

## **Comments and Short Communications**

### **Role of the Media in Good Governance**

*Muhammad Habibur Rahman\**

Until recently the term 'governance' was used as a synonym of the word 'government'. Government is now regarded as a part the most important part though, of the spech.um of governance.

In our Constitution the word 'governance' has been used only once in clause 2 of Art 8 (of the Constitution). The word 'government' has been referred to at as many at twenty-one places. I am not absolutely sure of that number though.

Part II of the Constitution contains eighteen articles that deal with the fundamental principles of State policy. Democracy, human rights, promotion of local government institutions, participation of women in national life, public health and morality, equality of opportunity, duties of citizens and of public servants, separation of judiciary from the executive, fostering of national culture, preservation of national monuments, and promotion of international peace, security and solidarity are regarded as fundamental to the governance of Bangladesh. These principles shall be applied by the State in the making of laws, shall be a guide to the interpretation of the Constitution and other laws of Bangladesh and shall form the basis of the work of the State and of its citizens, but shall not be judicially enforceable.

Part II also contains some socialist principles like state ownership of property, emancipation of peasants and workers, provision of basic necessities, rural development and agricultural revolution, free and compulsory education, and work as a right and duty, etc. In the preamble, as it stood at the commencement of the Constitution in 1972, it was stated that socialism was one of the four principles which inspired our heroic people to dedicate themselves to and our brave martyrs to sacrifice their lives in the historic struggle for national liberation. The preamble was changed by Proclamation order No.1 of 1977. Socialism was then spelt out to mean economic and social justice. In 1977 socialism was not an anathema. It was supposed to have some attraction in public relations of a

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\* The author is the former Chief Justice and Chief Adviser of the 1996 Caretaker Government of Bangladesh.

poor developing country. Soon socialism lost its battle to capitalism. There was great need for a new political potion in the western world. With two drops of honey of good governance capitalism with conscience was offered as a new panacea.

It was in 1989 for first the time that the concept of governance was discussed a World Bank document on sub-Saharan Africa. Good governance in that document was equated with sound development management of a country's economic and social resources. Public sector management, accountability, the legal framework for development, and information and transparency were highlighted as the four key elements in good governance. On the other hand, the failure to make a separation between public and private domain often encourages "appropriation of the public resources for private gain. The failure to establish a predictable framework of law and governance conducive to development, excessive regulatory rules impeding the functioning of markets, misapplication of resources and non-transparent decision-making were identified as the symptoms of poor governance. In 1992 the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries accepted this concept of good governance and tried to link it further with participatory development, promotion of democracy and open pluralistic societies, strengthening of transparent, accountable, efficient and effective national government, reinforcement of rule of law, including fair and accessible legal and judicial system, promotion of independent media and dissemination of information, anti-corruption initiatives, and efforts to reduce excessive military expenditure.

Article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims for independence of media. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right includes freedom to hold opinion without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 39(2) of our Constitution provides: "Subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offense, the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression, and freedom of the press, are guaranteed. The restrictions are quite a few. Was the restriction as to friendly relations with foreign powers a cut-and-paste misadventure or a hangover from the Pakistan's Constitution of 1962?"

With regard to several ascriptive aspects of good governance (and there are many like accountability, transparency, efficiency, empowerment, participation, sustainability, equity and justice), the media may have the most important role in the field of transparency. It may help to make the government more responsive, if not responsible. With regard to efficiency, empowerment, sustainability, equity and justice the media may have an indirect role, though not of mean importance. Recently in several countries including Bangladesh, UK and USA the media's influence on the result of election has demonstratively been found to be enormous. It can help a party to come to power, but it can hardly help to keep that party in power.

Modern journalism has become possible for the invention to printing press and expansion of general education. Printing media started with a mission with the publication of Gutenberg Bible in 1456. Everywhere in the world including our country the Christian missionaries were involved in printing enterprises. Press media started as a mission, then soon it became a profession a noble profession, and now it is turned into a business venture. In a never ending circulation war the newspapers are now more engaged in covering stars and sports than in dissemination of news. Indulgence in prurience and prejudices is not out of bound when profits and returns are calculated.

Present day media Mughuls are coming from all corners of the business world. In our country a lot of newly rich people are attracted to and investing in the media business. Where there is money businessmen generally rush there. There is nothing wrong in that endeavour. Occasionally one may detect a lack of sense of proportion when a rich man is found just for his richness to be occupying the chair of the editorial board of a newspaper without having any contribution either in reporting, writing or editing of the paper. Media men are selling a saleable product which it is hoped they will sell with their business acumen and sophistication. They must have a sense of humor. And a sense of humor demands decency. Because a media man deals with public information and the members of the public repose a trust on him, he is to remember that he is in a position of a trustee de son trust.

Different international organisations including the UNESCO are championing the cause for freedom of the press. The World Press Freedom Committee, an organisation based in Reston, Virginia representing over 40 national and international news media, is working to gain adherence to its 10 - point Charter for a Free Press. It is demanding that there should be