

Administrative Reforms: Agenda for Intervention

by Syed Naquib Muslim

HERE is a convergence of views among different groups of the citizenry that the administrative system of Bangladesh is still traditional in form and function and therefore it merits modernization for achieving optimal level of administrative efficiency aimed at making a good government. For a developing and independent country like Bangladesh, modernization of the administration is now a basic necessity. The present government has, however, perceived the urgency of this need and has recently constituted an eight-member Administrative Reforms Committee (ARC). The ARC is expected to submit, within eight months, a set of recommendations aiming at "enhancing managerial capacity, accountability of the administration, eliminating complexity and hastening decision-making process."

History testifies that all the successive governments embarked upon administrative reforms on the plea of streamlining the old administrative system of Bangladesh. The administration of Bangladesh seemingly became the guinea-pig for experimentation and reforms were initiated both for realising ulterior political motives or for fulfilling the conditions imposed by the donor agencies or aid/loan-givers. Civil Administration Restoration Committee (1972), Administration and Service Reorganization Committee (1972), Pay and Services Commission (1977), and Committee for Administrative Reforms/Reorganization (1982) sought to introduce administrative reforms for achieving efficiency and economy in the administrative system. But the experience suggests that the efficiency of the administration and the quality of public service have not improved and the people cannot claim of having a good government.

It is admitted by all and sundry that administrative reforms may be needed from time to time by a country in order to make the administration dynamic and responsive to the changing needs of the citizenry. The declared objectives of the ARC, 1993, seem to be in consonance with the objectives of administrative reforms as are perceived globally or ideally.

Moreover, with the change in the form of government and introduction of the democratic order, it has become imperative for the government to bring necessary changes for institutionalizing the hard-earned democracy.

The writer seeks to place before the ARC a few points for consideration.

RIGHTSIZING THE GOVERNMENT: The size of the bureaucracy in this country seems inflated. According to the Finance Minister, ninety per cent of the revenue budget is spent for paying 12 lac government employees in the form of salary and other benefits. Thus further expansion of the civil service may not help in promoting the efficiency of the government because efficiency inheres more in quality than in quantity. Almost every year hundreds of civil servants are recruited by the Public Service Commission; how the number of recruits is determined is not known. The rate of recruitment does not seem to match with the rate of retirement.

Today many new entrants of civil service, soon after joining the service, allegedly begin to dream of building a house in Dhaka overnight by resorting to corrupt means as they find no prospects for promotion; there are, of course, exceptions. After the dissolution of the magisterial courts, officers are often found loitering on the corridors of the district collectorates. All these circumstances suggest that recruitment in Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) needs to be rationalized. A kind of mechanism needs to be devised so that meritorious persons with altruistic minds can be recruited. Merit must be combined with morality. If the filtering process is to be strengthened, stringent modalities of the competitive examinations held in 1977, 1979 and 1981 need to be revived. After all, good persons are necessary for a good administration/civil service.

The existing civil service has to be trimmed to a reasonable size so that the members do not turn parasitic or become underworked. Honest and incorruptible civil servants are an asset to a government or a nation. A rational incentive structure has to be formulated to attract good

people in the civil service and to enable the honest civil servants shun corruption or other malpractices. According to a survey conducted recently by the PSC, brilliant persons are not feeling attracted to civil service today; 47% are eager to go abroad for service and only 20% are willing to join the civil service. It is assumed that if the size of the bureaucracy is squeezed to an optimal size, the government can save huge money and afford to pay attractive emoluments to the satisfaction of the civil servants; good emoluments are expected to have positive impact on the efficiency of the administration. The provision of "golden handshake" may also be applicable to those government employees who are liabilities for the nation.

DEVELOPING A DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDE BY TRAINING: Almost all the previous governments, specially the Ershad government, concentrated mainly upon the structural changes rather than the behavioural changes of the government employees. Experience indicates that structural changes brought through decentralization of administration at the grass-roots level in 1982 did not produce positive results because little was done to effect attitudinal change in the actors of decentralization. The present government has introduced democratic administration based on accountability and transparency; these twin values cannot be installed unless the old administrative ethos and culture are changed. New rules can be framed fast but unless attitude to enforce and practise these rules is not built correspondingly, efforts towards democratization of administration will prove unavailing.

Training can play an intervening role in this respect as good training can shape or effect expected behavioral changes needed for the administrators of today. The present ARC should, therefore, assign stronger emphasis to public administration training based on up-to-date and pragmatic curriculum. The training contents as are presently administered at the training institutes seem to be mostly economics-

biased and rule-oriented; less emphasis is laid on the behavioural science or social psychology. The impeding factor here is politics-in-training (not politics of training). This politics-in-training is also preventing the training institutes from designing an impersonal or rational curriculum often the relevant persons are not inducted into the curriculum committee.

If democratic attitude is to be built in the civil servants or if a new breed of development-oriented administrators is to be produced, training should receive its due status and there should be exclusive and elaborate module on democratic education for the administrators of all ranks and this may be one of the priorities of the reforms.

Articulation of emphasis on training for attitude development will lapse into mere lip service unless pragmatic steps are adopted to develop professionalism of the administrators. The government has to respond to the global slogan "Professionalize or Perish" which implies establishment of a training culture in the administration. But before that what is most needed is a national training policy which is the official and principal source of guide-lines for the training activities to be carried out in the country. Therefore, formulation of a National Training Policy (NTP) aiming at development of civil service professionalism is a significant area for reforms. The draft NTP prepared in 1986 should be revised and finalized immediately. The final version of the training policy should indicate the training plan, strategies, priorities, training utilization activities and career plan. The existing mismatch between training needs and training curriculum, between training and career development has to be minimized. Training needs of the government employees must be based on job analysis and curriculum to be assessed. Public administration-based training institutes must be staffed with competent and committed trainers. Administrators who are seconded to the training institutes to work as trainers should be models or credible persons. Thus, there should be a clear

policy on the recruitment/appointment/deputation of officers to be placed in the training institutes. The government has to keep track of the officers who are prospective and effective trainers having aptitude for and commitment to training and adequate incentive provided to retain them in the training institutes for a reasonable period of time. Experience of work in the training institutes may be considered a plus point for promotion to the higher rank.

In the public sector, training is still considered a discrete event having little link with career development and promotion. Most of the training activities are classroom-based and there is little scope to utilize training in the job. In order to meet the deficiencies of the institutional training, practice of systematic on-the-job training (OJT) in all the government offices and compulsory training on "Training of Trainers" (TOT) to all the supervisors of the ministries/directorates/corporations should be emphasized. Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre has, however, decided to introduce an exclusive module on the Techniques of OJT in all the training courses. The TOT course is important as it is only through this activity that we can produce a new breed of supervisors who will nurture and nourish the new entrants of the civil service and who will in fact work as agents of new administrative culture.

A good government is a corruption-free government; a good government is reluctant to tolerate both bureaucratic and political corruption. Unfortunately, corruption is beginning to be the object of our national shame. The fact that corruption is endemic or pervasive in our government offices is known to all. The Finance Minister has admitted that one-third of the government employees are mischief-makers. Therefore, unless innovative measures are adopted to tackle this problem, administrative reforms will be incomplete.

Corruption not only affects the efficiency of the government, it also impedes the practice or growth of a democratic culture. It is also true that if democratic practices and norms are pursued, corruption will slowly

disappear. It is necessary to examine the adequacy or inadequacy of the existing anti-corruption administrative laws and to see that these are compatible with the gravity or variety of corruption now visible in the administration. Civil servants at all levels believe that unless professional ethics is developed and integrity is heightened in the government officials, bureaucratic corruption cannot be reduced. This again gives rise to the question of training or a massive reorientation. A major segment of the training agenda should therefore cover topics on civil service ethics and administrative culture.

INSTALLING THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN: The present government is committed to establishing a responsive and a transparent administration in the country. Transparency implies people's right to know facts and information for the solution to their problems and also obligation of the administration to inform the public of what is happening inside it. One of the effective mechanisms to install transparency in the administration is to introduce the office of the Ombudsman which is operating in at least 30 countries of the world. The constitution of Bangladesh embodies appointment of the office of the Ombudsman through the article 77 (2) & (3). One of the allegations of the public against the civil servants is that they are often uncivil or arrogant in their manners and that they often behave with them like their masters. Courteous interpersonal behaviour is one of the important dimensions of administrative accountability; effective performance of responsibility alone is not enough. The office of the Ombudsman is expected to redress the public grievances against the administrative corruption and misdemeanour. The judiciary with its existing lengthy, costly and cumbersome procedures can hardly handle cases of administrative injustice or excess. Moreover, 650 lac cases, as a report indicates, are awaiting disposal in different lower and higher courts. This situation justifies the introduction of the office of the Ombudsman.

(To be concluded tomorrow)

A Boost for Aviation

The government's decision to permit operation of private airlines on different domestic routes which, at the moment, are not covered by Bangladesh Biman serves as a welcome boost for our fledgling aviation industry. For the private sector, it also opens up a new area of entrepreneurship — and a challenging one at that — with considerable potential. Since, at least at the initial stage, the privately-owned airlines will operate on routes not covered by the Biman, with short take-off and landing services, the question of immediate competition between these new privately-launched ventures and the national carrier should not arise. However, by establishing new standards in ground and in-flight services, the proposed airlines can serve as models for the Biman, more in healthy competition than in rivalry. After all, they will have to share several facilities, technical and managerial, some provided by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism.

While we offer our congratulations to the Ministry for coming up with this proposal, we cannot underestimate the need for adequate homework on the part of the authorities and relevant entrepreneurs in the private sector. To start with, applications for launching proposed new ventures should be carefully examined and the number of new proposed ventures should be kept manageable small, linked to the available facilities. We should welcome foreign participation, in capital and technical know-how, in these ventures. It is possible — even practical — for some of these new ventures to get their aircraft on lease, instead of buying them. But it is for our authorities to ensure that they are in good serviceable condition and that their maintenance is given top priority by their operators. The training of personnel, especially on the technical side, should be carefully planned and monitored. Again, with monsoon season, accompanied by poor visibility and heavy downpour, often playing havoc with air travel, we should certainly ensure that weather forecasts even for such small airports as Sharmshernagar and Ishwardy are as reliable as possible. We cannot take any risk whatsoever with the safety of the passengers, whether it comes to the condition of the aircraft or the weather.

While we are all for an effective supervisory role played by the authorities on the new ventures, we would be opposed to any government agency turning this role into one of constant interference. If these new ventures are to become viable and eventually profitable, they should certainly be allowed to fix wages for their employees and fares for their passengers. After all, one of the primary objectives of the new move is to break the monopoly of the Biman, by stages. This being so, the new privately-owned airlines, however small they may be, should not look upon Biman as a model.

This new boost for aviation closely follows another welcome decision by the authorities to upgrade the technical facilities at a number of airports, with Sylhet figuring prominently as a beneficiary. This means that under the new arrangement the continuing heavy traffic between London and Sylhet will put much less pressure on customs and immigration facilities at the ZIA International Airport than is the case today. At the same time, it will also let passengers from our southern districts reach their home towns without going through what many of them regard as unfamiliar if not unfriendly, atmosphere at the Dhaka airport.

Creativity and the Liberation War

March 25, 1971 has its parallel only in the Nazi programme of sending to death six million unarmed civilians in East Europe or in the mass murders of Halaku Khan in the middle ages. But the War of Liberation that was ignited by the opening salvos of the nine-month long genocide was possibly one of the most glorious performances in centuries of this forlorn and wayward nation.

Many developments combined over a long period to mature the conditions to a stage where a genocide could be converted into a national achievement of enduring significance. And creative cultural responses to the necessity of finding a true national identity occupied a very big part in those developments. In fact, the Liberation War itself can be viewed as a vast surge of disjointed and spontaneous action integrated into one mighty heave through the supreme alchemy of a people creating a nation out of itself. Spontaneity and creativity formed the soul of the success that the war achieved.

It cannot be said that the Liberation War was reflected as inspiringly in the more familiar areas of creativity — literature, music and the visual and plastic arts — or for that matter the dramatic arts. There has been a halting but sustained narrow flow of works in these media harking back to the gory emergence of this state. With some exceptions, these have so far been nothing outstanding, falling largely to match the scale and import of the Liberation War.

A new organisation headed by the manysided old hand Rabul Husein and very evocatively styled as Ekattur Jatee — the Voyagers of '71 — has organised an exhibition of paintings that have been inspired by the War of Liberation. Works of art fail to attain the significance of earthshaking social and political events primarily because these try to speak of those events basing on correspondences too mechanical — amounting to some sort of copying those in art media. This never works. A fiction or a painting, to be as valuable as the Liberation War, must not play a second fiddle to anything, not even to the inspiration — Liberation War in this case.

The show is being participated by the best of our painters many of whom do know about things called life and creativity more than we can write about. We wish the show to succeed in enkindling the spirit of the Liberation War in the hearts of the visiting art lovers.

BANBATT — the Brave UN Peace-keepers in Cambodia

by Shajahan Bhuiya

TO resolve conflicts in the troubled areas of the world through suitable diplomatic and political process and peaceful means, the United Nations has been getting increasingly involved in peace-keeping missions now-a-days. Cambodia is an arena where the UN has shown an apparent success by holding a free and fair election. This success has been due to the courage and determination of the Cambodian people to have peace in their country and a matching commitment of the United Nations Security Council to help the Cambodians to express their free will through a multiparty election. The election programme, the most important software of the UNTAC, was supported and protected by the UN military hardware to get implemented.

The UNTAC with civil and military components was established by the United Nations according to the provisions of the Paris Peace Agreement signed on 23 October, 1991. The military mandate in the Agreement enunciated that: "1. UNTAC will supervise, monitor and verify the withdrawal of foreign forces, the cease-fire and related measures... including (a) verification of the withdrawal from Cambodia of all categories of foreign forces, advisers and military personnel and their weapons, ammunition

and equipment, and their non-return to Cambodia; (b) liaison with neighbouring governments over any developments in or near their territory that can endanger the implementation of this agreement; (c) monitoring the cessation of outside military assistance to all Cambodian parties; (d) locating and confiscating caches of weapons and military supplies throughout the country; (e) assisting with clearing mines and undertaking training programmes in mine clearance and mine awareness programme among the Cambodian people.

2. UNTAC will supervise the regrouping and relocating of all forces to specifically designated cantonment areas.....

3. As the forces enter into cantonment, UNTAC would initiate the process of arms control and reduction.....

4. UNTAC would take necessary steps regarding the phased process of demobilization of military forces of the parties.....

5. UNTAC would assist, as necessary, the International Committee of the Red Cross in release of all prisoners of war and civilian internees."

To the Editor...

Character

Sir, A man of character is always loved and liked by all. Even men of questionable character themselves know it fully well that they are not only disliked by others, but that people would very much like to avoid keeping their company. That is why at the time of recruitment, an employer insists on the production of character certificate by the intending candidates from men of position who are not related to the incumbent — obviously because certificates granted by a relative is not expected to be free from bias.

However, character is a very wide term and it has varied meanings. An individual who preaches and practices 'golden rules of life' is said to be a man of character. And not one (1) who not only does not himself do good acts (2) but also prevents others from doing good acts (3) promotes and encourages others to do evil acts (4) appropriates one's money in his custody (5) defiles a woman other than his wife (6) takes money illegally in lieu of per-

forming stipulated duty (7) does an act infringing the right of others and the like is said to be the person who has lost character. Such people will not be liked even by their own men, far to speak of others.

It is, accordingly, very much incumbent for one to inculcate the spirit of doing things which fall within the meaning of 'good character' to ensure a healthy and prosperous society befitting the status of a free, sovereign, independent and democratic state.

Abdullah al Abu Bakar, Btrod, Dinajpur.

'Secrets of Indian success'

Sir, I like to point out the news titled "Secrets of Indian success" published in The Daily Star of 11th instant. Our sports authority should underline what did Ajit Wadekar say about code of conduct. Also remember Indian captain's remarks that enjoying too many late night and dinner parties caused a defeat. I pointed out these matters

because our cricket team will go to Sri Lanka at the end of this year, and for I. E. E. trophy next year. We don't want hear any gossips like that our team had gone more for marketing than for play.

Thanks to India and Azharuddin.

Luftul Islam Titu, Fulbaria Road, Mymensingh-2200

mandatory functions by the peace-keepers, the Party of Democratic Kampuchea and its armed wing National Army of Democratic Kampuchea (NADK), also known as Khmer Rouge, put forth new demands beyond the scope of the Agreement and insisted that Vietnamese forces were not withdrawn from the soil of Cambodia. On the plea of this, they refused to cooperate with the peace-keepers according to the military mandate and disarm themselves. And this situation created a stumbling-block on way to implementation of military mandate for creating a congenial environment for the upcoming free and fair multiparty election. Due to partial disarmament of other three warring factions and complete refusal of NADK to disarm needed under the process, the military functions could not be performed exactly according to the previous plan. Hence, military hostilities, particularly between NADK and CPAF, armed wing of the Cambodian Peoples Party (CPP), and cease-fire violations became rampant unfolding greater degree of risk and uncertainties for all the civilian and military personnel of UNTAC who worked for peace in Cambodia. In addition to many casualties of local population, there were casualties of UN per-

sonnel due to accelerated military violence of the two factions.

Bangladesh Battalion

Out of 21 provinces of Cambodia, Siem Reap Province, in the north of the country, was the worst theatre of Cambodian civil war. Bangladesh battalion, acronymed BANBATT, was deployed in military Sector-2 for Siem Reap Province to work as per military mandate. In the changed military climate, command structure of BANBATT has to be very careful. After re-assessing the situation, they took some civic actions aimed at winning the hearts of Cambodian people to enhance their zone of acceptance for the UNTAC personnel. The officers and soldiers were not only disciplined, but also polite and well-behaved while dealing with the factional leaders, civilian population, their counterparts and other UNTAC personnel from a wide range of countries. They proved the bravest of the brave when they took part in really dangerous missions. One UN helicopter carrying Pakistani officers to Samrong district was shot and had to make emergency landing in a hostile territory. Braving all the risks, BANBATT officers rescued the victims. All the activities of BANBATT conformed to the

ideal of a great quotation — "A best life is one which is inspired by love and guided by knowledge", hung in the wall of the office room of the liaison officer in the Sector Headquarters.

Programmes drawn and implemented to benefit the local people received commendations from UNTAC high officials and local people. Under these programmes, a good number of local people were trained as light and heavy vehicle drivers. Some people also received training on poultry rearing and vegetable cultivation.

BANBATT people distributed food items as relief among the poor and transistor sets donated by Japan for the Cambodian people. A very effective civic education and information dissemination programme was implemented jointly by BANBATT and Electoral Component of Siem Reap Province for psychologically disposing the people in favour of UNTAC and the upcoming election. In the provincial town of Siem Reap, the army team jointly with the electoral team implemented such programmes in all eight communes of the town. Coupled with audio visual performance on UNTAC activities and lectures on elections by the members of the electoral team, they used to demonstrate and teach about preparation of safe drinking water and oral rehy-

dration salts, and first-aid for the patients of snake bites and victims of mine blast.

From the time of registration to the most difficult days of political campaign and actual polling, BANBATT officers and soldiers did everything to provide safety and security of UNTAC personnel, particularly the electoral staff. Most of the District Electoral Supervisors (DES) and International Polling Station Officers (IPSO) had to operate with assistance and co-operation from the BANBATT camps during the crucial days of polling. Mr. Derm Whelan, a provincial electoral officer of Siem Reap Province and a Canadian citizen, used to make good comments on BANBATT in many meetings of electoral component. One of such comments was: "BANBATT is a very competent and professional army under UNTAC."

Many DESs and IPSOs from various countries made the similar comments. For peace-keeping operations in the troubled areas of Cambodia, we feel proud of our officers and soldiers. Their uncountable good deeds will remain as an unforgettable episode of UNTAC.

The writer, now Director, Administration of Comilla Proshika Centre for Development, worked under UNTAC in Cambodia.

T & T seeks subscribers' co-operation

Sir, In a section of the press, I came across a news headline on August 5: "T & T Board seeks co-operation of subscribers". Immediately after reading it, questions flashed in my mind: Does really the T&T bother for co-operation of the subscribers? Does not it consider itself enough to move alone in its usual way and style?

The news was that a telephone lineman was beaten up by a telephone subscriber. It is bad and sad too. I discussed about this with some other

readers. Their views may be summed up the following.

Probably this incident was an outburst of long accumulated dissatisfaction and hatred cropped up due to extreme suffering of the subscribers — having no remedy, or relief or even sign of sympathy from the telephone authority. It was just an exposure of the bitter feeling of suffering subscribers as a whole, as the officials actually needed are never available for mitigation of the grievances. Some of them also said that apparently it was a petty and isolated case. But the matter is otherwise much deep rooted and grievous nature. This case may be taken as a signal of much bitter anger of thousands of frustrated telephone subscribers which might burst out with much more velocity. (And that would be enough to blow off the castle of corruption and maladministration of the Telephone Dept. as they say.) You can see, with just the occurrence of signal already eleven said to be corrupt employees of the T & T have been placed under suspension (section of press report 7-8-93).

However, let me come to my

point. Many subscribers are surprised to hear that the T&T Board seeks subscribers' co-operation. In one hand, the service standard of the T&T has fallen to the lowest ebb, while on the other, subscribers are being financially robbed and sucked off (overbilling) almost every month. The mounting problems of the subscribers are simply not resolved but the T&T Board has been biting its drum in the media — "our aim is to serve you". Should this hollow declaration and baseless assurance not be treated as sheer mockery?

In this situation, the "Jattyo Telephone O' Biddut Grahok Kollyan Shomiti" feels that the chronic indiscipline of the T&T can be resolved if the following measures are adopted:

- To replace the age old colonial rules and regulations of T&T by progressive laws suiting the time and need.
- To induct representative of the telephone subscribers association in the T&T Board as its member.
- To set up at least a five-member permanent investigation team consisting of

a representative each from the Armed Force Intelligence, Anti-corruption, T&T Dept., Telephone-O-Biddut

Grahok Kollyan Shomiti and journalists, for investigation in Telephone affairs anywhere in Bangladesh.

iv) To have a panel of judge including a retired judge of High Court, a member from T&T and a member from the TBOK Shomiti for giving verdict on the report of the investigation team.

The implementation of these proposals will, in one hand, help the government to yield more revenue (if not 100% at the moment) while, on the other, the subscribers will get rid of unwanted suffering and humiliation. Only on creating of such an atmosphere, it may be accepted that the T&T Board really seeks cooperations of the subscribers.

S A Hussain Secretary General, TBOK Shomiti 85 Elephant Road, Boro Mogbazar, Dhaka