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Ahmad, Sayed Javed

Civil Service College Bangladesh, University of Dhaka

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State of Governance in Bangladesh: Problems and Prospects

By
Sayed Javed Ahmad

Abstract: *This paper discusses the problems and issues on the political failures in Bangladesh as well as identifies some possible solutions. The approach here is analytical mostly reviewing current news, reports and other related materials. A comparative study is also done between the present and proposed system to get a quick glimpse on the overall situation. The idea here is to seek out reasonable and practical solutions that would yield better result for Bangladesh and bring about positive changes in the political scenario that would allow the country to move forward as a successful and dignified nation. I've kept the scope of this paper limited to political party, elections and governance.*

Keywords: Governance, Good governance, Public Policy, Public Administration, Elections, Parliament, etc.

1.0. Introduction

Almost thirty seven years have elapsed since Bangladesh emerged as an independent state. The independence came relatively easy through only 9 months of struggle; whereas many nations fight for years to be independent. Probably that is why the nation does not seem to appreciate the value of independence. Nor do we value the people who fought for this independence.

No explanation or proof is needed to believe or accept the fact that we have failed as a nation over and over again. This leads us to believe that we must be doing things seriously wrong, and not learning anything from our mistakes. In this paper the author tries to discover few of those “mistakes” we made or still do.

1.1. The Foundation

What is the base or foundation of this nation? It is said that the foundation of the nation is the “Constitution” we have. Who developed that constitution? It was originally formulated by the British colonialists when they ruled the continent. That constitution has been revised from time to time to suit the needs and changes occurring in the environment. But the backbone remains pretty much the same as it was originally set.

The British colonialists had a mindset to rule the people of this continent; therefore, whatever they have formulated is meant to be useful for them to rule. In other words, the constitution was formed from the “masters” point of view to rule the “slaves”. Now one can ask, “Is this constitution any goof for us as an independent nation when we are now self ruled?”

What was good for the British may not be good for us. Therefore, we ought to look into our extant constitution carefully and critically and formulate a new one if necessary.

1.2. Governance and Public Policy

We have produced volumes of laws and by-laws of which few of us are fully aware of them. We do not tell our citizens about their rights and privileges as free citizens, nor do they care to know. For instance, in a program like Master of Public Affairs with a major in Governance and Public Policy, we are not required to study the “Constitution” as a semester long course. We do not talk about the policies our government makes from time to time, nor do we show any concern about them. If the policy is an ineffective one, we just suffer without knowing why.

We need to have a “Care Taker” government to come in power to adjust the mess our democratic governments make every five years. Our political parties are so patriotic and efficient that they cannot manage things for or by themselves any more. As a result, every once in a while our standing military forces has to stage a coup to get rid of the untouchables from power and declare a martial law. They too when in power forgets who they are and wants to remain in power as long as possible. When elections take place, we can be sure that it will not be a fair election; it would definitely be rigged; as they happens in the US, Russia and like.

“Politics” today is just a business. In this business, one just uses the connections through abuse of power to achieve one’s goal. Ethics and morality are underrated. As a result we witness the reality of tremendous decline of our ethics and morality.

Today we are busy catching the crooks, criminals and thieves without discovering the reasons for an increase of such criminals. Unfortunately, this is a world wide phenomenon today. Many so called democratic economically solvent nations are also dealing with decline of ethics and morality. No wonder why we are introducing courses on “Ethics and Morality” in our MBA programs!

Our policy makers are no longer in a position to offer and maintain a good government as they themselves is no longer good. Therefore, we are now dreaming about “Good Governance” without any clue on how to achieve it. Today we talk about good governance but we do not really mean it or want it. It is just a bluff.

We have become so greedy that we do not mind selling our values and morals for a cheap price. We have sacrificed our principles and personalities for material gain hoping to live better. Forgetting totally that none of it would remain if we lose our precious independence and freedom. What good is wealth when there is famine and starvation all around? How well off are the crooks and criminals who so dedicatedly used their mind and soul for illegal hoarding of wealth? What good is their wealth to them now when they are locked up in jails? Are they repenting? I doubt if they are.

1.3. Good Governance

Good governance is not something that could be done quickly as we see in a magic. It takes a lot to achieve the objectives. This is a realistic dream that could only be fulfilled if certain conditions are met. “Goodness” is a primary requirement before anything good can happen. If we are untrue to ourselves then we are just faking our intentions. Thus the result is “hypocrisy”.

Only a “cadre” of good folks can ensure a good government. Our Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) cadres are supposed to be the part and parcel of our government system. When the recruitment process is corrupted, then whole government system is bound to get corrupted. And so it did. Instead of appointments on the basis of merit and qualifications, the political parties appointed crooks and criminals in those positions. By doing so, the parties may have benefited for a short term by achieving their personal goals and agendas, but failed the nation as a whole.

Nothing good can be expected out of a bunch of fowls. Their greed has led them to sell the country and its resources to foreign preys. We make unfair deals with foreign subjects without even understanding the consequences. Let us take Niko incident for example.

Where do they expect to go when their freedom is curtailed? What good is freedom if you can't do anything? Are they planning to be “refugees” and seek refuge and shelter in a foreign land living like a traitor betraying his or her own nation? Indeed, from their activities, it seems like it.

1.4. Public Policies

What good are the policies if they are not enforced and implemented? We have nice and wonderful policies written down in our books and gazettes but few of us even aware of them. As a result, citizen charters are showing up in public offices to educate the citizens about their rights and expectations. Our educational system and school curriculum does not provide any options for our citizens to learn and be aware of the policies we have for ourselves. Many of us are not even aware of our basic civil rights!

We are not even certain if the policies we have formulated and drafted are enforceable and workable simply because they have not been put to use. Our situation is like running an organization without any “service rules” even though we are supposed to have one. But it is assumed and pretended that we do.

Randomly we violate each others rights without any accountability as if no law and order in the country exists. In reality we do have such enforcing authorities in place but they are totally ineffective. As such, no policies and laws gets enforced or implemented. Because enforcers themselves are not aware of them!

1.5. Economics and Cultural Invasion

All our concerns boil down to one single area, which is “economics”. It is the major factor for our people not to behave the way they should. With it comes our poor basic foundation. Our educational system is not preparing us the way we should be prepared. Through cultural invasions, we are adopting more and more foreign philosophies and lifestyle that is full of greed and immorality. Our thinking patterns are today changed through the subliminal messages we receive from our daily cable TV transmissions – domestic and foreign alike. As if we have chosen to corrupt our minds and souls knowingly and willingly without questioning the programs we view. As a result, our world expectations and love for materials have increased and we do not mind attempting illegal means to achieve dreams and desires. Instant gratification has now become the cult for most of us.

In a Muslim majority country, Islam is just a show. The faith and belief has left most of us so did the practice of it. Although we do not want to admit, but the fact is, we no longer believe in Islam. Therefore, we are no longer Muslims. And this is exactly the very reason for our moral decay. Since we no longer believe in the Day of Judgment and meeting with our Lord after death, therefore, we no longer fear the consequences of our activities in this life. Majority of us no longer believes in after life and have been made to believe that this is the only life we will live. So, don't worry, be happy! The ultimate mantra Satan wants us to believe.

1.6. Population Pressure and under use of HR

We are over loaded with population pressure that had caused severe competition for survival. Due to which we have lost respect for one another as we now consider each other an open competitor in the urban jungle. People are flocking to the cities hoping to survive by clinging to something for a while. Those who fail in competition choose unethical and dangerous means to survive.

Same thing goes for our politicians. The people who come to politics are the ones who are basically good for nothing and those who know for sure that they are totally incompetent to survive in a competitive world. Upon this realization, a good number of people are flocking to join the political parties prepared to do pretty much anything to please the leader so that he or she gives a caring eye by offering a job or business. The blessed child in turn becomes a faithful servant of the master knowing well enough that his survival lies on pleasing his or her master. No merit or qualification is needed, except for a total blind submission.

Therefore the politicians' leaves not stone unturned to discover the ways and strategies to remain in power or to regain it if lost to another party. They are ready to adopt any policy and strategies no matter how mean and cruel it may be. They just want to be in power, that's all matters.

I remember once one of my teachers in the US asked me if I agreed to that fact that Bangladesh would be well off if for some reason the population is suddenly halved. I looked at him for few moments wanting to give an answer, but I couldn't. Because, I understood what he meant by posing the question and he was absolutely right.

We have been calling upon family planning for few decades now and it did not do any good to us. Our population is doubling every decade. Ironically, the educated citizens are adapting to making small families adjusting to their economic situation, but the common poor class has been motivated to do the reverse. Because, according to their calculation, more children would mean more helping hands in the old age. And the result is dire; we now have more poor unlearned, unskilled population who would one day pose a threat to the society. Do not be surprised if a day comes when the mob of this level attacks, loots and ransacks your private houses and apartments out of grief and desperation. If we remain unmindful about them, then that day is not really far.

1.7. Effects of Industrialization

When I was young, Bangladesh was in dilemma in deciding on which way to go, towards industrialization or agrarian economy. Personally, I was always for an agrarian economic base for Bangladesh. But, the country chose to step toward industrialization hoping that it would bring prosperity to the nation creating job opportunities, etc. Eventually, the nation did move toward industrialization and consequences are not as positive as hoped for.

Today our environment (lake, rivers, land and air) is polluted due to chemicals waste from the industries. Due to expansion of industrial bases and urbanization, we have used up many of our cultivable and farming lands. The country that did not have to worry much about food production and was relatively self sufficient is now dependent on food imports and facing a shortage.

Today in Bangladesh, poverty is a day to day struggle compounded with food shortages. What ever foreign currencies we earn from different sources are to be spent largely on food imports. The irony is, the whole world is now facing food production shortage, which means, there won't be much food available for imports in the near future. All our foreign exchange (Forex) reserves will be exhausted just by importing food items, which is the basic need for the survival of the nation. Now the question is, how long would our Forex reserve last? What will happen when we will run out of Forex reserves?

1.8. International Turmoil and its Impact

Day by day the whole world is approaching toward an international turmoil by getting embroiled in wars and conflicts. As such, all nations are getting increasingly restless and facing uncertainties. All this is upsetting regular peaceful lifestyle in many countries, especially in war torn countries. As a result, food production is hampered causing the prices of food to go up as the supply is now being reduces while the demand is constantly increasing. In such a condition, almost all nations in the world today are now witnessing high inflation on basic necessities that are must for survival. Take the present situation for instance, the price of rice, wheat and edible oil have gone up world wide simply because there is a short supply. Shortage of supply will continue to grow as more and more nations get embroiled in war and conflict. Not just that, many people's lives will be shattered bringing enormous loss and sufferings. Do you think the war mongers care? All they care about is "control" of power, wealth and world resources.

It is now assumed that the 9-11 incidents in New York City took place under full knowledge if CIA and they did not even attempt to prevent the attack.

“Fahrenheit 9/11 is a film by American filmmaker Michael Moore that presents a critical look at the presidency of George W. Bush, the "War on Terrorism", and its coverage in the American news media. The film holds the record for highest box office receipts by a general release political film. In the film, Moore contends that American corporate media were "cheerleaders" for the 2003 invasion of Iraq and did not provide an accurate and objective analysis of the rationale for the war or the resulting casualties there. The film's harsh attack on the Bush administration generated much controversy around the time of the film's release, including disputes over its accuracy...” (Source: http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Fahrenheit_9/11)

The “War on terror” is just a false pretext to invade Afghanistan blaming it all on Osama who could not have possibly conducted an attack from Afghanistan. Similarly, no weapons of mass destructions were found in Iraq on which pretext the country was attacked and invaded. The underlying causes were actually the laying of the Caspian Oil Pipe line through Afghanistan and production of the Poppy drugs under the supervision of the CIA, and for Iraq, it was just control of oil and opening the flow of it to Israel through the Haifa pipe line which was closed for years.

Can we just shut our eyes closed to this entire phenomenon? We can't, simply because we are now all tied to a common global problem and have become excessively dependent on other nations produces like food items due to the crazy movement called “Globalization”. The question is who is bound to benefit from globalization game? Bangladesh? You would be naïve to believe it.

2.0. Solutions

The objective of this paper is not just to talk about the problems, but also to seek out solutions. Focusing and considering the present scenario of Bangladesh, we now find ourselves in a position where we are no longer sure which path to choose. We have pretty much tried out all the known political systems and have failed miserably with all of them. Therefore, we are reluctant to try the old methods again. On the other hand, we do not have much time to invent something absolutely new either. Instead, what we can do is identify the major problems and modify or patch here and there to get our country up and running with a democratic government that would function properly the way we want it. Some clues are discussed below.

2.1. Political Parties:

It is now evident that the political parties in Bangladesh are not worth a paisa. All of them are motivated by greed and lust for power and nothing else. Their prime objectives are ascending to power by hook or by crook and then loot the nation left and right. And this process has been going on for decades by BNP, Awami league, you name it.

I say enough is enough. Let's abolish all political parties and ban all political activities in Bangladesh. Instead, let us all accept and move forward with a new concept of democracy that is plain and simple. All we should care about is “One nation, one party”. That's it.

In absence of political parties, there will be no political candidates. Therefore, there will be no need for any political elections for candidates. You may be wondering, then how can we form a government? There is a way to handle this.

“What we really need is existence of public councils and forums. People of different walks of life should automatically become part of the appropriate council based on their academic background, experiences, and interest. For instance, there should be a Council of the Economists, where all the economists and those who are interested in contributing in this area would be members. They will discuss and debate issues nationally to come to a solution when a problem arises. Similarly, there should be a Council of Public Administrators, where the public policies would be analyzed and created. And so on.

Yes, we do need a national representative or a leader or a president, but we definitely DO NOT need any prime minister, or a long line of ministers for different departments; plain and simple. Only the experts in the respective fields and areas will deal with issues in question in open public forums, not in secret board meetings.

All participation would be on volunteer basis and no one will get paid to participate. Now tell me, in a process like this would there be any need for elections? Or Strikes? Political groups? Yes, there will be no need for any political parties. The whole nation would work as a single force aiming at improving their conditions nationwide...”
(Source: <http://javedahmad.tripod.com/docs/hello.htm>).

2.2. The Model

Considering the nature and situation of people of Bangladesh, the best workable solution would be a “Council Based Democratic System”. It means that, instead of elected officials in the government all we need is a group or council of “experts” independently formed to head the respected ministry. For instance, “The Council of Economists” will run and monitor the affairs of concerned governmental ministry. “The Council of Agriculturists” would look after the affairs of the Ministry of Agriculture, and so on.

The graduates of all the universities would automatically become members of the respective councils and they would have their own elected board members for certain term. Non graduates or graduates of other disciplines who are interested in becoming a member could be allowed membership to ensure participation and contribution in the area.

The routine council sessions will be held at the parliament house in regular intervals and will be broadcasted through our media of all kinds, so that the members’ at large or distant members could also participate in decision making process for the nation and get an opportunity to participate.

Under this system, there would be no need for wasteful nation wide elections, and all decisions would be taken in broad daylight through open sessions through meeting agendas and minutes and will be passed on to the concerned ministry for execution or implementation.

This system would not allow Tom, Dick and Harry (Or, Jodu, Modu and Kodu) to intervene in any democratic processes. Nor will they ever get a chance to hold positions for which they are not qualified. All things will be governed by experts in respective areas in a democratic way. All decisions will be taken on the basis for what is good for the nation. No personal interests would get preference at any point.

The good thing about his system is that the process would be constant and the vision of the nation will be long term and effective. There will be no chance for any interference in long term projects and national strategies, as there will be no change in government ever. The whole nation will be focused into one single direction and follow a track smoothly without any distraction.

2.3. The President

Yes, we need a national leader or a president. The leader who would be representing the nation could be an elected one, elected by the citizens in open competition. The criterion will be to elect the best among the candidates based on his or her academics, personalities, and other competitive edge they hold and offer. This position could be for a five year term, but would not hold much power in reality. Because, in a council based democratic system, the country is actually run by the citizens behind the scene. Any decision of the president would not be required. In fact, the country would function even if we do not have a president! But still, we should have one, who would be our ambassador to the world community.

2.4. Presidential Election

Every five year, there will a presidential election nationwide in an open competition among the interested and independent candidates whose candidature would be approved by the security council of the country after all background check. It will be a day long election day when the eligible voter citizens would cast their votes. The majority vote would bring the successful presidential candidate to take oath ceremoniously.

There will be no other national elections besides this presidential election. All other elections will be held internally within the council members of the respective councils. Every council will have a Board of Directors and Executive Committees.

2.5. The Parliament

The Parliament House will be used for regular National Council Assemblies. There will be no more fixed or permanent parliamentary committees as we have today. A special committee will be formed at the time of National Parliamentary Sessions on ad hoc basis. In other words, all the entry doors for crooks, criminals and ineligible candidates will be closed for good. Only the competent candidates with proven track records will take office.

3.0. Comparison

Following chart is a given to understand the difference between the old existing system and the proposed new one.

Sl.#	Present	Proposed
1	There is a powerless president.	Here too will be a president with some powers.
2	There is a prime minister	Prime minister not required.
3	There are bunch of “ministers” for different ministries.	There will be “Chairmen” for different councils heading a ministry.
4	There is a presidential election and the prime minister is appointed by the president.	There will a presidential election and there will also be independent council elections for chairmanship and formation of board of directors.
5	The president is the Chancellor of all the universities of Bangladesh.	There will be Chancellors for each university. The president would not be the Chancellor

		anymore.
6	The ministers are appointed by the prime ministers who are not necessarily qualified to hold the positions	Here the chairman will be of the same discipline and would be pre-qualified by his council members.
7	The chairmen are selected through elections.	The chairman will be an appointed position selected through competitive merit to ensure appropriate appointments.
8	The civil servants enjoy a sense of permanency in job.	No such notion will be there. Incompetents will be removed from positions.
9	There are unrest in normal public lifestyle due to strikes (hartals).	There will be no need for any of them as there will be no political parties to call for.
10	There are foreign interferences through political parties.	There won't be any. All the people would develop a patriotic feeling.
11	There is open and hidden competition among the political parties to gain and stay in power.	There will be no such "power" to fight for as all citizens would participate in political and democratic process at will.
12	Bangladeshis keep distances with other on political ground even in foreign lands and shows sign of disunity.	Bangladeshis will stay united regardless of their background in foreign lands upholding the dignity and good image of the nation.
13	Every five year before the new election, a caretaker government intervenes and cleans the mess of the earlier party government.	There will be no need for the caretaker government to intervene.
14	When things deteriorate badly politically, the military jumps in to take control and declare martial laws.	Since the system will be run by the citizens without any political party influence and there is no appointed terms in the sense we have today, our military would not have go out of their way to enter into political rescue.
15	There is uncontrolled corruption without any scope for any check to it.	There will be no corruption as all appointments will be on the basis of fair competition and on merit. Besides, there will be no permanency of jobs anymore. There will be no political party influence to rescue the criminals.
16	Due to five year term of party based government, many long term projects and plans go wasted when a new government takes over resulting in financial loses when such a project is halted or cancelled.	Since there will be no political motive at any time on any decision taken at the council by the council members, therefore, all projects would get implemented and completed even when the chairman or the board members changes.

4.0. Conclusion

Not just Bangladesh, the whole world should adopt this system of democracy. The democratic systems we have today is actually a “deception” and is meant to cause factions in a nation, not unify it. Besides, different countries have different kind of democratic systems anyway! So, we should have it our way.

“Bangladesh's political scene has been tumultuous since independence. Periods of democratic rule have been interrupted by coups, martial law, and states of emergency.

There is a proverb in Bangla which loosely translates into: If you have two Bengali's you will have three political parties. This is kind of evidenced in the existence of over 100 political parties. Most of these are small, fringe parties formed mostly by a small coterie of like minded intellectuals or politicians who usually have broken away from larger groupings...” (Source: http://www.virtualbangladesh.com/bd_politics.html).

Sorry, no more grouping will be allowed anymore. The idea of “grouping” is a killer for us. Grouping divides and leads to conflicts. As a single nation of Bangladesh, we should do away with all the groupings and unite under a single philosophy, which is best for all of us.

The US practices a strange kind of democracy. No matter who becomes the president, the administration behind the scene remains the same. For instance, Henry Kissinger and Donald Rumsfeld were the advisors to ex-US president Nixon, and they are still in the government! In other words, the people behind the scene administration work permanently until they drop dead. There is no such thing as retirement in US administration.

Even in a country like the USA, there are only two political parties. Although on the surface they show some difference in opinion publicly, but deep inside they follow the same agenda.

We do not want a democracy like this in Bangladesh, nor do we need one like the “Yes Minister” (i.e., British). In those democracies, there is a smell of greed for power and a desire for manipulation of the system. In Bangladesh, we would follow any failed or controversial systems, but develop and enact a new one of our own.

The idea here is, if the echelon is cleaned and remains stable then the remaining branches would also enjoy a better outcome. Elimination of party based politics would yield multi-dimensional benefits for the country and its people. The main objective is to give something useful and meaningful to the nation that could be seriously considered for implementation at a turmoil situation as we are facing today. I fear that Bangladesh is going to make the same mistake again if no new directions are shown. Therefore, this paper is intended to serve that purpose.

5.0. Acknowledgements: All credits and acknowledgements have been given where it is due.

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