

## The sixth National Pay Commission Some thoughts

M ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

In his budget (2004-2005) speech on June 10, 2004 the Finance Minister said, "In the fulfilment of our election pledge, a Pay Commission will be constituted at the beginning of the next year for fixation of Pay Scales of the officers and employees of the government and autonomous bodies keeping in view the increased cost of living. I propose to implement the new Pay Scale from January, 2005 after evaluation of the recommendations of the Pay Commission."

The proposed National Pay Commission (NPC) has now been formally constituted by the government. The NPC has been asked to submit its report within four months i.e. by November next. The NPC will review the existing pay scales, allowances and other benefits of the employees of the government organisations and public bodies, and in formulating recommendations take into account the expenditure of a four-member family and educational expenses of two children, and resource position of the government and public sector bodies. As the new scales of pay will be effective from January, 2005 it is expected that the NPC will submit its report and recommendations within the stipulated time. But one report published in the Daily Ittefaq of June 29, 2004 has surprised me. The report said that the Ministry of Finance had sent the draft of pay scales to different ministries and organisations for giving their opinion by the 31 July, 2004. If this report is true (I have not seen any rejoinder from the Ministry of Finance), then it is like putting the cart before the horse.

This sixth NPC of Bangladesh will be headed by the former Cabinet Secretary M Mujibul Huq who also headed the fifth NPC formed on September 7, 1996. Like previous NPCs, the sixth NPC will have full-time and part-time members from different disciplines including armed forces. A separate committee headed normally by the representative of the armed forces, in the NPC is formed to recommend scales of pay and other benefits for the defence services personnel. One representative from each of the three services, that is, army, navy and air force is nominated to this committee which works in close-co-operation with the NPC.

The modus operandi of any NPC includes, inter alia: (i) obtaining opinion of the government organisations, statutory bodies and enterprises which are the beneficiaries, and of the general mass of people who are not beneficiaries, through separate sets of questionnaire; (ii) exchanging

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opinion with the academics, researchers and leaders of civil society; (iii) reviewing the reports submitted by the previous NPCs; (iv) reviewing the pay policy and structure of the neighbouring countries; (v) holding meetings of the NPC.

In the formulation of its report and recommendations, any NPC has to take into consideration a number of issues which include, inter alia: (a) the trend of cost of living indices over the last few years and their probable course in near future; (b) the minimum physical, social and moral needs of the employees; (c) the need to attract and retain in public sector highly talented and trained, professionally and technically qualified persons; (d) the need to reduce disparity of income between the public servants at the topmost and the lowest levels; (e) the imperative need of keeping public servants in key positions above temptation; (f) the requirement of efficiency, equity and incentives for work; (g) the overall economic condition of general mass of the people; (h) the resources of the government and public statutory bodies and enterprises, and demands thereon such as those on account of development planning and national security.

The newly formed NPC will undoubtedly take those and other issues into consideration in the formulation of its report and recommendations. It is our expectation that this NPC will not recommend routine incremental benefits in pay and fringe benefits, rather make an in-depth study on some basic issues and questions and suggest remedial measures. One such issue is whether we should have a centralised and uniform pay policy and structure for the public sector as a whole. Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) in its report of June, 2000 (vol-1) has noted: "Bangladesh is one of the few countries of the world where salaries in the commercial or industrial enterprises are not differentiated from regular government salaries. This policy has a telling effect on the

52 grades and scales of pay. But the government reduced them into 20 grades and scales. The third, fourth and fifth NPCs recommended retention of 20 scales of pay."

After every pay commission, Finance Division's Implementation Wing (I headed this wing for about 2 years in the late nineties) is burdened with innumerable representations for removal of alleged anomalies in pay scales. The NPC may examine whether the number of pay scales may be increased not on the basis of designation of posts but taking into consideration job responsibilities of a post, its educational requirements and belonging to a revenue earning organisation or not and some other relevant factors.

The need for highly talented, efficient and dynamic civil servants in Bangladesh can hardly be over emphasised. Poor pay package in government jobs has been leading to brain drain. Brilliant students are not willing to compete and accept government jobs with low salaries. Rather, they prefer to become professionals with wide overseas acceptability. In order to attract and retain brilliant boys and girls in government jobs, particularly in the cadre service posts, the NPC may examine whether a recruit at the entry level of a cadre post having three or more first division/equivalent and first class in his/her career may be allowed at least three additional increments in his/her scale of pay. The NPC may come with its recommendation on this issue. Above all, our civil servants must be paid reasonably for a decent living. This will encourage them to discharge their assigned duties and responsibilities with devotion and sincerity.

M Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary, Government of Bangladesh.



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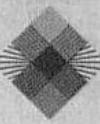
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## NGOs as civil society organisations

NIKESH AMIT

THE final two decades of the twentieth century have experienced an abundant growth of civil institutions including NGOs around the globe. There are a number of theories that analysts apply to explain the mushrooming of the organisations. One of the schools relates such growth of the civil institutions to the failure of the state organs in delivering services to its constituencies. Whatever might be the reasons behind their phenomenal growth, the NGOs have gained acceptance in different constituencies including the donor community as well as the mass people.

However, the question remains to be tested against the degree of contribution NGOs can realistically reach in developing countries such as Bangladesh. Here, I would first look briefly into the origin and definitional understanding as well as typology of NGOs and then move on to explore their legitimacy and potentials as civil society organisation in making developmental contribution in Bangladesh.

**Definition, Commonality, Differences and Specialty of NGOs**

In spite of the maturity in terms of activities and life span, a wide range of definitional variety of NGOs exists that differs from country to country. However, we take the World Bank's definition that describes NGOs as "private organisations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interest of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development".

Among many other typologies, NGOs can be classified according to whether they are: relief or development, religious or secular, service delivery or participation oriented; public or private oriented.

Whatever might be the differences in definitions and typologies, a fundamental commonality of the NGOs lie in the fact that they mobilise social energy and resources through the mechanisms of shared values and expectations. Other commonalities of the NGOs include strong grassroots links, field-based development expertise, the ability to innovate and adopt, participatory methodologies and tools, promoting gender issues, flexibility and cost-effectiveness.

**NGOs in Bangladesh**

Most of the NGOs in Bangladesh started working during and after the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 to help deliver relief and rehabilitation to the war ravaged people. Keeping pace with the development of the NGOs around the world, Bangladeshi NGOs have also graduated in stages.

The increasing growth and influence of the NGOs coupled with polarisation of the traditional civil society along narrow political lines paved the way for the emergence of NGOs as a new social actor into the stage. However, in recent times a crude political polarisation along political lines has started to make pervasive inroads into the NGO sector as well.

**NGOs as Civil Society**

Civil society is the sphere where social movements take shapes. The organisations of civil society represent many diverse and sometimes contradictory social interests that originates from its social base, constituency and thematic orientations. Here, we would look at the NGOs within the framework of three sectors of the society namely the government (first sector), market/business (second sector) and private non-profit ventures (third sector). It is the third sector of the society which is termed as civil society organisation. From the defining characteristics of NGOs, as has been discussed earlier, we can easily trace them within the third sector and hence as a civil society organisation.

**Legitimacy**

According to one development commentator, "Legitimacy is generally understood as having the right to be and do something in society -- a sense that an organisation is lawful, proper, admissible and justified in doing what it does and saying what it says, and that it constitutes to enjoy the support of an identifiable constituency".

Here, we would look into the legitimacy issue of NGOs in Bangla-

des through: legality, acceptability, self-reliance, and accountability.

**Legality:** NGOs in Bangladesh work under the legal framework outlined by the NGO Affairs Bureau established by the Bangladesh government. The formation of the NGO Affairs Bureau and the drafting of the Foreign Donations Act ensure the legal frame under which NGOs operate. The provision of licences to operate and permission to receive foreign funding regulates the operation of NGOs. Apart from the government regulation, NGOs themselves have also developed self-regulation adopting 'code of ethics' initiated by the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB).

**Acceptability:** Since inception, NGOs are being considered as organisations that are based on the concept of serving people as opposed to coercion. In fact, a missionary zeal has worked as a driving force in organising and implementing the work of the NGOs in general. As opposed to the bureaucratic attitude of government officials, the NGO staff are

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comparatively more easily reachable by the mass people.

Through their grassroots network, NGOs have played a vital role in all the national disasters of the country reaching to the poor before any government agency could. This has also enhanced, to some extent, the acceptability of the NGOs to masses as well as the government. Apart from this, some of the NGOs' successes in micro-finance and non-formal education have arguably contributed immensely to the wide acceptance and legitimacy of the NGOs in the country.

**Self-reliance:** The main concern for the Bangladeshi NGOs lies in their dependency on foreign funding. As NGOs are always in the look out for funding, they are less able to think strategically in terms of their specialty and sustainability. While it is true that non-government development interventions in Bangladesh cannot be financed completely by beneficiaries or by other domestic resources, the concern of funding will always pose a threat, either in the form of acquiescence to donor demands or termination of funding resources.

**Integrity and Accountability:** The issue of integrity is probably the trickiest part of the legitimacy issue. Integrity is much more to do with values, commitment, relationship and human dignity. It has been argued that voluntary organisations in

industrialised countries have been able to maintain a sense of social values and downward accountability whereas any genuine sense of downward accountability to the beneficiaries is not common among development NGOs in the south including Bangladesh. However, limited efforts have been made to make NGOs' operation truly participatory. But beneficiaries are seldom allowed to make decisions on programmes or budgets, or even to participate in monitoring and evaluation.

### Some Observations

Most of the criticisms of the NGOs in Bangladesh are focused around the issues of funding and accountability. Among many negative perceptions of NGOs are: too rich, anti Islamic, too western.

The most vocal critics of the NGOs during the cold-war period were the leftist groups who termed NGOs as agents of capitalism involved in deterring revolution of the people. Another group vocal about the NGOs are

make valuable and sustained contribution.

### Potential as Civil Society Organisation

With their limitations as discussed above, NGOs in Bangladesh are trying to come of age as civil society organisations in working with the grassroots people making them more active economically as well as socially and thus contributing to some extent to the development and democratisation of the society. However, in a society having high illiteracy rate, political pressure and coercive policy regime coupled with people's inclination in explaining poverty in terms of cultural and religious terms bypassing the structural causes, the question remains unanswered as how and what substantial role NGOs can play while their legitimacy and accountability are also being questioned?

The social and economic politics in Bangladesh is also dominated by money and hooliganism as opposed to genuine participation of the masses. The vertical relationship i.e. patron-client relationship in the society is much more valued rather than the horizontal one. As NGOs are part of the whole socio-economic entity, a reflection of social structure i.e. patron-client relationship is obvious in the construction and leadership of Bangladeshi NGOs in general.

### Conclusion

It seems that the NGOs in Bangladesh have so far negotiated, more or less successfully, their legitimacy with various sectors of critics including the government. However, the challenge in increasing their legitimacy and success in the days ahead would depend on how they negotiate relationship with the left and right wing groups and, of course, with the government as well as other social actors.

Another crucial area for NGOs on the way to deepen legitimacy would be their accountability towards grassroots people. The more they would be able to strengthen inclusive synergistic relationship with their constituents, the more they would be able to make other actors of the society including the state more accountable and thus contributing to the transition to a more prosperous and democratic society.

It seems that under the present political culture, the political parties and the elite in the government are not willing to entertain any role by the NGOs that they think may go against their interest. So, the goal of contributing substantially in the social development would depend on how the dialectic relationship among the government, NGOs, donors, religious institutions and the masses evolve in the days to come.

Nikesh Amit is an NGO worker.

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