

Governance and Integrity in Election Manifestos of Political Parties in Bangladesh

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Context

Since independence, Bangladesh has experienced different forms of systems and governments – from electoral democracy to military rule, from one party to multi-party system, and from presidential to parliamentary legislature. Likewise, the party system experienced noteworthy changes since the birth of Bangladesh (Jahan, 2015). During the first three years after independence (1972-1975), the country moved from a one party dominant to a single party system. During the 15 years of military rule (1975-1990) the emergence of state-sponsored political parties was observed with the control of government power, allowing multiple political parties to operate in opposition with certain restrictions. After the restoration of electoral democracy in 1991, there was initially (1991-2001) a two-party dominant system which later changed into two electoral alliances led by the two major parties. After a two-year military-backed caretaker government system (2007-2008), a one party dominant system was again flourished since 2009.

Political parties of Bangladesh have so far played an important role in this endeavour. The parties, particularly those in power, have contributed in the development of the country, and along with others, contributed in promoting democracy and good governance as well. Since independence, the major parties have expressed their commitments for establishing democracy and improving governance through electoral pledges, known as election manifestoes. A manifesto is a published verbal declaration of the intentions, motives, or views of the issuer, be it an individual, group, political party or government,¹ through which a candidate or political party try to win an election.² 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. Thus election pledges in manifestos give an overview of plans and policies of parties. The election manifestos create substantial public interests in the election time, as both media and concerned citizens had taken great interests in the manifestoes of the prominent political parties.

The history of the parliamentary elections in Bangladesh shows a landmark with different forms of regime in different parliaments. In those different consequences the election manifesto of different political parties was not structured enough as of now. After the restoration of democracy in 1990, political parties became more organized to flag their commitments to citizens before election. As Bangladesh is trying to establish democratic practice and institutionalize good governance, it may be observed that in the manifesto some statements are directly allied and a few are indirectly linked in promoting democracy and governance.

As a member of the United Nations, Bangladesh is committed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Bangladesh is obligated, under SDG 16, to “promote a peaceful and inclusive society ... provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. The Goal 16 promotes sustainable governance, with specific targets most notably on illicit financial flows (16.4), bribery and corruption (16.5), effective, accountable and transparent institutions (16.6), responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels (16.7), and access to information (16.10).³

The ‘Fundamental Principles of State Policy’, incorporated in the Constitution adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 4 November, 1972, are, among others, to ensure the attainment of a just and egalitarian society, free from exploitation of man by man (Article 10); guarantee fundamental human

¹ Cited from David Robertson, *The Routledge Dictionary of Politics*, Edition 3, Psychology Press, 1890 p. 295, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifesto#cite_ref-4 (accessed on 3 September 2018).

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Election_promise (accessed on 3 September 2018).

³ For details see <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> (accessed on 3 September 2018).

rights and freedom (Article 11); ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life (Article 19); and allow none to be able to enjoy unearned incomes (Article 20). A cardinal commitment of the Government is to establish justice, fair play and honesty in the society by promoting integrity and preventing corruption effectively.⁴

That the existence and activism of multiple political parties is indispensable for an effective democratic system has been identified in the National Integrity Strategy 2012.⁵ It also recognizes their roles in the struggle for independence, war of liberation and establishment of democracy in Bangladesh. It also recognizes that it is crucially important to promote integrity in the activities of the political parties for promotion of integrity in the country. Such integrity involves financial transparency in maintenance of party accounts, conduct of audit regarding fund management and promotion of democratic practices in organizational activities.⁶ Other challenges, as identified in the policy document, include greater responsiveness to citizens' need and avoidance of confrontational politics. This strategy paper recommends for adoption of clearly delineated election manifestos and their proper implementation after election.⁷

As institutions of the National Integrity System (NIS), political parties also have a crucial role in achieving this goal. One of the means of propagating this from their part is the election manifesto where the political parties express their commitments for the above-mentioned goals. An assessment needs to be done on how political parties have reflected such commitments in their election manifestos since the independence of Bangladesh, and to what extent these commitments are met. Keeping in mind the forthcoming 11th National Parliament Election and on the occasion of the International Democracy Day, such analysis is imperative that can guide the participating parties in preparing their election manifestos.

1.2 Objectives and Scope

In this paper an attempt has been made to review the election manifestos of the leading political parties prior to the national parliamentary elections since the independence of Bangladesh in light of the commitments with regard to establishing democracy and governance.

For this review, the election manifestos of parties including Bangladesh Awami League (AL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jatiyo Party (JP), and some other parties have been included that have a likelihood of contesting in the forthcoming 11th Parliament Election to be held in December 2018. Moreover, in doing so all the available election manifestos of the above-mentioned parties since the independence of Bangladesh have been covered.

1.3 Methodology

This paper is primarily based on secondary literature including published books, articles, lectures, election manifestos, news analyses and commentaries pertaining to the political parties of Bangladesh. Moreover, interviews of academics, experts, former Election Commissioner, representatives of political parties and journalists were conducted for further corroboration of available data.

1.4 Structure of the paper

This paper is divided into a number of sections. The first section deals with the context, objectives and methodology. The second section discusses the conceptual framework where the definitions of political party, good governance, integrity and democracy are covered, along with the role of political parties in establishing governance and democracy. The third section reviews the process of developing election manifestos of political parties, and the issues covered in these manifestos pertaining to governance and democracy. The fourth section gives a picture of the reality against the commitments made in consolidating democracy and good governance in Bangladesh since

⁴ Government of Bangladesh, Cabinet Division, 2012, *Commitment for Golden Bengal: National Integrity Strategy of Bangladesh*, p. 11. Source:

http://dss.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dss.portal.gov.bd/page/336a3f1d_47ed_4f41_8135_aa3946fcf744/1.National%20Integrity%20Strategy%20of%20Bangladesh_Bangla.pdf (accessed on 30 August 2018).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40-41.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

independence. The fifth section summarizes the discussion where the major trends of the manifestos have been identified. Finally the last section proposes a probable agenda for political parties in the forthcoming 11th parliamentary elections, with an aim to highlight promoting democracy and good governance in their electoral manifestos.

2. Conceptual Framework

This section discusses the conceptual framework of political party and their roles, particularly in establishing governance, integrity and democracy.

2.1 Political Party

According to the Constitution of Bangladesh, the political party “includes a group or combination of persons who operate within or outside Parliament under a distinctive name and who hold themselves out for the purpose of propagating a political opinion or engaging in any other political activity”.⁸

Political parties have been considered as one of the central components for the proper functioning of a representative democracy (Jahan, 2014). According to Schattschneider (1942), modern democracy is unthinkable without political parties. The key features of a political party include that it is an organized group of citizens who profess to share the same political views (Gilchrist, 1921), endeavours to make the determinant of the government (MacIver, 2013), has the purpose of making nominations and contesting elections in the hope of gaining control over governmental power through the capture of public offices and the organization of government (Huckshorn, 1984), seeks to control the governing apparatus by legal means (Downs, 1964), is organized to gain control of government in the name of the group by winning election to public office (Schlesinger, 1991; Leacock, 1921; Gilchrist, 1921; Heywood, 2002). Political parties are seen as coalitions of elites to capture and use political office (Aldrich, 1995). Parties are often confused with interest groups or social movements, and may seek political power through elections or revolutions (Heywood, 2002).

The major role of political parties are interest aggregation and articulation, forming government, developing and promoting policy position and programs, political recruitment and socialization, representation and mobilization, facilitate accountability of government, connect citizens with the government, parties can create political legitimacy for regimes, conciliate and manage conflict among competing groups, facilitate national integration, and promote political stability (Carothers, 2006; Jahan, 2014; Khan, 2017). In recent years, academics and practitioners of democracy-building projects have highlighted the role of political parties in promoting and consolidating democracy (Jahan, 2014).

Without political parties democracy cannot be established, and at the same time they should have the capacity to represent citizens and the ability to govern for the public good (Norris, 2005). Furthermore, strong political parties are essential for sustaining democracy, as they have quite a lot of important functions to the government (Jahan, 2014).

A free and fair election with all-party participation is one of the main prerequisites of a democratic government. In this process, several entities need to play some fundamental roles to ensure that the people can partake and utilize their voting power appropriately to elect their representatives. Among the stakeholders, political parties are required to perform an important part as they deploy the candidates for the people to vote and also make sure the government carries out their duties as expected to uphold people's rights. The politicians run the executive and legislative organs of the state after being nominated by the political parties and being elected by the people. They frame laws as members of the legislature and conduct executive functions by forming government.

2.2 Democracy

Democracy, in modern usage, refers to a system of government where the citizens exercise power by voting. The term comes from the Greek words *demos* (the people) and *kratos* (rule), literally

⁸ *The Constitution of Bangladesh*, Article 152, http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=367 (accessed on 3 September 2018).

meaning “the rule of the people”.⁹ The most cited definition of democracy comes from the former US President Abraham Lincoln, who coined it as a “government of the people, by the people, for the people”. “Rule of the majority” is sometimes referred to as democracy.¹⁰

Democracy has three forms. In a direct democracy, the citizens as a whole form a governing body, and vote directly on each issue. In a representative democracy the citizens elect representatives from among themselves, who meet to form a governing body, such as a legislature. In a constitutional democracy the powers of the majority are exercised within the framework of a representative democracy, but the constitution limits the majority and protects the minority, usually through the enjoyment by all of certain individual rights, e.g. freedom of speech, or freedom of association.¹¹ Democracy is a system of processing conflicts in which outcomes depend on what participants do, but no single force controls what occurs and its outcomes.

According to Larry Diamond (2016, 2004), democracy consists of four key elements: (a) a political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections; (b) the active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life; (c) protection of the human rights of all citizens; and (d) a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.

However, there is some complexity on practical meaning of ‘rule’ and thus lack of consensus on the meaning of democracy. As a result the debate about democracy has been ongoing for centuries and is constantly developing new understandings, which can be placed into a continuum that ranges from maximalist to minimalist approaches.

The minimalist democratic scholars focus on electoral system and they do not set any condition for democratic outcomes. According to Przeworski (1999) democracy is “a system in which parties lose elections”, and thus the essential value of democracy is the peaceful transfer of power through regular elections. Schumpeter (1950) defines democracy as a method of transferring of decision making to individuals who have gained power through competitive struggle. Popper (1963) argues that democracies are a system wherein one administration can be replaced by another without bloodshed, which indicates elections.

On the other hand, maximalist scholars of democracy identify further characteristics to meaningfully constitute a democracy. They argue that without effective guarantees of civil liberties, elections do not constitute democracy, and that a “procedural minimum” for defining democracy must include not only elections, but reasonably broad guarantees of basic civil rights, such as freedom of speech, association and assembly. Robert Dahl (1971) mentioned three essential conditions for well-functioning multiparty democracy, such as (a) extensive competition by political candidates and their groups or parties; (b) political participation that provides the choice for the electorate to select candidates in free and fair elections; and (c) civil and political liberties that enable citizens to express themselves without fear of punishment. Larry Diamond (1988) included, in the definition of democracy, organizational and informational pluralism, extensive civil liberties (freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations), effective power for elected officials, and functional autonomy for legislative, executive and judicial organs of government.

Despite the many differences in how democracy is defined, there are two basic assumptions of democracy – all people are equal (equality), and all people are free (liberty). In addition, certain minimum conditions must be met in order for a system to be labelled democratic. These are: respect for human rights and the rule of law; collective deliberation, choice and participation; and representative and accountable government. Democracy emphasizes that values should not be forced

⁹ “Definition of Democracy”, www.merriam-webster.com, <https://www.google.com/search?q=democracy+definition&oq=deemocracy&aqs=chrome.3.69i57j0l5.6200j1j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> (accessed on 5 July 2018).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Oxford English Dictionary: *Democracy*; Watkins, Frederick (1970). *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Hardcover), 7 (Expo '70 ed.). William Benton. pp. 215–223, <https://www.google.com/search?q=democracy+definition&oq=deemocracy&aqs=chrome.3.69i57j0l5.6200j1j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> (accessed on 8 August 2018).

upon any people, and stipulates liberty, the separation of power, majority rule, and the sovereignty of the people. Thus it gives primacy to political and moral values of equality, reciprocity, and respect for the views of others.

2.3 Governance

Governance can be defined as the process of decision-making by which decisions are implemented or not implemented (UNESCAP, 2009). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defined governance as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels (UNDP, 1997). It is a process, mechanism or institution through which all citizens and groups put forward their interest, exercise their legal rights, meet their duties and solve their differences through mediation. Governance, also defined in the broad sense, is constituted of traditions and institutions which determine how authority is defined in a country (Kaufman *et al*, 2000). The World Bank's definition of governance includes all processes by which governments are selected, replaced or monitored as well as the government's capability to formulate and implement effective policies, and finally, the respect of citizens and the states for the institutions which govern socio-economic interactions between them.

In general terms there has been no clear consensus or a set definition of governance, but it is widely understood that the quality of governance is measurable, with scholars speaking of "good" and "bad" governance (Farrington, 2009: 249). Being an umbrella concept, good governance is used in the different discussion in a different way. The term can be actually traced from the concepts of Aristotle's "good life" which eventually led to the component of good governance of the present day (Barker, 1964). Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau also indicated to build a peaceful society through their theory of "Social Contract" with the guarantee of the protection of life, liberty and property for all where good life could be ensured. Any action and policy that can adversely affect the citizen's life, liberty and property are now considered as unlawful. Thus, it is important that all state powers should be exercised and executed in a way conformable to the citizens' ideas of liberty, fair dealing, and good administration.

In short, good governance can be viewed or defined as a value-based model made up of components, values, such as transparency, accountability, participation and equality. Good governance can have many criteria and most importantly, its measurement varies and does not have a set framework. This is the main reason why various institutions provide different measurements for good governance, made up of different components, depending on which factors are under analysis.

Different definitions and components are used in aggregating governance indicators, created by organizations putting forth best practices and 'global standards'. However, the major characteristics of good governance may be identified as follows:

- a. **Participation** includes the inclusion of both men and women either directly or through legal representation and institutions. This encompasses representative democracy for all realms of society, the presence of freedoms of expression and association, as well as the existence of an organized civil society (UNESCAP, 2009; UNDP, 1997). It also includes the voice and accountability capturing perceptions of the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government (World Bank, 2010).
- b. **Rule of law** means the presence of a legal framework which is enforced without any partiality or bias as well as an effective promotion of human rights (including minorities). The impartiality under the rule of law applies to the judiciary and the police force, with the absence of corruption (UNDP, 1997; UNDP, 1997), and the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence (World Bank, 2010).
- c. **Transparency** ensures that information is available and accessible in regards to decision-making, including understanding of the consequences of decisions on their respective stakeholders (UNESCAP, 2009; UNDP, 1997).
- d. **Accountability** is an important aspect where government, private sector, civil society, institutions in general is accountable to the public and to their stakeholders (UNESCAP, 2009; IMF, 1996; UNDP, 1997). This is also linked with freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media (World Bank, 2010).

- e. **Control of Corruption** denotes to the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as “capture” of the state by elites and private interests (IMF, 1996; World Bank, 2010).
- f. **Efficiency and effectiveness** means it achieves the needs of society with the results expected while making the best use of available resources (UNESCAP, 2009; UNDP, 1997; IMF, 1996). While applied for the Government, it relates to capturing perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies (World Bank, 2010). It is also related to the **regulatory quality**, capturing perceptions of the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development, as other important characteristics of good governance (World Bank, 2010).

Furthermore, the World Bank (2010) also identify **political stability and absence of violence**, capturing perceptions of the likelihood that the government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including politically-motivated violence and terrorism. On the other hand, UNDP identifies **responsiveness** relating to the timely manner with which institutions serve their constituents, **consensus oriented** requires comprehensive mediation between the different represented interests in society, and **equity and inclusiveness** is the presence of equal opportunity among all individuals in various spheres as components of good governance (UNESCAP, 2009; UNDP, 1997).

In the National Integrity Strategy of Bangladesh, emphasis has been given on the behavioural excellence influenced by ethics, morality and honesty, along with individuals, practiced by organizations as they are the manifestation of the overall goal of the individuals (GoB, 2012).

2.4 Role of political parties in consolidating democracy and governance

Political parties are the gatekeepers and the measuring political barometer for indicating the degree and effectiveness of the practice of democracy and establishing good governance. Political parties are one of the key factors of a stable political system in a country.

It has been argued that political parties remain dominant in structuring the electoral process, governing and the ‘symbolic integration’ of citizens into the democratic process in the effort to consolidate new or recent democracies even though political parties are only one of three generic types of intermediaries between the citizen and the state – parties, interest groups and social movements (Diamond and Gunther, 2001; Schmitter, 2001:71-89). Consolidation of democracy¹² depends on at least one party developing their overall institutional strength (coherence, complexity, autonomy and adaptability) (Diamond, Linz and Lipset, 1994). It has been also argued that democratic government is unlikely and may not be possible in the absence of competitive political parties (Crotty, 1993), and thus political parties are indispensable. Certainly there is a widespread assumption that parties play or can play a crucial role in democratic consolidation.

3. Governance and Integrity: A Review of Election Manifestos

The right to form political parties and their activities are approved in the Constitution of Bangladesh.¹³ Laws provide that no political party can be formed with the objective of propagating any opinion or acting in a manner, prejudicial to the sovereignty, integrity or security of Bangladesh and no one will be allowed to form, organize, set up or convene a foreign-aided party.¹⁴ Laws also provide that political parties having the purpose of participating in the parliamentary elections must be registered

¹² Consolidated democracy refers to ‘a political regime in which democracy as a complex system of institutions, rules and patterned incentives and disincentives has become, in a phrase “the only game in town”, behaviourally, attitudinally and constitutionally (Linz and Stepan, 1997: 15; Pridham, 2000: 20-24). According to Diamond (1995), democratic consolidation means that “political competition becomes fairer, freer, more vigorous and executive; participation and representation broader, more autonomous, and inclusive; civil liberties more comprehensively and rigorously protected; accountability more systematic and transparent.”

¹³ *The Constitution of Bangladesh*, Article 152.

¹⁴ *The Political Parties Ordinance, 1978*, Articles 2(a), 3(1).

with the Election Commission (EC).¹⁵ The laws provide safeguards against the arbitrary dissolution of Parties by the Government.¹⁶ The laws detail out the options of mobilizing funds by the political parties and require disclosure of funding sources and elections expenses alongside statements of the contesting candidates' assets and liabilities. Political parties are required to submit their financial audited report (audited by a registered CA firm) to the EC in every fiscal year.¹⁷

According to the EC there are 41 registered political parties along with many unregistered ones active in the politics of Bangladesh.¹⁸ Although several parties applied to the EC seeking registration keeping in view the upcoming 11th Parliament Election, none of them got approval from the EC.¹⁹ Most of the registered parties obtained registration before in 2008 before the 9th Parliament Election, thanks to the reform initiatives for bringing the political parties under an accountability mechanism through the amendments of the Representation of the People Order 1972.²⁰

3.1 Process of preparing election manifesto

Different processes are followed for preparing election manifestos by the political parties. In case of AL, a sub-committee with a few experts is formed by the Election Working Committee who are assigned for preparing draft manifesto. After the draft is developed, it is shared with the Chair of the party for feedback and revise accordingly. The revised draft is placed to the Working Committee for final approval. Generally, the election manifesto is followed by party manifesto. However, in 2008 before the 9th Parliament Election, AL conducted 36 workshops at different tiers of the local level party leaders and workers to have the views and opinion of the grassroots. This process started back in 2002 after AL lost in the 8th Parliament Election. Through this AL made an assessment as the preparation of drafting the manifesto for the next election. Expert groups who are in the Information and Research Committee at that time prepared a draft of 300 pages. On the basis of that document the final manifesto was developed later in 2008. The election manifesto of 2014 is a continuation of the earlier one.²¹

In case of BNP, the Standing Committee of the party assigns a group of few persons to prepare the draft manifesto. The draft is placed in the standing committee meeting to review and discuss. With the feedback of review of the standing committee that group finalizes the draft and places again to the standing committee for approval. The standing committee finally approves that draft once it gets approval from the party Chairperson. In this process the members of that assigned group discuss with the local level party leaders and also visit some areas to have the views and opinion of the grassroots.²²

In JP first a draft is prepared by an assigned person. In the Presidium Committee meeting the draft is placed for discussion and review. After having the feedback from the Presidium Committee, the draft is revised and placed to the Chair of the party who finally approves the manifesto. No participation of the local committee or views/opinion of grassroots exists in this process.²³

It may be noted that the issues of election manifesto of different political parties are mostly similar, but the phrasings and presentation of those are different. In paper a draft manifesto is prepared by a

¹⁵ *The Registration of Political Parties Rules, 2008.*

¹⁶ The Political Parties Ordinance, 1978 (it is mentioned in Article 6(1) & (2)).

¹⁷ *The Registration of Political Parties Rules, 2008* (Article 9(b)).

¹⁸ There are more than 70 unregistered political parties. The unregistered small parties are not active but generally support major political parties during the election by joining or forming larger political alliances. Source: TIB, 2014; Bangladesh Election Commission website: <http://www.ecs.gov.bd/page/political-parties>, (accessed on 15 August 2018).

¹⁹ Last year seventy-six new political parties applied to Election Commission to get the registration. <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/76-new-parties-seek-registration-1513123> (accessed on 15 August 2018).

²⁰ Almost all the parties made necessary changes in their respective constitutions in line with the preconditions laid in the Political Party Registration Rules 2008, and took part in the election. However, later the registration of Bangladesh Jamaat-E-Islam was declared illegal by the High Court in 2013.

²¹ Interview with Nooh Ul Alam Lenin, Information and Communication Secretary, AL, on 29 August 2018.

²² Interview with Nazrul Islam Khan, Member, Standing Committee, BNP, on 10 September 2018.

²³ Interview with G M Quader, Co-Vice Chairman, JP, on 3 September 2018.

sub-committee of the election committee formed by a party before an election. This draft is then reviewed in the meeting and vetted by the committee before submitting to the party Chair. After his/her approval the manifesto is finalized and declared as the election manifesto. However, in practice this does not happen. In most cases a few of the sub-committee members are given the responsibility to prepare a draft, which may or may not be discussed in the meeting. In all cases the draft has to be approved by the party Chair.

Before going to the discussion on the role of political parties in consolidating democracy and establishing good governance, it is imperative to have an overview of the commitments made by the political parties in their election manifestos over the decades. In this section, the history of flourishing the notion and the gradual inclusion of the democracy and governance discourse in the declared election manifestos of major political parties can be observed.

3.2 Highlights of the Manifestos of Bangladesh Awami League (AL)

Established in 1949, and later named as Bangladesh Awami League after the independence in 1971, this party has taken part in most of the national elections of Bangladesh, except the 4th (held in 1988) and 6th (held in 1996) Parliament Elections. The political agenda of AL in the late 1960s committed to democracy, as emphasized in the manifesto before the election of 1970, which included the six points declaration of 1966 that was mainly focused on the directly elected parliamentary form of government with supremacy of a legislature on the basis of universal adult franchise.

In the 1st Parliamentary Election held in 1973 after the emergence of independent Bangladesh, AL outlined the manifesto highlighting to preserve the basic rights of the citizens, establish an independent and neutral judiciary, institute democratic government, initiate anti-corruption drive to cleanse the administration, rebuild the economy by state investments into agriculture, rural infrastructure and cottage industries.²⁴

In the 2nd Parliament Election held in 1979, AL declared their manifesto emphasizing the economic independence of the citizens and revive the parliamentary democracy. It is to be noted that after the second parliament election till 1990 the fair electoral practice and democracy in politics were obstructed. The then 15-party alliance continued the demand of restoration of democracy (Lenin, 2015).

In the 3rd Parliamentary Election held in 1986, AL pledged to establish democracy and promote democratic institutions for political sustainability; protect freedom of newspaper; ensure independence of judiciary; safeguard the equal rights and opportunity of all citizen irrespective of their religion, cast, creed and community, and upholding justice and basic human rights; institute corruption free administration in the manifesto. In this manifesto AL emphasized on a free and fair election to terminate the dictatorship as well (Lenin, 2015).

After the fall of the military regime in 1990, in the 5th Parliament Election held in 1991, the AL pledged in the election manifesto to establish democratic government and multi-party democracy, transparent and accountable public administration, and ensure the effectiveness of the Constitution (AL, 1991).

For establishing a non-party caretaker government (NCG) system for holding free and fair national elections the AL did not take part in the 6th Parliament Election. After the introduction of the NCG through the 6th Parliament, the AL took part in the 7th Parliament Election in June 1996. The AL election manifesto emphasized on promoting democracy and good governance through transparent and accountable government on the basis of national consensus, party influence and corruption free administration, terrorism free societies, all out initiatives to eradicate corruption, independent judicial system separated from the executive, autonomous radio, television and government-controlled news

²⁴ Shah Mohammad Farid, "Integration of Poverty Alleviation and Social Sector Development into the Planning Process of Bangladesh", UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), https://web.archive.org/web/20090326051941/http://www.unescap.org/drrpad/publication/ldc6_2174/chap4.PDF (accessed on 16 August 2018).

media, privatization of newspapers owned by the government, establishing equal rights for women and children as per the Declaration of the United Nations, repealing laws prejudicial to the equal rights and opportunity of all citizen irrespective of their religion, cast, creed and community and upholding justice and basic human rights.²⁵

In the 8th Parliamentary Election held in 2001 the AL further committed to institutionalize democracy and ensure good governance. It committed that democracy and the rule of law would be further expanded, consolidated and established in all spheres. The National Parliament will be the centre of all political activities. AL also declared to introduce the double number of reserved seats for women in the Parliament and system of direct elections. The AL committed to set up a modern, corruption-free and people-oriented administration for ensuring efficiency, accountability and transparency in all levels to establish good governance in the country. An independent Anti-Corruption Council would be established. The AL affirmed of separation of Judiciary from the Executive. Additionally, AL pledged for the initiative to appoint an Ombudsman. It also committed to make state-owned radio and television autonomous institutions free from party influences, would be made effective, and the freedom of newspapers would be protected. The AL also committed to strengthen the local government through decentralization of the power. Moreover, Zilla Parishad and Upazila Parishad elections would be held on priority basis. Every union Sadar would be made the centre of local socio-economic, administrative and development activities. Every Upazila Sadar would be turned into municipality as full-fledged townships (Sultana and Sultana, 2018).

In the 9th Parliamentary Elections held in 2008, the AL termed its manifesto as ‘A Charter for Change’ containing 23 broad pledges placed against the backdrop of a vision for Bangladesh by the year 2021 where they mentioned proclamations for the establishment of good governance and democracy. Restoration of democracy and democratization of the institutions were the main motto of AL through ensuring transparency, accountability in the administration. The AL promised to promote good governance through establishing rule of law and avoiding political partisanship. Human rights would be established on a strong footing with a view to ensuring the rule of law. It promised again that the number of reserved seats for women by direct election in the parliament would be increased to 100. The participatory approach was prioritized in the election manifestos of the political parties. It also promised that local government institutions will be strengthened through decentralization of power. District Councils, Upazila and Unions would be transformed the headquarters for development and administration of the area. The AL announced insignificantly to ensure the tangible independence and neutrality of the judiciary for the establishment of good governance. The independence of ACC was prioritized in the manifesto. The AL manifesto pledged that strict measures would be taken to eliminate bribery, extortion, rent-seeking and corruption. They would 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. The AL declared the freedom of all types of mass media and free flow of information (AL, 2008).

In the 10th Parliamentary Election held in 2014 the slogan of the AL’s manifesto was ‘Peace, democracy, development and progress – Bangladesh moves forward’. In this manifesto, the AL pledged to enhance effectiveness of the Parliament to establish democracy and ensure accountability and transparency of MPs inside and outside of the Parliament by enacting necessary laws and policies. It affirmed to establish rule of law by elimination of terrorism, communalism and keep the police and law enforcement agencies free from politicization. The AL proclaimed to appoint an ombudsman and enhance the effectiveness of the Human Rights Commission. Also they focused on effective implementation of the laws to stop violence against woman and children, stop discrimination and trafficking. The AL also declared to decentralize the power structure of the local government and administration through reforming the centralized administrative structure and make Zilla Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Union Parishad more responsible and powerful. It committed to expand e-governance at all levels and continue the administrative reforms, initiatives of capacity building of public servants and the process of increasing their benefits. It affirmed to ensure the independence of the judiciary, and enhance legal, political, social and institutional efforts in combating against corruption, and take steps strictly to uproot masterly behaviour, nepotism, bribery, extortion, loan

²⁵ ‘Election Watch: Awami League’s 1996 manifesto’, *The Daily Star*, 28 September 2001.

dodging and corruption. Finally it affirmed to continue the policies on flow of information and freedom of mass media, take initiatives for building people awareness on access to information for more effective IC and implementation of RTI Act. Also the party manifesto focused on enactment of necessary laws and policies to stop misuse of social media and online newspaper and make them more responsible (AL, 2014).

From AL's election manifestos over the years, it may be observed that AL has been able to reflect contemporary issues in its manifestos. It gave emphasis first to establish parliamentary democracy after independence, and later the institutionalization of democracy. The continuity of pledges for establishing governance can also be noted that included rule of law, independence of the judiciary, eradicate corruption, transparent and accountable administration, strong local government, and free flow of information along with independent media. Later recent issues have been included in the manifesto such as preventing abuse of social media, and establishing e-governance.

3.3 Highlights of the Manifestos of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

Formed in 1978, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has taken part in most of the national elections except those held in 1986, 1988 and 2014. In the 2nd Parliament Election in 1979 a broad election manifesto was issued by BNP that included a 19-point program originally developed in 1977 by the then President. This manifesto promised some specific points to establish democracy and promote good governance focusing to preserve the independence, integrity and sovereignty of the state at all cost, to reflect in all spheres of our national life the four fundamental principles of the Constitution – democracy, nationalism and socialism meaning economic and social justice, to ensure people's participation at all levels of administration, development programs and in the maintenance of law and order, to place women at their rightful position in the society and to organize and inspire the youths for nation building, to decentralize the system of administration and development and strengthen the local government, to establish a social system based on justice and fair play and free from corruption, to safeguard the rights of all citizens irrespective of religion, colour and sect and consolidate national unity and solidarity (Jahan, 2015).

In the 5th Parliamentary Election held in 1991, the BNP made certain commitments to help eradicate corruption through appointment of ombudsman, setting up of an independent anti-corruption commission (ACC), and disclosure of assets and properties of all elected representatives (Sultana and Sultana, 2018).

The 6th Parliamentary Elections of 1996 was boycotted by most opposition parties out of demanding a non-party caretaker government system for holding national elections. In this election BNP did not have any particular manifesto.

In the 7th Parliament Election held in June 1996, BNP made commitment to strengthen all state institutions along with all tiers to establish democratic society, and establish transparent and accountable administration. It would continue the efforts to eradicate corruption, and take necessary steps for protecting the independence of judiciary. BNP wished to ensure free flow of information. It would protect constitutional rights to preserve the language, culture and heritage of the indigenous communities and keep continued their social opportunities, safeguard the right of all citizen irrespective of religion, colour and sect. It also aspired to take necessary steps to strengthen, accelerate and self-contained the Union Parishad, and establish Thana Parishad and Zilla Parishad to decentralize the system of administration (BNP, 1996).

In the 8th Parliamentary Elections of 2001, BNP emphasized on the appointment, promotion and posting in administration on the basis of merit, skill and experience in the manifesto. BNP declared to eliminate corruption, committed to appoint an Ombudsman in the shortest possible time, and set up a constitutional, independent and autonomous Anti-Corruption Commission. The assets and property of all people's representatives, the prime minister, ministers and others of equal rank and status would be made public. BNP also stated of separation of Judiciary from the Executive Department. It guaranteed for real autonomy of the state-controlled radio and television. BNP highlighted to strengthen district and Upazila Parishad and re-introduce Gram Sarkar to accelerate development. BNP proposed to raise the number of seats in the national parliament to 500, and increase women's seats by direct election.

Besides, it gave emphasis on the disclosure of wealth of PM, ministers, MPs and others (Sultana and Sultana, 2018).

In the 9th Parliamentary Elections in 2008, BNP's manifesto was titled 'Save the Country, Save the People' that included a 36-point charter of promises. In the manifesto BNP declared to affirm the transparency and accountability and to free the administration from all sorts of political interference without any commitments to the appointment of an ombudsman. BNP committed to make the Parliament at the centre of good governance together with the opposition parties. They declared that decision would be taken by the parliament based on consensus with the national interest. They committed to appoint the Deputy Speaker and the chiefs of parliamentary committees from the opposition. To activate the national parliament, BNP wanted to bring a constitutional amendment against walkout except issue-based and unauthorized absence (BNP, 2008).

BNP committed 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. It also committed for the system of local self-government, 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. BNP's manifesto gave special importance to form an independent secretariat under the Supreme Court, and reform the weak administrative structure in judiciary to prevent corrupt practices and introduce digital database for managing the case management.

The corruption issues and independence of ACC were emphasized in BNP manifesto respectively. 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 MP would have to disclose their assets by giving a statement within 30 days after taking the oath. BNP also committed to forming an all-party parliamentary committee to ensure transparency in the ACC.

As the BNP-led 18-party alliance boycotted the 10th Parliamentary Election in 2014, no election manifesto was placed.

It may be observed that BNP's election manifestos included pledges on establishing an independent Anti-corruption Commission, with particular and continuous pledges of publishing financial information of elected representatives and decentralization of the administration. Moreover, BNP pledged for specific activities and initiatives for making the Parliament more effective while establishing democracy.

3.4 Highlights of the Manifestos of Jatiyo Party (JP)

Since the formation in 1986, the Jatiyo Party (JP) has participated in all the national elections. However, no election manifesto was prepared during the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th Parliament Elections.²⁶

In the 8th Parliamentary Elections JP affirmed of separation of Judiciary from the Executive. It also committed to increase the number of High Court Judges as per requirements and enhance the facilities and benefits and removal of Public Safety Act of 2000, Special Power Act of 1974 and all other black laws. JP placed the affirmation of freedom of press and mass media as similar to the major political parties. It committed to raise reserved women's seat to 64 from 30 after due amendment to the Constitution. JP wished to reintroduce full-fledged Upazila system including Upazila courts.

In the 9th Parliamentary Elections JP promised a corruption and terrorism-free society. JP significantly mentioned the independence of judiciary in their election manifesto. It is said that freedom of the judiciary would be ensured. Judiciary would be separated from the administration. The number of High Court Judges would be increased as per requirements and the facilities and benefits will be enhanced. JP declared to introduce the provinces in the country. Local government, decentralization

²⁶ Interview with G M Quader, Co-Vice Chairman, JP, on 3 September 2018.

of power and rural development administration, particularly Dhaka-based central administration, would be reorganized. Upazila and union councils would be developed into strong local administrations. Introduction, implementation and management of development programs would be entrusted with local government councils. It committed to raise reserved women's seat to 64 from 30 after due amendment to the Constitution. JP included the freedom of mass media in the manifesto (JP, 2008).

In the 10th Parliamentary Election JP proposed to introduce provincial system of government which can be able to replace the present system which concentrates power in one hand. JP declared not only to strengthen local government but also to empowered public representatives. Besides, the party had mandate focusing re-establishment of Upazila court and specially more involvement of Upazila council in development works. JP had the mandate to make the executive and Judiciary completely non-partisan (JP, 2014).

It may be observed that JP has continuously put emphasis on empowering the local government through decentralization of the administration in its manifestos.

3.5 Highlights of Manifestos of other Political Parties

In the Parliament Elections held after the independence, other political parties also declared their own manifestos. In 1973, in 1st Parliamentary Election the opposition parties National Awami Party (NAP-Bhashani) and *Jatiyo Shamajtantrik Dal* (JSD) declared their manifesto focusing to combat against corruption, promote better law and order and reduce price hike etc. (Sultana and Sultana, 2018). Some key pledges of some of the political parties with regard to governance are presented below.

Jatiyo Shamajtantrik Dal (JSD): In the 9th Parliament Election JSD announced a few promises and proclamations for the establishment of good governance and democracy. It committed to establish transparency, accountability, good governance and rule of law through ensuring the formation of all parliamentary committees in the first session, introducing public hearing of the committees, amending Article 70 and ensuring access to information effectively. It also promised to establish a Police Commission to reform the Police Department, ensure effective law enforcement, and take necessary steps for building capacity and effectiveness of the law enforcement agencies. They had mandate to strengthen local government by timely election and keep it free from the influence of MPs and bureaucrats; protect the rights to control over the discrimination and human rights violation and preserve the language, culture and heritage of the indigenous communities and establish land commission and acknowledge their constitutional rights. They also promised to repeal all discriminatory acts against women, introduce direct election in 33% women reserved seats of the parliament, ensure equal wage for male-female and protect the religious rights of all citizens and band the politics based on religious ideology, communalism and Fatwa culture (JSD, 2008).

In the 10th Parliament Election, JSD declared their manifesto promising in promotion of democratic practice and governance. The manifesto was somewhat repetition of the previous one. In addition, JSD stated to increase manpower and training to strengthen ACC and make sure of its independence and also make it mandatory to disclose the details of assets of each MP, President, leaders of all political parties, secretaries of ministries, and all public servants (JSD, 2014).

Workers' Party (WP): During the 10th Parliament Election WP stated to ensure transparency and accountability in every tire of the administrative structure and establish the culture of serving the people. The party promised to introduce e-governance to ensure transparency, accountability in public administration and keep it free from corruption and reform the public administration based on the policy of proper democratic decentralization, transparency and accountability. WP declared to increase the reserved seat to one-third of total and introduce the direct election. Establish a parliamentary commission on gender. WP stated to ensure the free, fair election in time on the basis of the constitutional mandate. WP stated to keep the judicial process free from corruption and politicization. It also guaranteed the appointment of judges on basis of their merit and increase court and rearrange the structure of the process for speedy trial. WP had the mandate of taking necessary step to seize the assets of the corrupt people and ensure the punishment for them. WP pledged to

establish the access to information and enact laws and policies to restraint the misuse of the access to information (BWP, 2014).

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB): The election manifesto of CPB for election held in 2008 included reduction of corruption and bribery, under which it committed to take strong measures to stop corruption from each and every tier of state and society; to initiated the Ombudsman system; to increase the power and efficiency of ACC as an independent constitutional body; and to take punishable action of those who are involved with the foreign company against national interest. It also committed to achieve democratic decentralization of power through effective democratic decentralization, transparency, accountability and effective control by the people through on the basis of which the administrative system of the state will be restructured. CPB also committed to give the constitutional recognition of minority groups; and preserve and flourish the language, culture, law, customs and knowledge of minority groups (CPB, 2008).

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (JI): Since its rehabilitation in politics in independent Bangladesh, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has taken part in most of the national elections. JI's election pledges included build up an honest, able, responsible and accountable administration; reform administrative structure, rules and institutions and reshaped to suit the requirements of an independent Islamic Welfare State; consider efficiency and qualification as standard in respect of appointment of all officials and employees; establish democratically elected local Government bodies and decentralize the administration. They also promised to uproot bureaucratic intricacy, masterly behaviour, nepotism, bribery and corruption from all tiers of administration with an iron hand, strengthen the Anti-Corruption Department and make it independent, enact rigid laws against corruption and exemplary punishment to be meted out against the guilty person or persons. JI stated to separate the Judiciary from the Executive. They also emphasized to repeal all repressive black laws like Special Powers Act and Public Safety Act in order to guarantee the people's fundamental rights, increase the number of reserved women seat in the parliament, and ensure freedom of mass media (JI, 2008).

Bangladesh Nationalist Front (BNF): BNF promised to keep public administration free from corruption and politicization and establish good governance. BNF, the smallest party, pledged to keep the judiciary free from corruption and politicization and establish good governance.

Gono Forum: Established in 1993, *Gono Forum* presented a 23-point program in 2005. This program included establishment of rule of Law, neutral and effective implementation of law, cancel of all laws and rules that contrary to fundamental rights, stop extra-judicial killing, stop partisan-grouping in administration and judiciary, recruitment and promotion on basis of merit and qualification, ensure independence and neutrality of judiciary through the separation of judiciary from executive. It also mentioned making effective parliament through making the parliament centre of all activities and ensure accountability of government, arrange election at local government institution including district and Upazila within one year, strengthen and effective self-govern local government through empowerment. The document also mentioned disclosure of assets and regular monitoring of assets of minister, MPs and leaders of all political parties in order to eviction of corruption from state and all sector of the society. Ensure independence and effectiveness of Anti-corruption commission. Confiscated all money and assets acquire through illegal way including exemplary punishment of debt defaulter and corrupt people. *Gono Forum* wanted full independence of newspaper, radio-TV through removing control of government, ensure free flow of information and enact necessary laws.

Socialist Party of Bangladesh (Bangladesher Shamajtantrik Dal): Established in 1980, the party did not take part in the election of 1986, 1988 and 2014. In 1991 the election manifesto included ensuring independence of judiciary, revising the legal structure for law enforcement agencies, forming a national government structure (Jatiyo Sarkar), seizing illegal assets and income, protecting the freedom of news media, ensuring the effectiveness of the constitutional and statutory institutions. In 1996 the commitments made in the election manifesto were establishing democratic rights, seizure of black money, placing international treaties to the Parliament for discussion, enacting law to segregate the jurisdiction of the President and Prime Minister. In 2001 the election manifesto repeated the same commitments made in 1996. In 2008 the election manifesto included making effective the

constitutional and statutory institutions to establish democracy and governance and ensure social security, strengthening local government, and taking necessary steps for asset declaration.²⁷

Islami Andolon Bangladesh: Established in 1987, the party published its manifesto during the 9th National Parliament Election. It committed to bring in qualitative changes in politics through focusing on party not person for ensuring political stability, national solidarity, and effective parliament. The party pledged for a sincere, honest and perfect leadership to establish good governance. By creating public opinion politics would be free from unscrupulous, corrupt, terrorist and fraudulent leadership. It proposed three-fold punishment for people's representatives, government and non-government officials, and officers of autonomous institutions involved in corruption and terrorism. Political and constitutional commission would be formulated for establishing the integrity in political parties and observing the implementation status of election manifesto as well. Handsome salary, allowance, facility and promotion would be offered to all government staff on the basis of integrity and qualification. Effective Upazila system including Upazila Court would be initiated. The independence of mass media and newspaper as well as security of journalists would be ensured (Islami Andolon, 2008).

4. Establishing Governance, Integrity and Democracy: Reality against Commitments

Theoretically Bangladesh conceives the principles of pluralism, democracy, and a functional multi-party system.²⁸ However, there are gaps between theory and its practice. In Bangladesh, political party has the image of paradoxical role. Political parties have a positive image for their contributions in the nationalist movement, and in restoring democracy in the 1980s. On the other hand, the parties have failed to strengthen democratic practices within their own parties as well as the state mechanism. As explained by Jahan (2015), the role of political parties in Bangladesh are puzzling and run counter to theories of political development. She argues that the political system controlled by two parties or two alliances has created political confrontation and instability, the major parties have never reached an agreement on basic rules of organizing credible elections acceptable to both sides, have not been able to exhibit significant greater institutionalization of parties, and have continued agitation-based street politics demanding overthrow of elected governments despite regular transfer of power, especially after the re-establishment of parliamentary democracy since 1991.

In the light of the analysis of functions of political parties in establishing governance and electoral commitments made by the major political parties of Bangladesh, the following reality can be identified.

4.1 Establishing Governance and Integrity

The Bangladesh Constitution affirms that the State will create conditions in which individuals will not be able to enjoy 'unearned incomes'.²⁹ Bangladesh accessed to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2007 by which it made an international commitment to resist corruption effectively. The National Integrity Strategy adopted in 2012 also emphasizes the importance of preventing corruption and promoting integrity.

For establishing good governance, the ruling political parties have so far undertaken a number of legal, administrative and institutional reforms. The first such initiative was enacting the Government Servants (Conduct) Rules 1979 which puts restrictions on the public officials on a number of issues. According to the Rules, a large number of civil servants including their spouses and children (with a few exceptions) are required to disclose their assets, all moveable and immovable property and liquid assets in the month of December every year.³⁰ Guidelines for public officials in respect to integrity,

²⁷ Interview with Khalekuzzaman, General Secretary, Central Committee, SPB, 12 September 2018.

²⁸ Pluralism as a political philosophy is the recognition and affirmation of diversity within a political body, which permits the peaceful coexistence of different interests, convictions and lifestyles. While not all political pluralists advocate for a pluralist democracy, this is most common as democracy is often viewed as the most fair and effective way to moderate between the discrete values. See Witten (2015) and Flathman (2005).

²⁹ *The Constitution of Bangladesh*, Article 20 (2).

³⁰ *The Government Servants (Conduct) Rules 1979*, Rules 13-14.

fairness, and impartiality³¹; gifts, benefits, and hospitality³²; undue preferential treatment³³; abuse of authority³⁴; and conflicts of interest³⁵ for ensuring the transparency and integrity in public administration have been adequately addressed (TIB, 2017). Due to the lack of effectiveness of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) was set up under the Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2004, with an aim to prevent corruption and other corrupt practices in the country and to conduct inquiry and investigation for other specific offences and to enact other relevant matters.³⁶ Other institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission to ensure human rights and the Information Commission were set up to ensure the right to information of common citizens.

Moreover, ‘The Right to Information Act 2009’, ‘The Public-Interest Information Disclosure Act (Provide Protection), 2011’, and ‘The Money Laundering Prevention Act 2012’ are some of the laws that are aimed to address corruption and promote transparency. Anti-corruption laws are not only applicable to public administration, they are also administered to prevent corruption in the business organizations, civil society and NGOs. To ensure transparency and prevent corruption in government purchases, ‘Public Procurement Act, 2006’ and ‘Public Procurement Rules, 2008’ are followed. Laws, rules and regulations have been adopted for the regulation of non-government organizations (NGOs), industries and commercial establishments. These laws, rules, regulations and practices are designed to ensure integrity of the institutions, organizations and the individuals engaged in them. For instance, for the prevention of unethical business practices of the cartels and syndicates, ‘Competition Act, 2012’ has been passed.

Different regimes took initiatives for establishing transparency and accountability. These include legal obligation of candidates of parliament elections publish their financial information, information on electoral expenditures, introducing citizens’ charters for all public institutions, introducing digitalization for different public procurement and services, introducing ward meetings and open budgeting at local government institutions, public hearing in different public service providing institutions, and so on. The number of reserved seats for women MPs has been increased a number of times. The Annual Performance Agreement (APA), signed between the high public officials and the government, has been introduced as a part of practicing integrity in the administration. The Integrity Award Policy 2017 has also been adopted to encourage public officials in practicing integrity (TIB, 2017).

Through the amendments brought in the RPO 1972, initiatives have been taken to keep political parties under an accountability mechanism by the EC. They have to submit their electoral expenditure and annual financial audited report (audited by a registered CA firm) to the EC by 31 July of every fiscal year (TIB, 2014).

However, it can be observed that despite the presence of a robust anti-corruption structure (both legal and institutional), widespread corruption exists in the country, which is reflected in different national and international surveys on the experience and perceptions on corruption. According to the nationwide household survey conducted by TIB on a regular interval it is observed that the proportion of households experiencing corruption and bribery while taking services from both public and private sectors and institutions continues to be quite high. In the survey of 2017, among the surveyed households that received services from different sectors, 66.5% experienced corruption,³⁷ while this

³¹ *Ibid*, Rule 25.

³² *Ibid*, Rules 5, 6.

³³ *Ibid*, Rules 20, 30.

³⁴ *Ibid*, Rule 27.

³⁵ *Ibid*, Rules 15, 16, 17.

³⁶ The offences scheduled to this law are: Offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947 (Act 11 of 1947); Offences under Sections 161-169, 217, 218, 408, 409 and 477 A of the Penal Code of 1860 (Act XLV of 1860); Offences under Section 109 (abetment), Section 120 B (criminal conspiracy) and Section 511 (attempt) of the Penal Code.

³⁷ TIB, 2018, *Corruption in Service Sectors: National Household Survey 2017*; https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/beta3/images/2018/report/nhs/NHS_2017_Ex_Sum_EN.pdf (accessed on 9 September 2018).

proportion was 67.8% in 2015.³⁸ The survey also shows that 49.8% of the households who received services from different service sectors paid or were forced to pay unauthorised money an average of Tk 5,930 during the reference period.

The perception on the existence and spread of corruption in different international surveys and indices also reflects a similar picture. In Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), Bangladesh's score has been consistently below 30 points on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean) over the years.³⁹ According to the Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) 2013 of TI, 34% of the survey respondents from Bangladesh think that over the past two years corruption increased a lot, while 26% said it increased a little.⁴⁰ According to this survey, 22% of respondents state that their government performs "well" at fighting corruption in government.⁴¹ Two other indicators, the World Bank's Control of Corruption and the World Economic Forum's assessment of Irregular Payments and Bribes, paint a similar picture.⁴²

It has been argued that, among others, there is allegation of impunity on the part of corrupt political leaders that may have provided incentive for the expansion of corruption at different levels. Policies related to transparency and accountability in public institutions are regularly flouted. The willingness of the government to pursue anti-corruption measures is challenged due to some legal limitations, and lack of implementation (TIB, 2017). At different times attempts have been made to adopt amendments in laws that in reality hinder proper implementation of anti-corruption laws, and hamper accountability.⁴³

Despite a number of positive initiatives, the Parliament has not been effective at an expected level (TIB, 2017, 2015). The main opposition has been lacking the capacity and voice to play an expected role in ensuring accountability of the government. The MPs have limited participation in the motion of law-making, question-answer, and notices on public importance. They seem to have been more interested in development and administrative functions at the local level. The Parliament also observes limited participation of female members in different motions. It struggled due to continuous boycott by the opposition. Conflict of interest in the case of some of the standing committee members and irregular meeting of the committees is also evident. Studies suggest limited access to the information in parliamentary business (Aminuzzaman and Khair, 2017). There is the widespread dominance of the Executive in the Legislative process. Poor parliamentary culture and dominant attitude of the ruling party is evident.

³⁸ TIB, 2016, *Corruption in Service Sectors: National Household Survey 2015*; https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/beta3/images/2016/es_nhhs_16_en.pdf (accessed on 9 September 2018).

³⁹ TI, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2017*, https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017#table (9 September 2018). Bangladesh was earlier placed at the bottom of the list for five successive years from 2001-2005. The score of Bangladesh has been somewhat static around 24-27 over the period 2011-16. See Iftekharruzaman, 'Bangladesh in CPI 2016: We deserve better', *The Daily Star*, 26 January 2017.

⁴⁰ TI, *Global Corruption Barometer 2013*, <http://www.transparency.org/gcb2013/country/?country=bangladesh> (accessed on 13 August 2018).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² World Bank, *Worldwide Governance Indicators: Bangladesh, 1996-2014*, <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#countryReports> (accessed on 13 August 2018). The World Bank scores Bangladesh 18.8 for 'Control of Corruption'. According to the *Bangladesh Enterprise Survey 2013*, among 15 areas of the business environment, firms in Bangladesh are more likely to rate political instability to be the biggest obstacle to their daily operations, followed by electricity, access to finance, and corruption. Moreover, 47.7% of the surveyed companies reported bribery incidence (per cent of firms experiencing at least one bribe payment request). See World Bank Group, 2013, *Bangladesh Enterprise Survey*, <http://www.enterprisesurveys.org/~media/GIAWB/EnterpriseSurveys/Documents/CountryHighlights/Bangladesh-2013.pdf> (accessed on 13 August 2018).

⁴³ For instance, the provision of taking permission from the concerned authority before lodging cases against public officials is proposed to be included in the proposed Public Service Act. See *The Daily Star*, 'Public Service Law to protect honest civil servants', 28 August 2018. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/city/public-service-law-protect-honest-civil-servants-acc-chairman-1625443> (accessed on 9 September 2018).

There are significant gaps in implementation especially in the areas of human rights violation, corruption and holding the powerful political elites accountable. Controlling attitude and practices are evident in the Executive to use and control law enforcing agencies, ACC, EC, media, civil society and business by means of shaping legal framework as well as by creating disabling climate. Independent institutions suffer from mistrust and inefficiency which is derived from faulty appointment procedures of the heads and members of institutions, which is mostly made on political consideration (TIB, 2017).

Over the years, the successive governments have been accused of being more and more intolerant and having tendencies to create a controlled environment for the media, business, civil society and opposition political parties. This have been done through enactment of laws such as The Information and Communication Technology Act 2013 and The Foreign Donation Control Act 2016 (TIB, 2017). The ruling governments also did not pay heed to the demand of discarding 'black laws' and provisions that either violate or control human rights. No ruling government seemed to be interested in appointing Ombudsman for different sectors and institutions; the position of Tax Ombudsman was also abolished after a few years.

All the registered political parties conform to the provisions laid in the laws and rules. However, the practice of integrity promoting transparency with regard to finance is still below the expected level (Global Integrity, 2015). The income and expenditure records are not properly maintained by the political parties.⁴⁴ Different studies revealed that parties do not receive donations through bank accounts, as required by law, but receive to the account of party leader(s). Voluntary donations from wealthy individuals and businesses organization for parties is common practice in Bangladesh without any reporting or submission of financial or accounting reports. There has not been any instance of disclosure of financial information by any political party (TIB, 2009; Global Integrity, 2015).

4.2 Establishing Democracy

The major political parties have so far demonstrated their intentions in promoting and establishing democracy in various ways.

It may be observed that all the political parties promote free and fair elections as a means of transition of power. The six-point program of AL in 1966 gave priority on establishing people's rights by formulating a parliamentary form of government through direct election.⁴⁵ Since the independence of Bangladesh, and especially since 1991 all the major political parties have taken part in elections or have waged movements for establishing a free and fair system of elections. Representation of multi-party in the election process is one of the indicators which demonstrate the presence of democracy in the state.

However, on the other hand, non-participation in national elections has also been applied as a strategy to raise movement for establishing a democratic government – either for establishing a parliamentary form of government (BNP during anti-Ershad movements in the 1980s for instance)⁴⁶, or a non-party caretaker government system for organizing a free and fair election (for instance AL during the 6th Parliamentary Election⁴⁷, and BNP during 10th Parliamentary Election⁴⁸).

Movements by political parties has been a key instrument for promoting/ establishing democracy. In 1986, 1988, 1996, and 2008 the political parties led either by AL and/ or BNP successfully formed vibrant movements for credible elections for establishing a democratic government. Different programs including indefinite boycott of Parliament by the entire opposition, strikes, street

⁴⁴ TIB, 2009, *op. cit.* Also see Global Integrity Index 2010, p. 48.

⁴⁵ See http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Six-point_Programme (accessed on 10 September 2018).

⁴⁶ BNP did not participate in the Parliament Election in 1986 as it was organized by the military ruler. Furthermore, the 4th Parliamentary Election in 1988 was boycotted by several major political parties due to the absence of fair environment for the election.

⁴⁷ The 6th parliamentary election was boycotted by all parties because the AL-led opposition political parties claimed that BNP government had rigged the election process.

⁴⁸ BNP did not participate in the 10th parliamentary election because of election was arranged by a party government, as it demanded a caretaker government for creating a free and fair environment.

demonstration, and marches continued until the ruling party government was forced to resign and formulate a caretaker government to arrange the Parliament Election. The BNP-led alliance is still pushing the ruling coalition for the restoration of the NCG system and refuses to participate in any election under the incumbent AL-led government, as it did in the 10th Parliamentary Election.

Furthermore, as a part of the commitment for establishing democracy, the ruling parties have so far empowered the local government institutions, albeit partially, through enacting laws and rules, and elections almost regularly for the last decade. Some efforts can be observed to make the Parliament more functional and effective (TIB 2018).

However, along with promoting democracy paradoxically some of the parties have acted in ways that hampered democratic process. In early 1975, AL moved to a single party (*Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League - BAKSAL*) system where all political parties, including the AL, were dissolved and their members were asked to join this single party. It is widely criticized that this initiative hampered the democratic process of the country as a single-party dominant system not only abolishes a country's political system but also breaches citizens' democratic rights.⁴⁹

Controlling the electoral process and results can be observed as another tendency and practice by most of the ruling parties. Two mainstream political parties were founded by the two military rulers by using the state machinery, most notably the intelligence agencies for increasing the political support to legitimize their activities (Jahan, 2018). The formulation process of these parties followed a top-down approach rather than considering people's demand, 'break away groups' from different parties as well as some retired civil military bureaucrats and technocrats joined these parties.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the three parliamentary elections conducted during the tenures of these army-backed political parties were widely perceived as rigged. Although participation in Parliament Elections is a means of entering in the democratic process, the election was widely perceived as being engineered by the regime where the opposition parties operated under strict control under the ruling government (Jahan, 2018).

This led to the erosion of trust on elections held under the ruling party. The political party that boycotted a Parliament Election in the wake of demanding a neutral election time government, later after coming to power abolished the system. On the other hand, some of the political parties' positions with regard to such demand changed according to the context, especially when not in power.⁵¹ After analysing the trend of participation of political party in national election, it can be said no political can rely on acting government led election.

Confrontational political culture prevails in Bangladesh, although it is observed that political parties have devoid from violent political movements like *hartal* only recently. There is a tendency among the elected parties to treat the Government as a device of their own party to harass the opponents. They have a lack of transparency in fundraising and use of funds. There is a tendency of the criminals and business community in Bangladesh to get in politics to abuse power for personal gain. This tendency has led to criminalization and commercialization of politics in Bangladesh (Aminuzzaman and Khair, 2017). The tendency of using religion for political gain is another common trend. There are allegations of violating electoral rules and code of conduct against most of the political parties (TIB, 2017).

⁴⁹ Uganda Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2011, 'Concepts and Principles of Democratic Governance and Accountability: A Guide for Peer Educators', Published under the project: 'Action for Strengthening Good Governance and Accountability in Uganda'; http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_29779-1522-2-30.pdf?11121919022 (accessed on 20 August 2018).

⁵⁰ Interview with Brig. (Rtd.) Sakhawat Hossain, former Election Commissioner, on 22 July 2018.

⁵¹ For instance, BNP boycotted elections held in 1986, 1988 and 2014 for ensuring a fair environment by neutral government/ NCG but they did not want to arrange an election under neutral government/NCG while they were in power in 1996. Then AL started a campaign to institutionalize a NCG system to organize future parliament elections. As the Sixth Parliament Election was boycotted by all parties, AL succeeded in forcing BNP to accept the NCG system institutionalized through the 13th Amendment of the Constitution. However, the NCG system under which three elections were organized in 1996, 2001 and 2008, was abolished in June 2011 through the 15th Amendment, following a Supreme Court judgment which declared the NCG system as unconstitutional.

With regard to practicing democracy within the parties, most of them do not meet the expected level. There are significant deficiencies of internal democracy within the political parties of Bangladesh. In almost all parties in Bangladesh supreme power is overwhelmingly provided to the party chief. It is observed that in all the large parties the top leadership has been continuing for decades (Khan, 2018). Furthermore, Councillors delegate their power to the party chiefs to select members of all other bodies. Although all the parties' respective constitutions provide formation of local level committees through elections on a regular basis, almost all the parties seldom practice this. Moreover, the parties severely lack proper documentation of these committees.

None of the parties has met the RPO guideline of having 33 percent women in all its committees. Only AL has 25 percent women's representation at the top decision-making body. AL also has a better record in nominating and getting women elected as MPs from the general seats. The representation of religious minorities in top decision-making bodies of parties is also poor in all the parties (Jahan, 2018). Businessmen dominate the top decision-making bodies.

The nomination of candidates for Parliament Elections is also not done through a transparent process for most of the parties. AL and the JI made some effort to follow the RPO guidelines during the 2008 Parliament Elections to get the grassroots committees of the parties to prepare a panel of nominees for each constituency (Jahan, 2018; TIB, 2010).⁵²

5. Concluding Remarks

From the above discussion it is observed that almost all the political parties presented their party manifestos having promises and proclamations for the establishment of good governance and democracy in the country. However, some trends can be identified from the above discussion.

Firstly, the issue of institutionalizing democracy as a commitment in the manifestos varied according to the context. While the emphasis on establishing parliamentary democracy was given during the 1970 elections before the independence, it was shifted to re-establishing parliamentary democracy after 1975. Later the need of establishing effective parliament gradually became prominent in most of the parties' manifestos in view of the growing criticisms on the effectiveness of the parliament in the last decade, whereas establishment of multi-party parliamentary system was given emphasis during the military regimes. Some specific commitments such as increasing the number of women's reserved seats in the parliament or through direct election, making MPs more accountable and transparent through disclosure of their assets have also been mentioned.

Secondly, inclusion of different issues of good governance such as curbing corruption, establishing separation of the Judiciary, administrative reforms, freedom of media, right and access to information, decentralizing the administration through empowering local government, ensuring rights of common people particularly women, children and other marginalized and minority groups have been a comparatively recent phenomenon, especially since the 7th Parliamentary Elections. This can be linked to the lowest position of Bangladesh in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of Transparency International (TI) for a consecutive five years during 1999-2003. Some of the large parties (i.e., AL, BNP, JI) emphasized on establishing an independent anti-corruption body (ACC) while JP and other parties did not offer any specific plan.

Thirdly, specific commitments were repeated in the consecutive election manifestos by the parties. For instance, the idea of appointing ombudsman (AL and BNP), repealing black laws (AL, JP, JI), independence of Judiciary (AL, BNP, JP, JI), disclosure of information of elected representatives and introducing Gram Sarkar (BNP), Upazila Courts and provincial system (JP) were repeated in successive manifestos. The commitment of repealing black laws was propagated by AL, JP and JI before the 8th Parliamentary Election but was not repeated later.

⁵² In AL in most cases the recommended nominees of grassroots committees prevailed, while BNP made no effort to get nominations from grassroots committees. Instead seven special teams were formed under the leadership of the National Standing Committee (NSC) of the party to collect information from the grassroots and prepare a list of potential candidates before the 2008 parliamentary elections.

Fourthly, the election manifesto was declared based on partisan point beyond alliance view although alliance was formed centered upon election. Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish whether the manifestos of the parties under an alliance reflects its position or not. Moreover, although many of the indicators of the good governance were reflected in the election pledges, in most of cases no outline was given the way they could be materialized or how to mobilize resources to implement all these promises of good governance (Haque and Alam, 2017).

Fifthly, although a number of electoral pledges as a part of establishing good governance has been fulfilled by some ruling political parties, it can be observed that some commitments have never been attended to. Such commitments include establishing an effective Parliament, appointment of Ombudsman, repealing 'black laws', making state-owned radio and television autonomous, and disclosing financial information of public representatives on a regular basis. It may be noted that although the Tax Ombudsman was appointed in 2005, this post was not extended by the ruling government in 2010, and thus was abolished (TIB, 2011).

Sixthly, no party has been able to exhibit their commitment to good governance and integrity through its activity, while not in power. Commitments such as disclosing financial information of elected representatives or making the Parliament more effective could have been fulfilled by the opposition that made the same. Even unfortunately, BNP amended its Party Constitution and deleted Section 7 and omitted one of the criteria for becoming a member that went against the party stance against corruption.⁵³ Moreover, no party has ever committed in its manifesto to practice internal democracy.

Lastly, according to a number of experts, declaring the electoral manifesto is still largely a formality for the political parties. Most of the parties do not take it as a serious issue, as little effort and research is spent for developing the document. In almost all cases the election manifesto bears the reflection of the party chief's position. Thus the party after forming the government is not serious about fulfilling the commitments it had made. On the other hand, in a few cases election manifestos have been used as a strategic document to win in the election, and for this ample time and effort was given.⁵⁴ This can be considered as a 'minimalist approach' of the political parties as reflected in their manifestos, i.e., parties concentrated all-out effort on winning in the election in a 'winners takes all' context.⁵⁵

Largely, it is observed that democracy had to go through a hurdle since the independence of Bangladesh. In this journey the political parties have become more structured in their approach and practice. After the restoration in 1990, although political parties specified mandates to promote democracy and governance in their manifesto, in practice all those were not implemented accordingly, and a lot more effort is required to achieve the commitments the parties have so far made.

6. Recommendations

On the basis of the above assessment and discussion, the following recommendations are proposed for consideration by the political parties for establishing good governance, integrity and democracy in the future, particularly for the forthcoming 11th Parliament Election.

1. The immediate outgoing ruling party must prepare a report on to what extent it has fulfilled its electoral commitments made in the previous election and make the report public.
2. Every political party participating in the Parliament Election must make it clear in the manifesto what role it will play to establish democracy and good governance even if it does not form government through winning the election.
3. All the political parties must develop their respective work plans for the implementation of recommendations as laid in the National Integrity Strategy.

⁵³ It stated that people who are convicted under the President's Order No. 8, bankrupt, mentally disturbed, and infamous for graft and crimes are not eligible to become a member of the party. See *Prothom Alo*, 29 January 2018; <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1419716/> (accessed on 12 September 2018).

⁵⁴ Interview with G M Quader (3 September 2018), Nooh Ul Alam Lenin (29 August 2018), Nazrul Islam Khan (10 September 2018), and Professor Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, Dept. of Government and Politics, Jahangirnagar University (2 September 2018).

⁵⁵ Interview with Professor Emajuddin Ahamed, former Vice Chancellor, University of Dhaka (on 8 September 2018), and Brig. (Rtd.) Sakhawat Hossain, former Election Commissioner (on 22 July 2018).

4. The political parties must provide in their election manifestos detail and specific outline for establishing good governance and democracy.
5. The following issues with regard to establishing good governance and democracy should be included in the election manifestos for the forthcoming 11th Parliament Election.

A. Parliament, Public Representative and Political Party (SDG 16.6)

- Ensuring effective participation of all parties in the election, and both ruling and opposition parties to discourage dominant role of the ruling party in the Parliament; one person not to be the party head, government head and parliament head at the same time.
- Giving the opposition more opportunity of participation (appointment of Deputy Speaker, Chairs of one-third of all committees, including the Public Accounts Committee and committees on ministries having higher budgetary allocation to be nominated from the opposition members).
- Enacting a 'Code of Conduct' for the MPs; managing and proactively disclosing information of various activities of the MPs outside of the Parliament.
- Amending Article 70 of the Constitution to ensure the opportunity of freedom of expression of the MPs.
- Keeping the standing committees and different responsible positions absolutely free from direct or indirect conflict of interest. For instance, being a leader of labours or owners and the concerned minister at the same time, or being a government staff getting involved in any profitable project run by public money.
- Disclosing and updating all information related to parliamentary matters including the attendance of MPs, committee reports and parliamentary proceedings to be published on its website regularly.
- Increasing practice of internal democracy of political parties; increasing transparency of financial management; bringing political parties within the purview of the Right to Information Act 2009.

B. Combatting corruption and practicing integrity (SDG 16.4, 16.5)

- Discarding nepotism, vested group interest and political consideration in all the appointment/ selection of Chairs/ Commissioners/ Members of all constitutional and statutory institutions including the ACC; amending the process of such appointment if necessary.
- No legal amendment to be made that may affect the independence and effectiveness of the ACC.
- Making all appointments, promotions and transfers in all government institutions and sectors on the basis of merit, qualification and experience.
- Bringing withdrawal of the cases of corruption and crimes based on political consideration to an end.
- Not legalizing black money in the national budget; bringing back all laundered money.
- Following the Constitutional obligation, appointing Ombudsman at the national level and for all important sectors and institutions.
- Ensuring transparency, accountability and presentation of corruption for successful implementation of development programs.
- Designing and implementing projects that are practical, free from political bias, and in accordance with public need and demand – establishing transparency and practice of open information in all decision making processes while designing and implementing projects; enacting Code of Conduct for all concerned institutions involved in project implementation; keeping the procurement process out of political influence and keeping the elected representatives directly or indirectly involved or influencing in local level development and administrative activities; making necessary amendments to the procurement policy for complete implementation of e-procurement.

C. Independence of judiciary and rule of law (SDG 16.3)

- Taking a consolidated and all-encompassing strategy for increasing the professional advancement and effectiveness of the judiciary, administration and law enforcement agencies; making necessary amendments to ensure involvement of all stakeholders.
- Making the judiciary independent from the executive and neutral in real sense.
- Setting up a separate secretariat for the judiciary; ensuring appointment and promotion of honest, meritorious, highly qualified and efficient persons as judges.
- Enacting and effectively implementing a specific, transparent, neutral and objective appointment policy in appointing Justices in the High Court.
- Discarding all laws and provisions that violate human rights and encroach accountability; avoid enacting laws and provisions that violate human rights and encroach accountability.
- Preventing all kinds of human rights violation including extra-legal killing, forced disappearance and arbitrary arrest.

D. Public Administration and Local Government (SDG 19.7)

- Ensuring recruitments, promotions and posting in public administration only on the basis of qualification and efficiency; undertaking necessary training, ensuring positive and negative incentives through updated performance evaluation mechanism for all government staff along with the public administration.
- Establishing a neutral and independent Local Government Commission to make the local government institutions empowered, dynamic and accountable.
- Discarding the provision of MPs of local constituencies as advisor in the activities of Upazila Parishad.

E. Rights of women, minorities, disable and marginalized (SDG 16.7)

- Putting an end of using religion and tradition of use of woman, children and students in gaining political benefits.
- Amending all discriminatory legal, institutional and administrative structure for all marginalized groups including woman, minorities and handicapped.
- Ensuring effective woman empowerment through institutional reforms; increasing the number of the woman reserved seat in the Parliament to 33%; direct election to be introduced for the reserved seats.
- Giving the indigenous communities constitutional recognition; reforming discrimination in constitutional, legal and institutional systems to the indigenous; taking effective and affirmative action to implement the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord.

F. Right to Information, freedom of expression and independence of media (SDG 16.10)

- Ensuring independence of media; no law to be enacted which can be contrary to the independence of media; ensuring safety and security of media activists.
- Enacting no law and provisions that can create any obstacle in access to information, and hamper freedom of expression (such as Clause 57 of ICT Act); discarding laws and provisions that can create any obstacle in implementation of RTI Act and freedom of expression (such as repressive clauses of Digital Security Act and Clause 14 of Foreign Donation Control Act).
- Making business, political party, (barring certain exceptions of secret information important for the security of the state) law enforcing agencies, armed forces and all intelligence agencies, and media included under the purview of the RTI Act.
- Ensuring proactive disclosure of information by government, semi-government and autonomous institutions.
- Undertaking necessary training and awareness activities to increase supply and demand of information and performance.

- Undertaking initiatives of publicity to implement the Public Interest Related Information Disclosure (Protection) Act 2011.
- Giving autonomy to the state-owned radio and television channel.

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Annex 1: Highlights of Election Manifestos of Major Political Parties on Governance and Integrity

Highlights of AL Manifesto (1970-1991)

Issues	1970	1973	1979	1986	1991
<i>Effective Parliament</i>	Establish directly elected parliamentary form of government		Revive the parliamentary democracy	Establish democracy and promote democratic institutions for political sustainability	Make sure of effectiveness of the constitution
<i>Institutionalizing Democracy</i>		Institute democratic government		Free and fair election to terminate the dictatorship	Establish democratic government and multi-party democracy
<i>Good governance / Transparency & Accountability</i>					Institute transparent and accountable public administration
<i>Rule of Law</i>					
<i>Curbing Corruption</i>		Initiate anti-corruption drive to cleanse administration		Institute corruption free administration	
<i>Independence of Judiciary</i>		Establish an independent and neutral judiciary		Ensure independence of judiciary	
<i>Freedom of Mass media</i>				Protect freedom of newspaper	
<i>Access to information</i>					
<i>Women's empowerment</i>					
<i>Underdeveloped Regions and Communities</i>					
<i>Preserve Human Rights & ensure empowerment of people</i>		Preserve the basic rights of citizens	Economic independence of citizens	Safeguard the equal rights and opportunity of all citizen irrespective of their religion, cast, creed and community, and upholding justice and basic human rights	
<i>Strengthen Local Government</i>					
<i>Administrative Reforms</i>	Institute provincial autonomy				

Highlights of AL Manifesto (1996-2014)

Issues	1996	2001	2008	2014
<i>Effective Parliament</i>				Enhance effectiveness of the Parliament to establish democracy and ensure accountability and

Issues	1996	2001	2008	2014
				transparency of MPs inside and outside of the Parliament by enacting necessary laws and policies
<i>Institutionalizing Democracy</i>		Expansion, consolidation and establishment of democracy		
<i>Good governance / Transparency & Accountability</i>	Establish transparent and accountable government on the basis of national consensus	Appoint an Ombudsman	Ensuring transparency, accountability in the administration	Ensure disclosure of earning sources and asset details of all citizens, NGOs, foreign aid CSOs and prohibit the political involvement of these entities and appoint an ombudsman
<i>Rule of Law</i>	Establish terrorism free societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of rule of law in all spheres • Take strong measures to uproot violence, improve law-and-order situation 	Establishing rule of law by avoiding political partisanship	Eliminate terrorism, communalism and keep the police and law enforcement agencies free from politicization
<i>Curbing Corruption</i>	All out initiatives to eradicate corruption	Establish independent Anti-Corruption Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize independence of ACC, take strict measures to eliminate bribery, extortion, rent-seeking and corruption • Introduce computerization for minimizing corruption 	Enhance legal, political, social and institutional efforts in combating against corruption.
<i>Independence of Judiciary</i>	Independent judicial system separated from the executive	Separate the Judiciary from the Executive Department	Ensure the tangible independence and neutrality of the judiciary	Ensure independence of the judiciary
<i>Freedom of Mass media</i>	Institute autonomous electronic media and government-controlled news media, privatization of govt.-owned newspapers	Establish autonomous media free from party influences and protect freedom of newspapers	Ensure freedom of all types of mass media and free flow of information and discontinue discrimination in distribution of advertisements on partisan consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the policies on freedom of mass media • Enact necessary laws and policies to stop misuse of social media and online newspaper and make sure of the necessary incentives for the newspaper industry promotion
<i>Access to information</i>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the policies on flow of information • Take initiatives for building people awareness on access to information for more effective IC and implementation of RTI Act

Issues	1996	2001	2008	2014
Women's empowerment	Establish equal rights for women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve women's rights, dignity and stringent measures to stop violence against women • Introduce double number of reserved seats for women in the Parliament and system of direct elections 	Increase the number of reserved seats for women by direct election in the parliament and prioritize participatory approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure effective implementation of the laws to stop violence against woman and stop discrimination and trafficking • Preserve the rights and freedom of women in workplace • Encourage women entrepreneurship in commerce and service sector
<i>Underdeveloped Regions and Communities</i>	Repeal laws prejudicial to the equal rights and opportunity of all citizen irrespective of their religion, cast, creed and community and upholding justice and basic human rights	Protect equal rights for all religious and ethnic minority communities.	Terrorism, discriminatory treatment and human rights violations against religious and ethnic minorities and indigenous people must come to an end permanently	Protect constitutional rights to control over the discrimination and human rights violation and preserve the language, culture and heritage of the indigenous communities.
<i>Preserve Human Rights & ensure empowerment of people</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserve children rights • Create extensive job opportunities for unemployed 	Ensure just wage for workers	Ensure human rights on a strong footing	Enhance effectiveness of the human rights commission
<i>Strengthen Local Government</i>		Decentralization of the power by establishing four-tier autonomous democratic local governments	Strengthen LG through decentralization of power	Decentralize the power structure of the local government and administration through reforming centralized administrative structure
<i>Administrative Reforms</i>	Reduce party influence and establish corruption-free administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a modern, corruption-free and people-oriented administration • Raise age-limit for government service to 60 years in stages 	Introduce the system of local self-government and improve standard and quality of civic facilities	Expand e-governance at all level and continue the administrative reforms initiatives of capacity building of public servants and the process of increasing their benefits

Highlights of BNP Manifesto

Issues	1977	1991	1996	2001	2008
<i>Effective Parliament</i>				Raise the number of seats in parliament to 500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint the deputy speaker and the chief of parliamentary committees from the opposition parties • Establish good governance under the process of lively parliament • Forming an all-party parliamentary committee to ensure transparency in the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC)

Issues	1977	1991	1996	2001	2008
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring a constitutional amendment against walkout except issue-based and unauthorized absence.
<i>Institutionalizing Democracy</i>	Preserve the independence, integrity and sovereignty of the state at all cost and reflect in all spheres of our national life the four fundamental principles of the Constitution, Democracy, Nationalism, and Socialism meaning economic and social justice		Strengthen all state institutions along with all tires to establish democratic society		
<i>Good governance / Transparency & Accountability</i>		Appoint ombudsman and introduce disclosure of assets and properties of all elected people's representatives	Establish transparent and accountable administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint Ombudsman in the shortest possible time • The assets and property of all people's representatives, the prime minister, ministers and others of equal rank and status will be made public 	MPs will have to disclose their assets by giving a statement within 30 days after taking the oath
<i>Rule of Law</i>	Establish a social system based on justice and fair play and free from corruption				Ensure law and order situation and combat terrorism to protect the life, liberty and dignity of the people
<i>Curbing Corruption</i>		Help to eradicate corruption and set up an independent ACC	Continue the efforts to eradicate corruption	Recast the Anti-Corruption Bureau and set up a constitutional, independent and autonomous Anti-Corruption Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake strict measures to block the sources of corruption • Bring transparency and accountability in the government transactions and state owned enterprises
<i>Independence of Judiciary</i>			Take Necessary steps for protecting the independence of judiciary	Separate the Judiciary from the Executive Department.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reform the weak administrative structure in judiciary to prevent corrupt practices • Introduce digital database for managing the case management and • Form an independent secretariat under the Supreme Court.
<i>Freedom of Mass media</i>				Ensure real autonomy of the state-controlled Radio and Television and	

Issues	1977	1991	1996	2001	2008
				advancement of responsible Radio, TV and newspaper in the private sector	
<i>Access to information</i>			Ensure free flow of information		
<i>Women's empowerment</i>	Place women at their rightful position in the society			Increase women's seats by direct election	
<i>Underdeveloped Regions and Communities</i>	Safeguard the right of all citizen irrespective of religion, color and sect and consolidate national unity and solidarity		Protect constitutional rights to preserve the language, culture and heritage of the indigenous communities and keep continued their social opportunities		
<i>Preserve Human Rights & ensure empowerment of people</i>	Ensure people's participation at all levels of administration, development programs and in the maintenance of law and order		Safeguard the right of all citizen irrespective of religion, color and sect		Ensure people's direct participation in development programs under the administrative structure of full-fledged representation of the populace
<i>Strengthen Local Government</i>	Strengthen local government		Take necessary steps to strengthen, accelerate and self-contained the Union Parishad	Strengthen Zila and Upazila parishad and re-introduce Gram Sarkar to accelerate development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institute system of local self-government and administrative decentralization • Reintroduce the Gram Sarkar system under the framework of local government
<i>Administrative Reforms</i>	Decentralize the system of administration		Establish Thana Parishad and Zilla Parishad to decentralize the system of administration	Establish the system of appointment, promotion and posting in administration on the basis of merit, skill and experience	Free the administration from all sorts of political interference

Highlights of JP Manifesto

Issues	2001	2008	2014
<i>Effective Parliament</i>			Introduce provincial system of government which can be able to replace the present system which concentrates power in one hand
<i>Institutionalizing Democracy</i>			
<i>Good governance / Transparency & Accountability</i>			

Issues	2001	2008	2014
<i>Rule of Law</i>			
<i>Curbing Corruption</i>		Establish corruption and terrorism- free society	
<i>Independence of Judiciary</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate the Judiciary from the Executive Department. • Increase the number of High Court Judges as per requirements and enhance the facilities and benefits and • Remove of the worst black law of the century- Public Safety Act of 2000, Special Power Act of 1974 and all other black laws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure freedom of the judiciary by separating from the administration • Increase number of High Court Judges as per requirements and enhance the facilities and benefits 	Make the executive and Judiciary completely non-partisan
<i>Freedom of Mass media</i>	Ensure freedom of press and mass media	Ensure freedom of press and mass media	
<i>Access to information</i>			
<i>Women's empowerment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the Family Courts to protect the women rights • Increase reserved women seat to 64 from 30 after due amendment to the constitution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen functioning of the Family Courts would to protect the women rights • Increase reserved women seat to 64 from 30 after due amendment to the constitution 	Safeguard the rights of women
<i>Underdeveloped Regions and Communities</i>			
<i>Preserve Human Rights & ensure empowerment of people</i>		Safeguard right of the followers of all religion	
<i>Strengthen Local Government</i>	Reintroduce full-fledged Upazila system including Upazila courts		Re-establishment of Upazila court and specially more involvement of Upazila council in development works
<i>Administrative Reforms</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the provinces in the country • Decentralize power and rural development administration, particularly Dhaka-based central administration 	