

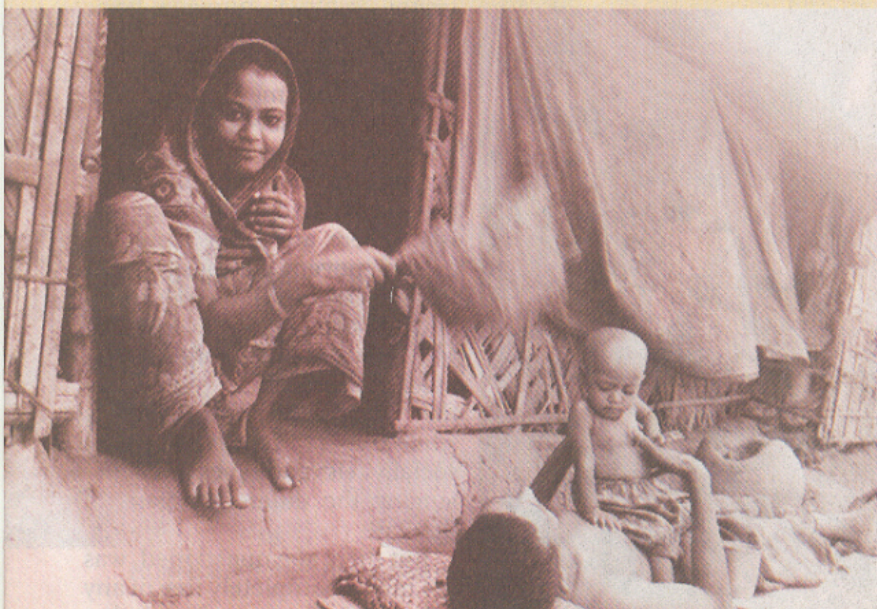
GOOD GOVERNANCE

The Rules of the Game

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Poverty, Politics and Governance: Where does Bangladesh stand and the way forward?

While explaining good governance, Dr Salahuddin M Aminuzzaman, chair of the department of Development Studies, Dhaka University, said, "Governance denotes how people are ruled, how the affairs of the state are administered and regulated as well as a nation's system of politics and how these function in relation to public administration and law."



The poor must have a stronger voice in society.

Dr Aminuzzaman classified the history of Bangladesh's political governance into four distinct phases: Civilian control of the civil and military bureaucrats, military control of political system and civil bureaucracy, military civil service partnership and elected civil political regime.

Describing our political culture as "confrontational", Dr Aminuzzaman said, "All major parties bank on populist approach of rhetoric, symbolism and sentiments as the major instruments for mobilising voters."

In fact, in his paper, Aminuzzaman portrayed a grim picture of our major political establishments. The parliament, he said, is populated by MPs, many of whom have allegedly made financial 'investment' in their nomination by their party, and in their subsequent election. Dr

Aminuzzaman said that the wealth of the candidates is a more important factor determining electoral nomination and success than local credibility, and their ability and willingness to represent the interest of the constituents.

The professor also observed that, "though the parliament is popularly elected by a free and fair election under the caretaker government, it is still far from being vibrant, effective and participatory."

The situation is even worse for marginalised people. "At both the national and local levels, the elite has achieved tight control over resources and opportunities distributed by the state and through the imperfect markets of the private sector," Professor Aminuzzaman observed.

Major poverty alleviation programmes have also come under Aminuzzaman's scathing criticism. He says that all these programmes in the country are loosely coordinated and lack an adequate institutional framework. Dr Aminuzzaman also identified the "key constraints" to good governance and development in Bangladesh as dominance of a small elite in politics, lack of effective representation of the interest of the poor, lack of transparency, widespread corruption and poorly performing institutions.

The solution, Dr Aminuzzaman added, lie with the establishment of pro-poor governance. "If poverty is to be reduced in Bangladesh, it is necessary that the poor themselves become a stronger voice in society." The key ingredient to this, he asserted, is political will.

Role of International Institutions in Promoting Good Governance

Dr. Atiur Rahman, Chairman of Shamunnay, in his paper gave special emphasis on three institutions that are dominant in policy-making and agenda setting. They are the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Rahman listed quite a few challenges of governance in Bangladesh that these institutions have been quite vocal about. These include: high levels of corruption in the public sector, lack of democracy in party politics,