Good Governance and Election Manifestos: An Empirical Study on the 9th Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh

Md. Shahabul Haque[a],*; Md. Bayezid Alam[b]

[a]Associate Professor, Department of Political Studies, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh.
[b]Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Government M.C. College, Sylhet, Bangladesh.
*Corresponding author.

Abstract

Political parties are playing a significant role in promoting good governance. In this analytical study, an attempt has been made to throw light on the good governance in the election manifestos of the political parties in Bangladesh. The manifestoes of the four major political parties of 9th parliamentary election have been reviewed on the basis of nine key indicators of good governance. The study founds that the election manifestos of the major political parties reveals that many of the indicators of the good governance found reflections as election pledges.

Key words: Good governance; Election manifesto; Parliamentary election

INTRODUCTION

Election pledges in manifestos give an overview of what plans and policies parties have the voters. The election manifesto is a published document of a political party setting out the policies that the party will pursue if elected to govern. When elected to power, a party will often claim that the contents of its manifesto constitute a mandate to introduce legislation to bring these policies into effect.

Nowadays, before an election political parties usually issue a manifesto in which they outline the policies they advocate.

Election manifestoes generate significant public interests. In the election time, both media and concerned citizens had taken greater interests in the manifestoes of the prominent political parties. In the 9th parliamentary elections of Bangladesh (held on December 29, 2008), in almost all the political parties presented their party-manifestos having promises and proclamations for the establishment of good governance in the country. It is observed that the election manifesto was declared based on partisan point beyond alliance view although alliance was formed centered upon election.

The Awami League (AL) has termed its manifesto as "a charter for change". On the other hand, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has initiated their document with "save the country, save the people" slogan. While the BNP manifesto is a 36-point charter of promises, the AL manifesto contains 23 broad pledges placed against the backdrop of a vision for Bangladesh by the year 2021. The Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI), and Jatiya Party (JI) also announced their partisan election manifestos. This study is an attempt to analyse the election manifestos of the major political parties. The manifestos of the four major political parties (AL, BNP, BJI and JP) have been reviewed on the basis of selected indicators of good governance.

1. THE CONCEPT OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

The issue of good governance became a matter of serious and high level consideration all over the world (Muhith, 2001). The concept has emerged as a sequel and the failure of the *Structural Adjustment Policy* (SAP) adopted by the World Bank. After that various international development partner and academics came forward to further sharpen

the concept good governance. Good governance means the ability of government and civil servants to serve the public and the country in a transparent, inclusive (taking everyone along), efficient (less money and time) and effective way (achieve objective).

Stowe (1992) indicated a set of things to define and clarify the meaning of good governance, such as: (a) political freedom, including free speech and a freely elected parliament; (b) constitutional and judicial protection for the rights of the individual; (c) the maintenance of the rule of law by an independent judiciary; (d) the maintenance of a stable currency, the essential underpinning of economic and social development; (e) development of society as a whole by education and hearth care; (f) executive accountability to a freely elected legislature.

The World Bank (2008) fixed the six components of good governance: voice and accountability, political instability and violence, government effectiveness, regulatory burden, rule of law and control of corruption. The ESCAP (2004) of the United Nations provides eight major characteristics of good governance. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. The characteristics are shown in the following figure:
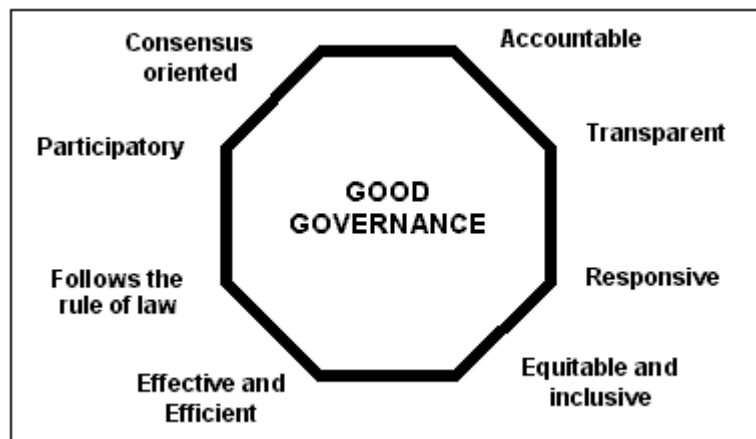

Figure 1
Characteristics of Good Governance
Source: ESCAP, 2004.

So we can say that good governance is a system to establish and maintain accountability, transparency and efficiency in all spheres of governmental and administrative machinery. It ensures subjection of the government to the rule of law, enjoyment of citizens' rights, and maintenance of a healthy and symbiotic relation between the society and the state.

2. GOOD GOVERNANCE IN ELECTION MANIFESTOS

2.1 Accountability and Transparency

Accountability and transparency are prerequisites of good governance in any democratic country. These two things would never be established unless the rampant corruption existing in state machinery and social life was eliminated. The political parties made pledges in their manifestos to ensure transparency and accountability in all sectors of administration. For instance, BNP declared to affirm the transparency and accountability and to free the administration from all sorts of political interference. On the other hand, restoration of democracy and democratization of the institutions were the main motto of AL through ensuring transparency, accountability in the administration. In this context, BJI emphasized to say that a transparent, efficient, responsible, accountable and service-oriented administration will be developed. Appointment and promotion of officers and employees will not be determined on the basis of political affiliations. Merit, competence, moral quality and seniority will be the determining factors. Unfortunately, there was no bold-headed commitment relating these issues in the election manifesto of JP. No party had the commitments to the appointment of an ombudsman, although it was needed to introduce this post for ensuring the administrative transparency and accountability.

2.2 An Effective Parliament

The components of good governance such as accountability, transparency and participation are directly related to the primary functions of Parliament (Rahman, 2007). In Bangladesh, the parliament has been dominated and monopolized by the ruling party. It has performed poorly and contributed insignificantly towards promoting good governance. The main political parties had promised in their manifestos for a functional parliament. BNP is committed to get national parliament at the centre of good governance together with the opposition parties. This party

declared that decision will be taken by the parliament based on consensus with the national interest. They committed to appoint the deputy speaker and the chief of parliamentary committees from the opposition parties. This stand of BNP was to ascertain good governance under the process of lively parliament. BNP committed to forming an all-party parliamentary committee to ensure transparency in the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). To activate the national parliament, BNP wanted to bring a constitutional amendment against issue-based walkout and unauthorized absence. BJI promised to amend the rules of procedure and constitution for activation of Parliament. AL didn't emphasize in their election manifesto of the strategy of establishing an effective parliament. Although, AL promised that 33% of parliamentary seats for direct election would be reserved for women. JP didn't mention anything beyond the effective parliament.

2.3 Rule of Law

Good governance requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. It is quite impossible to establish good governance without rule of law. It is one of the unique characteristics of the constitution of Bangladesh which declared that every function of the state must justify his action with reference to the law (Hossain, 2004). Impartial enforcement of laws requires an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force (ESCAP, 2004). AL in its election manifesto promised that good governance will be promoted through establishing rule of law and avoiding political partisanship. Human rights will be established on a strong footing with a view to ensuring the rule of law. BJI also pledged that the rule of law will be established to ensure an equal application of law for all citizens. JP didn't pledge anything especially in its election manifesto for the rule of law. They declared to end all the maladies of social and political life. BNP declared that they will expense their all strengths to ensure law and order situation and to combat terrorism. BNP will concentrate them to protect the life, liberty and dignity of the people.

2.4 Human Rights

The Human rights is crucial for good governance. The constitution guaranteed the fundamental human rights and freedoms and respects for the dignity and worth of the people. BNP said that they will implement the declaration of Universal Human Rights of UNO. AL promised that terrorism, discriminatory treatment and human rights violations against religious and ethnic minorities and indigenous people must come to an end permanently. Security of the life, wealth and honor will be guaranteed. The equal opportunity in all spheres of state and social life will be ensured. JP's election manifesto revealed some declaration on human rights. JP said that right of the followers of all religion will be safeguarded. Functioning of the Family Courts would be further strengthened to

protect the rights of women. Interests of the aborigines would be safeguarded. BJI in its election manifesto promised that rights of children and women, religious freedom, welfare of the scheduled caste, cultural identities of non-Muslims and indigenous communities, equal opportunities in education and employment, the security of Chittagong Hill Tracts will be ensured. Security of life, property and honour of people from all religions will be guaranteed.

2.5 Participation

Participation, either direct or representatives, is a key cornerstone of good governance (ESCAP, 2004). Participation means people's involvement in the decision making process in the benefits of development programs. In Bangladesh all sectors of government are suffering from lack of meaningful participation. BNP commited to administrative decentralization and to ensure people's direct participation in the development programs under the administrative structure of the full-fledged representation of the populace for establishing good governance. While the JP manifesto promised to establish the provincial system of government through people's participation, the BJI manifesto was totally silent in ensuring participation in all sectors of administration. JP also promised to raise reserved women's seat to 64 from 30 after due amendment to the constitution. Similarly the AL promised that the number of reserved seats for women by direct election in the parliament will be increased to 100. The participatory approach was prioritized in the election manifestos of the political parties.

2.6 A Strong Local Government System

Local government is the yard stick of Good Governance. A strong local government system can ensure good governance through transparency, accountability, effective participation and equal opportunities for all (Alam, 2009). The system of local self-government had been placed in the election manifestos of both AL and BNP. BNP committed to administrative decentralization and to ensure people's direct participation to make strong local self-government for establishing good governance. BNP wanted to reintroduce the *Gram Sarkar* system under the framework of local government. AL promised that local government institutions will be strengthened through decentralization of power. District Councils, Upazillas and Unions will be transformed the headquarters for development and administration of the area. The power and sphere of responsibility of City Corporation and municipalities will be enhanced; the standard and quality of civic facilities will be improved. JP declared that they want to introduce the provinces in the country. BJI said in their manifesto local government, decentralization of power and rural development administration, particularly Dhaka-based central administration, will be reorganized. Upazilla and union councils will be developed into strong

local administrations. Introduction, implementation and management of development programmes will be entrusted with local government councils.

2.7 Independence of Judiciary

An independent judiciary is one of the main themes of good governance (Ara & Khan, 2006). Political parties in their election manifesto attached their attention to the independence of judiciary. BNP had given more than half of the page relating to this issue, which is positive but it created panic for what they utter to achieve their prescribe goal. BNP's manifesto gave special importance to form an independent secretariat under the Supreme Court. AL announced insignificantly to ensure the tangible independence and neutrality of the judiciary for the establishment of good governance. BJI wanted to ensure the justice through the amendment of the conventional or existing law of the country and also be confirmed that all are equal before the law. JP also significantly mentioned the independence of judiciary in their election manifesto. It is said that freedom of the judiciary will be ensured. Judiciary will be separated from the administration. The number of High Court Judges will be increased as per requirements and the facilities and benefits will be enhanced.

2.8 Curbing Corruption

The minimization of corruption in the administrative machinery is a most crucial prerequisite of good governance (Ibid.). The corrupt practices are widespread and are institutionalized in all spheres of public affairs in Bangladesh. The corruption issues placed 2nd and 3rd in the election manifestos of AL and BNP respectively. The independency of ACC is highly prioritized in both of the manifestos. The AL manifesto pledged that strict measures will be taken to eliminate bribery, extortion, rent-seeking and corruption. They will adopt a strong stance against black money, loan defaulters, tender manipulators, and users of muscle power at every level of government and society. The manifesto promised to computerization for minimizing the corruption. BNP made commitments to undertake strict measures to block the sources of corruption. They committed to bring transparency and accountability in the government transactions and state owned enterprises. Each Member of Parliament (MP) will have to disclose their assets by giving a statement within 30 days after taking the oath, according to the manifesto. BJI stated that they will make ACC as independent institution. A social movement will be launched against corruption. New laws will be promulgated against corrupt people. BJI will reshuffle the salary of employees for corruption free administration. JP promised a corruption and terrorism-free society in line with its ally AL.

2.9 Freedom of Mass-Media

Freedom of mass media is a dominant factor for ensuring good governance in a multi-party democratic country like Bangladesh. AL declared the freedom of all types of mass media and free flow of information in their election manifesto. Besides, they committed to introduce the community radio in the country. All false cases against the journalist will be withdrawn. Discrimination in distribution of advertisements on partisan consideration will be discontinued. Unfortunately, AL declared nothing in terms of government controlled Radio and Television. BJI accentuated to utter about the freedom of mass-media in their election manifesto. The party declared that a National Policy will be framed to encourage sound and creating thinking through literature, culture and popular media. Radio and television will be given autonomy to work impartially. In the election manifesto of JP, the freedom of mass media was included but there was the awfully absence of the freedom of mass media in spite of having other crucial options in the election manifesto of BNP. It was a question not to prioritize the important sector likewise mass-media, rather neglected in the election manifesto of BNP and they didn't refer to the fact of the autonomy of both Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Radio.

CONCLUSION

In a democratic system, political parties that aspire to be in power publicly pledge what they want to achieve for the people. The election manifestos of the major political parties including the AL, BNP, BJI and the JP revealed that many of the indicators of the Good governance found reflections as election pledges. AL had taken a more eclectic approach. On the other hand, BNP seemed to have taken a more governance approach. But both have covered all the issues that can come under political governance and economic management framework. BJI and JP seem to have taken a little governance approach. But no party has outlined even cursorily the way they could be materialized or how to mobilize resources to implement all these promises of good governance.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, M. U. (2008). *Nirbachito Sangkolon*. Asia Publications, Dhaka.

AL. (2008). *Election manifesto of Bangladesh Awami league.* Bangladesh Awami League.

Alam, M. B. (2009). *The role of civil society in promoting good governance: Lessons from the Bangladesh experience* (Unpublished M.S.S. thesis). Department of Political Studies, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet.

Ara, F., & Khan, M. R. (2006). Good governance: Bangladesh perspective. *The Social Sciences, 1*(2), 91-97.

BJI. (2008). *Election manifesto 2008.* Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami.

BNP. (2008). *Election manifesto 2008*. Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

ESCAP. (2004). *What is good governance?* Retrieved 2004, April 12 from http://www.unescap.org/huset/gg/governance.htm

Hossain, M. S. (2004). Perception of good governance in Bangladesh. *Bangladesh Political Science Review, 2*(1), 93-100.

JP. (2008). *Jatiya party (Ershad) election manifesto 2008*. Jatiya Party.

Khan, M. M. (2003). Political and administrative corruption: Concepts, comparative experiences and Bangladesh case. *Asian Affairs, 25*(1).

Muhith, A. M. A. (2001). *Issues of governance in Bangladesh*. Mowla Brothers, Dhaka.

Rahman, M. R., & Azizuddin, M. (1996). Good governance and administrative efficiency in Bangladesh. *SUST STUDIES, 2*(1), 24-31.

Rahman, T. (2007). Parliament and governance. In: M. K. Roy et al. (Eds.), *Good governance in rural development*. BARD, Comilla.

Stowe, K. (1992). Good piano won't play bad music: Administrative reform and good governance. *Public Administration, 70*(3), 387-394.

World Bank. (2008). *World bank research release worldwide governance indicators 1996-2007*. Washington DC.