make the Parliament fully functional and democratic by making the speaker system a non-partisan institution.