

Administrative Reform in Bangladesh: An Overview of Political Dynamics

Muhammad Azizuddin

Abstract

This paper explores the interplay between politics and administrative reform in Bangladesh by drawing some perspectives from other developing countries. It covers the period both before and after democratization of the country, hinging around the events of 1991, and thus provides the opportunity for comparisons. It has sought to draw out the relative importance of political will (including the intentions and authority) of governments, and to critically assess their capacity, the degree of co-operation they gained from civil service actors, and to assess the relevance and appropriateness of international donor interventions.

I. Introduction: Administrative Reform Perspective

Administrative reform is the induced systematic improvement of public sector operational performance (El Ghaziri, 2005:5). It is to cope with changes in government of countries' objectives with changes in both the local and global social, economic and political environment (Fuller, 2010). It is a political function as important as the general political activities. It must adjust the relation between a bureaucracy and other elements in a society, or within the bureaucracy itself in order to change the behavior of the public service (Montgomery, 1969; Huque, 2002). The issue of administrative reform depends mostly on the nature and orientation of politics and political leadership. When there is a change in the nature of politics in the society the nature of administrative reform too gets substantially transformed (Ahmad and Ahmed, 1992). Bangladesh's experience over four decades clearly illustrates this fact. In developing countries like

Bangladesh, it may need the support and cooperation of bureaucratic forces for its survival in power. However, a tacit completion is always there to prevail between bureaucracy and political leadership to ensure one's influence over the other. This is war of a different kind and it is political. It becomes intensified at the administrative reform initiatives (Ahmad and Ahmad, 1992).

The administrative system in Bangladesh is a powerful institution systematically developed over the British colonial period (Atria and Armstrong, 2002) and now sustaining the traits and culture of colonial bureaucracy. Reform attempts may be initiated by the government to please administrative forces (by giving opportunities to deal with reform and change to the senior administrative figures and influential lobbies) and to remain safely in power with their support (Ahmad and Ahmed, 1992:82). The nature of the government and political support practically determines the actual internal motives of administrative reform that may not be

visible in the reform reports. The international communities can be of importance in the process of reform and change in designing and implementing strategies for institutional development in Bangladesh; with the appropriate mix of assistance at timely junctures, international organizations as development partners and bilateral donors can support, facilitate and encourage the process. However, they generally do a poor job of discriminating between different phases of the reform process and adopting packages of assistance to support reform (World Bank, 1998). Moreover, their assistance reinforces existing administrative lopsidedness. The incentive for administrative rent-seeking behavior, in which the country has pursued project initiatives, it seems to attract external support because they are most needed from a development perspective.

Bangladesh had started to reform the administrative system quite in line with the then political beliefs of socialist ideology and democratic tradition. Due to personal influence on politics and administration, the then political leadership had failed to prove their competence in running the state. Consequently, the irregular regime changes have been there with the direct and indirect military interventions. As a result of the so-called 'block' change to capitalist ideology in mid-1990s, international organizations and bilateral donors have emerged as influential elements for administrative reforms in Bangladesh. They advocate combating bureaucratic dysfunctions to improve the quality of services to the citizens.

They are, in fact, keen to paradigm shift from traditional Weberian public administration to managerialism: New Public Management (Haque, 2001). However, their involvements may serve to aggravate, rather than reduce, administrative difficulties. This can occur when poor donor coordination results in different donors supporting rival bureaucracies or competing programs (Jenkins and Plowden, 2006).

The successive governments in Bangladesh have been dealing with the issue of administrative reforms, however, they have failed so far. Consequently, the bureaucracy, which was pushed out of their position of influence and power in the early years, brought to the forefront, with changes of regimes, and ultimately emerged as the influential partners with the military staff (Ahmad and Ahmad, 1992). Thus, the appearance of such a state of affairs was a response to demands for 'efficiency' rather than those for democratic values, popular discipline rather than popular participation, and the governmental virtues of centralization and not so much as that of decentralization. These tendencies have had a profound impact on the nature of administrative reform in the country. Apart from these internal political compulsions, external urges, emanating from the donor countries and emphasizing both development of administration and administration of developmental activities have also influenced the nature of administrative reform in the country. This paper tries to explore the interplay between politics and administrative reform in developing Bangladesh. It covers the period both

before and after the democratization of the country, hinging around the events of 1991, and, thus, provides the opportunity for comparisons. The second section depicts the nature and relation between politics and administration. The third section sketches out the reform efforts in the country, which follows the fourth section: the dynamics of administrative reform assessing critically their capacity, the degree of co-operation they gained from administrative actors, and to assess the relevance and appropriateness of international donor involvements. The final section concludes the paper drawing out the relative importance of political will (including the intentions and authority) of governments.

II. Political Regimes and Public Administration

The public administration in Bangladesh is the legacy of the past that traveled down from ancient Bengal via Mughul (1556-1757), British India (1757-1947), and Pakistan (1947-1971) to Bangladesh (1971 -). In fact, it started serving the citizen of a sovereign state with a pseudo-democratic tradition. It has performed with different regimes of autocratic and democratic governments that have been led by two major parties, and a third one: Bangladesh Awami League (AL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and Jatio Party (JP). The nature of political regimes is shown in Table-1 below:

Table 1: The usual character of politics in Bangladesh

Timeline	Duration	Political Party	Ideological Nature
Before 1991	1971– 1975	Bangladesh Awami League	Socialist
	1976- 1990	Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jatio Party (JP)	Capitalist
After 1991	1991 -	Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Bangladesh Awami League	Capitalist

The *Bangladesh Awami League* formed the first government in the country with a democratic socialist ideology. However, fortunately or unfortunately, the regime turned autocratic with the formation of BAKSAL (Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League) in 1975, that paved the way to martial rule, which, in fact, turned into a process of militarization of public administration with two successive regimes of BNP (1976–1982: General Zia) and JP (1982–1990: General Ershad), wherein

the bureaucracy served as their support base. The BNP, formed by General Zia, included diverse personalities from different political groups, former army and senior administrative figures. But, it was forced to quit power in 1982 by General Ershad, who declared Martial Law and ruled the country in such a way that it paved the path for the establishment of a new political platform for *Jatiya Part*. The party-building process was with the faction-prone political parties and with the

support of some groups of breakaway sections of bureaucracy while all the opposition parties were disorganized and weak organizationally (Ahmad and Ahmed, 1992). Following a mass upsurge in 1990, and the re-establishment of a democratic system of government in the country, the democratization process started. However, the BNP and the Awami League rotate the governments and public administration has been serving *with* these two parties in governments (Azizuddin, 2006; 2008).

The first Awami League regime 'was initially democratic in character but gradually developed authoritarian tendencies that eventually led it to transform the country's political system from parliamentary to presidential, with multi-party democracy replaced by one party rule' (Zafarullah, Khan, and Rahman, 2001:63). The BAKSAL, the only officially permitted party in the country, inducted senior administrative figures into the central committee. This unpredictable change gave the bureaucracy the opportunity to become part of the political process and formal politicization of public administration started. Both the BNP (1976–1982) and JP (1982–1990) regimes began with the Martial Law rule, which later turned civilian through the parliamentary elections in 1979 and 1986 respectively. This 'civilianization of military rule on two occasions was accompanied by the floating of state-sponsored political parties enable them easily to win large majorities in general elections in a multi-party political milieu' (Zafarullah, Khan, and Rahman, 2001:64). But, these parties remained the 'political citadel'

(Ahamed and Nazneen, 1988) of martial rulers. The nature of civil-military relations changed; senior administrative figures were made advisers and ministers in the cabinets (Islam, 1988:123). The civil service has the obligation to be responsive to the majority party in power and in return acquired the advantage of nominating regime loyalists to key positions in the administration. This situation thus creates the political support base for the regime, and the opportunity to look after their own interests and the interests of those they served (Zafarullah, Khan and Rahman, 2001). This implicit politicized support of the bureaucracy for the regime was then withdrawn (Ahmad and Ahmad, 1992) in response to mass upheaval in 1990, and this accelerated the fall of the regime in late 1990. The irony is that during the democratic period the state power tended to rotate between the BNP and the Awami League. While the form of government was ostensibly democratic, the style of governance remained largely unchanged. The bureaucracy, to a great extent, remained unchanged though the pattern of governance did switchover to a parliamentary form in 1991 (Azizuddin, 2008).

Due to the lack of political agreement between the regimes of the BNP and the Awami League, 'the bureaucracy became clearly factionalized along party lines; some senior civil servants openly defying the Government with others lending their support. The former were punished by demoting them to trivial positions, while the latter were rewarded for their services with jobs in important ministries (Zafarullah, Khan, and

Rahman, 2001:46). There was 'participation of many generalist civil servants under the leadership of a powerful ex-CSP (Civil Service of Pakistan) officer in the protest movement launched by the Awami League against the BNP government' (Sarker, 2001:164) in mid-1996. As a result, when it did form the government in 1996 and 2009, many officers were rewarded by the then government of Awami League, for example, one even being made a State Minister of Planning (Khan, Zafarullah, and Rahman, 2001), and the followers and so were also rewarded with mass promotions. Therefore, 'because of political instability and experimentation with different kind of political regimes, civil service responsiveness has been present in varying degrees. Some might have become obscure, but may return with a change in regime attributes' (Heady, 1996, cf. Zafarullah, Khan, and Rahman, 2001:64).

Bangladesh has experienced either pseudo-democratic or civilianized military regimes for nearly two decades of 1970s and 1980s, with the former predominating in the period following the democratization process which began in the early 1990s. Due to the authoritarian nature of democratically elected politicians or martial involvement in politics, parliaments have tended to be used as a convenient instrument of the 'strongman' (Khan and Zafarullah, 1988) in power. Other than the bureaucracy, the political institutions like political parties and the parliament as well remain largely

underdeveloped. Trade unions and workers' associations, however, have played a major part in the politics of Bangladesh. They have gained informal authority to influence management decisions, and the political parties have received their political loyalty and support at the organizational, industrial, and grass-roots level (ADB, 2001). A scenario of politics and administration relations in Bangladesh can be gauged in Table-2.

Following the coup of 1975, the military took over the power and the successive regime of 1976–1982 shifted the fundamental state policy from socialist to capitalist ideology and there was a tacit partnership between the senior administrative and military figures (Ahamed and Nazneen, 1988). The senior civil-military figures held most of the crucial positions in the decision-making structure of the government. The regime in the country could be defined as a coalition between civil–military bureaucrats and technocrats (Hossain, 1991). In the field administration, senior administrative figures, including those from the erstwhile Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP), held such coveted positions as Divisional Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner (DC) with immense power and prestige in the divisions and districts— sub-national level of administration in the country. The bureaucrats, both civil and military, thus emerged as the ruling elite in Bangladesh (Ahamed and Nazneen, 1988:75).

Table 2: Political Regime and Bureaucracy relations in Bangladesh

Timeline	Duration	The Regime	The Fate	The Nature	Politics- Administration Relations
Before 1991	1972 – 1975	Bangladesh Awami League with Mujib	Remove by the military coup	Pseudo-democratic/personalist	Ruler + Single-party Responsiveness and self-defense/ self- interest.
	1976 – 1982	Bangladesh Nationalist Party with Zia	Leader Assassinated	Civilianized Military	Military + Civilianized military partnership/ subservience to military.
	1982 – 1990	Jati Party with Ershad	Overthrown by mass upsurge	Civilianized Military	Military + Civilianized military partnership/ subservience to military.
After 1991	1991 – 1996	Bangladesh Nationalist Party with Khaleda Zia	Resigned on opposition demand	Democratic	Major - Party responsiveness plus bureaucratic self-interest with semi-neutral character
	1996 – 2001	Bangladesh Awami League with SkHasina	Transferred power to elected government	Democratic	Major - Party responsiveness plus bureaucratic self-interest with semi-neutral character
	2002 - 2006	Bangladesh Nationalist Party with Khaleda Zia	Transferred power to elected government	Democratic	Major - Party responsiveness plus bureaucratic self-interest with semi-neutral character
	2009 -	Bangladesh Awami League with SkHasina	Transferred power to elected government with some interruption	Democratic	Major - Party responsiveness plus bureaucratic self-interest with semi-neutral character

Sources: M. Azizuddin (2006; 2008), S. A. Malek (2002), F. Heady (1996), H. M. Zafarullah (1996; 2001).

By 2011, despite four-decades of sovereignty, democracy remained in a somewhat nascent or embryonic stage, with underdeveloped political values, unhealthy democratic institutions, a traditional social structure and defective bureaucratic machinery. However, the public administration has also been undergoing a reform process, and people's expectations from the state are high. Their intended commitment to contribute to the reform process was also clearly shown at a number of critical events, e.g., during the fall of Ershad's nine year civilianized military

regime in 1990, with the development of wider movements for a just society.

Following the events in 1991, the negative elements widespread in the public administration such as service conflict, conservatism and inertia were to be gradually reduced to make the bureaucracy more effective, responsive and responsible. Administrative Reform would be to fine-tune the contemporary situation: reorder the numerous inherited entities and to launch a new system of human resource management that would meet the demands of the civil service as a protected professional public service. The civil service, well established in

Bangladeshi society, is an organized political institution. It is still insulated, to a large extent, from the people, with a distinctive outlook and substantial sub-system autonomy (Zafarullah, Khan, and Rahman, 2001). Politics still formally controls the policy making role, however, civil service due to its competence and expertise tends to establish their influence through formulating and implementing the policies drawn up by the policy makers.

The politicians, in general, have the vision of reform in the administrative system. The problem that administrative reform faces in the country is that many politicians and political parties talk about reform, but there is little evidence that their commitment is genuine (Malek, 2002). None of the political parties in Bangladesh have had a specific agenda for administrative reform, nor did administrative reform figure in their election manifestos. The political leaders are, in fact, populist and they do not have enough understanding of development politics and, therefore, lack technocratic skills, and, as a result, democratic rule has not been able to provide the desired home-grown policy decisions for the country.

III. Reform and Reorganization: Leap Services as Commonly Uttered

The emergence of independent Bangladesh in 1971 necessitated making the public administration more accountable and responsive in line with the resulting shift in state policy(ies) and objective(s). The prevailing euphoria after independence, and the need for an

effective and efficient administrative system to handle the increasing responsibilities of a nation state were responsible for making administrative reform efforts a top priority for political leaders. Table-3 below shows the remarkable administrative reform efforts in the country.

Reform Efforts Before 1991

Just after independence, the then government of Bangladesh Awami League initiated the administrative reform quite in line with their political beliefs of socialist ideology and democratic traditions. The public administration 'can therefore be neither innovators nor catalytic agents for a social change It is only a political cadre with firm roots in the people and motivated by new ideology and willing to live and work among the people as one of them that can mobilize the mass and transform their pattern of behaviour' (GoB, 1973a:4). Therefore, at the outset, the government paid due attention to administrative reform from its legal status to its structure.

The appointment of the Administrative Service Reorganization Committee (ASRC) in 1972, known as MAC Commission, and the National Pay Commission (1973) were the first of their kind in the direction of administrative reform in line with the government objectives that were recommended for 'a single classless grading structure covering all services in ten grades' (GoB, 1973:10) of pay scales (GoB, 1973a:4-5). These were in the expectation that the public administration should be attuned to the

hopes and aspirations of the people, and they were expected to create a kind of 'living fellowship with the common men' on a 'firm dedication to democracy and socialism' (GoB, 1973: 10); and having regard to the declared objectives of government to 'establish a socialist society in Bangladesh' and reduce the disparity between the highest and lowest incomes in the society – a nine tier administrative system with corresponding pay scales could meet the requirements of a rational system for the next five year (GoB, 1973a:4–5). However, the regime was unable to

implement all these proposals, though it had early success. The reform efforts were undertaken in a context of serious socio-economic and political crises. Political unrest of the highest magnitude developed in the country and the regime directed all its efforts towards its own survival. Ironically enough, the bureaucracy, which was denounced by the political leadership for its impermeable character, was ultimately to be relied upon and utilized by the regime itself during its last phase thus helping to restore its political influence (Ahamed, 1980:157–162).

Table 3: Remarkable Administrative Reform Efforts in Bangladesh

Timeline	Reform Committee/ Commission	Main Focus
Reform Efforts before 1991	Administrative Service Reorganizing Committee (ASRC), 1972 with Muzaffar A Chowdhury	Service Structure
	Pay and Service Commission (PSC), 1976 (1977) with M A Rashid	Services Structure and Pay Issues
	Martial Law Committee for examining organizational set-up of Ministries/ Divisions/ Directorates and other Organizations (MLC), 1982 with Brigadier EnamulHaque	Organization and Rationalization of Manpower in the Public Sector Organizations
	The Committee for Administrative Reorganization/ Reform (CARR), 1983 with Rear Admiral MA Khan	Reorganization of sub-national level administration
Reform Efforts after 1991	Cabinet Committee of Administrative Reform, 1993 (1995) with Colonel (rtd) Wali Ahmed MP	Recognition and review the reports of Public Administration Sector Study (UNDP) and Towards Better Government in Bangladesh.
	Administrative Reorganization Committee (ARC), 1993 (1996) with NurunNabiChowdhury	Structure and Rationalization of Manpower Across Ministries/Departments/ Directorates
	Public Administration Reform Committee (PARC), 1997 (2000) with A T M ShamsulHaque	Administrative change and development in the light of New Public Management

Source: A M MShawkat Ali, Civil Service Management in Bangladesh An Agenda for Policy Reform, UPL, Dhaka, 2010.

The appointment of the *Pay and Service Commission* (PSC) by the BNP in 1976, known as Rashid Commission, for a suitable pay and service structure (GoB, 1977:45-46) like that of the earlier regime, disparaged the claims of the generalists and advocated on behalf of the new class of technocrats, equal pay for equal status and an appropriate level of participation in the decision-making structure, and suggested a newer pay policy with a new pay structure of civil service within 21 grades (GoB, 1977:53). It called for the creation of a super cadre at the top of the pyramid staffed by men of superior intellect and vision from each of the cadres (Ahamed and Nazneen, 1988:77).

The regime also undertook certain steps to rationalize the staffing process, framing new rules and regulations to replace systems of patronage. Competitive examinations began to be held more or less on a regular basis from 1977, and the standard of civil servants recruited on the basis of examinations was quite high (Ahamed and Nazneen, 1988:78). The introduction of this rational basis in the staffing process from the later part of the 1970s was a significant stride forward. However, the efforts at reforms during the regime could be considered as piecemeal changes and changing the form rather than the substance (Khan and Zafarullah, 1982). In fact, apart from the changes detailed above, no substantial progress towards administrative reform had been achieved during the regime in spite of the fact that the PSC had submitted a comprehensive report proposing new organizational structure for services (Ahmad and Ahmed, 1992).

In course of time, however, unpleasant features arose in the administrative system, such as the tension between the BCS administration cadre and the remainder of the twenty-nine cadres (Miah, 1997; Murshed, 1997).

The regime, however, was able to bring about some changes in Bangladesh public administration (Ahamed and Nazneen, 1988; Ahmad and Ahmed, 1992); the appointment of PSC in 1976 was intended to resolve issues which had been left unresolved during the earlier regime. The government decided to implement its proposals in a modified form (Miah, 1997). As the apex pool in the administration the 'Senior Service Pool' (SSP) was established for the central secretariat services at national level administration, that would provide an opportunity for representation from various cadre services of the civil service in the Secretariat (Ahmad and Ahmad and Ahmed, 1992). This was quite in line with the expectation of the senior administrative figures who dreamed of assuming authority and prestige like that of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) and the CSP officers. The SSP was, in fact, was not an institutional arrangement for mobilizing the support of members of all cadre services, support that was essential for such a regime starting to run the state administration without political and administrative experiences. It was not from the standpoint of administrative efficiency; rather, it was used and misused politically (Ahmad and Ahmed, 1992).

This was, in fact, the period when Bangladesh began to be assured of larger share of external assistance after

the dilution of the so-called socialist ideology. As a result, the economic situation that had started deteriorating from 1973 and reached its lowest ebb in 1974 began to show signs of improvement from the beginning of 1976 (Ahamed, 1980; Ahamed and Nazneen, 1988; Ahmad and Ahmad, 1992). During this period of transformation, some of the trends in reform that had become visible during the early years of the Awami League regime were watered down. From this time, more emphasis began to be placed on efficiency rather than on democratization, on productivity rather than on participation and more on centralization than on decentralization. In many areas, the orientation of the civil service changed towards, in other words, 'militarization of administration' (Ahmad and Ahmed, 1992, Ahamed and Nazneen, 1988), through direct induction of a large number of military personnel into the public administration. The regime during 1982–1990 continued the military rule in the country. It introduced some measures as part of a program of top priorities including administrative reform with an emphasis on decentralization and the process of transition to civilian rule. It was heavily dependent on the senior administrative figures and had a number of civil bureaucrats, technocrats and politicians in its Council of Advisers at the outset, and in successive Cabinets, in addition to retired military officers. In the absence of political leadership in the government machinery, policy making and implementation had been done by the army officials in close cooperation with the civil service. Two major

administrative reform measures were taken in 1982 and 1983 respectively: the Martial Law Committee for examining organizational set-up of Ministries/ Divisions/ Directorates and other Organizations (MLC), known as Enam Committee, and the Committee for Administrative Reorganization/Reform (CARR), Known as Khan Committee, to materialize the intention of strengthening and legitimizing the military's power over the state mechanism (Miah, 1997). The MLC recommended improvements for the efficiency and effectiveness of civil service officials working at the national level, resulting initially in the reduction of the number of Ministries/ Divisions and manpower and 'rationalization' of the charter of duties of the civil servants (Khan, 1991). On the other hand, the CARR has been for administrative reorganization and institutionalization of a local government system in the country. The regime, by making the two reform bodies reflect diverse memberships, intended to project the recommendations as the views of different professional and pressure groups. The fact remains that the leading army officers in the two committees, with the assistance of senior administrative figures, ably represented the interests of the regime-government.

Reform Efforts after 1991

Following the mass upheaval of 1990, the BNP became the single majority party in the parliamentary election of 1991, and formed the government for a five-year term. The government in power felt the necessity of

administrative reform for a newly established democratic environment. Some international organisation and bilateral donor-sponsored voluminous reports were produced during the tenure of the regime. The government-sponsored reports were produced by committees staffed mostly by the senior administrative figures both directly as members and in supporting roles.

The first such report was during the first democratic regime of 1991-1996 for the UNDP by a team of public administration experts: Reports on Public Administration Sector Study in Bangladesh, known as UNDP Report, and completed its work in June 1993, providing valuable proposals for administrative reform in the country. Simultaneously, the British Overseas Development Agency (British ODA) sponsored study Towards Better Government in Bangladesh, known as Four Secretaries' Report, was started with four senior members of the civil service playing an important role in its subsequent development. The report identified anomalies and suggesting changes in the civil service. The government subsequently appointed the Cabinet Committee of Administrative Reform in 1993 (GoB, 1993), which reported in 1995 mostly in line with the so-called 'Four Secretaries'. Subsequently, the Administrative Reorganization Committee (ARC) was appointed by the government in 1993, to review the size and scope of public administration, so that the machinery of administration would be dynamic in its operation. Again, senior administrative figures dominated the composition of the committee. However, the efforts at

reform in this regime effectively achieved little other than the production of four voluminous reports (Subhan, 2001).

The following Awami League regime of 1996–2001 appointed in 1997 a new Public Administration Reforms Commission (PARC,) once more chaired by A T M ShamsulHaque, a retired senior administrative figure, which took until June 2000 to complete its report. Since the Awami League regime left office in mid -2001, and they rotate to the power successively in 2001 and 2009, the administrative reforms it proposed have not been carried out and the chances of the report obtaining cabinet approval, going through a process of public debate seeking legislative support, all within years, did not look promising (Subahan, 2001).

The disappointing results of the reform efforts during the democratic regimes may be seen partly as a consequence of political factionalism, and the deeper structural relationships between political and administrative actors in Bangladesh. The fact is that 'Collective action by the bureaucracy is seen as an accepted norm of behavior. Each political party fears the cost of resisting such collective pressures. The party in power fears administrative disruptions, they fear loss of votes, but above all they fear the loss of control over the administrative machinery so as to be able to use it for partisan gains. This compulsion by successive regimes for using the machinery of state for partisan and personal gain has given the administration a sense of immunity to reform and forged a collusive bond between state, politics and business'

(Subhan, 2001:95). As a result, the citizens' interest has largely been sidestepped. It is generally the fact that all these reports are paved with good intentions, and propose scores of ways in which administration maybe reformed. But they do not expose the political economy of 'politico-bureaucratic entente' in Bangladesh which serves as the most powerful driving force in retaining the old administrative order (Alam et al, 1998: 36).

IV. The Dynamics of Reform: Civil, Military Bureaucrats and Donors' Intervention

Bangladesh inherited an administrative system, institutionalized in the colonial regime of British India, which grew stronger with military interventions throughout the quarter century of Pakistani period (1947-1971). However, the administrative system was very much for provincial governance instead for an independent nation-state (Ahamed and Nazneen, 1988).

Administrative reform efforts during the early years (1972–1975) aimed at streamlining the public administration by integrating the different categories of civil services, abolishing elitism from the services and making the administration accountable to the political leadership. The need was for a different system responsible to the political government and capable of implementing those political and constitutional objectives. Moreover, the government had a strong hatred for the then Pakistani public administration system which helped sustain military

rule in Pakistan at the cost of political development and caused much suffering for the new ruling politicians and their political allies (Ahmad and Ahmed, 1992). However, the bureaucracy was composed of diverse elements with different group interests. The overall political situation of the country was not congenial for the stability in administrative system (Ahmad and Ahmed, 1992). The formation of a new political party, during 1976–1982, with BNP broke down the backbone of all major political parties. Most of the members of the party were from the existing parties including the earlier regime's ruling party, the Awami League, which caused the disintegration of political parties as a whole (Maniruzzaman, 1981; Ahmed, 1996). As a result, the opposition in government was found to adopt a new strategy to create pressure on the government by using the different service unions and professional service groups (Ahmad and Ahmad, 1992:73).

The induction of military officers in the civil administration through 'literal entry' became visible. In this process, a large number of military officers gained access to the 'classical citadel of bureaucracy' (Ahamed and Nazneen, 1988). There were 25 military officers in the 625-member contingent of SSP meant for policy-making in the Secretariat at national level administration (Ahmad and Ahmad, 1992). Of the 101 Chairmen/ Managing Directors of the public corporations, 42 were military officers and 22 of 40 district superintendents and additional superintendents of Police were from army personnel. It has been contended

that taking advantage of secure military power, the armed forces increased the remuneration of the civil servants in various forms and thus a coalition of civil and military bureaucrats developed further (Maniruzzaman, 1981). More significantly, the trends of 'people participation' and decentralization of the administrative system tended to be diluted; in its place a new trend of over-centralization began to surface in reality although 'people's participation' and 'decentralization' were commonly uttered terms in the public speeches of important government functionaries, including the president (Ahamed and Nazneen, 1988:79).

The regime during 1982–1990 followed the footsteps of its earlier regime as regards the bureaucracy and administration in the country, in that the cabinet was filled with representatives from the army and the civil bureaucracy and greater trust was placed on the administrative elite in the decision making areas, especially the allocation of resources, than on the political elites. This trend continued throughout and the military officers began to man important positions in the secretariat and public corporations and they gradually made inroads into foreign affairs, too. This hampered the planned change in the public administration system.

The feelings of deprivation among different cadres were observed in the formation of SSP. There was a political urge on the part of the government to view the administration in such a way so that it could utilize it as a political base, which every military government needs. The attempts for administrative reform in the regime served the same political

purpose. Intended for the effective administrative system and the importance of reform from the perspective of the total system, the creation of the 'Upazila' came into being, a mid-tier of local government where members of Bangladesh Civil Service were posted in the name of administrative decentralization. It was an amalgamation of local government system and government bureaucracy by the name of Upazila system (Ahmad and Ahmad, 1992:76).

The abolition of the sub-divisional tier in the sub-national level during the regime, and converting them to a district raised the number of districts from 21 to 64. These were able to satisfy the members of civil service by giving promotional scope so that 64 Deputy Commissioners (DC) and more Additional Deputy Commissioners (ADC) were posted in the districts, and paved the way for the appointment of 300 Upazila Nirbahi (executive) Officers (UNO), the chief executive officer in the Upazilas. It also opened up opportunities for the specialist civil servants such as doctors, engineers etc. However, these new promotional opportunities gave the regime the opportunity to gain support amongst civil servants to run the civil administration. On the other hand, the influence of senior administrative figures in the government and administration was manipulated to provide the main support for the Ershad regime (Ahmad and Ahmad, 1992) – hence decentralization may be seen as 'window-dressing' and reorganization was, in fact, the extended hands of the national administration at the local level.

The efforts at administrative reform by the regimes during the democratic period of 1990s onwards followed the same tradition, though reforms were urgently needed. Although, the bureaucrats as a group came out victorious during the regimes of Zia and Ershad in their struggle for power and prestige in the polity, the inner contradictions, developed in the civil service over the years, tended to fragment it (Ahmad and Nazneen, 1988). The earlier factionalisms in the 1970s, based on patronage or participation in the liberation war of the country, were replaced by those based on academic background or professional specialties or functional expertise in the 1980s and the 1990s. This trend of growing, micro-bureaucracies (Ahmed and Nazneen, 1988) in the country became heightened. This is partly because of the greater involvement of the technocrats in the production process and partly because of the international donors' involvements in the development of administration.

Donors are endowed with 'economic and technical assistance which together constitute foreign development aid' through which they supposedly 'significantly influence the public policy making process' (Khan, 1994:01; Khan, 1998:123) in the country (Sobhan, 1982; Subhan and Bhattacharya, 1990). The issue of the donors' involvements in the development of administration is multifaceted. Critics speak of a consensus on the agenda for reform in general and improving the capacity of the administration in particular (Jenkins and Plowden, 2006; ADB, 2001; Muhi, 2000). The UN agencies as a whole, and

the World Bank in particular 'recognize the centrality of a competent, affordable, and accountable public administration' (WB, 2002:1). However, 'Initially they tried to operate only in their donor supported activity environment, only to realize that the pervasive and preponderant influence of the total public sector will offset whatever gains they may achieve in their limited area. Many donors and lenders actively argue, advocate, support and promote public sector reform' (Rahman, 2001:150 - 151). The reform challenges facing the administration are largely structural issues. The major donors, all agree that the strengthening of government institutions in Bangladesh is essential for a significant improvement in the governance-related outcomes. Their efforts, however, at reform are not well coordinated and problems have arisen from the uncoordinated actions (Jenkins and Plowden, 2006; WB, 2002). During the early 1990s, two important donor-funded reports (UNDP, 1993; Rahman et al, 1993) on public administration reform were produced. One was prepared by a team of national and international public administration reform experts, funded by the UNDP, in June, 1993. The other one was prepared by a team of senior members of civil service, funded by the British ODA, in September 1993. The submission of the former report coincided with the start of work on the latter, and this simultaneous uncoordinated donors' effort may well have undermined the reform effort (Shelley, 2000).

There has been a sharp lack of coordination, as observed among government initiatives, donors'

assistance and bureaucrats' support. During the democratic period, for example, two donor-aided and two government initiated reform reports were produced. These were reviewed by a high powered commission on public administration reforms during the Awami League regime (1996–2001). The senior administrative figures dominated most of the government committees. Indeed, one extreme example of their approach is provided by an account of a meeting between the members of the team who had prepared the UNDP report and the senior officials responsible for the 'Four Secretaries' Report:

'One meeting between the Members and Advisors of the Public Administration Sector Team [better known as UNDP report of 1993] and the Advisory Committee took place. After the Minister of Establishment opened the meeting and asked the Team Leader to explain briefly the Study (but not the findings and recommendations), several of senior civil servants [those who prepared the Four Secretaries' Report of 1993 funded by British ODA] present dominated the meeting, and castigated the UNDDSMS/ UNDP for undertaking such a study and maintained that the Government had never agreed to such a study, and openly questioned its legitimacy. In essence, these senior civil servants condemned the study before they had seen the findings and recommendations or examined the data upon which the findings and recommendations were based' (La Porte, 2000:196–197).

A donors' meeting in May 2000 (ADB, 2001) under the auspices of the World

Bank formed the Bangladesh Initiative for Good Government (BIGG) aimed at funding joint initiatives. This was in part because the relationship between the donor agencies particularly the World Bank had improved with early dialogue and the building of personal relationships between staff (WB, 2002). However, this 'doesn't mean that there is a single organizing principle and consistent donor strategy for administrative reform. Rather donor organizations have tended to pursue their own specific portion of the agenda – determined partly by their perceptions of governance imperatives in Bangladesh but also by their own agency charters, political relations and the political ideologies and imperatives back home or (in the case of the multilaterals) on their governing boards', on the other, 'on the whole joint donor funded projects are few, most agencies preferring to pursue their own strategies. Only a small number of missions have any staff with any specialist knowledge of core public sector reform' (ADB, 2001:60 – 61).

International organizations and bilateral donors are often the critics of public administration in general rather than the administrative system in particular (Khan, 1994). Most critics of public administration refer to the decline in capability of the administration (ADB, 2001). Training and development of the public administration falls short of the required standard (WB, 1998; ADB, 2001). In order to make the administrative system well-run, donors tend to emphasize the training of the civil service. Therefore, they, like the World Bank and UNDP, looked at

training institutions in the country in order to enhance their institutional capacity. While this form of assistance is worthwhile, it is unlikely to impact on the structural issues.

V. Conclusion: Similar Sides of the Coin

Administrative reform in Bangladesh is now to be carried out under the democratic conditions of competitive politics. Popular support for such a national issue should be relatively easy to mobilize. Citizens want change, to avoid suffering in their dealings with the government in the present system, and that the general public was supportive of reform.

Bangladesh is still striving for real democratic practice. There has been a lack of national consensus since independence, which has had an impact on many major policy issues, including that of administrative reform. There have been disagreements between and among the political regimes. A positive culture has yet to be developed among the political parties as how to respect each other. Each successive regime has sought for administrative reform, in the meanwhile abandoning or ignoring the efforts of previous governments. Instead, they form new committees and commissions with new chairmen and members, instead of continuing with previous plans and seeing them through to implementation. This is probably due to the tradition of appointing committees for implementation which are staffed by senior administrative figures. The latest of these, for example is located in the Cabinet Division of the Bangladesh

Secretariat. This committee has been headed by the Cabinet Secretary with the support of a section within the Cabinet Division named the 'Administrative Reform Cell'. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the work of the Secretary Committee and the 'Administrative Reform Cell' (responsible for setting priorities and issuing executive orders) is not intensive; meetings are rare, other work often takes priority, and attempts to move forward may have been stifled through lack of enthusiasm on the part of other highly placed officials.

The motives and capabilities of political leaders is also a matter of question. The lack of bold political commitment and weak political leadership are always there towards the reform process; and the negative attitude of senior level bureaucrats seeing this almost as a form of undeclared bureaucratic non-cooperation (Azizuddin, 2006; 2008). The shortcomings have been glaring as a result of the poor design of the reform process itself, of unclear goals and objectives of reform, to some extent, unrealistic reform proposals and an absence of appropriate reform implementation strategies. Such factors obscure the wider structural and political dynamics of political-administrative relations in Bangladesh, which clearly have a crucial role in determining the context and outcomes of the reform process. Political leaders, especially during the democratic period, have not been sincere in their attempts to reform administration. Confrontations between the political regimes have largely jeopardized agreements among the political leaders about the necessity of

the administrative modernization (Sarker, 2001). The reform programmes, in fact, taken up by the ruling party are seen with suspicion by the opposition followed by their likeminded senior administrative figures (World Bank, 2000). The party in power appears more

interested in establishing its hegemony (Sarker, 2001:162) rather than following a long-term strategy of development and nation-building. So, the process of administrative reform remains in the end, by and large a populist politico-administrative gadget.

References

- Ahamed, E. and D. R. Z. A. Nazneen (1988), "Political Dimension of Administrative Reorganization: Its Impact in Bangladesh Over the Years", *Lok*, 4 (1): pp12-27.
- Ahamed, E. (1980), *Bureaucratic Elites in Segmented Economic Growth: Pakistan and Bangladesh*, Dhaka: University Press Limited.
- , E. (1988), *Military Rule: Myth of Democracy*, Dhaka: UPL.
- Ahmad, F. and M. U. Ahmed (1992), "Politics of Administrative Reform in Bangladesh from 1970 – 1991: A Review", *Social Science Review*, IX (2): pp72-81.
- Ahmed, M. U. (1996), "Redesigning of Public Administration System in a Developing Country: the Case of Bangladesh Administrative Reform from 1971 to 1995", *Social Science Review*, XIII (2): pp46-59.
- Ahmed, S. G. (2001), "Three Decades of Public Administration", S I Chowdhury and F. Alam eds., *BANGLADESH on the threshold of New Millennium*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Asiatic Society.
- Alam, A. K. M. Shamsul, Dr. M. A. Momen, S. Haque, I. A. Choudhury (1998), *Cadre Conflict: An Investigation into Conflicts in Bangladesh Civil Service*, Saver, Dhaka: Bangladesh Public Administration Training Center.
- Ali, A M M Shawkat (2010), *Civil Service Management in Bangladesh An Agenda for Policy Reform*, Dhaka: UPL.
- Asian Development Bank (ADB), (2001), *Bangladesh: The State of Governance A Report for the Asian Development Bank*, Wellington, New Zealand.
- Atreya, B. and A. Armstrong (2002), *Evaluation of the Applicability of NPM Reforms to Developing Countries: A Case from Nepal*, Working Paper 17/2002, Melbourne: School of Management, Victoria University of Technology.
- Azizuddin, M. (2008), *Public Administration Reform in Bangladesh: Challenges and Prospects*, Dhaka: Centre for Administrative Research and Innovation, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Osder Publications.
- , M. (2006), *Public Administration Reform: Challenges and Prospects in Bangladesh*, London: Marvel Design.
- El Ghaziri, N. (2005), "It Takes Two to Tango: The Dynamics of Government-Donor Interactions in a Post-Conflict Context (The Case of Post-war Lebanon 1992-2002)", Paper prepared for the Workshop: Research Bank on the World Bank Organized by the

Centre for Policy Studies, Central European University and the Centre for the Study of Globalization and Regionalization, University of Warwick 1-2 April, Budapest, Hungary.

Fuller, D. E. (2010), "Public Administration Reform Theory in Transition Country", Presented at the 18th NISPAcee Annual Conference, Working Group on Public Administration Reform.

Government of Bangladesh (GoB), (1973), *The First Five Year Plan: 1973-1978*, Dhaka: Planning Commission.

----- (GoB), (1973a), *Report of the Administrative and Services Reorganization Committee*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Government Press.

----- (GoB), (1977), *Report of the Pay and Services Commission*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Government Press.

----- (GoB), (1993), *Bangladesh Gazette: Extraordinary*, December 9, Cabinet Division: Bangladesh Government Press.

Government of Bangladesh (GoB) (1995b), *Bangladesh Gazette Notification* No.MoE (Dev. and Impl) – 04/94 – 81.

Haque, M. S. (2001), "Recent Transition in Governance in South Asia: Contexts, Dimensions, and Implications", *International Journal of Public Administration*, 24(12), pp1405-1436.

Heady, F. (1996), "Configurations of Civil Service Systems", A.J.G.M. Bekke, J.L. Perry and Th. A.J. Toonen (eds), *Civil service Systems in Comparative Perspective*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hossain, G. (1991), *Civil-Military Relations in Bangladesh: A Comparative Study*, Dhaka: Academic Publishers.

Huque, A. S. (2002), "Government – Society Relations and the Politics of Administrative Reform in Hong Kong", *Public Policy and Administration*, 17(1): pp45-62.

Islam, S. S. (1988), *Bangladesh: State and Economic Strategy*, Dhaka: UPL.

Jenkins, K. and Plowden, W. (2006), *Governance and Nationbuilding: The Failure of International Intervention*, Cheltham UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar.

Khan, M. M. and H M. Zafarullah (1984), "The Recruitment of Higher Civil Servants in Bangladesh: An Overview", *SICA Occasional Paper*, Second Series, No 6, Washington DC: SICA ASPA.

-----, M. M., and H M Zafarullah (1980), "Public Administration Training in Bangladesh: An Overview", *International Review of Administrative Science*, 46: pp1322-1332.

-----, M. M., and H M Zafarullah, (1982), "Public Bureaucracy in Bangladesh", K K Tummala, ed., *Administrative Systems Abroad*, Washington DC: Uni Press America.

-----, M. M. and Habib M. Zafarullah (1988), "Entrenched "Strong Man" Rule: The Governmental System in Bangladesh", J. W. Longford and K. L. Brownsey eds., *The Changing Shape of Government in the Asia-Pacific Region*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: Institute of Research on Public Policy.

- Khan, M. M. (1986), 'Process of Decentralisation in Bangladesh', *Community Development Journal*, 21(2): pp51-63.
- , M. M. (1991), *Politics of Administrative Reform: A Case Study of Bangladesh*, Delhi: Asish Publishing House.
- Khan, M. M. (1994), "Role of International Donors in Civil Service Reform in Bangladesh", *Journal of Administration and Diplomacy*, 2 (1): pp3-10.
- , M. M. (1998), *Administrative Reforms in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: UPL.
- , M. M. (2001), "Problems of Democracy: Administrative Reform and Corruption", *Journal of Bangladesh Institute of International Strategic Studies*, 22(1): pp9-21.
- LaPorte, Jr. R. (2000), "Governance and Public Administration", H A Hye ed. *Governance: South Asian Perspectives*, Dhaka: University Press Limited.
- Malek, S. A. (2002), "Democracy of Undemocratic Forces", *News and Views* (a Weekly Magazine), Vol. 04, Issues 16, May 31.
- Miah, M. A. (1997), *Strategies of Civil Service Reform: A Case study of Bangladesh*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Public administration, Dhaka: University of Dhaka.
- Montgomery, J. (1969), "Sources of Bureaucratic Reforms: A Typology of Purpose", RelphBraibanti ed., *Political and Administrative Development*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Muhit, A. M. A. (2000), "Governance and International Development Community", H. A. Hyeed., *Governance: South Asian Perspective*, Dhaka: UPL.
- , A. M. A. (2001), *Issues of Governance in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Mowla Brothers.
- Murshed, M. M. Rahman (1997), *Bureaucratic Response to Administrative Decentralization: A Study of Bangladesh Civil Service*, Dhaka: UPL.
- Rahman, A. T. R. (2001), *Reforming the Civil Service for Government Performance: A Partnership Perspective*, Dhaka: UPL.
- Rahman, A., Siddiqui, K., Rahman, H., Ali, A. M. M. S. (1993), *Towards Better Government in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Cabinet Division, (Mimeo).
- Sarker, A. E. (2001), "New Public Management in Bangladesh: Chasing a Mirage?", *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, XLVII (2): pp622-31.
- Sarker, M. R. (2000), "Governance and Administration: Challenge of New Millennium", *Governance: South Asian Perspectives*, Hasanat A. Hye, ed., Dhaka: UPL.
- Subhan, R. (2001), "The State of Governance in Bangladesh", *Changes and Challenges: A Review of Bangladesh 2000*, Dhaka: CPD and UPL.
- Subhan, R., and D Bhattachayra (1982), "Donors Perspectives and Influence on Economic Policy", Subhan, R ed., *From Aid Dependence to Self Reliance: Development Options for Bangladesh*, Dhaka: UPL.
-

UNDP (1993), *Report on Public Administration Sector Study in Bangladesh*, New York: United Nations Department of Development Support and Management Services, UNDP.

World Bank (1998), *Strengthening Public Administration Training in Bangladesh*, Washington DC: the World Bank.

----- (2000), *Reforming Public Institutions and Strengthening Governance: Public Sector Board Poverty Reduction and Economic Management*, New York: the World Bank.

----- (2002), *Taming Leviathan: Reforming Governance in Bangladesh; An Institutional Review*, Dhaka: The World Bank.

Zafarullah, H. M., M. M. Khan, and M. H. Rahman (2001), "The Civil Service System of Bangladesh", John P Burns and Bidhya Bowornwathana (eds), *Civil Service Systems in Asia*, Cheltenham and Massachusetts: Edward Elgar.
