

The Patterns of Influence of Political Parties on the Local Self-government Elections in Bangladesh: Some Policy Suggestions

Dr. Tareque M. Taufiqur Rahman¹

Dr. Md. Habibullah²

Abstract: The idea of local government had followed the establishment of 'modern government' in different states of the world. Though the local government units were, absolutely, the 'local agents' of the central (State) government, even then, those were a sort of achievement of the 'local people'. Through these local government units the local people, at least, attained some administrative or official facilities. The idea of 'local self-government' came later to the existence to ensure the control and participation in the 'purely local issues' by the local people. 'The local issues and activities would be administered or governed by the representatives of the local people, not by the central government,' was the basic spirit of the concept of local self-government. The local self-government units are functioning in Bangladesh, least or best, from the very inception of the country. In the recent years, the major political parties are significantly intervening in the elections of the local self-governments (LSGs). The present article has studied primarily that new dimension of LSG on Bangladesh perspective and offered some suggestions to address that new phenomenon

Introduction

The Local Self-governments are indispensable parts of any democratic state. Democratic states need powerful and effective local self-government where the local people can participate in local socio-economic and political development activities. The effective Local Self-Governments (LSG) builds up the foundation of democracy at the root level along with all aspects of local development process. So the democracy, for this reason, needs strong, active and powerful LSGs. The LSG is considered as the infra structure of democracy. But the realities of over populated developing countries are different on the local self-governance point of view. As the LSG in those countries enjoys less power and authority, it could not stand on a strong foundation. Eventually it could not be effective in local development process. Moreover it has a nominal financial authority for imposing tax and making budget for local area. It, absolutely, depends on the central authority for the almost

1 Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh.

2 Lecturer, Department of Government & Politics, Asian University of Bangladesh.

development allotments. Since the central authority does not want to strengthen enough the LSG fearing to lose their popularity at the root level, the LSG failed to draw the proper attention from the central authority due to this misconception. Such type of misconception has been increased during the democratic regimes. Obviously it is a matter of regret that all the major political parties were in favor of the autonomous LSG from the very beginning of independent Bangladesh, but they did not implement autonomous LGS when they were in the state power. But it is a reality that the central authority and the political parties show enough interest and attention to the LSG elections. It is considered that the election is a bridge between the political parties and the local people.

Though the influence of political parties on the LSG elections is a common feature of the indigenous politics of Bangladesh, it is, still, to be measured properly, its depth to be revealed in the right way. This influence was limited in the rural power structure based local politics and its leadership which was not considered as a part of formal political process. That is why, there was no proper attention and interest of the experts, the media, the civil society and others on the influence of local leadership. From the very beginning of democratic restoration in 1991 the local level politics has got a direct link with the national level politics. Involvement or relation with the national political parties is regarded as an important factor to influence the rural classical power structure. At the same time the national political parties needed to spread out the organization at the root level to contest in power politics, which is the fundamental way of democratic process. After the independence every political party tried to expand its activities and capture the seats of power. The political parties concentrated their activities on the villages in order to attract the loyalty of people. Political parties, for this reason, had to pay give attention to the LSG elections because the local self-government election is the focal point of local politics. The Local elites try to expose their ability of influence in their locality with their political affiliation. Political parties also try to set up their strong organization in local areas with the help of the local elites. Actually both of them want to be benefited through the role of each other. Eventually the influence of local area has been shifted from classical rural elites to local political leaders who are also the inheritants of rural elites. As a result, local political elites have occupied the fields of influence in local area. This is why the experts, the intellectuals, the media, the civil society and other parts of citizens need to pay a proper attention to the influence of political parties

in the LSG elections. And such type of influence might be a new phenomenon of indigenous politics of Bangladesh, but this is not a new experience for some other developing countries like India.

Objectives

1. To offer the present situation of influence of political parties on LSG elections;
2. To identify the degree of influence of political parties on LSG elections;
3. To understand the attention and interest of political parties in this context;
4. To find out the patterns of influence of political parties on the LSG elections;
5. To consider some policy suggestions;
6. To suggest steps for such kind of practice of political parties.

Research Methodology

Necessary information and data related to this work have been collected from the secondary sources like news papers, published books, articles, unpublished research works and government documents.

Limitations

The role and influence of political parties on LSG elections is not legitimate and formal. So providing observation, evaluation and suggestions would be risky as there is a little proper exercise.

Operational Definition: Influence

Influence, in its simple sense, whether from the social or political point of view or any reason it may have, means the diversion of the behaviors of a particular person or group. General elements of the definition of influence in different fields of social science are: (a) That influence would start a change or it would turn the previous decision, ethics or behavior. (b) Practice of influence (influential activities) will not harm own principles rather it harms others.

According to Morton, 'Influence is not an invisible act of a person; it is a process to mix up two or more persons.' According to the social scientists and political scientist, there is difference between the power and influence, though it is not visible easily. These two concepts are very

close but not same. According to Morton, "In case of 'hierarchy' power, status, position etc may create an 'inter personal influence' but it cannot ensure the limit to judge the influence. On the other hand, H. A. Simon, in his book "Notes on the Observation and Management of Political Power", shows power and influence as synonyms. H. D. Lasswell strongly says, "to study politics means the study of influence and influential.

There are different opinions among the analysts regarding the basement of influence the way of practicing and measuring it. Changing behavior of influenced persons for different reasons such as using suggestions, instead of 'oppression' or formal authority, its practice, imitation etc are called 'influence' not power. Though the value of yield to someone gives the pleasure or service to the influential and powerful persons, punishment is not so severe in case of influence.

This present research will treat influence as the direct but unlawful process of biasing the decision of local voters to take part in local elections. It will highlight the influence of political parties who try to bias the local administration, the mass media and work in favor of them.

Related Issues: Western & Developing World's Perspective

One school of thought in India believed that political parties should be kept away from the politics of Panchayati Raj. It was feared that the association of political parties with the Panchayati Raj would create new problems in the working of these institutions and that the philosophy of Panchayati Raj, viz. to take Swaraj to the people, to become active participants, in the building of a new life, would not be achieved.

It was further argued that the problems and tasks that the village Panchayat normally faces do not call for party solutions, rather they transcend party divisions. Parties and their programmes and politics are hardly relevant to them. Parties create dissensions where unity is called for and exaggerate differences where they should be minimized, parties often put party interest over the national interest.

Supporters of parliamentary democracy reject such arguments on the ground that they are visionary and are likely to lead to some form of totalitarianism. They feel that parliamentary democracy based on organized political parties and direct elections is the only and certain means of effective government. Dr. M.N. Lakshminarasaya observed "when once power is decentralized and authority for Local Government

is vested in statutory constituted institution, it is impossible to conceive of a political vacuum there. In an open society like ours, one cannot keep pockets of political vacuum. In spite of all our efforts, like air, politics will rush in."

Panchayati Raj institutions have to perform many developmental activities, which largely depend on the powers given to these institutions. So long these institutions had little power, there was little reason for political parties to have any interest in them, but once their powers were increased, parties were inevitably drawn to them. It is thus a mistake to think that villagers are constantly being "exploited" by political parties. It is no less true that village functions exploit political parties.

Panchayati Raj of India is the training ground for leadership and political career and serves as a step toward levels of political hierarchy. This is possible only when the leaders of Panchayati Raj are actively associated with political parties. Many of the present leaders at the state and national level have started their career in Panchayati Raj institutions.

Studies on local self-government of countries like U.S.A. and U.K. show that political parties have assumed an active role in the elections of members of rural local self-governments. The party organizations in the U.S.A. are well connected from rural to the national level. However, their working is being criticized on the ground that they complicate any formal discussion of functions and undermine the "localness" of local Government. Though the elections are conducted on a party basis, the councilors once elected act as independents.

The parliamentary system of government of India necessitates the association of political parties with Panchayati Raj institutions to keep the power linkage from village to the State and to the Centre. The village leaders depend upon the leaders at the state level for getting government aid which they can utilize in the village and strengthen their influence and power. In return the leaders at the State and even at the Centre depend on the Panchayati Raj functionaries for their success in elections. Therefore a close examination would disclose that whenever power has been decentralized both in the developed and developing countries, it has engendered? politics. Those who treat this as an unnatural development ignore the character of power itself and its psychology and mechanism.

Political Party based Results of Different LSG Elections in Bangladesh

LSG elections should have a non political character according to the prohibition of Election Commission (EC). But recently in Bangladesh it is not being followed and political parties are showing a lot of interest to these elections. On the other hand the media has given positive response to the intention of political parties and published news of the LSG elections in a political way. This is why the LSG elections have got a political character. The following tables containing the results of the LSG elections indicate this tendency.

Table-1: Result of Upazilla Parishad election 2009

Name of the party	Secured (chairman) seat
Awami Leauge (AL)	313
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	93
Jatiya Party (Ershad)	17
Jamaat	21
Others	19
Total	475

Source: The Daily Ittefaq, Dhaka, 24th January, 2009.

Table-2: Result of Pouroshava election 2011

Name of the party	Secured (Mayor) seat
Awami Leauge (AL)	111
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	104
Jatiya Party (Ershad)	1
Jamayat	5
Neutrul	15
Total	237

Source: The Daily Ittefaq, Dhaka, 7th February, 2011

Table-3: Result of Union Parishad election 2011

Name of the party	Secured (Chairman) seat
Awami Leauge (AL)	2101
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	1618
Jatiya Party (Ershad)	84
Jamayat	129
Others	83
Neutrul	247
Total	4262

Source: The Daily Jugantor, Dhaka, 7th July, 2011

Pattern of influence of political parties on the LSG elections

Local self-government system is an important element for practices and development of democracy at the root level. Though practice of democratic values is absent in local self-government in Bangladesh perspective but it is true that the LSG is an essential institute for participation of root level people in local politics and development functions. For this reason political parties of Bangladesh have interested regarding the root level socio-economic and political issues so that they can protect their support at the root level which is very significant for power politics. Power and politics go hand in hand. So, political parties are compelled to give attention to the LSG which is organized and operated by the root level mass people. This is one of the most priorities for political parties. They expect that their nominated or supported candidate must win at LSG elections like Union Parishad (UP), Upazilla Parishad (UZP) and City Corporation for retaining their popularity and strength at the local level. Political parties take different methods for the selection of the candidates. Parties give importance to personal qualities and economic position. Most of the candidates are selected on the basis of their popularity in the local areas. Thus political parties could be organized by their supporters and try to do everything for their candidates. Because political parties think that the elections provide a good opportunity for them to seek power as representatives of the people. For this reason position of the political parties according to result in those elections is considered as significant for future politics in local areas. No political party wants to receive unexpected result from those elections. Various types of strategies are taken by major political parties for wining

these positions. Therefore political clash, case filling against the opposition and use of black money in elections is being increased. And such type of tendencies is destroying the local peaceful life. The LSG elections, however, are considered as a challenge for the ruling party. So, they want not only to give support to their own candidates but also try to do everything for gaining their position by dint of local administration and other parameters of manipulation. This experience has been repeating since the very beginning of democratic regime after the independence of Bangladesh. At the same time this experience could hardly bring any positive attainment of socio-economic and political development in Bangladesh. Because this type of process has been operated in the wrong way. Since the LSG of Bangladesh has not awarded financial liberty yet, the LSG is to depend on the central authority. Proper coordination between the LSG and the central authority is very much important for attaining any development grant for the local area of this country. In addition, in any effective initiative and development function might be achieved through a good relation with the ruling party and their local representatives. This type of interest and interference of political parties to the LSG elections are not insignificant but it has not developed properly due to the illegal and unlimited interference by the ruling positions. That is why this interest of political parties to the LSG is being considered as indisciplined from the democratic point of view. The system of LSG of Bangladesh has been suffering severely because of the problematic tendency of major political parties in spite of genuine obligations to the EC prohibitions. So, the LGS system is going to be paralyzed in case of its role playing in local socio-economic and political development. And recently this tendency has increased in the UZP, the Pourashova, the UP and the City Corporation elections. Meanwhile it is being observed that the media has given a lot of importance to the election of the LSG on the political basis and it has been appreciated significantly by the local people. Some of them have tried to show argument in favor of this tendency. On the other hand most of the media have shown the negative reactions to the tendency. In fact no candidate could contest in the LSG elections with a direct nomination of political parties according to the EC provisions. At the same time no one can use either political party monogram or the photo of respective leaders according to the same provision. Actually there is no opportunity for any body to contest in the LSG election under the banner of any political party. It would be direct violation against the present law, if some body does so. But the major competitors are violating this law by dint of the

weak points of the EC rules. The LSG elections have been operated nonpolitically during the long past. It is also being identified as a socio-economic tradition of rural Bangladesh which is the potential field in generating new leadership for local area. For this reason the EC has introduced a prohibition against the practice of political party-based competition in the LSG elections considering the indigenous socio-cultural and traditional history of Bangladesh. But the major political parties were ignoring the endeavor of the EC. The ruling and the main opposition parties had formed a central committee for the selection of the candidates for the UZP and City Corporation elections and that committee selected candidates for their respective party through the media declaration. The selected candidates were treated as the fellow of respective party in local area and local respective political leaders framed election plan in favor of those candidates. Recently both of the major parties have compromised with their alliances in selecting candidates of the LSG elections. The party-based contest in the LSG election may be considered as a new dimension of indigenous politics of Bangladesh. In the mean time Mr Syed Ashraf Islam, the LGRD Minister and the General Secretary of the ruling party, said the LSG election should be operated on political party basis like national (Parliament) election. This statement could make a good opportunity for a political party-based LSG election amending of the present law. Experts on the LSG have become hopeless for such type of ministerial statement and they have also suspected that the potential field of new leadership might be in trouble.

The patterns of influences of political parties in the LSG elections

1. Forming central committee for selecting candidates

The political parties influence significantly in the LSG elections by forming a central committee for selecting candidates. And this practice is a new feature of the political influence on the LSG election. Recently the ruling party, Awami League (AL) had formed a central committee for selecting candidates in the Pouroshova elections naming Kazi Zafarullah, a Presidium member of AL as the head, Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni, Md. Nasim and Joint Secretary General Mahbubul Alam Hanif as the members. List of AL candidates were finally selected by this committee with the final approval of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the President of the ruling AL. Another list from the Grand Alliance was presented to the Prime Minister for her consideration. At the same time main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had formed a same type of

committee led by Mr. MK Anwar, a member of Standing Committee, the highest policy making forum of BNP. Other members of that committee were Nazrul Islam Khan, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamghir and Rizvi Ahmed. The committee had finalized the list of candidates for Pourashova election coordinating with the Four Party Alliance.

2. Lobbying to get support from the political parties

Maintaining a lobby in to the political parties by influential local leaders is an important factor to get informal nomination from a political party. Since the candidates need political support, they do not hesitate at all to offer a handsome amount of money as bribe to the political leaders, if necessary, to snatch it. There are some vital organs of the LSG like City Corporations and district level Pouroshovas where formal leadership is regarded as an important factor to the political parties. So, competition among political leaders is observed to get support from political party for that formal post. However the central political leaders are divided in favor of their respective candidates. They deliver speeches in the local meetings and to the media in favor of their chosen candidates. Narayanganj City Corporation (NCC), first election of NCC, may be considered as the latest example in case of this tendency.

3. Declaration of selected candidate's name in the media from the respective party

Declaration of selected candidate's name from the respective political party is an important way to influence the local self government election. Non-political LSG elections are being violated due to the support to a specific candidate in spite of having specific prohibition in this case. Such type of objections has been raised in NCC election from the EC and LSG experts. The ruling AL and the main opposition BNP had formally declared their candidate's name for the NCC election violating the prohibition in this concerned issue. Thus the demand of party-based LSG election is getting logistic ground by turns.

4. Withdrawal of candidature from the election due to political pressure

The main opposition BNP had decided that they will not compete in any election under the present government because of their nullified demand of EVM (Electronic Voting Machine) method, deployment of military for creating a free and fair environment for election and restoration of Caretaker government. But the government did not deploy army in the

NCC election in spite of the demand of the EC. As a result BNP has boycotted the election and they created force to their party candidate to withdraw his candidature from the NCC election at the eleventh hour. BNP candidate said, 'I have sacrificed myself for showing my obedience to BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia.' At the end of the election, political parties did not get any achievement from the NCC election. Neutral candidate, having failed to get support from AL, had won in the election game with huge public support. This disgrace of defeat of major political parties has been heavily criticized by the civil society and the experts. Actually, win of a neutral candidate in the NCC election is nothing but a slap against the party dictatorship. Monirul Islam Sakku, a Central leader of BNP and ex-Chairman of Comilla Pouroshova, had resigned from respective party posts for ensuring his candidature in upcoming Comilla City Corporation (CCC) election. Otherwise he would not be able to compete in the CCC election due to his membership of BNP. Already BNP had declared that they will not compete in the CCC election. BNP has established an example of direct interference in the LSG election which is not a positive sign for the LSG and democracy of Bangladesh. Later, Mr. Sakku won the CCC Mayoral post defeating the ruling party AL supported candidate with a double margin of votes.

6. Field administration influenced by the ruling party

Role of local field administration in LSG election was not seen neutral and fair ever. Rather LSG elections always have got question mark due to the controversial role of field administration where the result goes in favor of the ruling position. It is needless to say that no election could be free and fair under any biased administration. For this reason government should take necessary steps for reshuffling the field administration according to the demand of oppositions. Having no initiatives of the government, main opposition has decided to boycott the LSG election which is considered as a bad sign for the democratic process.

7. Taking part in propaganda and meeting by the local MP and leaders in favor of party candidates

Propaganda is an inevitable accompaniment of elections. Various methods are used by the candidates in this process. It may be classified as 1) the party approach, 2) the key-man approach, 3) the emotional approach, 4) the situational approach. All of these approaches are used in the LSG elections of Bangladesh. The success of the candidates in the elections largely depended upon the nature of the contests. Direct

elections and a straight contest between two candidates necessitated vigorous propaganda by the candidates. Where there are more contestants, it gives an upper hand to the candidates who are well supported at least by a political party. The more the number of contestants the better was the chance of victory for such candidates. It is a common tendency in Bangladesh that local MP and leaders must participate in all sorts of arrangement for party candidate in LSG election. Generally local leaders take part in election campaign in favour of their party candidates and motivate voters to work for them by giving different commitment for development so that they can expect success in election. At this period of time these party leaders stay in local area to observe the field situation. Local MP plays a vital role for respective party candidate showing a lot of concentration in to the local people. So they are considered as an important factor for LSG voting politics.

8. Forming an election steering committee

Political party form an election steering committee so that election campaign of respective party runs smoothly as well as local people can be motivated in favour of party candidate. The committee involves various type of election works like poster fitting, banner hanging, arranging election related procession and meeting. Even they try to influence to the voters with unethical way such as offering bribe, material help and so on.

9. Establishing the election offices for operating election campaign

All process of election campaign is organized in election office of political parties so that local voters are attracted by the candidate. Necessary information like voter number from voter list, name of the expected vote centre and so on are provided to the local voters so that the voters may not face any obstacle. And light refreshment is usually served at the campaign centre for the voters by the candidates.

10. Arranging press conference to uphold their position

Arranging press conference of political parties regarding LSG election may be considered as a significant feature of political influence on the LSG election. Target of this conference is to explain their position in the election and try to give messages to the local people from their political point of view. Generally such type of conferences is used as a strategy against one another by the major political parties (AL and BNP). Major opposition party usually demands neutral administration and necessary

steps for level playing ground for all concerned. One the contrary the ruling party appreciates the government for its election related steps as well as they raise objection against the opposition for destroying the election process.

11. Political Show-down

Show-down (huge gathering in a mass procession, would be 'show-up' in a proper use) of political parties along with central leaders and local MP in the LSG election is another important event for campaigning election to make the mass people understand about their strength in local area. It is a new added culture in the LSG elections.

12. Making popular slogans for respective candidate

Political parties and personality of the candidates distinctly influence the election of the candidates. So, making popular slogans for candidate is one of the most important cultures for election based local politics. This is prepared with the name of the top leaders of respective party so that local supporters and voters can be motivated to the party easily. It has been proved that slogans are important and effective strategies for political parties in the elections retaining support within local voters and supporters. So, major political parties try to make the modern and attractive slogans to make it effective for the candidate.

13. Decision of suspension order against the rebel party fellow

The LSG elections have been influenced mostly by political parties in this unconstitutional process. Any one can compete in this non political LSG election according to the EC rules and regulations. In fact political parties have no legal ground for such type of influence. But major political parties are ignoring severely the provision and they are imposing suspension order against those political fellows who want to compete in the LSG elections denying party decision. It is regretful that no one could take any necessary legal action against this undemocratic process.

Impact of Political Influence in the LSG elections

Political factions, conflict and clash happen mostly among the major political parties due to the LSG elections and it is making political condition unrest at the national level. Generally most of this blame of political violence goes against the ruling party because they strictly try to increase their manipulation process in the elections abusing the local

administration what demolishes the peaceful election atmosphere. In addition, ruling party takes various types of strategies for suppressing the oppositions like case filing in the court or police station, occupying vote centre, harassing the opposition supporters physically, showing threat to general voters, ensuring leave of polling agents from the vote centers and other processes of election manipulations are applied in the LSG elections.

Standing of the EC in this regard

The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) urged all political parties to help them to hold the LSG elections in a transparent and credible manner. The Commission's efforts alone could not ensure to achieve free, fair and transparent election. The civil society, the administration and all the political parties must come forward. The EC expects that the political leaders would not try to influence the LSG elections. Sohul Hossain, member of EC, said that the political parties could not have any large influence in the UP elections. He sought help from all concerned areas including the political parties to make the election free and fair. The EC took initiatives to discuss with the political parties about the political influence, free and peaceful Union Parishad (UP) election. But no political party from the Awami League (AL) led Grand Alliance or opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led Four Party Alliance turned up at the EC on 24th February 2011 to discuss the ways to keep the upcoming UP election free from political influence. The EC earlier had invited these two alliances for discussions and to find out the ways to keep the LSG elections free from political influence. The EC has urged all political parties not to influence the nomination process of the candidates for the UP polls. Dr. ATM Shamsul Huda, the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), said, the LSG polls are not completely out of politics; but it is not party based election. The EC had planned to sit on 24th February, 2011 with the political parties having their representatives in parliament to discuss and to find out the ways to keep the upcoming UP polls free from political influence. CEC said, 'we wanted to know the political parties view on keeping the UP election free from political influence, during the dialogue with the representatives of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The LDP delegation head Jahanara Begum said that her party would help the EC to hold a non-partisan election. The CEC urged former and incumbent ministers and parliament members (MPs) to go by the electoral code of conduct. EC Muhammad Sakhawat Hussain narrating his experience in the municipal election, said there were

allegations that senior leaders had taken money from the candidates for taking part in their campaigns. 'High-handed attitudes and actions of a few law makers of ruling party AL, it seems, are making the task of EC difficult to ensure the freeness and fairness of the ongoing UP election.' Muhammad Sohul Hossain, one of the Election Commissioners, lamented on the third day of the six day's first phase of the election, 'it is difficult if the MPs do not abide by the code of conduct' and said that the Commission was planning to convey (the message) to the highest level of political parties, ironically, but not quiet surprisingly some members of the ruling party who tirelessly professes their commitment to 'free' and 'fair' elections are leading, as the charged, as far as the violation of the electoral code of conduct is concerned. For example, polls in four UP of Pirojpur had to be cancelled after candidates staged a rally in violation of section 144, apparently at the behest of the local AL lawmakers. Moreover, it looks unlikely that the EC's plan to report to the 'highest level' of the political parties about the deliberate violation of the electoral code of conduct by some law makers would return favourable results.

Positions of civil society in this regards

Speakers at a discussion, pre-election dialogue, organized by Sushashaner Jonnya Nagorik (SUJON), said that the upcoming UP election should be free from political influence. The election, if hampered by political parties, will not bring any good to the general people. Humayun Kabir Bhuiyan, chairman of Dhamiha UP in Taraile of Kishoreganj said, Local lawmakers (MP) try to influence their choice the candidates. This practice, he said, is not a good sign for UP election. Parliamentarians actually want influential candidates to benefit their respective party.

Impact of political influence on the traditional rural power structure

The political influence has brought about a new polarization in rural power structure system because of their hold on national politics. Central political authority has spread out the network to have the control on this polarization process. Therefore the root level political elites are compelled to show their responsibilities to implement the decision imposed by the central authority. As a result originality of rural elites has been destroyed as well as political views has been given priority more than social unity in case of selection for a social leadership. Necessary growth of politics in root level is absolutely indispensable for a strong foundation of democracy but that process should be in a proper way so

that it could help rural socio-economic and political development. As the development of politics at the root level has been accelerating since 1990's, major political parties have given attention most to spread out its organizations from that decade. On the other hand any link to the political parties (specially ruling party) is considered as an important factor for being influential in rural society. Politics, recently, has turned into the main source of rural power structure identified in rural related research work. It has radically changed in 1990 decade. Now a days political connection is being considered as the most important element in rural power structure. Recently 97.5% leadership in local area is involved with political parties who are divided into different groups. If one group is involved with BNP politics, another group is involved with AL politics. Both of them enjoy power when their party is in power. Election of the LSG is one of the most significant elements for the power politics in local area and that has brought a new dimension in the politics of rural Bangladesh. Enthusiasm to the election of Bangladeshi people, classical tendency, has got tremendous degree which has been more activated in recent time and politics has been decentralized. Statements of Shamsul Huda Haroon, a prominent researcher, are significant in this regard. Mr. Haroon wrote, 'Bangalies tend to be emotional as the elections warming up to fray, and nothing excites them more than elections which enable them to air their views on issues both explicit and smouldering'. Therefore the LSG elections have been transformed as the focal point of root level politics. Actually eagerness to the local elections is not a matter of consciousness of local people rather it might be considered as a matter of prestige, power and influence in local area which is significant for empowering in local power structure. For this reason big fellows of political parties are winning in the LSG elections any how so that they can harass their political rivals in local area which is a main obstacle for a peaceful local life. That is why the number of political harassment cases against opposition is increasing day by day and that would be an alarming condition in future. The classical settlement process of local disputes has been changed where political intervention imposed by local political leaders becomes important to that settlement. Thus the negative political orientation is influencing to break down the classical power structure which is not desirable for the democratic reforms of Bangladesh.

Policy Suggestions

If political party-based LSG elections are accepted;

a) Forming an independent election commission (EC)

Independent EC must be formed so that it could provide an atmosphere of a free and fair election. The EC will have to ensure that the ruling party must not get any extra opportunity. The EC will perform its responsibilities and authority without any obstacle as well as the executive authority must provide for cooperation mentioned in the Constitution of Bangladesh.

b) Process of nominating the candidates

The Candidates will be nominated by respective political parties according to law what will be framed by the EC so that political parties could follow the procedure to participate in the LSG elections. The nomination process should be controlled by the local units of political parties following a democratic process. On the other hand any manipulation in the process of nomination must be abolished and that nomination process should be monitored by the EC. The local law enforcement agencies must take necessary steps on any violation of the laws, if necessary.

c) Importance of manpower structure for the EC

The EC needs sufficient manpower to perform all necessary actions properly in the LSG elections.

d) Ordinance of electoral code of conduct

EC needs to make a strong and effective ordinance of electoral code of conduct so that all of the candidates of the LSG elections would be compelled to follow the instructions. Poster fitting, wall writing, Banner typing, announcing, procession, meeting and so on must run under the ordinance. In that case the EC should provide a level playing ground for all the contestants so that no one could raise any allegations against the neutrality of the EC.

e) Role of the media

The media should try to draw attention to the political election in local level. As a result local people will inspire to the political election in local level. The praise worthy role of the media can fulfill the expected target

of this process. Party- based local government elections can be held with an amendment to the existing law. The law will have to be changed to make it legal. As a result the members of registered political parties will be allowed to participate. Political parties can be held responsible if any problem occurs.

The Positive Impacts

- Political consciousness at the root level people will be improved.
- Local powerful and influential leaders will inspire to be a candidate in the LSG elections and this would be a positive sign for local development functions.
- Democratic practice at the root level people will be increased with a political link up which is important for a strong democracy.
- Elected body will be compelled to show their responsibilities towards local socio-economic and political development due to a pressure of the members and supporters of respective political parties.

The Negative Impacts

- Political clash and conflict might be increased which could damage the socio-economic and political stability of local area.
- Dishonor and unfair of national politics may be infiltrated in local politics and it might turn the unrest situation.
- Traditional rural power structure what is an inheritance of rural Bangladesh might be decayed.

If political party base LSG election is unacceptable:

Since good governance and democratic process would be hampered due to an unfair political interference in the LSG elections, it should be stopped in the legal way. Therefore the LSG elections must be arranged keeping free from any formal political influence where none can raise any objection against political parties for their support to the party candidates. Necessary policy suggestions might be as:

- The Election Commission needs to bring its weight as the constitutional body to impose on the government and political

parties to ensure that no one, law makers or not, can violate any electoral code of conduct to disrupt UP or any other elections. If there are allegations of disruptions in these elections against someone, the Commission must deter recurrence of violation of the electoral code of conduct.

- The government needs to realise that violation of the electoral code of conduct by some ruling party law makers ultimately puts a question mark over its ability and sincerity to help the EC to conduct elections freely and fairly and also undermines its self professed commitment for a free and fair elections. The government and, of course, the ruling party needs to rein on the trouble making law makers and sends a clear message that such high handedness would not be tolerated. The Speaker, the custodian of the Jatiya Sangsad, needs also to play a role; after all, any aberration by any law maker ultimately undermines the prestige of the august House.
- The LSG elections will become questionable if the EC is not strengthened in every way to attend its tasks completely and efficiently. It must be ensured that the administration and the law enforcement machineries will perform their election related duties, scrupulously and impartially.
- Simultaneously the people will have to show their consciousness in this regard. They will have to take the LSG election as a local affair. So, they should support the candidates who have a strong determination to uphold the socio-economic and political development in local area.
- The media, both electronic and print, should be sincere to ensure the coverage of the LSG elections without any political flavour. If the media abstain from such kind of coverage, The LSG elections might be free from a political flavour.

Conclusion

The existing LSG has failed to satisfy the aspirations of the rural Bangladeshis of an increased participation in local affairs. In principle the LSG should be independent, administratively and financially, but that is not the reality under the political governments. The concept of the LSG is pro-people not pro-political parties. Political parties may not like autonomous and independent local bodies so they may oppose and try to prevent any existence of independent LSG bodies. On the contrary the political parties of Bangladesh show a lot of interest to the LSG elections. This election has significance in national politics of Bangladesh because the elected body plays an important role for mobilizing support among the root level people for political parties in the general election. In addition, it provides useful indication of various issues such as law and order situation, public support to the ruling position etc.

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