

Civil service shame



ANM NURUL HAQUE

THE BNP-led coalition government, at the fag end of its tenure, is allegedly going for mass promotion of civil servants on political considerations, turning the civil administration into a political one. The government on July 3 promoted 153 deputy secretaries to joint secretary level, superseding seniors and depriving around 100 eligible officers.

According to media reports, 95 out of the 153 elevated below to the 1982 special BCS batch, nine belong to former secretarial cadre of 1982 batch, eight to the 1982 BCS regular batch and three to the BCS 1981 batch. Around 50 eligible officers from 1982 special BCS batch, seven from 1981 batch, 12 from 1982 BCS regular batch and 10 from other cadres were deprived of promotion.

Similarly, five additional secretaries were promoted to full-fledged secretaries. The selection of officers for promotion, superseding the seniors, is sparking agitation in the administration, while a large number of aspirants complained that an influential quarter had handpicked officers considering their loyalty to the BNP and its major coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami.

The government also promoted 378 senior assistant secretaries to the post of deputy secretary on January 26, ignoring about 200 officers having requisite qualification for promotion. After the promotion of 378 senior assistant secretaries, the number of deputy secretaries to become OSD rose to 463, as there were no vacant posts at deputy secretary level. All of the newly promoted deputy secretaries have been made OSD and posted to the establishment ministry until they get fresh postings.

BY THE NUMBERS

The frequent mass promotions on political consideration (latest one being the fifth of its kind under this government) has a demoralising effect on all the tiers of the civil service. The system of civil service is bound to be blemished if partisan loyalty, rather than merit, becomes the criterion for promotion. The civil servants, of all descriptions, are the servants of the republic and not of the party in power.

The number of contractual appointments has also been increasing and most of such appointments, and extensions of contract, are being made on the basis of political allegiance. It has been alleged that most of the secretaries and additional secretaries getting contractual appointment, or extension of contracts, are inclined either toward BNP or Jamaat-e-Islami. Such appointments are greatly hampering smooth functioning of the administration.

The country director of the Department for International Development (DFID), David Wood at a press briefing in a city hotel during a two-day long conference titled Asia-2015: Promoting Growth, Ending Poverty said: "Bangladesh civil servants are not capable of implementing foreign aided projects in time." He also said that Bangladesh has to curb corruption, enhance capability of civil servants and ensure proper utilisation of foreign aid to reduce poverty.

Mass promotion of government officers has resulted in a record number of officers getting OSD status, having no work for years together. While there are 865 deputy secretary level posts, the number of deputy secretaries was 950 before the last promotion of 378 senior assistant secretaries to the posts of deputy secretaries on January 26. The other dimension of such mass promotion is that a large number of officers have got promotion on political consideration while many of them having requisite qualification were deprived. This is breeding frustration and resentment among an increasing number of officers in different cadres.

Bangladesh inherited this bureaucratic system introduced by the British rule. The civil service in this sub-continent, under the British

regime, was regulated as per the terms and conditions laid down in the India Act, 1935, which contained fair and beneficial provisions aimed at protecting the interests of civil servants for performing their duties neutrally. But the civil servants in Bangladesh, unlike the civil servants in the neighbouring countries like India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, have failed to maintain political neutrality.

The political neutrality of the civil servants in Bangladesh is also reinforced by rules restricting their political activities. Section 30 of the Government Servants Conduct Rules of 1979 holds: "No government servant shall bring, or attempt to bring political or other outside influence, directly or indirectly, to bear on the government or any government servant in support of any claim arising in connection with his employment. Section 32 of the said rules adds: "Contravention of any of these rules shall be construed as misconduct within the meaning of the Government Servants (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1985 and a government servant found guilty of such contravention shall render himself liable to disciplinary action under the aforesaid rules."

But the sections 30 and 32 of the Government Servants Conduct Rules are honoured more in breach than in observance. Not a single instance, however, can be cited in which a civil servant was awarded punishment for breach of conduct for his involvement in political activities. Many high government officers are now found to be engaged in extra-official activities that are political in nature, and the neutrality of the civil service is spoiled in these ways.

Bangladesh does not have, as yet, any civil service act or any other

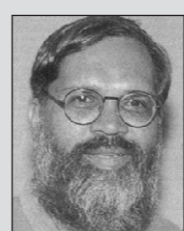
law regulating the civil service. The Government Servants Conduct Rules of 1979, the Government Servants (Special Provisions) Ordinance 1979, the Government Servants (Discipline and Appeal) Rules 1985, and the Public Servants Dismissed on Conviction Ordinance 1985 contain the important rules regulating the civil service.

But these rules and ordinances do not provide protection to the civil servants from being repressed or victimised by the political party in power. Political neutrality of the civil servants is indispensable for smooth functioning of the administration. Self confidence, mutual trust and capability of shouldering responsibility are the key elements that are conducive to the growth of a politically neutral civil service. But mass promotion on political grounds has an undesirable impact on political neutrality of the civil service.

The frequent mass promotions on political consideration (latest one being the fifth of its kind under this government) has a demoralising effect on all the tiers of the civil service. The system of civil service is bound to be blemished if partisan loyalty, rather than merit, becomes the criterion for promotion. The civil servants, of all descriptions, are the servants of the republic and not of the party in power. They are not expected to be loyal to the party in power but are required to serve governments of different political ideologies without being partisan to any one of them. If the process of politicisation of the civil service continues unabated, the goal of good governance will remain elusive.

ANM Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star.

After the Agni-III crash



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

WHAT a dramatic coincidence! Two Indian rockets, meant to escape the earth's atmosphere under the trust of their powerful engines, crash into the sea one after another. Both are built by prestigious institutions. Each failure inflicts a Rs 200 crores-plus loss on a country which cannot feed all its people!

The coincidence ends there. The failures of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)'s Agni-III missile and the Indian Space Research Organisation's Geostationary Space Launch Vehicle are totally disparate.

ISRO's failure is "honourable" and redeemable. Such mishaps are not uncommon globally. Satellite launches occur under extreme stress, so even minute faults translate into large abnormalities. But DRDO's failure may not be redeemable. It caps its poorly performing Integrated Guided Missile Development Program.

ISRO isn't flawless. Post-1979, six of its 21 launches (29 percent) have failed -- compared to five percent for the European Ariane. But ISRO has shown an upward learning-curve. It's likely to bounce back.

DRDO remains plagued by incompetence, inefficiency and a hyper-bureaucratic, secretive culture. It shows little will or ability to learn.

The ISRO crash sets back India's moderately successful civilian satellite programme. The Agni-III was designed to be a military means to bring Beijing and Shanghai into the range of India's nuclear deterrent. Its success would have triggered a missile-centred arms race -- just when Sino-Indian relations are looking up.

DRDO's malaise comes from India's low standards in manufacturing, and from its own hyper-bureaucratic, authoritarian culture. It's not that Indians are not technologically gifted. Their success in Information Technology, metallurgy and pharmaceuticals belies the claim. However, Indians are weak when it comes to meticulous adherence to good manufacturing practices, an eye for detail, and workmanship which aims at perfection. India's manufacturing culture is marked by an almost Brahminical reluctance to soil one's hands. DRDO laboratories inherit and amplify these weaknesses.

The decision to launch INSAT-4C was wholly Indian. The Agni-III decision was driven partly by the United States' plans to contain China through India. Last month, chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff Peter Pace publicly encouraged India to test-fly Agni-III.

Contrary to his claim that this wouldn't destabilise the regional military balance, it would have adversely affected Sino-Indian relations. The India-Pakistan nuclear and missile race is bad enough. Extending it to China would degrade India's security.

The Agni-III failure holds many lessons. DRDO has an annual budget of Rs 3,000 crores -- of the same order as the Department of Atomic Energy, which runs India's civilian-and-military-nuclear programs. This is reason enough to hold DRDO accountable.

We still don't know the causes of the crash of the new-design Agni-III. According to sympathetic reports, these lie in basic defects such as using the wrong propellant, not malfunctioning of specific mechanisms. DRDO has rarely succeeded in developing new designs -- as distinct from limited reverse-engineering.

In the 1970s, it launched two missile programmes but had to abandon them. "Project Valiant", an ambitious attempt to develop a 1,500 km-range missile, totally failed. "Project Devil" partially succeeded in "reverse-engineering" the Soviet SA-2 to produce Prithvi (range 150-250 km).

Prithvi, then, isn't truly indigenous. Nor is it very dependable. Its liquid fuel is highly corrosive. Its launch demands half-a-day-long preparation. No wonder the armed forces resist buying it.

DRDO didn't develop the Agni series on its own either. The missile's first stage is ISRO's SLV-3 space-launching rocket. DRDO simply fitted a Prithvi on top! The

Agni was first test-flown in 1989. But after three flights, it was declared a "technology demonstrator."

India suspended Agni tests in 1994-1999. It was re-launched as Agni-II (range, 2,000-2,500 km), with both stages solid-fuelled. Agni-II was test-flown just three times before it was declared ready for serial production.

By international standards, a missile isn't considered developed unless it undergoes 12 to 20 test-flights under different weather and operational conditions for range and accuracy. It's vital that missiles carrying nuclear warheads have a near-zero failure rate -- to minimise accidents. But DRDO has always compressed several stages of development into a few launches.

In January 2002, DRDO announced the test of a new shorter-range (800-900 km) Agni-I. This too was declared ready for production after just three tests.

DRDO started work on the Agni-III in 1999 and announced it would be ready for a test-flight by 2003. The test was postponed twice for "political" reasons -- averting Washington's displeasure. But it's not clear that DRDO was really ready to test. The final clearance came only after Gen Pace's visit.

DRDO's poor performance isn't confined to missiles alone. "DRDO isn't the world's most reliable weapons agency," says Admiral L. Ramdas, former chief of Naval staff. "The armed services' experience with DRDO-made armaments has not been happy."

No major DRDO project has ever been completed on time or without cost overruns. Consider the three biggest: a Main Battle Tank (MBT), a nuclear-powered submarine, and an advanced Light Combat Aircraft (LCA). The MBT project was launched in 1974. But the tank has failed to meet service requirement tests. It's reportedly too heavy and undependable to be used in com-

bat. The army prefers Russian tanks and says it will use MBTs for training, not operations.

The submarine project launched 31 years ago is unfinished despite having sucked up Rs 3,000 crores. The reactor hasn't yet been tested with the hull. The LCA project, launched in 1983, is still in the doldrums. The DRDO has failed to develop its engine.

The primary reason for this shocking underperformance is DRDO's lack of public accountability.

DRDO's malaise comes from India's low standards in manufacturing, and from its own hyper-bureaucratic, authoritarian culture. It's not that Indians are not technologically gifted. Their success in Information Technology, metallurgy and pharmaceuticals belies the claim.

However, Indians are weak when it comes to meticulous adherence to good manufacturing practices, an eye for detail, and workmanship which aims at perfection.

India's manufacturing culture is marked by an almost Brahminical reluctance to soil one's hands. DRDO laboratories inherit and amplify these weaknesses.

DRDO suffers from excessive hierarchy under its overpowering bosses, who are lionised by the media. Thus, APJ Abdul Kalam, responsible for the less-than-successful Agni program, was given the Bharat Ratna two years before Amartya Sen. After the 1998 blasts, DRDO staff started receiving special "security"-related pay irrespective of performance.

Brain drain to more lucrative jobs in IT has also further denuded DRDO of talent and initiative. DRDO won't perform unless it's held publicly accountable. That's Agni-III's biggest lesson.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

CEC's exit can facilitate things

I believe the ruling coalition is also interested in the dialogue. I firmly believe the ruling coalition can, of course, cut the Gordian knot by persuading the CEC to step down. Such a move, I think, would bring double benefits for the ruling coalition. By that move, it will be able to project that it has caused removal of a person in whom there is no public confidence on the one hand and that it is interested in free and fair elections under a competent and committed CEC on the other.

KAZI SM KHASRUL ALAM QUDDUSI

CHIEF Election Commissioner (CEC) Mr. Aziz's speech, in a press briefing on July 9, 2006, is, I think, a funny combination of futile war cry and wishful thinking. His words came as a shocker while he remarked that there is none in the country who can threaten him. He is absolutely right.

But, what prompted him to make such a rash comment? Does such a comment go well with a CEC? Why will anybody bother to threaten him? Who is in need of threatening him? Election Commission (EC) is such an institution to whom all the people of a country look to for proper conduct of elections.

Chief Election Commissioner is the chief executive of that institution with whom lies the crucial responsibility of conducting free, fair and successful elections. Thus, no one is supposed to -- without cogent reason -- dare to speak ill of a CEC, let alone threaten him. I think the CEC is inventing enemies. He is, with his queer words and activities, antagonizing people of all sorts. He is also inventing his counterpart which is not only gratuitous but also distasteful. Concurrently, the CEC's expectation that the next

general elections will be held under him is, I think, nothing but a wishful thinking.

EC is a constitutional body and its success lies in conducting inclusive elections. What is the utility of an Election Commission -- no matter how much exalted position it enjoys -- if a major portion of people, for that matter, political parties, opt for boycotting elections to be undertaken by that EC. What can a host do if the guests find it befitting not to attend his party as a rejoinder to his audacity? What can a teacher do if the students decide not to attend his classes for fault of the teacher? Many more of such eventualities can be mentioned where application of force can only invite ridicule and pity.

The constitution is, indeed, a sublime entity. But, is the constitution a bulwark for the lunatics and the tyrants? Is law for humans or humans are for law? May I ask -- with due respect to the dignity of the constitution -- whether the constitution is for people or people are for the constitution? These words should not be construed as derogatory to the supremacy of constitution but are expected to serve as message to the ones that keep on floundering on the strength of constitutional patronage.

Patriotic people of the country were heartened

when the influential ministers of the ruling coalition -- very much in line with the concerns expressed by opposition parties and civil society people of all complexions -- aired their discomfiture with the subversive activities of the current CEC. Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Barrister Nazmul Huda and many more belonging to the ruling coalition expressed displeasure at the activities of the CEC. Even grassroots BNP leaders expressed their sheer annoyance with the CEC lately and observed that the CEC is in a sense taking away the ruling coalition's popularity.

Barrister Nazmul Huda, while talking to a private channel, even went on to comment that the CEC seems to be determined either to conduct free or fair elections or to shut down all ways to do so -- none of the CEC's activities, however, prove the former but rather suggest the latter. There were reports that stalwarts of the ruling coalition were going to take a positive step by requesting the aberrant CEC to take honourable exit. However, people's worries must have been augmented as the CEC is still continuing, with full vigour, probably to present us with some more -- as if not enough by now -- of his shoddy work.

Admittedly, each and every conscious citizen of

the country is now worried about happenings regarding Election Commission (EC), the dialogue between the ruling party and the main opposition and the elections to be held in early 2007.

Though the people want -- with their fingers crossed -- positive developments in the build-up to the next general elections, the country is still bogged down in the quagmire of uncertainty. The Gordian knot seems to be tightening with the passage of time. To my mind, the CEC issue is badly impacting the crisis. As the opposition parties have little confidence left in the CEC, they are, perhaps, not feeling safe to negotiate with the ruling coalition with the current CEC still in his position.

I believe the ruling coalition is also interested in the dialogue. I firmly believe the ruling coalition can, of course, cut the Gordian knot by persuading the CEC to step down. Such a move, I think, would bring double benefits for the ruling coalition. By that move, it will be able to project that it has caused removal of a person in whom there is no public confidence on the one hand and that it is interested in free and fair elections under a competent and committed CEC on the other. There is no question of bowing down to the demand of the opposition parties because the ruling coalition doesn't have confidence in the CEC either and he is, moreover, something of a burden for it.

Kazi SM Khasrul Alam Quddusi is Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Chittagong.

One hug at a time

Lowered expectations could also help Edwards' chances. In '04, he was billed as Bill Clinton's second coming, and many audiences were disappointed when they saw the real thing. Now he simply has to show more ability to connect with audiences than, say, Hillary or Mark Warner -- a somewhat easier hurdle to scale.

JONATHAN DARMAN

IT'S Friday night in Iowa and an old politician is trying some new tricks. John Edwards is back -- back, with the familiar deep draw, dark tan and honeyed hair. Gone, though, are the old catchphrases -- "two Americas" and "hope is on the way." In their place: a long meditation on America's moral obligation to confront the plight of its poor. "Thirty-seven million of our people, worried about feeding and clothing their children," he said to his audience. "Aren't we better than that?" It's not the stuff of great sound bites, but it's part of Edwards' new political plan: a presidential campaign with fighting poverty as a central plank. It's a risky strategy in today's Democratic Party -- Edwards may be the most viable national candidate since Bobby Kennedy to tie his destiny to a fight for the destitute. "Yeah, I heard all that stuff. 'Who cares?' or 'It's a dead end,'" Edwards tells Newsweek. "Well, it's what I want to do."

Rebel outsider is an odd role for the Democratic Party's most recent vice presidential candidate to play. Yet Edwards' 2008 presidential campaign -- still hypothetical but proceeding at high speed -- is all about breaking with the established script. He's largely opted out of the buzz primary -- leaving candidates like former Virginia governor Mark Warner and Indiana Sen. Evan Bayh to convince Beltway insiders and media types that they're the best alternatives to front runner Hillary Clinton. Instead, he's using the name recognition

he built up in '04 and hitting the campaign trail early and often -- quietly raising \$6.5 million in 105 appearances for Democrats running in 2006.

His under-the-radar strategy is paying off, in Iowa at least. A June Des Moines Register poll of likely Democratic caucus-goers had Edwards leading a pack of potential presidential candidates that included other widely known names like Clinton, 2004 ticketmate John Kerry and even Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack. Edwards is certainly not the only candidate hustling in corn country -- Warner and Bayh visited within days of his most recent visit -- but with 10 trips to the state since the beginning of 2005, he's logged more time there than any candidate in either party. This time, they're counting on Iowa, which brought John Kerry's candidacy back from the dead in 2004, to propel them into New Hampshire, and beyond. To win, Edwards must leverage his 2004 visibility, shake off the disappointment many Democrats felt at the campaign and emerge from Kerry's shadow as a worthy candidate in his own right.

Edwards talks about 2004 like it was a lifetime ago. His wife, Elizabeth, was diagnosed with breast cancer the day after the election. "We just threw ourselves into it," he recalls. "I went with Elizabeth to every chemo test." The twin traumas -- losing a national election and watching a spouse suffer -- were an enormous emotional load. But Elizabeth's illness helped Edwards keep the election loss in perspective. "The adjustment wasn't

that hard," he says, "because I was so focused on getting her well."

Edwards' old running mate, John Kerry, has had a harder time moving on. Relations between the two men were always more functional than friendly, and the two Johns are now eying each other as potential opponents. There is history here: before inviting him to join his ticket, Kerry asked Edwards if he would run against him in 2008 in the event they lost the election the first time around. Edwards, according to two former campaign aides who asked not to be named describing closed-door discussions, was taken aback and ducked the question. (Edwards declined to comment on a private conversation; Kerry was unavailable for comment.)

Still, to truly cut the cord with Kerry-Edwards, the North Carolinian has to shore up the political weaknesses highlighted by the last campaign. Dismissed as a foreign-policy lightweight in '04, he's co-chaired (with former Republican veep candidate Jack Kemp) a task force on US-Russia relations, and traveled to Europe, India and the Middle East. "The important thing," he says, "is making it clear you have a world view." He's signed up with the New York investment group Fortress -- a move that may help combat the notion that as a long-time trial lawyer, he's anti-business. (It also helps cover a new home on 100 acres in Chapel Hill.)

One key advantage Edwards is counting on: people know who he is. His retooled stump speech takes ironic jabs at his old cam-

paign persona. ("There is the chance that at least one of you remembers that I'm the son of a millworker," he told the Indianola audience.) His advisers learned in 2004 that the hardest hurdle a candidate faces is simply getting voters to remember his name. That's not a problem in Iowa anymore, they say. "A Warner or Evan Bayh would have to spend \$30 million to get where Edwards is," says an aide who asked not to be identified speaking about a still unannounced campaign. Other campaigns point out that a figure as well known as Edwards will have a hard time redefining himself.

Lowered expectations could also help Edwards' chances. In '04, he was billed as Bill Clinton's second coming, and many audiences were disappointed when they saw the real thing. Now he simply has to show more ability to connect with audiences than, say, Hillary or Mark Warner -- a somewhat easier hurdle to scale.

Soon, he'll start inching back toward the limelight. This fall, Elizabeth will publish a memoir; publicity plans include an excerpt in People magazine and major television appearances. But Iowa looms largest, and as the caucuses get closer, Edwards will have to take bigger steps to prove he really is a new man. After his Indianola speech, Edwards disappears into the star-struck crowd of well-wishers. "I really hope you'll get in again," a woman wearing an Iowans for Edwards 2008 button says to him. "Thank you, ma'am," the former senator replies. "Yes," she says, "and I hope you'll really fight this time."

(c) 2006, Newsweek Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.