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Media and NGOs: Strategic Effective Governance

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Introduction

The term ‘governance’ has been derived from the Greek word ‘Kubernan’ which means manifold or multiple concepts that comprises of a lot of political, economic, and social issues related to government and administration. Such a changing issue is constantly giving multifarious interpretation in various phases concerning socio-political and socio-economic

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status of a country/society. From the time immemorial, especially from the time of Plato and Aristotle, governance has been defined to be the task of running different organs of the government and administration. Later on, it has been defined to include various aspects from different angles of the society and prevailing circumstances full of realities in the particular society. However, there is still no definite concept about the very terminology—governance. It may vary from time to time, place to place, and society to society, both nationally and internationally. We may therefore conclude that governance stands to mean the way by which power is executed in managing the day-to-day affairs of a state in social, political, and economic arenas for the sake of development by ensuring transparency and accountability.

A look at the second half of the 1980s and onward will present us with a peculiar scenario as regards the fashionable term in global politics and economy that helps ensure quality and goodness of governance. Recently, it has been emerging from the forefront of the global agenda for development of the society and a country where the need of good governance is mandatory factor without which no better output can be expected in the arena of socio-economic development of a country and society (Anam 2002).

This is because of the hard realities of life that in spite of huge resources, manpower, and institutional facilities the main objective of economic growth and human development have not yet been made possible in some countries of the world to solve poverty, confront civil frictions, and community development as well. The reasons are obvious and not beyond human capacity to undertake the challenges that we have to face every time. That is why several international organizations like the World Bank, IMF, UNDP, and a large number of NGOs have been functioning emphasizing the need for good governance as one of the preconditions to ensure services and delivery of funds for the purpose (UNDP 2005).

As one of the developing countries of the world, Bangladesh has been pointed out for its failure to extend public sectors, to meet up the growing demand of the common people. Because of the absence of appropriate leadership, lack of transparency and accountability in public administration, and vigorous political influence, proper environment for private sector development could not be achieved.

Governance does not mean a single unit or idea rather it means comprehensively the interaction between the problems created and solution to be made in a befitting manner. For that purpose, the following points may be taken into consideration so that solution can be given in the light of the existing problems.

- Exercise of power
- Legalization of power
- People's rights and authority
- Mobilization of recourses for development of the country and its people
- Ensuring security of life and property

The concept of governance still remains hazy and the term lacks a precise definition. The concept of governance covers various actions by the state and government. The plain meaning of governance means the act, manner, or function of governing. Thus, the act, manner, or the function of governing would have components such as the form of political authority exercised in Bangladesh, which has been changed several times from the inception of Bangladesh. Political authority has been exercised by the parliament that was formed based on a democratic Constitution. The Constitution declares that, "it shall be a fundamental aim of the state to realize through the democratic process in a socialist society, free from exploitation - a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice, political, economic and social will be secured for all the people in the territory of Bangladesh." (World Bank 2006a).

Problems of Good Governance in Bangladesh

Currently, good governance is a major challenge faced in Bangladesh. In many sectors of our national life, its underperformance is evident from views of our international donors and from the pronouncement of the policy makers relating to the realm of good governance. Absence of good governance and efficient political management are now the major

constraints on the way to hardening the foundation of democracy and improvement of the quality of governance in Bangladesh.

Now, let us move forward with an attempt to have a look at the problems of good governance in our country with a focus on some major political institutions.

Election Commission

Holding regular elections at both national and local levels is one of the pre-conditions of democracy and good governance. Good governance by the representatives of the people can never be effective unless the people reflecting their sentiments elect their representatives. If the election is not fair, the authorities of the people's representatives shall always be questioned and this will surely weaken the government. Fair and free election plays a very vital role in the formation of the state policies. The election also makes the government accountable and responsible to the people to meet up their needs and expectations. Therefore, to continue the practice of good governance, election must be free, fair, participatory, and acceptable to the people. However, it is a matter of regret that this real practice is not seen in Bangladesh. The election commission in Bangladesh, in the true sense, is not independent of the executive and legislative organs of the government. Directly or indirectly, the election commission is badly influenced by the party in power (If the Parliament is not dissolved) and by the party that was in power in the recent past (If the Parliament is dissolved), to manipulate the election results in its favor.

Therefore, all the elections held since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 have been characterized by the non-management of electoral policies involved in using intimidation, threat, vote-rigging, and official malpractices. **But it is a matter of good hope that during the regime of the last caretaker government headed by Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, some notable changes, like separation of the election commission from the grip of the prime minister's office, took place to make EC more effective and independent and as a result, the holding of the ninth parliamentary election in 2008 was mostly free, fair, and transparent.**

National Parliament

The legislature is no doubt, one of the most significant institutions in a democratic country for promoting good governance in a country. In fact, parliament deals with governance goals of greater accountability, transparency, and participation in the elections by the political parties in a very fair and uninterrupted way. In every country where parliamentary democracy prevails, sovereignty of the people and ensuring all their democratic rights rest in the hands of the legislature, it thus acts as the custodian of the people's sovereignty that makes the legislature the most important organ of the modern democratic state. The very first role that the legislature has to play is ensuring the fundamental principles of governance and embodiment of the institutions entrusted to them. The legislature can ensure the good governance in making constitution and enactment of various laws to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the people living in the state.

All the concerned dignitaries including the speaker of the parliament have been politicized and used by the ruling party against the major opposition parties of the country. It has become a wrong practice that the ruling party has felt no necessity of consulting with the major opposition parties regarding the appointment of officials to major constitutional positions. It is a fact that parliament and parliamentary committees have been dominated and monopolized by the ruling government.

Therefore, the oppositions are left in the street to face and challenge the government. The unwillingness of the ruling party's law makers to attend the parliamentary sessions, their indifference to abide by the norms and rules of the parliamentary form of democracy, frequent boycott by the main opposition party and reluctant tendency of the government to discuss the major issues in the house have not let the eighth national parliament play an effective role. Comparing to those of previous two parliaments (fifth and seventh national parliament), the eighth national parliament had taken a step backward instead of consolidating the parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh (Ministry of Information 2006).

Independence of Judiciary

The judiciary system involved in making legal decisions is an indispensable part of good governance. Hence, good governance demands necessarily the functioning of judiciary independently and impartially. It is also the responsibility of the judiciary to make the government accountable and responsive to the demand of the common people, which are definitely the essential elements of good governance. The independent and impartial judiciary of a country upholds equal rights of both men and women, which is one of the preconditions to ensure democracy and good governance (Haque 2005).

It is quite evident, that the judiciary can play an independent and impartial role in cleansing the administration of the corrupt politicians and officials by bringing them into the arena of judicial trial for the sake of social justice. Due to the absence of independence of judiciary in Bangladesh, the lower courts have become subservient to the whims of the executives and legislative members.

In the true sense, the independence of judiciary is yet to be ensured in the light of the Masder Hossain Case (1999), although the ruling party had declared when it assumed power in 2009 that good governance should be ensured to harden the foundation of democracy in our journey ahead (Ministry of Information 2006). It should be remembered that the actual dream of our war of liberation was to uphold the democracy and economic equality of the people.

Institutionalization of Political Parties

The major barriers for consolidation of democratic governance in Bangladesh is derived from the distorted growth though there still exist a large number of parties of which very few could really develop clear and cohesive socio-economic programs, stable membership, and democratic practices. Students, laborers, public sector employees, and teachers of government schools and colleges have become politicized to join the ruling party in power.

Bureaucracy and Public Administration

All over the world, bureaucracy is considered to be one of the most powerful instruments of governance. Through bureaucracy, public policies are given shape and put into practice. Therefore, governance inevitably requires efficient bureaucracy to run the whole show of the government-public administration and good governance as they have an inseparable relationship in the concept of a modern democratic state. Of course, there are some universally recognized methods, which have been totally absent in the administration since its inception. **To speak the truth that both civil and military personnel actively participated in the war of liberation.** That is why, the government of Bangladesh inherited political administration. This has resulted in the recruitment of politically influenced, inefficient people and by utilizing those people; good governance cannot be expected in most cases. Their political allegiance is notable in comparison to their professionalism. Now very fast and decisive action is needed at the highest level of the government to overcome the bottlenecks (Ministry of Information 2006).

Local Government

Strong and autonomous local government system is one of the most vital institutions of democratic governance. Local government can be one of the most effective means by which the residents of a local community can accomplish together what neither the national government nor the individual residents can do or accomplish effectively.

The concept of administration in the modern state is not possible without delegation of powers to the local governments with the increasing number of population and massive expansion of governmental activities. Some matters of policy and administration relating to national and international affairs are controlled by central administration and the rest of the functions lie in the hands of local government authorities.

The local government through Article 60 has been empowered to levy taxes for the specific requirements of the local community welfare. The elected members of the local body at the Upazilas (sub district) level

unfortunately are not independent and are under the control of the central government. The colonial attitude is still prevalent.

Bangladesh, being a republican state is committed to establish local governments at various levels for the cause of good governance. In accordance with article 59 of the Bangladesh constitution, the local government of every administrative unit shall be entrusted to bodies composed of the provisions of law and the maintenance of public order. They will perform functions relating to administration and work of all public offices and the preparation and implementation of plans and policies as regards public services and economic development of the country (Manik and Zaman 2011; Aminuzzaman 2010).

Media's Role in Governance

Media is the most significant element for conveying information in a society. The media has extended its arena in an unbelievable way and has made its impact on the society through radio signals in villages, newspaper, prime time news shows to know the updates throughout the day or a quick piece of news on the internet through smart phones. Therefore, the part played by media has become quite difficult and critical for the smooth functioning of democracy, since it extends cooperation in forming the public opinion on major issues. This is why media is treated as the fourth estate since it is not a non-state component that aims at protecting the rights of the citizens. As we understand that all specific media have their own selected set of followers so their united effort ensures better governance. History says that print media was basically responsible for conveying information regarding the freedom struggle of the great leaders of the world. It survives to exist popular despite fierce competition and until now, the privileged medium to reach out to masses and classes as well.

It may be mentioned here that the Radio is a very simple portable media that can influence people greatly in rural areas where the residents mostly do not know how to read and write. As a large number of people are still ignorant, this media criticizes government and at the same time it can communicate the urgent information like weather forecasts and the

related matters very rapidly. Even television plays a very vital role to draw the attention of the people on important issues that leave a great impact. The latest invention is the internet that plays a very significant role to spread any news within a very short time to millions of people all over the world. That is why the government is now focusing on the internet so that it may reach out to a greater section of the people, especially the youth (Haq 2003; Haque 2005).

Media in Bangladesh

As good governance embodies accountability transparency, responsiveness, equity, justice, efficacy, and effectiveness, media has a great role to play in ensuring criteria, policies in practical life so that the people as a whole benefit. Good governance essentially ensures the management of public resources.

For a developing country like Bangladesh that still reels with poverty, superstition, a range of religious extremism, the involvement of media becomes even more important. Another reason why media is of paramount importance for the country is the immense disparity that is prevalent.

The media in Bangladesh inherits a tradition of independence. In general, it can talk about the issues and its right to do so is guaranteed in our constitution. However, media at the local and national levels are still facing pressure, intimidation, and threat from all levels of administration, commercial, and even criminal bodies. So they have to impose self-censorship to save the own skins.

The media market in Bangladesh has mushroomed over the past ten years, with a large range of highly profitable newspapers and satellite TV channels springing up.

Media, as the fourth estate, aims at protecting citizens; hence, the role of media has become extremely critical for the smooth functioning of effective governance as it helps in forming public opinion on vital topics in a society. All forms of media have a specific set of followers and therefore, they together ensure effective governance. Indeed, all developing countries face myriad issues on a day-to-day, short- and long-term basis,

and Bangladesh is no exception. The media is to hold the flag with an open mind for its consistent and transparent role (Iftekhazzaman 2011).

The process of democratizing the existence of a free and independent media within each nation is essential. Media is thought to be the mirror of the society; for them, it is possible to comment on the affairs of a country's governance, their commitment to democracy, economic and social growth of the country. Surely, media acts as a bridge between the state and the people. The strong and impartial media puts pressure on government to be more transparent and accountable. Nevertheless, it is largely a matter of regret that the media world has been divided and influenced by the government and many of them are observed to be serving their purposes which is badly affecting the ethics of journalism.

It is established all over the world that freedom of media is one of the most significant elements of democracy and governance which is given due importance by various national and international agencies that especially includes the World Bank–governance report vide “Voice and Accountability Component.” If the state is in the practice of deregulating its control over the media world, people receive great exposure to varieties of information that help transition to transparent democracy and the media-men play the role of a watch dog. This helps the government to run the administration in a very balanced way (Chowdhury 2005; World Bank 2006b).

The Recent Development of Media in Bangladesh

Despite its growth in number, whether print, electronic, or broadcast, media can enjoy freedom to play their role in the current situation of Bangladesh. This is a very vital issue raised by the critics and experts.

Since the restoration of democracy in 1991, in spite of less restricted environment and more media activity, even the democratically elected governments have upheld the policy of suppression of media when they are faced with critical voices from the said quarters.

Very justly and rightly, “The Freedom House Index” comments that the environment for media in Bangladesh is “Partly free.” Even, The World Press Freedom Index 2014 of Reporters without Borders ranked Bangladesh as 146 out of 180 countries. Not only that, the Amnesty International stated that Bangladesh journalists who write about social injustice, human rights, corruption, judicial irregularities, violations, extrajudicial killings, rape in the custody, and gender-based violence are harassed, ill-treated, and detained by police and security agencies on politically motivated charges and tortured inhumanly. Under the banner of media-freedom, the ruling force intends to choke the voice of the media personnel though through the new National Broadcast Policy-2014, the government has claimed to bring all the media outlets into one integrated structure with a view to building up an independent pluralistic accountable and responsive broadcasting system in Bangladesh (Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) 2013).

Problems of Media in Bangladesh

A responsive, free, and independent media is essentially required to be present to ensure democratic governance in a country. As a precondition to succeed democracy, the role of impartial, free, responsive, and independent media is very much significant so that accountability to the people is established.

Media has a multifarious role to play as a public watch dog on formulating economic policies, monitoring election process, exposing human right abuses, keeping constant eyes on political corruption, and the empowerment of women. Therefore, in any democratic state, the role of media is of first and foremost importance: “An unfettered, professional and virile press is essential in democratic governance” to ensure good governance, transparency, and openness within the government, transaction free and fair press and media is mandatory that acts as a complement to run the administration in a democratic way. There is a saying in our society that a popular government without popular information is nothing but a farce or a tragedy or perhaps both and since our independence in 1971, radio and TV have been used as the mouth piece of the

government. That is why, it can be remarked that there appears to be a fairly large audience for non-Bangladeshi radio sources including All India Radio, BBC, and VOA. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Awami League had vowed commitment to the people that they would give autonomy to the state-controlled radio and TV. Nothing has yet been done to this effect (Haq 2003).

Parameters of NGOs in Bangladesh

As one of the developing countries, Bangladesh has experienced a lot and witnessed the downfall of military dictatorship, failure in conventional good governance, speedy globalization, spread of information technology, expansion of inequality, persistence of mass poverty, formation of democratic government, rise of aspiration for alternative development, and a desire for participation in decision making in all levels. It is worth mentioning here that we have also noticed the expansion of democratic space in the midst of disillusionment with the role of state in facilitating coveted progress for the majority of the people. Multiple stakeholders are coming forward to take part in the process of decision-making, protecting essential services to the needy and disadvantaged class of people.

Despite some positive gains in the field of globalization, it is observed with concern that many anti-democratic tendencies have arisen out of concentration of capital at both the national and international levels. From this perspective, some commentators view that the role of civil society that includes NGOs can be very much crucial in democratizing the system and contents of good governance with positive advantages by making new platforms for participation.

A strong and vibrant civil society is necessary for ensuring good governance in the sector of development of Bangladesh. Thus, they may facilitate two-way traffic between the state and the common people; as we have been observing in our day-to-day affairs, we must bear in mind that the civil society is having both social value and set of institutions and thereby they may develop good governance in a developing country like Bangladesh.

NGOs and Civil Society

We have noticed several realities while discussing the evolution of civil society in the context of Bangladesh. Most significantly, in the countries of the developing world, the evolution of civil society lags behind in state building and economic growth the way it should be. A gap is noticed between the old and new though the lives of common people are being transformed fast. An artificial approach or attempt is being taken to patch up the gap and we are not sure how effective this would be, for the “Non-Government Organization” (NGOs) model borrowed from the industrially developed countries of the west is an attempt or initiative to gear up the growth of the civil society. However, this approach may not work in reality. Now, the donors are willing to underwrite the direct provision of services to the poor in Bangladesh. Since many of the NGOs are running after earning money by making investments in various projects/schemes, their ethics that are the “non-profit” organizations and the donors are providing them fund to uplift the standard of the life style of the common people. Even, they do not hesitate to realize money from the common people by applying inhuman and cruel methods. But this is not a conclusive one, we are still optimistic about the role of NGOs in bringing up the standard of life of the distressed common people through alleviation of poverty from the society with that aim in view, a large number of registered NGOs have been functioning all over Bangladesh, we believe and are optimistic about their future.

Government-NGOs Relationship

We must say that the government’s attitude towards the NGOs manifested in its five-year plans and other government records has been very positive. The government acknowledges that the NGOs have been playing a very innovative role in uplifting the standard of life of the distressed common people (Haque 2002).

Conclusion

Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, it was widely believed that once the task of reconstruction was over, the domestic economy would provide most of the resources for development. However, this concept is now proved a mistake because drainage of the resources of Bangladesh during the British and Pakistani regime had left us with a deficit of food-grains availability. Inadequate internal savings and a major portion of the population living below poverty line led to a state of chronic eternal dependence.

But in the last decade, Bangladesh has made a big turn, under the leadership of Honorable Premiere Sheikh Hasina, to move forward in achieving the status of a middle income country and gradually the government mechanism is also getting more mature in that line of order. To gain proper governance or good governance, media and NGOs are contributing a lot.

The role of media has risen over the time and it would gain more importance in the times to come as many across the world still yearn for better governance or at best governance itself and not autocratic rule. While media does highlight some of the concerns from time to time, it does not delve deeper into the real issues. The checks and balances which media ensures by reporting issues in an objective manner can go a long way in ensuring that governance by government would be fair and fruitful.

There is no denial of the fact that in spite of some management and administrative lapses, NGOs have been playing a very significant role to alleviate poverty in Bangladesh by extending assistance and cooperation for the sake of good governance and we are optimistic about it.

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