

Bureaucracy and Administrative Reform for Democratic Governance in Bangladesh: Rhetoric and Reality

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Abstract

This paper develops a theoretical perspective of analyzing the role of public bureaucracy in a democratic governance, and then based on the theoretical framework examines the role of the bureaucracy in democracy and development in Bangladesh. This paper also argues that the bureaucratic culture and practice in Bangladesh are hindrances to democratic ethos and development of Bangladesh. In this paper, it is also argued that reform efforts of the regimes of Bangladesh for democratizing bureaucracy and enhancing socioeconomic development in Bangladesh were much more rhetorical and political than the reality. Furthermore, this paper argues that the failure of the administrative reforms for sound, transparent and honest governance, and decentralization of administration for ensuring people's participation for development of Bangladesh were contingent upon several factors, such as lack of political commitment, insincerity of the regimes, bureaucratic resistance, intransigence and so on.

I. Introduction

Like the bureaucracies of many developing countries, the present bureaucracy in Bangladesh is a by-product of British colonial administration, which has elitist, non-participative and undemocratic characters (See Khan, 1991; Ahmed, 1981). Although Bangladesh adopted the parliamentary democracy in 1972 after independence from Pakistan in 1971 to guarantee human rights and political freedom of citizens, the democratic politics was thwarted several times in the history of Bangladeshi politics. Numerous factors can be identified as the causes for the dwindling democracy and underdevelopment in Bangladesh. Among different factors responsible for obstructing the promotion of democracy and development in Bangladesh, military intervention, bureaucratic intransigence, elitist and centralized administration, widespread corruption in administration, and lack of commitment and political integrity, as well as non-cooperation among the ruling party and

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the opposition political parties are highly remarkable (Also see Zafarullah, 2002).

Volatile and unstable political conditions, economic depression, illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, hunger, and malnutrition of poor people are the common phenomena in Bangladesh (Hussain, 1994, p. 47), in which social services are extremely limited (Zafarullah and Huque, 2001, p. 1380). Inefficiency in bureaucracy, nepotism and favoritism, political interference in public administration and management, and infringement of the rule of law and fundamental rights are also rampant in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has suffered from political instability since its independence, and the economic mismanagement has seriously marred the potential for development (Huque, 2001, pp. 1290-1291).

A sound, seamless and transparent governance, and a responsive and democratic public bureaucracy are essential in a system of democratic governance for cherishing the democratic ethos and promoting all-round development. Since independence, different regimes made different administrative reform/reorganization efforts from time to time for bringing about social change and development in Bangladesh, and for making the bureaucracy responsible, responsive and people-oriented. A number of reform/reorganization committees/commissions made recommendations for effectuating reforms/reorganizations. Although some of the recommendations for reform/reorganization have been implemented in modified forms, most of the reform/reorganization efforts have been unsuccessful due to the lack of integrity, commitment, consensus, reluctance of the successive governments and bureaucratic resistance. In fact, different administrative reform/reorganization efforts under different regimes for sound governance and development in Bangladesh were much more political and rhetorical than the reality.

What is required of bureaucracy in democratizing the public administrative system in Bangladesh? What are the structural and behavioral patterns of public bureaucracies in Bangladesh? Are the public administrative and management systems in Bangladesh democratic and conducive to development? If not, what were the major reform initiatives undertaken by different regimes of Bangladesh to make bureaucracy democratic and/or development-oriented? Were the reforms under different regimes of Bangladesh more rhetorical and political than the reality in Bangladesh? These are some basic questions the answers to which I have attempted to explore in this paper. The main purpose of this paper is to examine the role of public bureaucracy in reforming public administrative systems in Bangladesh. In order to understand the roles of bureaucracies in democracy and development of Bangladesh, it is also imperative to understand the bureaucratic structure and culture in Bangladesh, as well as their roles in implementing the administrative reform/reorganization efforts in Bangladesh.

This paper begins with a theoretical analysis of the desired role of bureaucracy in democratic governance in Bangladesh. The second section briefly discusses the historical background of the bureaucracy and public administration in Bangladesh. The third section of this paper examines the success or failures of administrative reforms over the past three decades under different regimes of Bangladesh. The final section of this paper critically examines the role of the bureaucracy in democratic practice and development process in Bangladesh.

II. The Desired Role of Bureaucracy in Democratic Governance: A Theoretical Perspective

In a system of democratic governance, it is expected that bureaucracy must be decentralized, participative, people-oriented and collaborative as well as responsible and responsive to the needs and demands of the citizenry. In fact, without a participative, responsive, transparent, seamless and citizen-oriented bureaucracy, the socio-economic, political or administrative development of a nation cannot be aspired. Since the individuals or people are highly valued in a system of democratic governance, the bureaucrats or government officials of a democratic country like Bangladesh should respect the citizens in dealing with day to day governmental activities or public affairs. Although different proponents of democratic bureaucracy, such as Robert Dahl (1956), Charles E. Lindblom (1962), Charles S. Hyneman (1978), O. C. McSwite (1997) and Robert Behn (2000) pinpoint the different perspectives of bureaucracy in a democratic society like the United States, most of their writings have greatly valued the needs and demands of the public or citizens.

Although there might be legitimate arguments over the exact meaning of democracy both in philosophical (for instance, Satori, 1987) and operational (Morone, 1990) perspectives, almost everybody will agree that it denotes the involvement of citizens in their government (deLeon and deLeon, 2002, p. 230). Charles E. Hyneman (1978) rightly states that in a democratic society there must be ways for the people to be informed about what is going on inside bureaucracy (p. 13). According to Hyneman, bureaucratic activities must be overseen under the control of elected officials (p.13). Like Hyneman, Smith (1988) also argues that public bureaucracies in democratic governance should be responsive to political leadership, i. e. the democratically elected members of the legislature (p. 27). Robert Behn (2000), however, provides a thoughtful argument on the problems of how to control bureaucratic activities in a democratic society.

deLeon and deLeon (2002) in their study of democratic ethos of public management and administration review literature on two areas of public management and administration—one is literature on citizen participation

(Forester, 1999), and the other is on participatory policy analysis (deLeon, 1992).

The literature on citizen participation (Forester, 1999) evokes for an increasingly accessible interface for public organizations that allow participation in organizational processes by citizens, clients, politicians, and representatives of other governmental agencies as well as private and nonprofit civil organizations. The literature on participatory policy analysis (deLeon, 1992), however, proposes for offering citizens a distinct voice at the primary stages of setting direction for public programs during policy formulation stage (deLeon and deLeon, 2002, p. 230). In his argument for upholding the democratic values in public organizations Levitans (1943) rightly says, “a democratic state must not only be based on democratic principles but also democratically administered, the democratic philosophy pertaining its administrative machinery” (p. 359).

deLeon and Denhardt’s study (2000) as well as Osborne and Gaebler’s *Reinventing Government* (1992) propose citizen participation in public management and administration in order to make public bureaucracies more democratic and performance-oriented (deLeon and deLeon, 2002, p. 231). Linda deLeon and Peter deLeon (2002), however, underscore the need for making public bureaucracies democratic in a system of democratic governance. Regarding the importance of democratizing public bureaucracy, deLeon and deLeon write, “ Democratic public management, among other benefits, (1) enhances the development of individual persons, (2) promotes efficiency and effectiveness more successfully than does non-democratic management and administration, (3) provides a model for private sector, (4) binds together the breach between citizens and the public bureaucracies, and (5) builds political democracy” (p. 236).

Both the World Bank (1978) and the United Nations (1980) underscore the importance of popular participation in administration for accelerating the process of development. It has been ostensible from the World Bank and the United Nation’s report that bureaucracy can play an important role for ensuring active involvement of the local population in the planning, management, implementation and evaluation of development projects, as well as by ensuring equity in the distribution of the benefits of development (World Bank, 1978, p. 6; United Nations, 1980, p. 34; Khan, 1994, p. 149). Proponents of democratic governance, such as Charles E. Lindblom, Robert Dahl (Yates, 1982, p. 31), and B. C. Smith (1988, pp. 191-228) also explain the importance of decentralized administration and citizen participation in government. Robert D. Behn (2000), however, urges for creative, responsible and responsive public service by ensuring democratic accountability in administration, which can be fostered through a mutual, collaborative and collective manner so

that the common interest of the public will be better served (pp. 62-80). O. C. McSwite (1997) also emphasizes the collaborative and participative role of public bureaucrats in order to promote the democratic ethos of public administration.

Given the above discussions, it can be asserted that public bureaucracies or civil servants in a system of democratic governance must involve the public in the developmental activities through decentralized administration since they are public employees, and are officially committed to working for the common good or public interest. As public employees, it is also undemocratic for the civil servants or public bureaucracy to be alienated from the public or the common masses. Moreover, the civil servants are also expected to be honest, seamless, cooperative and corruption-free, not only in a democratic system of government but also in any form of governance. Finally, the elitist attitudes and behavior of the civil servants or public bureaucracies must be cast off in order to ensure citizen participation and collaborative action for promoting democratic practice and development.

III. The Historical Background of Public Administration and Bureaucracy in Bangladesh

Although Bangladesh was ruled by the Mughal empire for several centuries, the basic structure of public administration and bureaucracy in Bangladesh was established during the British colonial periods for nearly two centuries (Zafarullah and Huque, 2001, p. 1382; Khan, 1991, p. 11; Alam, 1997, p. 19). Although the British colonial rulers brought about structural changes of bureaucracy in Britain, they retained the elitist and centralized administrative machinery in India. The British colonial administrative machinery, known as the Indian Civil Service (ICS) was completely alienated from the common masses. The members of the Indian Civil Service (ICS), who were educated in Britain, in fact, sustained the British colonial norms and values. The ICS officers were even trained to keep them alienated from the general masses (Khan, 1994, p. 146). In fact, the British colonial rulers used the elitist and centralized bureaucratic machinery as an instrument of repression and control of the Indian native population in order to strengthen the foundation of imperial domination (Khan, 1980, pp. 71-89; Khan, 1994, p. 146). Even after Indianization of British Indian Civil Service, the elitist behavior of the ICS officers remained the same that helped sustain the colonial rule (Zafarullah and Huque, 2001, p. 1382). Moreover, the entry into the ICS during the colonial rule was extremely limited, and only highly educated people among the affluent Indians could qualify for entering the civil service career (Zafarullah and Huque, 2001, p. 1382).

The bureaucracy under the British imperial rule became so segregated and privileged segment in the society, and was so submissive and loyal to

the colonial rule in safeguarding the imperial interests of the colonial masters that common masses experienced excessive difficulties in communicating with the bureaucrats and in receiving government services (Zafarullah and Huque, 2001, p. 1383). However, even after independence of India from the British, the elitist and centralized administrative system was still very strong within the newly named Indian Administrative Service (IAS) (Alam, 1997, p. 20). Secretariat was the nerve center of colonial administration located at both the center and provinces, while the miniature prototype of colonial administration was located at the district levels. The framework of public bureaucracy in Pakistan was also developed during the colonial period, and little structural changes were made within the public bureaucracy (Ahmed, 1981, p. 38).

Since Bangladesh's independence in 1971, although different reform efforts have been undertaken to reshape the operational and behavioral pattern of bureaucracy in Bangladesh, the elitist and authoritative administrative system is still prevailing in Bangladesh. Although some initiatives have been undertaken in the recent time to eliminate the dominance of the generalist civil servants over the specialist civil servants, the professional generalist civil servants are most dominant in civil service of Bangladesh (Siddiquee, 2003). Like the British Indian (ICS) and Pakistan Civil Service (CSP), the Secretariat is the nerve center of administration in Bangladesh located in the capital city, Dhaka, and the local level administration is dispensed in the districts, and the thanas, respectively. The Secretariat consists of a number of Ministries, each of which is composed of several Divisions. A Division is divided into two or more Departments, each of which is further subdivided into a number of Sections.

IV. The Rhetoric and Reality of Administrative Reforms in Bangladesh Administrative Reforms in the 1970s

Although three reform efforts were made in the 1970s, none of them was successfully implemented towards democratization of civil service in Bangladesh. The first democratically elected government of Bangladesh under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Mujib) appointed the Administrative Services and Reorganization Committee (ASRC) in 1972 in order to make structural and procedural changes in civil service. The committee found that the existing services were divided into so many distinct entities being too much class and rank oriented, and lacking in professionalism (Ahmed, 1981), which were inadequate to fulfill the needs of the government for bolstering development. In order to remove the existing problems of civil service, the ASRC made several recommendations which included creation of a single classless structure covering all the services in ten grades, abolition of elite cadres, and establishment of a people-oriented decentralized governmental structure to ensure popular

participation and protect the principle of democracy and socialism (Ahmed, 1981, p. 45; Khan, 2002, p. 81; 1994, p. 152; Zafarullah, 2002, p. 53). The Mujib government also appointed the National Pay Commission (NPC) in 1973 to eliminate the disparity in pay scales among the civil servants of the ten grades (Khan, 1994, p. 153; Ahmed, 1981, pp. 47-49).

The NPC's recommendations were partially implemented, although some of its recommendations about the pay scale of the middle and senior civil servants could not be implemented due to resistance of the senior bureaucrats, especially members of the former CSP (Civil Service of Pakistan) and EPCS (East Pakistan Civil Service), who demanded increase of their salaries and fringe benefits (Khan, 1994, pp. 153-154). The ASRC's recommendations for bringing about structural and behavioral procedural changes in the civil service were however entirely rejected by the Mujib government. There were several reasons for the failure of the administrative reform efforts during the Mujib regime. One major reason for the failure of the implementation of the ASRC's recommendations for establishing a decentralized, democratic and single classless civil service system was due to the resistance of the middle and top level generalist civil servants, especially the former CSPs (Civil Servants of Pakistan). Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his Awami League party relegated the status of generalist civil servants, especially to the former CSPs because of their cooperation with the governments during the Pakistan regime. These elitist and class concerned generalist civil servants proved themselves to the Mujib government that they were not the neglected groups in the society or public service—rather they were the essential parts for the running of the governmental machinery (Khan and Zafarullah, 1991, p. 655; Khan, 1991, p. 89).

Other factors that were responsible for the failure of implementing administrative reforms during the Mujib regime included lack of experience of ministers of running government departments, and their over-dependence on bureaucracy at the initial stages of reorganization after liberation war (Huque, 1985, p. 206), and widespread corruption among the ministers and members of ruling AL. It is mentionable that without a commitment of political leadership, and an honest, efficient and skilled political leadership it is not an easy task to make any positive change in administrative system (Hope, 1996, p. 145). It is also difficult to make bureaucracy democratic, people-oriented and decentralized without the democratic practice within political parties. Although Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after coming to power introduced parliamentary democracy since independence from Pakistan, he castigated the democratic practice in January 1975 after introducing a single party political system called Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League

(BAKSAL) (Huque, 1985, p. 208). Freedom of press and media was also severely restricted after the introduction of single party system in Bangladesh. Moreover, the political leaders of the Mujib regime became highly deviated from the long-established beliefs and ideologies that helped expedite the perversion of democracy (Zafarullah, 1987, p. 464). In fact, due to numerous factors including the bureaucratic resistance to change, and the existing political reality, the rhetoric of Sheikh Mujib's regime for completely transforming the civil service system, and bringing it under political controls, ultimately created a severe backlash to regime. Furthermore, bureaucracy that had been relegated by the AL regime took advantage of the existing social, political and economic problems and made it essential and indomitable for the management and administration of the state (Zafarullah, 2002, p. 67).

Another civil service reform initiative in the 1970s was made during the civilianized military government of General Ziaur Rahman (Zia). In 1976, the Zia regime appointed the Pay and Services Commission (P & SC) the major recommendations of which comprised the combination of all erstwhile services and the setting up of a single classless grading structure comprising all the services; focusing on merit principle as a basis of recruitment and promotion; elimination of existing barriers between the CSP and other services by introducing equal initial pay scales; and provisions for equal opportunity for advancement toward the top echelons of the administrative hierarchy, and the creation of a new elite cadre, comprising the outstanding, talented and efficient officials of all functional cadres based on properly conducted civil service examinations (Khan, 2002, p. 81; 1994, p. 154; Zafarullah, 1987, p. 471; Ahmed, 1981, pp. 50-51).

While some of the major recommendations of the P & SC were accepted by the Zia regime, they were implemented with modifications. In the implementation phase, twenty-eight services were created within fourteen main cadres with an objective to reorganizing Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS). The government of Ziaur Rahman affirmed to ensure equality of opportunity in promotion under the new system, and vowed that a superior cadre would be created so that the most talented of the functional cadres could be able to reach the zenith of the public service. As a result, in 1979, a Senior Policy Pool (SPP) was set up in order to encourage free and open representations for all the services of Bangladesh in the key secretarial positions that apparently looked democratic step in the civil service of Bangladesh (Ahmed, 1981, p. 55). However, in the pay structure that was constituted as a result of the P & SC recommendation, 21 pay scales were created with a huge increase of discrepancy between the highest and the lowest levels (Zafarullah, 1987).

In order to promote economic development, the government of Ziaur Rahman also reformed public financial management by privatizing many

public sectors. The objective of privatization was, however, to reduce cost and duplication of function in public sectors, and to increase productivity. As a result, many public sectors were privatized (Zafarullah, 1987, p. 472). Although between 1975 and 1979, the civil service was reshuffled, political patronage was replaced by merit-based recruitment, management as well as career system was reinvigorated, and new pay scale was created, the bureaucracy remained elitist, conservative, parochial, centralized, paternalistic, unchanging and uncompromising in character (Zafarullah, 1996, pp. 92-93).

Critics argue that the reform initiative during the Zia regime reinforced the stronghold of power by the generalist bureaucrats. Compared to the total number of employees working in the public service, the creation of cadre service, in fact, benefited a very small section of the civil servants. Rather, the creation of SSP further strengthened the generalist civil servants (Khan, 1991, pp. 84-85, 89-90). The creation of SSP and departmentalization furthered conflicts between the generalist and specialist civil servants that helped prevent the cohesion and integration in administration (Zafarullah, 1987, pp. 470-471). In fact, the implementation of New National Grades and Scales of Pay (NNGSP) failed to fulfill the needs and demands of the majority of officials in the public service. The antagonism and conflict between the generalist and the specialist civil servants soared up so severely that strikes, absenteeism from work, meetings and demonstrations organized by the civil servants were the general phenomena of the everyday practice within the civil service (Khan, 1991, p. 90). Instead of making any effort to decentralize the local administration for popular participation, Zia made an attempt to reorganize the local government system. Zia introduced the Gram Sarker (Village Government) that was, in fact, a prototype of Basic Democracy introduced in Pakistan in 1962 by then military General Ayub Khan (Zaman, 1994, p. 107), in which the village headmen extracted the benefits other than the common masses.

Reforms in the 1980s

Like the reform efforts under the previous regimes in the 1970s, administrative reform during the second military regime of General Hussain Muhammad Ershad in the 1980s was also political and rhetorical. The Ershad regime appointed two main reform committees, such as Committee for Administrative Reorganization/Reform (CARR), and Committee for Examining Organizational Setup of Ministries/Divisions/Departments and other organizations under them were created. While the first reform committee (CARR) was formed to decentralize the politico-administrative system of Bangladesh, the second one was to make structural changes within the secretariat, its different ministries, divisions, departments and other attached organizations

(Khan, 1994, pp. 155-165). The CARR was largely influenced by the ASRC in democratizing different levels of government. Some of the major recommendations of the CARR comprised creation of decentralized administration through directly elected chairmen in each Zilla (district) and Upazila (sub-district), promoting popular participation in development and decision-making activities and local levels, sufficient devolution of administrative, judicial and financial powers at the district and sub-district levels, removal of influence of central administration over the local administration, and invigorating establishing village courts with sufficient authority and training (Khan, 2002; 1994; GOB, 1982a). Major recommendations of the second committee under the Ershad government included establishing an ideal standard for supervising officers in the Secretariat, promoting people across the classes based on merit, demonstrating the training needs and selecting right people through tests and interviews, and utilizing them in an appropriate manner upon completion of such training, and delegating administrative and financial powers to subordinates by the secretary of each ministry or department with responsibility (GOB, 1982b; Khan, 1994).

While the recommendations of the ASRC for introducing decentralized administration were not implemented during the Mujib regime, the civilianized military regime of General Ershad took immediate measures to implement the recommendations of CARR to create decentralized administration in each upazila (sub-district) of Bangladesh. However, it was revealed that Ershad was politically motivated to introduce decentralized upazila system in order to gain popular support for retaining power. Of many other political motives of Ershad, another strategy of the Ershad government to use general civil servants as administrators in upazilas was the extension of the national government's direct control mechanism to the grass root levels (Khan, 1994, pp. 74-75). Nomination of the candidates for upazila chairmen from Ershad's political party in most of the upazillas reflects on the political motive of the Ershad regime for introducing decentralized administration.

Although the civilianized military regime of Ershad introduced decentralized upazila system for removing the inherited centralized administrative structure, it did not address the fundamental problems of the bureaucracy. The bureaucrats were reluctant and hesitant to delegate authority to the lower levels of the administration, or to make liaison with the quasi-governmental or nongovernmental organization (Zafarullah, 2002). Because of the bureaucratic intransigence, arrogance and elitist mentality, as well as lack of political commitment and dishonest party politics of the Ershad regime, the long cherished hopes and aspirations of decentralized administration for promoting democratic practice and development in Bangladesh became abortive.

Reform Efforts in the 1990s and After

About six months after the fall of military dictator General Ershad through a massive mass upsurge in December 1990, the BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia came to power through a fair election. The democratically elected government of Khaleda Zia appointed the Administrative Reorganization Committee (ARC) to show its respect to the recommendations of the International Donor Agencies (IDA), such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the British Overseas Development Administration (ODA- now the Department for International Development), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for embarking administrative reform, the general purpose of which was to create sound governance to help promote the democratic norms and development in Bangladesh. But the bureaucrat-laden committee, which was suspicious about the politicians and other partners of the change for democratizing public sector bureaucracy and management (Zafarullah and Huque, 2001, p. 1397) spent nearly three years to prepare a detailed report (Zafarullah, 2002, p. 63), although the reforms it proposed were not so conducive to development and elimination of the elitist centralized character of bureaucracy. However, ARC could not submit its report due to the change of the regime that brought Sheikh Hasina to power in 1996.

As a long-time political rival of BNP, the AL regime of Sheikh Hasina, however, disregarded the reports of the ARC and was tinkering with time. As a result of the constant pressure from the IDC, such as the USAID, UNDP, World Bank and ODA, the successive regime of AL set up the Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC). Some major recommendations of the PARC included reducing red-tape and delay in decision-making in the ministries, examination of the class-system in the civil services that hinders performance, improvement of traffic systems and highway patrol, vehicle entitlement of officers, ceiling on the prevailing level of manpower, standard and quality of services in government organization, performance-based annual reporting by the ministries/divisions, and creation of the citizens' charter codifying the rights of the citizens, and the services available from different departments, creation of work improvement teams and carrying out campaigns on administrative reforms in all public organizations (Ahmed, 1999). In fact, the recommendations made by the PARC were almost similar to the recommendations made by the ARC (Zafarullah and Huque, 2001).

After the defeat of the AL in the October 2001 election the BNP again came to power, while the reform efforts for sound governance, and efficient, honest, participative, collaborative and decentralized administrative system for promoting democratic ethos and development

in Bangladesh is still in the doldrums due to the failure of the AL and BNP regimes like their earlier regimes. However, regarding the rhetorical political speech and lack of commitment of the two democratically elected regimes, Professor Habib Zafarullah candidly says:

“Apart from recurrent rhetoric by ministers, no clear statement of intent has ever been produced. There has been no meaningful discussion in parliament about administrative change, and both parties in opposition have almost ignored the issue. At best, it has resorted to polemics. The parliamentary committee on the Ministry of Establishment discusses routine administrative matters but has shied away from reviewing UNDP, World Bank and ODA initiatives. The print media have given wide coverage to the external prescriptions for reform, and seminars and discussions organized by outside bodies have been well attended by ministers and opposition politicians, who were eloquent about the need for reform, but there has been no follow-up of these exercises.” (Zafarullah, 2002, pp. 67-68).

V. A Critical Analysis of the Role of Bureaucracy in Reforming Public Administrative System in Bangladesh

Although the importance of public bureaucracies cannot be denied in a society (Farazmand, 2001, p. 885), the role of public bureaucracies in democratic practice and public administrative reform in Bangladesh is complicated. The complicated role of the bureaucracy in a developing nation like Bangladesh can be understood in light of different socio-politico-economic and cultural factors surrounding it. However, in this section that follow, I will critically examine some factors that help understand the role of the bureaucracy in democratic governance and civil service reform process in Bangladesh:

The Elitist and Authoritative Characters of Civil Servants

The democratic ethos of public administrative system is also tarnished by the elitist and authoritative behavior of the public bureaucracies. An interview with 25 civil servants of Bangladesh in 1976 by Professor Emajuddin Ahmed revealed the elitist and authoritative character of Bangladeshi civil servants. The study demonstrated that in terms of the nature of the government, the majority (about 60%) of the civil servants opined that the government would be authoritarian than democratic. To them, Bangladesh needed a sort of benevolent dictatorship. The bureaucrats also expressed that the developmental activities would be highly centralized, and guided by a central agency (Ahmed, 1981, pp. 81-89). Current literature on administrative reform in Bangladesh also depicts the elitist and authoritative characters of the Bangladeshi civil servants that help understand the causes of the failure of successful implementation of administrative reform efforts in Bangladesh for

making public administrative system more democratic and people-oriented (For more detail, also see Khan, 1991, 2002; Khan and Zafarullah, 1991; Zafarullah, 1987, 2002).

Change versus Status Quo

The bureaucrats in developing countries are often viewed as parochial and resistance to any change or development who always try to maintain the status quo. This common perception about the third world bureaucracy also applies to civil servants of Bangladesh. Because an examination of the role of bureaucracy in administrative reforms of different regimes of Bangladesh reveals that the civil servants, especially the generalist civil servants of administration cadre always tried to maintain their status quo and resisted the implementation of the recommendations of the reform/reorganization committees/commissions that went against their class interests. In fact, the bureaucratic resistance and inertia served at obstructing the reform efforts designed to help augment the decentralized system in Bangladesh (Zafarullah and Huque, 2001, p. 1383). Although devolution of power and authority to local levels of government are essential to make administration democratic (Zafarullah and Huque, 2001, P. 1385), the civil servants of Bangladesh were never interested in delegating administrative power and responsibility to the local levels of administration.

Bureaucratic Corruption

Although administrative corruption prevails in many developed countries, the extent and magnitude of administrative corruption is more widespread in the Third World countries. As Hope (1996) argues, corruption impairs administrative efficiency and negatively effects on the process of socioeconomic-politico and administrative development (pp. 136-137). In Bangladesh, administrative corruption takes place in several ways: (1) due to high levels of bureaucratic discretion, (2) public sector monopoly in commercial activities, (3) lack of strong mechanism for ensuring accountability, (4) low civil service salaries, (5) ambiguous regulatory measures, and (6) inadequate access to government information (World, Bank, 1996, pp. 69-70; Zafarullah, 2002, p. 58).

A survey conducted by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB, 1997) identified police stations (thana), lower judicial courts, public hospitals, sub-registrar's office, land record office, tahshil's office and schedules banks as most corrupt offices in Bangladesh. The study also revealed that the absence of accountability and misuse of position and powers appeared as the most salient features of corruption (TIB, 1997). A study by TIB between January 2000 and June 2000 revealed that of 927 corruption cases, the highest number of corruption indicated were reported in the law enforcement (Police, BDR, Ansar etc.) agency (30%) followed by local government agency (17%), while the lowest incidents

of corruption took place in Transportation sector (2%). Moreover, the different types of corruption as identified by the TIB in public sector in 2000 included misuse of power, bribe taking, embezzlement and extortion, misuse of resources and negligence of duty (TIB, 2000).

In order to eradicate corruption public bureaucrats must be open and they should not hide anything to the public (Hyneman, 1978, p. 13). The report of the team on “Towards Better Government in Bangladesh (TBGB)” also recommended freedom of access to information by public for bringing transparency in administration for promoting political and economic development of the country (GOB, 1993, pp. 46-58). But in reality, the bureaucrats in Bangladesh are reluctant to disclose what is happening inside bureaucracies or administration. Although the IDCs including USAID, World Bank, UNDP and ADB were pressing the governments of Bangladesh to create an efficient, effective and independent institutional arrangement such as ombudsman for checking administrative malpractices, it has not yet been established till now. So, the reluctance of the government to build a strong independent ombudsman to fight administrative corruption and malpractices in Bangladesh is also obstructing the democratic norms and development in Bangladesh.

Factionalism and Fragmentation

Factionalism in the civil service of Bangladesh is a major stumbling block to democratization of administration, as it has slowed down the pace of development in Bangladesh since Bangladesh’s independence. The democratization process of the civil service in Bangladesh has been hindered by the ever-existing inter-cadre and intra-cadre competition among the public servants for attaining personal benefits and opportunities (Mamoon and Ray, 1987, p. 32). “Freedom fighters vs. collaborators” and “CSP vs. EPCS” were among different factions that caused conflicts and tensions in the civil service during the Mujib regime. Factionalism aggravated the integration and unity of the civil service more severely when the Mujib regime arranged special examination for the recruitment of freedom fighters to the higher civil service holding up the appointment of those persons who successfully passed the written tests (Mamoon and Ray, 1987, pp. 33-34).

While factionalism was a common phenomenon in Bangladeshi civil service during the Mujib regime, interest group conflicts, such as “generalist-specialist” or “professional-technician” conflicts were more pervasive in the civil service during the Zia regime. For instance, the generalist civil servants, such as the members of the administration cadre tried to retain their dominance over the specialist cadres, the specialized civil servants of the technical professional cadres, such as audit or account branches, customs, excise, police or other allied departments became united to resist the dominant influence of the administrative cares

to protect their group interest. So did the technocrats such as scientists, engineers, doctors, and other professional bureaucrats for serving their own interests (Zafarullah, 1987, pp. 470-471; also see Islam, 2005). However, the antagonism and conflict between the generalist and the specialist civil servants have also eroded the integrity and morale, coordination of civil servants during the successive regimes of General Ershad, Khaleda Zia, and Sheikh Hasina. In fact, over time, it has been observed that the civil servants do not even hesitate to call strikes, restrain from work or to organize meetings and demonstrations by one group against another to protect their own group interests (For instance, see Khan, 1991, p. 90).

Lack of Administrative Accountability

Accountability is a significant component of a democratic system. Democracy creates a favorable condition for ensuring accountability of both the bureaucrats and politicians where the people have legal right to exercise control, directly or indirectly, over the administrators and politicians (Ahmed, 1992, pp. 389-407). While in a democracy the politicians or the elected members of a legislature are accountable to the people, the bureaucrats are supposed to be accountable to political leaders. In fact, maintaining control over bureaucracy is essential both for promoting democracy and development. The Mujib regime after coming to power, was trying to make bureaucracy accountable to the politicians. But the politicians including the Cabinet members of the Mujib government were corrupt. Mujib himself suffocated democracy by introducing authoritarian single party system by banning multi-party system in January 1975 (Huque, 1985, p. 208). Besides, due to famine, economic depression and political instability Mujib's regime failed to develop a strong political institution for making bureaucracy accountable and responsible to political leadership.

As mentioned before, the IDC including the World Bank, UNDP recommended for creating ombudsman for checking irregularities and corruption in administration. The successive governments of Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina were lingering with time to build an ombudsman to making bureaucracy accountable to peoples' representatives. But due to the socio-political and cultural reality in Bangladesh, creation of an independent ombudsman for ensuring administrative accountability has still not been materialized in Bangladesh (Zafarullah and Huque, 2001, 1395), which is in fact, hampering democracy and development process of the country.

Lack of Political Commitment

Political commitment is essential in a democracy without which socioeconomic and politico-cultural development of a nation is hardly possible. Political commitment is also equally important to maintain

political control over bureaucracy. In order to make a sound, transparent and efficient as well as participative and development-oriented administrative system, an honest intelligent, creative, skillful and committed political leadership is vitally essential. Without a strong political commitment no government efforts to administrative reform or change in administrative performance will be successfully implemented (Hope, 1996, p. 145; Islam, 2005). But Bangladesh since its independence has never had a strong political commitment to reform and check bureaucratic intransigence. Nevertheless, over time, the regimes have been depended on the senior civil servants instead of maintaining strong political control over the bureaucracies in Bangladesh (Khan, 2002, p. 82). The IDC including the World Bank, the UNDP, the ODA, the ADB expressed concern about lack of political commitment to administrative reforms in Bangladesh for changing the paternalistic, centralized and elitist behavior of the bureaucracies (Zafarullah and Huque, 2001, p. 1392; Zafarullah, 2002, p. 56). So, lack of commitment by the political leadership is a major hindrance to democratization of bureaucracy for promoting socioeconomic development of Bangladesh.

Inefficiency-Underperformance Conundrum

There have been often discontents among the academics and the public about the mismanagement and inefficiency of the public officials in the third world countries like Bangladesh. Although the civil servants of Bangladesh are much more educated than the average population, many civil servants are blamed as less efficient and underperformed. This is because the training programs provided by the training institutions to the civil servants are mainly archaic and theoretical in nature, which are devoid of practical problem-solving strategies-lacking any notion of the reality. Another way of envisioning the 'inefficiency-underperformance' conundrums in Bangladeshi civil service is the over emphasis of seniority than merit in promotion system (Siddiquee, 2003). In fact, one major reason of less efficiency and underperformance tendency among the public officials may be traced as in appropriate strategy of assessing the performance of the civil servants of Bangladesh (Islam, 2005). However, the Annual Confidential Report (ACR) used in the civil service of Bangladesh is also viewed as defective, which might be a major reason for 'inefficiency-underperformance' dilemmas in civil service of Bangladesh.

Apart from the above factors, tadbir-based administration, regionalism or districtism, lack of integrity and mystic of service are some common features of bureaucratic culture in Bangladesh (Anisuzzaman, 1985; Alam, 1997), which are obstacles to sound and transparent administration in Bangladesh. Tadbir is used as an administrative jargon in Bangladesh, which often means to make special effort to get the thing done if it does not operate automatically without any effort or persuasion. It has been a

tradition in public organizations in Bangladesh that a file does not move normally from one table to another table without any special effort by people (Anisuzzaman, 1985). Overemphasis on district-based quota system in the recruitment and promotion of civil servants in Bangladesh is also a hindrance to promotion of equity and social justice in civil service of Bangladesh, because it hampers merit system as it fails to recruit and promote the best qualified and most talented persons in civil service (Siddiquee, 2003). Furthermore, the civil servants often have a tendency to avoid democratic responsibility to provide better and satisfactory services to the citizens due to ambiguity of rules. Civil servants are always reluctant to use their discretion in rational manner in order to solve the problems created by the ambiguous procedures or rules, which Professor Anisuzzaman called mystic of rule (Anisuzzaman, 1985).

VI. Summary and Conclusions

Since independence, the democratic practice in Bangladesh has been severely hindered both by the dictatorial rule and military interventions. Moreover, both the politicians and the bureaucracies in Bangladesh have been more interested in serving their own interests than protecting the democratic rights of the public. Bureaucracies in Bangladesh have always been conservative, self-preservative, parochial, elitist, non-participative or undemocratic and anti-development-oriented. Despite the Bangladeshi governments' several attempts for making administration sound, transparent, efficient, accountable, and people-oriented, most of the reforms of the governments became abortive due to bureaucratic resistance, non-cooperation or intransigence, and lack of political commitment and political integrity.

Indeed, the governments of Bangladesh have been more rhetorical and eloquent than reality in safeguarding democracy and fostering all-round development in Bangladesh. Politicians, ministers and bureaucrats are so ingenious that they talk more than what they are supposed to do for the common good of the general masses in Bangladesh. Rather, massive corruption in both politics and administration has aggravated the democratic ethos and the speed of development in Bangladesh. Although the Mujib regime was very eloquent about reforming the civil service, the regime faced serious opposition from higher civil servants, and the regime's effort to implement the recommendations of the ASRC for decentralized administration and classless bureaucracy completely failed. Although the Zia regime made significant contribution by introducing merit system in recruitment and promotion of civil servants, it facilitated the reestablishment of the elitist bureaucracy through creating the SSP in 1979. On the other hand, Ershad's intention of introducing decentralized administration was to legitimate his power than decentralizing administration through popular participation (Khan, 2002, p. 82).

Like the previous governments, the reform efforts by the democratically elected regimes of Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina to make an honest, efficient, transparent, seamless and sound governance and administration and participative bureaucracy were also more political and rhetorical than the reality. Moreover, the ministers and politicians of the two governments since 1991 have organized many seminars, symposiums, conferences and public meetings to root out administrative corruption and make public administration honest, efficient and people-oriented for promoting national development (Zafarullah, 2002, 67-68). But the regimes' eloquent speaking in the seminars, symposiums, conferences or public gatherings for making good governance, and efficient and people-oriented administration for safeguarding democracy and promoting all-round development in Bangladesh has very little consistency with the reality.

While a sound and strong political mechanism for controlling administrative accountability in a country like Bangladesh is almost absent, it is hardly possible, perhaps, impossible to make bureaucracy efficient, honest, and people-oriented. To make the bureaucracy people-oriented and participative, or accountable to people a strong political commitment is inevitable. In fact, there is no strong political commitment among the political parties. Besides, most of the politicians in Bangladesh are always engaged in serving their own party interests. The political parties are more involved in opposing each other. There is no tolerance among the politicians across political parties. The political parties are also responsible for political instability and underdevelopment of Bangladesh, and bureaucrats always take advantages of the weak and volatile political system in Bangladesh so that they are over-powerful and beyond control. During the democratic regimes of Khaleda Zia between 1991 and 1996, the opposition AL boycotted the parliament for 23 months (Berfield and Ranawana, 1996), and called on strikes for 170 days, while the BNP called on strikes 86 times during the government of Hasina between 1996 and 2001 (Dawn, April, 2001). The longstanding hostilities between the two major political parties (the ruling BNP and the AL) in Bangladesh have continued till now as the major opposition party AL repeated boycotting or walking out parliamentary sessions since Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's BNP was reelected to form the government in 2001 (Jahan, 2004). Given the discussions, it seems clear that in order to make a sound, transparent, seamless governance and efficient and people-oriented bureaucracy for safeguarding democracy and promoting socio-politico-economic development in Bangladesh, an honest, efficient, skillful and strong political leadership, as well as stable political environment is essential in Bangladesh. Furthermore, it is also essential to create a strong political institution for maintaining political control over bureaucracy in Bangladesh.

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