

# Crisis of governance in Bangladesh

The rise of Islamic militancy in the country is the manifestation of poor governance. Not only the donors, but also the common people of the country have a similar view on ensuring the accountability of the government functionaries. The government now needs to do some soul-searching and be serious in addressing the problem of governance. Like the donors, the media and civil society should also mount pressure on the government to improve governance.



ANM NURUL HAQUE

BDHAKA scored the lowest marks among 209 low income countries in 2004 in the World Bank's governance situation survey. The survey report titled "Bangladesh PRSP Forum Economic Update: Recent Developments and Future Perspectives" has been submitted to the government. The survey was conducted on the basis of six indicators of the governance issue: voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption.

These indicators, that covered 209 low income countries across the world, showed lowest ranking of Bangladesh in four of the six indicators and second lowest in the two others. The rating of Bangladesh on political stability was 11.7, for regulatory quality 13.3, for rule of law 22.2, and for control of corruption 10.3 -- all of which were lowest.

Bangladesh, however, did somewhat better for government effectiveness in which rating was 26.4 and for voice and accountability, rating 28.6. "Improved governance is essential for the success of Bangladesh's economy and poverty reduction, and none of Bangladesh's major development partners will be able to sustain its support if the government does not squarely address the governance agenda" reads the report.

A three-day meeting with the

donor agencies was held in November in Dhaka to discuss how the donors will contribute to the implementation of the PRSP. The meeting with the donors was styled as PRSP Implementation Forum instead of the previous Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) as the donor agencies have decided that their development assistance will now be based on the PRSP. The Local Consultative Group (LCG), a forum of the country's bilateral and multilateral donors also made a number of recommendations for reforms in few programs of the PRSP which included the governance issue. The donors Joint Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) was prepared in the light of the PRSP. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Japan and the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom (UK) have prepared the joint country assistance strategy (CAS) for Bangladesh for 2005-08 to harmonise their development support activities.

Corruption is perceived to be most acute in Bangladesh and it has again been crowned as the top corrupt state in the world for the fifth consecutive year. The local consultative group suggested inclusion of a number of specific measures in the PRSP document to get rid of confrontational politics, corruption, and law and order, which are the outcome of poor governance. The PRSP, however, observed that the problem of corruption and poor governance lied largely in the fact that certain strategic sectors, particularly the police, judiciary and transport remain largely unreformed. The PRSP, first of its kind in Bangladesh, is framed to serve as a strategic tool for combating the country's pervasive poverty. There is no denying that all pervading corruption resulting from poor governance is the major impediment to our economic growth and poverty reduction.

The World Bank has cancelled

and demanded refund of Tk 6.8 crore from three projects on the ground of corruption. Praful C Patel, vice president of the World Bank for South Asia region on November 17 came down heavily on the government for its failure in curbing massive corruption, terrorism, lack of justice and misgovernance for which the country is known in the world. He said that if the government fails to curb corruption and violence and to bring about transparency and accountability in governance, it would be very difficult for the donors to continue assistance to Bangladesh. Though the donors' findings in respect of massive corruption and poor governance in the country are nothing new, this is for the first time the government received a stern warning from a very high quarter. World Bank president Dr. Paul Wolfowitz also called for improvement of governance in Bangladesh for faster poverty reduction and economic growth. He made the observation during a meeting with Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman in Washington in September.

The international development partners of Bangladesh, in their two-day meeting held in Washington in February also expressed their serious concern over poor governance, deterioration of laws and order and corruption. The issue of poor governance in Bangladesh that dominated the agenda of the Washington meeting does not require any elaboration. The whole mechanism of governance in the country has been vitiated owing to lack of accountability and transparency. The Public Expenditure Review Commission (PERC) headed by M. Hafizuddin Khan detected hundreds of irregularities in public expenditure and waste of funds. The PERC also categorically reported that the parliamentary standing committees have been failed to ensure accountability and transparency in public expenditure and to remove corruption from

the state organs. Inefficiency coupled with ever increasing corruption in most of the government departments is no doubt the consequence of lack of transparency and accountability in the mechanism of governance.

Not only the donor agencies but also those holding very respectable state position, are also vocal about corruption and poor governance in the country. President Iajuddin Ahmed said corruption, inefficiency and poor governance hindering economic growth. "Because of these reasons, we are not getting expected results in poverty alleviation despite all-out efforts," said the president while speaking as chief guest at the launching ceremony of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry's "Vision-2021 for a Prosperous Bangladesh" at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre on September 25.

Chief Justice J R Mudassar Hossain has said that good governance is an extension of the principle of the rule of law. He opined: "A society is well governed when there is a rule of law, not the rule of a man or woman." The Chief Justice said this on December 10, at the discussion session organized by the Bureau of Human Rights Bangladesh in observance of the 57th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at Dhaka Reporters Unity auditorium. But those who were at the helm of country's administration from time to time have failed to achieve the goals of good governance.

One of the main themes of the modern concept of good governance is the separation of judiciary from the executive. In a judgment the Supreme Court directed the government to separate judiciary from the executive. The law minister opined that the Supreme Court has no legislative power for issuing such directive to the government. But both India and Pakistan, from whom Bangladesh inherited the congruent system of judiciary and executive, have already separated the same. The rule of law is a cardinal phenomenon to good governance, which has been tainted with the increasing number of extra judicial killing by the RAB.

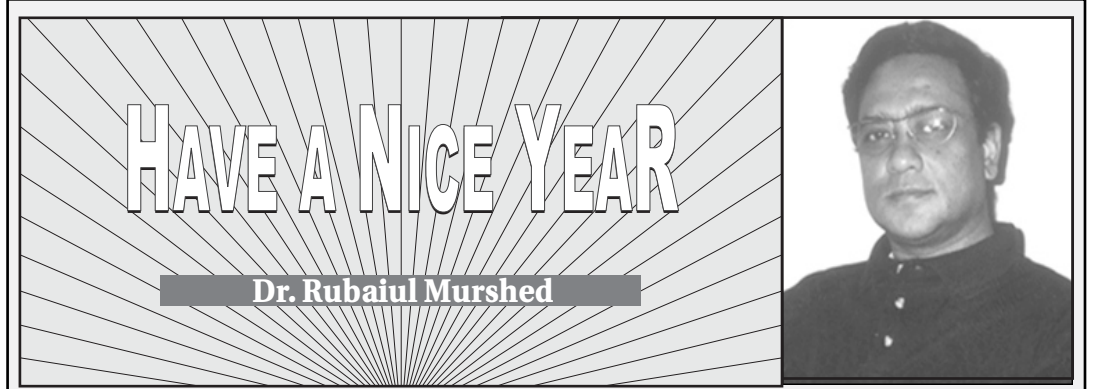
Access to information is another vital factor for achieving the goals of good governance, which promote transparency and public accountability in the working of government functionaries. Open governance associated with strong anti-corruption focus and rule of law, encourages foreign direct investment as the investors have more confidence in the transparent and accountable system.

The task of improving governance calls for concordant efforts both from the government and the opposition. Strengthening accountability and ensuring transparency are two major components for improving governance. Appointment of a sector-wise ombudsman, cancellation of the Official Secrecy Act for ensuring free flow of information, and creation of massive awareness among the people against corruption are very crucial to ensure accountability and transparency in governance.

"The greatest of all evil is the weak government," said Benjamin Disraeli, who was the British premier for two terms in 1868 and 1874. This saying is most appropriate for a country like Bangladesh. Good governance is what every citizen in the country craves. But over the last two decades, the people of this country have witnessed a large and increasing divergence in governance, which has doubled corruption, collapsed rule of law, and smashed political stability. Lack of good governance has impeded the sustained growth of democracy and poverty alleviation.

The rise of Islamic militancy in the country is the manifestation of poor governance. Not only the donors, but also the common people of the country have a similar view on ensuring the accountability of the government functionaries. The government now needs to do some soul-searching and be serious in addressing the problem of governance. Like the donors, the media and civil society should also mount pressure on the government to improve governance.

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## All health information to keep you up to date De-stress in 2006

It is not at all possible to get rid of stress from our life, but we need to know how we can (especially the negative stress) manage it and how we can have control over our lives to adjust to it. Modern lifestyle and stress walk together -- which kills us slowly. It ties us up in knots and this is nothing but "wear and tear" of both our mental and physical health. During stress, our body gears up and there are secretions of extra stress hormones (adrenaline, noradrenaline, and cortisol) -- the heart pumps faster and blood pressure rises, breathing quickens and sometimes we sweat more. Although short and light stress causes more glucose to be delivered to the brain, which makes more energy available to neurons, but prolonged stress can obstruct the glucose delivery and disrupt memory. Threshold levels of stress varies from man to man; it causes exhaustion, loss of or increased appetite, palpitations, headaches, crying, breathing difficulties, digestion slows insomnia or sleeplessness. Most vitally, if stress is putting someone in and out of control situation, seek professional help from a psychiatrist. To manage unhealthy stress we need to learn and understand four things -- calmness, clear thoughts, self confidence and contentment.

Tips for Stress Management

1. **Right of Way:** Try to prioritize the most important things. One of the main reasons for stress is overcommitment to a lot of things which are not that important. Plan ahead in the morning what you must do today. Try to find out what's bothering you most, try to concentrate on that in a fruitful manner. Take out some time every day to close your eyes and organize your plans. Take an extra 5 minutes in the washroom or sit quietly and gather your thoughts before meeting someone special. Think about your own behaviour and compare with someone whom you admire. Utilize your mental TV channels which are full of hope and harmony. Try to read and watch something that will make you alive.

2. **Take a Deep Breath:** During stress, you may be holding your breath in your subconscious mind! Shallow breathing puts less oxygen in the blood stream, producing an increase in muscle strain. Breathe deeply and try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. But when things become very difficult, take a walk or else change your surroundings. According to

scientists, natural light exposure, especially in the morning, increases level of serotonin (regulates temper) in the brain. Most importantly, do not overwork yourself. Resist the temptation to schedule things back-to-back. All too often we underestimate how long things will take.

3. **Express Yourself:** Do not "bottle up" emotions. Try to share your feelings with someone -- sometimes it could be your spouse, sometimes may be friends, colleagues, religious leader, or even your boss or teacher. Talking with someone is a useful tool that can help clear the stressful mind so that one can focus on problem solving. A good way to manage stress is to seek out activities involving friends. A good cry during stress can be a healthy way to bring relief sometimes to your anxiety, and it might keep away from headache.

4. **Physical Comfort and Involvement:** Wear comfortable clothing which you also like. Use sunglasses when you go out. Use comfortable chairs and other furniture. Try to stay in and use tastefully decorated clean rooms including washrooms. Physical activity is important for precluding the effects of stress. You can release the pressure of stress through exercise or physical activity. As we know, when stress appears, extra stress hormones are secreted. Try to find some physical activity you enjoy and make regular time for it -- it could be in front of television. Eating healthy food and proper rest or sleep are important weapons in dealing with stressful situations.

5. **Most Importantly, Know Your Limits:** Judge this world as an imperfect one. It would be very stressful when you try to manage people over whom you have little power; especially when it is related to behaviour of others. Be intelligent and don't be anxious regarding situations you cannot change. Know your limits and wait at least for 10-15 minutes before you commit to anything. If you face a problem which you cannot change, learn to accept -- be smart at that moment -- consider compromise rather than confrontation, keeping in mind about changing things in the near future. In fact, sometimes giving rather than taking reduces the strain and helps you feel more comfortable. It is nice if you can develop a nature of ignoring negative things of others. And, remember, you may not always be right. And try to do something every week for others, especially those who have less.

# Learning from the Asian trend in primary education

We can introduce a public examination at the end of the primary grade 6 (proposed here) and award a Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLC) as is the norm in many countries mentioned above. We know many students are dropped just completing the 5-year primary. Such students would be kept in the schools for an additional year.

ABDUS SATTAR MOLLA

THE wealth of a nation lies in its people -- their commitment to the country and community, their willingness to strive and persevere, their ability to think, achieve and excel. Education is the way to all these virtues.

Education systems in all the countries of the world follow a general pattern consisting of the Elementary (primary), the Secondary, and the Tertiary (or higher) levels. Many countries have several sub-systems of education at different levels. The most important sub-system is that of the general education. Many Muslim nations have a religious education subsystem beginning from the primary level. Most countries have a technical education sub-system usually starting from the secondary stage.

Bangladesh is an Asian country. There are about 49 countries in Asia. We can have a look into the education systems prevailing in the Asian countries to see where we are and what we can do to develop the system in our beloved motherland. The present write up focuses on primary education.

### Duration of primary education

The elementary education in many countries starts with kindergarten, and Asian countries are not an exception. But this stage of elementary education is nowhere compulsory. Usually the formal and compulsory or "basic education" begins with the primary grade One. The duration of the primary education varies from 3 to 10 years in various Asian countries. But the most prevailing trend is a 6-year primary education. Half (24 countries out of 49) of the Asian countries follow this pattern. Of the 23 countries of Asia studied in detail, 15 (about two-thirds) follow this 6-year primary education pattern. The countries are Bhutan, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, North Korea, Philippines, Saudi

Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. The second trend is having a 5-year primary schooling in 7 countries excluding Bangladesh (that is not counted in the 23 because we are collecting information of other countries to make changes here in Bangladesh). Most countries neighbouring Bangladesh follow this 5-year primary education as in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. The duration of primary education is 8 year only in Turkey.

During the last three years' attempt I could collect education systems of 182 countries. The duration of primary education in 87 of them is 6 years. In 28 countries the primary education is up to grade 8 (mostly in the cold European countries), in 19 countries up to grade 5, in 16 countries up to grade 9, in 15 countries up to grade 7, in 11 countries up to 4 years, and in only 3 countries each up to grade 10 and 3. The 6-year primary seems to be universal across the continents.

Our neighbouring India (since 1992) and Pakistan (1998) have also a plan of elevating the primary education up to grade 8 from the present 5, but they are still failing to implement it.

### Subjects studied in different countries

The subjects studied at the primary level can vary but every country puts emphasis on the mother tongue (and also the state language and English in many countries) and mathematics. Apart from language and mathematics, some type of physical education and arts/music are also practiced from the very beginning.

Religion is a compulsory subject in 11 countries out of the 23 studied. The countries are Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Turkey. Moral education (in place of religion) is taught in China, Japan, Philippines, Thailand, Taiwan, Vietnam, South Korea, North Korea, and Singapore. In Singapore, moral education is an on-

examination subject. Neither religion nor moral education is compulsory in India, Myanmar, and Hong Kong.

Science and social studies are usually taught from grade 3 or 4, and rarely from grade 1 (e.g. in China, South Korea, and Japan).

There is yearly pass-fail system in every grade of the primary level in countries studied. Besides, in 12 out of the 23 countries, there is provision for a public examination on completion of the primary stage and these countries also award a Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLC). Such countries are Bhutan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Myanmar, Thailand, Taiwan, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Turkey.

### Bangladesh context

The present day Bangladesh had informal and indigenous system of education nurtured by local elite (termed the "gurus") prevailing before the Mughal period and even before the Hindu kings. People having thirst for knowledge, used to work and learn under the guidance of such gurus. During the Hindu kingdoms and the Mughal period, rather formal primary education system developed in Tolls and Maktabas respectively. The Britishers started the secular formal education including the primary, secondary, and higher levels. After the end of British colonial rule and the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, Pakistan had a 4-year primary education, 8-year secondary and 4-year higher education system under the Calcutta University or the later (1921) established Dhaka University and Dhaka Board. The duration of primary education was elevated to 5-years in 1953.

Bangladesh was born as an independent country on December 16, 1971. In the very first year (1972), primary and secondary education was dependent on the system prevailing during the Pakistan days. Since history had changed much we read the "Diary of Bangladesh" as the social science course in 1972. The

Bangladesh Education Commission (the first commission) was formed (under the chairmanship of our most illustrious scientist Dr. Kudrat-E-Khuda) that year and the report was published in 1974. By this time some committees prepared some curricula based on which the 5-year primary and the 7-year secondary education were going on.

The Bangladesh Education Commission proposed an 8-year primary program to fulfill the Unesco requirement of compulsory schooling up to 14 years of age. Since then all the education commissions (including the Majid Khan Commission 1983-84, the Mofizuddin Commission 1988, MA Bari Commission 2002, and Moniruzzaman Mia Commission 2003) and curriculum committees formed later on, also supported this 8-year long primary education, but we could not implement the plan in the long 32 years. So we are to delve some depth why this could not be implemented.

The readers can see the most prevailing primary education in Asia (and also in the entire world) is of 6-year duration. Countries like China, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, etc. did not dare to make primary education up to grade 8 or 9. Education of grades 7-9 is still studied in secondary schools. These countries declared education up to grade 9 as "basic" to fulfill the Unesco requirement.

The 5-year primary education in Bangladesh is usually accomplished in two shifts in most of the schools. So the elevation of this stage up to grade 8 seems an over-ambitious plan and practically is beyond our capability. Even if we can somehow afford to prepare the necessary infrastructure and can also appoint the required number of qualified teachers, the actual standard of education, especially in grades 7-8 would lower rather than improve because of tagging these grades with the primary instead of the secondary.

I think our present infra-structure can hold the primary education up to grade 6, that is not only the Asian but the most prevalent world pattern. However, the discriminatory provision of the required educational qualification for teachers (SSC for females and HSC for males) should be made uniform and must be elevated to HSC for both the sexes so that the teachers can teach up to grade 6 better having the required

expertise.

We can introduce a public examination at the end of the primary grade 6 (proposed here) and award a Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLC) as is the norm in many countries mentioned above. The elevation of the primary grades from 5 to 6 would have double benefit. We know many students are dropped just completing the 5-year primary. Such students would be kept in the schools for an additional year. The second benefit would be making the primary-passed students eligible for entering the vocational/technical education providing them skills to do something valuable for their livelihood and also to enrich our manpower nationally. It may be mentioned here that China provides for technical education just after completing the 6th grade primary (though we have this provision after completion of grade 8).

The subjects in the primary level can remain as is now: Bangla, English, Mathematics, Natural Science, Social Science, and the individual Religion. Some educationists opine that the foreign language (English) can be excluded from the primary but most linguists and psychologists suggest language learning from early childhood.

We have a problem with the madrasa education subsystem in all levels including the primary. The Ebtedayee Madrasa (being the elementary stage of Aliya Madrasa system) follows our basic national curriculum but subjects like Bangla and English are studied only in brief. Some students like to transfer from madrasa to the schools later on and find difficulty in coping. So the basic subjects should be declared core and compulsory for both the madrasa and the school students. Masrasa students can learn Islam in detail in place of the Islamic studies taught in schools. They can learn Arabic as an addition to school subjects. But no compromise can be made with basic subjects since many madrasa students later like to join the mainstream school education. The Qaomi Madrasas should also follow the national curriculum, whatever other subjects they may wish to teach in addition.

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# The year in politics

Since the election of the Shiite slate that will hold power for four years, dedicated to an Islamic state allied with Iran, the president and his advisers have fallen eerily silent. As his annus horribilis draws to a close, Bush appears to have expended the turning points. Welcome to victory.

SIDNEY BLUMENTHAL

IN his second inaugural address, George W. Bush four times summoned the image of fire -- "a day of fire," "we have lit a fire," "fire in the minds of men," and "untamed fire." Over the course of the first year of his second term, all four of the ancient Greek elements have wreaked havoc: the fire of war and "fire in the minds of men" of culture war, the air and water of Hurricane Katrina, whirlwinds raging across the earth from Iraq to Florida, from Louisiana to Washington.

Through obsession or obliviousness, rigidity or laziness, Bush got himself singed, tossed about, engulfed, and nearly buried. He began the year proclaiming "a turning point" in Iraq. In every crisis he faced, he assumed that everything would turn his way as it always had in the past. He ended the year declaring "victory" within reach.

The first shift in his political fortunes came with his unprecedented intervention in the case of Terri Schiavo, a woman who had lain in a persistent vegetative state for 15 years, and whose husband's effort to remove her feeding tube was upheld after 14 appeals in Florida courts, five federal law suits, and four refusals to accept the case by the US Supreme Court.

Bush had won the presidency in 2004 with an extraordinary outpouring of support from the religious right. So he rushed from his Texas ranch back to the White House in March to sign the bill transferring the case from state to federal courts. Throughout the month, the Republicans strutted and the Democrats covered. Then, on March 21, the spell that had carried over from the election campaign was suddenly broken in a single stroke. The deus ex

machina that descended onto this fervent scene was an awakening public. An ABC News poll found that 63 to 28 percent backed the removal of Schiavo's feeding tube and 67 to 19 percent believed that politicians urging that she be kept alive were demagogic and unprincipled.

By now, Bush's plan to privatize Social Security was for all intents and purposes moribund. He languished over his long summer vacation besieged by a Gold Star mother, Cindy Sheehan, whose son had died in Iraq. She camped out beside the road leading to the president's ranch, asking him to explain the "noble cause" for which her son had given his life. Bush refused to grant her an audience, his motorcade racing past her to a lunch with big party contributors.

After Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on August 29, Bush's aides held a fraught debate about which one of them would have to tell the president he should cut short his vacation. Four days after the hurricane landed, Bush left his ranch and, on Air Force One, watched a custom DVD of television news coverage assembled by his staff. He had not bothered to see any of it on his own.

He praised his feckless chief of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Michael Brown -- "Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job" -- and then nominated his former personal attorney and White House Legal Counsel Harriet Miers for the Supreme Court. Though friends offered testimony of her evangelical religiosity, conservatives did not trust her because she had once made gestures toward women's and civil rights, and Bush pushed her to withdraw.

Bush hoped to erase the year's infamies with the election in Iraq

on December 15, his ultimate turning point. He delivered five major speeches crafted by his new adviser on the National Security Council, Peter Feaver, a Duke University political scientist and co-author of "Choosing Your Battles," based on his public opinion research showing that "the public is defeat phobic, not casualty phobic." In one speech, Bush mentioned "victory" 15 times, against a background embossed with the slogan "Plan for Victory," and the White House issued a document entitled "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq."

On December 14, the president invited bipartisan groups of senators and representatives to White House briefings on the progress that would follow the election. Among those assembled in the Roosevelt Room were the president, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley -- and Peter Feaver, the polling expert. At the meeting with senators after the presentation, Bush called first on Senator John McCain, the Republican maverick, who gave an enthusiastic statement of support. A few more spoke. "Great, gotta go," said Bush. Afterwards, Feaver buttonholed senators to survey their opinions on the new approach.

Since the election of the Shiite slate that will hold power for four years, dedicated to an Islamic state allied with Iran, the president and his advisers have fallen eerily silent. As his annus horribilis draws to a close, Bush appears to have expended the turning points. Welcome to victory.

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