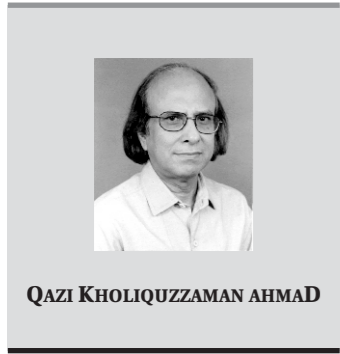


# Bangladesh in International League Tables



QAZI KHOLIQUZZAMAN AHMAD

IN this article I consider the international ranking of Bangladesh in terms of Human Development Index of UNDP, Corruption Index of Transparency International, Failed State Index of The Fund for Peace, and Growth Competitiveness Index of World Economic Forum.

Let us first consider the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI is based on longevity (life expectancy at birth), education (adult literacy rate and combined gross enrollment ratio), and estimated earned income (in PPP US\$ terms). Thus, HDI is a measure of health, knowledge, and standard of living. Since 1975, the value of HDI for Bangladesh has risen continuously from 0.345 in 1975 to 0.520 in 2003, the latest year for which the index is available. Since 2000, Bangladesh belongs to the medium human development category, which includes all the countries with HDI value between 0.500 and 0.800. For Bangladesh, the annual rate of increase in the HDI value accelerated continuously up to 2000. Thus, the annual growth rate exhibited by the HDI value for Bangladesh was 1.10 per cent between 1975 and 1980, 1.37

per cent between 1980 and 1985, 1.54 per cent between 1985 and 1990, 1.58 per cent between 1990 and 1995, and 2.39 per cent between 1995 and 2000.

But, the annual rate of increase has been substantially lower since 2000, at 0.92 per cent. It may be noted that, up to 2001, among the South Asian countries, Nepal and Pakistan were in low human development category, while Sri Lanka and India were in the medium category along with Bangladesh. But, while Bangladesh was ranked 139 in 2001, India and Sri Lanka were respectively ranked at 127 and 99. As of 2003, India retained its position at 127 while Sri Lanka improved to 93. Bangladesh also maintained its position at 139, but Nepal and Pakistan overtook Bangladesh acquiring ranks of 136 and 135 respectively. (All figures quoted above regarding HDI have been taken from or computed from figures obtained from UNDP, Human Development Report 2000 and 2005).

As indicated above, Bangladesh's HDI value increased steadily over the period 1975-2003; but the rate of increase considerably slowed after 2000 and the performance between 2000 and 2003 was rather disappointing when compared with those of the South Asian countries, Nepal and Pakistan. The question now is: what has been happening since 2003 and what might happen in future in respect of the socio-economic aspects included in HDI? It is important, therefore, to address the persisting and emerging problems in relation to income growth and distribution and other aspects of human development if the rate of increase in

## BEHIND THE FACADE

**All these problems facing the country are compounded by the absence of necessary political will to resolve them. It would seem, therefore, that the country is in the grip of a crippling leadership crisis. Let the indices discussed in this article act as a wake-up call to the nation, leading to appropriate action by all concerned for the purpose of sustainable (economically vibrant, socially equitable, environmentally sustainable, inclusive) national development.**

the HDI value is to be accelerated in future.

Transparency International has been ranking Bangladesh as the topmost corrupt country in the world for several years now and more recently Washington-based The Fund for Peace has assessed the country at number 17 in a list of failed or failing states in the world. The index to measure failed or failing states has been prepared for 60 countries, with relevant data collected during May-December 2004. The countries ranked one to 10 are fully or almost fully failed states, while those ranked 11 to 20 exhibit strong signs of going down that road, and those ranked 21 to 30 are okay for now but exhibit some signs of weakness in certain respects. Bangladesh belongs to the second category. In respect of both corruption and failed state indices one may question aspects of the methodologies used, but the fact remains that the conditions prevailing in Bangladesh are very unsavoury.

Corruption is pervasive and further widening and deepening in Bangladesh. It encompasses both public and private sectors. Collusion in corruption between, for example, the givers of bribes and takers of

bribes is rampant, as it benefits both the parties. Corruption is facilitated by lack of transparency and accountability in public administration. Politics has also become criminalised through corruption and muscle power and spawns further corruption and hegemonic politics.

In relation to the failed state index, regardless of Bangladesh's ranking, even a casual observer would find serious warning signs regarding social disintegration in terms of, for example, increasing population density, increasing rural to urban migration, criminalisation of governance, large-scale criminal and political violence, deepening poverty and accentuating socio-economic inequality, widespread human rights violations, poor and deteriorating public services, and political confrontations. These are among the 12 indicators used by the Fund for Peace to make the assessment. But we do not seem to pay heed to the emerging signs and the spreading disaffection.

The World Economic Forum's Growth Competitiveness Index (GCI) is based on: the quality of macro-economic environment, the state of the country's public institutions, and, given the importance of technology

and innovation, the level of its technological readiness. Three sub-indices are first constructed for these three pillars, as they are called, of the GCI, which is a weighted average of the sub-indices. Hard data is collected for different countries from various sources and, if hard data are not available, appropriate proxies are used. In terms of GCI, Bangladesh is ranked number 110 as of 2005, out of 117 countries for which the index has been constructed for the year, which is eight places below the country's ranking in 2004. On the other hand, India and Pakistan have both improved their competitiveness by five and eight places respectively. The GCI in fact measures the efficacy of the policies and institutions that determine the level of productivity in a country and is indicative of what level of prosperity a particular economy can attain. Productivity is in fact key to improved rates of return on investment and, therefore, key to economic growth. A more competitive economy is likely to grow faster compared to a less competitive economy. Bangladesh, ranked 110 (out of 117), exhibits a rather bleak picture relating to growth prospect over the medium and even longer

term, unless the country's growth competitiveness can be improved significantly. But, the constraints are severe.

A reality check on the three pillars of GCI will clarify the prevailing situation in Bangladesh. On the basis of micro-economic environment sub-index, Bangladesh is ranked 83 (out of 117). This means that the situation is pretty bad, contrary to the claim that macro-economic stability continues to be a major success story of ours. In fact, the macro-economic environment is severely strained by surging inflation (annualised average being upward of 10 per cent now and increasing), a huge and rising trade gap (Tk 197 billion for the 11 months from July 2004 to May 2005, having risen from Tk 122 billion in the previous full year, i.e. 2003-04), large unproductive public expenditures, a persisting foreign exchange (dollar) crisis, stickiness in investment, and a huge amount of black money.

As to the public institutions, there are serious problems arising from the absence of effective local government institutions; centralised administration characterised by procrastinations, inefficiencies, and absence of authority at local levels to

act quickly in response to emerging situations; pervasive corruption destroying the basic fabric of the institutional mechanisms and workings; the Anti-Corruption Commission remains marginal due to internal conflicts and government interference even after one year of its establishment, and it cannot also be effective as long as it is not made financially and administratively independent; political interference; non-separation of judiciary from the executive; and absence of rule of law. In fact, Bangladesh is ranked 117 (out of 117) in terms of the state of the country's public institutions.

In respect of technology and innovation, Bangladesh remains backward and is ranked 101 (out of 117). Human capability in Bangladesh remains low, given that adult literacy rate is only 41 per cent, and the spread of science and technology education is much more limited. Many schools and colleges located in the rural areas and small towns do not teach science at all; and those schools and colleges located in these areas, which teach science, are extremely ill-equipped in terms of teaching equipment and materials as well as lack of trained teachers. Only few school and colleges located in urban areas, particularly in large cities, are well-equipped to teach science. At the tertiary level, the proportion of students studying science and technology is extremely low. In terms of hardware, there are limited information technology facilities in the country, mostly in urban areas and available to people who know English. Agriculture, rural

non-agricultural activities, and urban information sectors are still largely characterized by traditional technologies.

Bangladesh suffers from resource constraints, notwithstanding substantial remittances from Bangladeshis working abroad, due to low domestic mobilisation, low official development assistance (ODA), and low foreign direct investment (FDI). Moreover, large-scale corruption siphons off a large part of the available resources. Then, there is the all-pervasive poor governance, as reflected in widespread corruption and various warning signs indicated earlier, which is in a mutually reinforcing relationship with the resource constraints. At the same time, another major constraint is the large-scale socio-economic exclusion manifested in the already mentioned glaring and accentuating socio-economic disparity. All these problems facing the country are compounded by the absence of necessary political will to resolve them. It would seem, therefore, that the country is in the grip of a crippling leadership crisis. Let the indices discussed in this article act as a wake-up call to the nation, leading to appropriate action by all concerned for the purpose of sustainable (economically vibrant, socially equitable, environmentally sustainable, inclusive) national development.

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# Why we need efficient and non-partisan civil servants

M ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

RECENT recruitment of 150 or so activists of Jatiyabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student wing of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party as Upazila Election Officers (UEO) is a much talked about subject in the country. Bangladesh Public Service Commission which recruited these UEOs has so far preferred to remain silent on the issue. But silence is not always golden. There goes a saying: "Silence gives consent." Although there was politicisation of appointment and promotion of civil servants earlier, the politicisation of administration in general, and appointment and promotion of civil servants in particular, has reached a new height during the last 14 years or so of parliamentary system of government. This article, therefore, makes an attempt to discuss as to why we need efficient and non-partisan civil servants.

First, Bangladesh inherited the civil service system introduced by the British in the sub-continent. Civil servants in Britain are servants of the Crown (the Crown is an institution which never dies, and the King or the Queen is the individual who holds the

institution). The position and functions of a civil servant remains the same whichever political party is in power. Stability of administration is ensured by the political neutrality of the civil servants. A follower of Westminster style of parliamentary democracy and inheritor of the civil service introduced by the British, Bangladesh needs politically neutral civil servants for the stability of its administration. In our neighbouring countries such as India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, the politically neutral civil servants continue to play an important role in the overall administration of their countries. In the United States, there are political appointees under the spoils system and the permanent civil servants.

Second, democracy has not yet taken a deep root in Bangladesh. Political analysts are of the opinion that the success of a parliamentary democracy depends upon the democratic spirit of tolerance, devoted sense of respect and relentless response towards institutionalism of democracy. In a country like Bangladesh where parliamentary democracy has made fresh a start, the ruling party or the leadership should do everything towards the positive turn of establishing a democratic

system of government. It should respect public opinion and the opinion of the opposition, whether inside parliament or outside, and resolve all political disputes with the spirit of democracy. On the other hand, the opposition political parties, particularly the main opposition, should accept the fact that the party/alliance winning the elections has got the right

day-to-day administration successfully.

Third, the Pay and Services Commission has observed that the task of the government makes heavy demands on the civil servants. The execution of policies embodied in existing legislation, formulation of new policy, formulation and execution of development programmes,

men would be able to handle such complex situations.

Further, interdependence is becoming an increasingly important phenomenon worldwide. The global approach to problems which were hitherto of national interest stem from our domestic needs of economic stability, poverty reduction, and creation of maximum employment

is ministers, state ministers, etc do not have previous knowledge of working in a ministry. It is the responsibility of the senior civil servants in the ministries to initially guide such ministers in the discharge of their duties. As public representatives, the ministers have certain obligations to their electorates and others who helped them financially or otherwise in their elections.

civil servants at the field level have to remain watchful so that the benefits of these programmes go to the target groups. This can be expected from the non-partisan civil servants only.

Sixth, for holding general elections of members of parliament peacefully, fairly and impartially, the system of non-party caretaker government was introduced in the constitution through the Constitution (Thirteenth Amendment) Act, 1996. The civil servants have to play the most crucial role for holding such elections peacefully, fairly, and impartially. This is an onerous responsibility on the civil servants. There are national and international election monitoring agencies and observers to see whether election is being held fairly and impartially or not. Future of our nascent democracy and national image are involved. Efficient and non-partisan officials are required to do the job successfully. The last three general elections of members of parliament held peacefully, fairly and impartially received national and international acclamation. This establishes the need for efficient and politically neutral civil servants.

Last but not the least, Article 59 of the constitution provides that local government in every administrative unit of the republic shall be entrusted

to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with law. Article 60 enjoins that parliament shall, by law, confer powers on the local government bodies. At the moment, elected local government bodies are functioning only at the union level. Elected local government bodies are absent at the zila and upazila levels. The ruling BNP is committed to reintroduce elected bodies at these two important tiers of administration. When reintroduced, the smooth functioning of the local governments, particularly at the upazila and zila levels, will require services of efficient, experienced, and non-partisan civil servants.

To conclude, considering the role of the civil servants in the overall administration of the country, the need for efficient and non-partisan civil servants can hardly be over-emphasised. Political parties should keep in mind that politicisation of the civil servants ultimately does not bring any good to them. The political masters should decide policy issues and the civil servants will implement them impartially. Clear distinction has to be maintained between the two roles.

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to rule for the period stipulated in the constitution of the country. But this happy situation has not been prevailing. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Awami League (AL), which have held the state power for the last 14 years or so, have created an unhealthy situation for functioning of democracy in general and the parliamentary system of government in particular. Such a situation demands efficient and non-partisan civil servants for impartial implementation of our national policies and programmes as well as for running the

management of international relations, wide range of research on commercial and other economic policies have imposed a heavy burden on our civil servants. The burden on the civil servants of a developing country like Bangladesh is all the more onerous when account is taken of the duty to secure international acceptability of development plans and projects and simultaneously national acceptability of the same at levels where poverty, illiteracy, and divisive political forces predominate. Only highly capable and carefully trained

opportunities. At present, Bangladesh cannot undertake a sizeable development programme without foreign assistance or without making high structural changes. In such circumstances, a civil servant is tested for his ability as an effective negotiator. A thorough knowledge of the subjects under negotiation and a high degree of confidence in the abilities for negotiation are demanded of the senior civil servants. The civil servants of the country have thus to be truly professional.

Fourth, many political bosses, that

When they come with requests, the ministers seek advice from the senior officers to suggest a way to help them. The senior civil servants come to suggest ways which are not in contravention with the established government rules, orders, etc.

Fifth, the ruling party always tries to achieve political gains from food safety-net and social safety-net programmes. These programmes include vulnerable group feeding, gratuitous relief, allowances for the widowed, deserted and destitute women, and old-age allowance. The

# Politicised bureaucracy the obstacle to good governance

SADRUL HASAN MAZUMDER

GOOD governance means policy frameworks conducive to social justice and responsible use of political power and public resources by the state authorities. This calls for capable public management: Policymakers and the administration need to grant civil society and the private sector scope for participation. They need to ensure the availability of information, and provide transparency. And they need to guarantee public accountability both internal and external of their actions. The rule of law and justice, especially concerning the principle of equality before law, must be guaranteed. There can be no good governance without abiding by basic democratic principles and human rights; indeed, democracy and political participation, which goes with it, are what generate "good" governance in the first place.

Different international organisations and donors interpret the term good governance, its concrete implications for promotion, and the criteria that distinguish it from other areas of promotion, slightly differently, according to their own particular objectives, mandates and focal areas of work.

The question of bureaucracy, corruption and aid, on the other hand, is a big one now-a-days and one of the buzz words in the field of development is "governance." Increasing politicisation of bureaucracy, gross corruption and inefficiency are the three major stumbling blocks to good

governance. Lack of proper recruitment and training has resulted in the bureaucracy being out of tune with the need of the globalised world and its highly competitive environment. Many bureaucrats succumb to political pressure or indulge in partisan politics to hide their inefficiency and corruption.

The country needs a more efficient bureaucracy in the 21st century to face the challenges of globalisation. Bangladesh still lags behind in building a modern administration and it is not prepared to participate in global negotiations. The political appointments and affiliations of the bureaucrats with particular parties sealed the fate of those decisions, making them foregone conclusions. It is as inevitable as death after birth that the public officials under the spotlight would not and could not rise above partisanship.

The public servants of every cluster -- administrators, judicial officers and law enforcers remain politically neutral or at least they are supposed to in most of the developed countries. This happens just because of the statutory requirement of their non-political status and on the basis of tradition. Their appointment through constitutionally established neutral machinery mandated to act free from political pressure lays the foundation of bureaucratic neutrality. Not only enacting new laws, it is the application of laws that prevent or at least drastically minimise the scope of discretionary powers of politicians to dictate the postings, transfers and promotions

arbitrarily. It provides the public officials the environment to conduct business transparently following rule-based procedures. Though we are not very much satisfied with the current state of the bureaucracy, it must have the authority to function independently under prescribed rules. Not being appointed by a political party or held in hock to them, the public officials do not have to curry favour for

individuals in the mainstream politics. The political parties have immense and unavoidable responsibilities to ensure an efficient leadership within the party. But they have not discharged as such. Political change e.g. the loss of legitimacy of traditional political parties, low electoral turnouts, disengagement from traditional forms of politics further indicate the lack of people's confidence in the political

**There are several countries with dubious distinction of corruption, lack of democracy and frequent changes of government. But the bureaucracy in most of those countries more or less remains stable because the civil administration functions under its own chain of command led by the cabinet secretary. We have almost similar rules and regulations but these are not followed because of frequent interference by political leaders. We must ensure that promotion, posting and recruitment process are free from interference by the political government.**

reward or preferential treatment.

Politicisation of bureaucracy started during the Pakistan period, especially during the military regimes. However, the trend acquired greater intensity in post-liberation period and posed a serious problem in the last decade or so.

In recent years, promotions in the civil service have seen more and more partisan approaches, which further politicised the administration. The politicians are the masters and bureaucracy must be subservient to a political government, but there must be a limit to the degree of interference by the latter. Political leaders must spell out what they expect from the bureaucracy and must not interfere in areas beyond their jurisdiction. And to ensure this it is inevitable to ensure participation of efficient and learned

parties and leaders.

The nomination process, which is the primary phase of selecting the future policy makers, has to be made transparent and the political parties should follow a stipulated set of criteria in selecting the contesting candidates who will run the general elections with the respective party mandate. But unfortunately politics in our country is marked by lack of democratic practice within the political parties and among their activists, which has a serious reflection on the country's governance policies. To come out of such circumstance and establish a good political culture the political parties should be brought under certain rules and regulations. A strong consensus among the political parties, certain reforms in the existing electoral laws and proper implement-

up to the lower tier. Creating an effective and efficient leadership at the grassroots level helps in the process of ensuring a sound decentralised effective administration. The capacity of the local elected representatives, particularly the women, should be enhanced so they can contribute in implementing the national development programmes. With a view to freeing the entire decision making process from the clutches of bureaucracy and the traditional practices, the exiting operational structure of the local government institutions should be vigorously reorganised so that the elected representatives specially the women can more proactively involve in the development activities. The Constitution also recognises the empowerment of women at the local government institutions stating: "The

will formulate policy and the bureaucracy will implement it. Clear distinction needs to be maintained between the two roles. The three organs of the country -- the Parliament, the Judiciary and the Executive should be facilitated to work independently maintaining well cooperation with each other. The members of Parliament should be kept out of the development programme leaving the local government institutions performing their duties independently, without any form of intimidation and political interference. The local government institutions should be strengthened enough with the local elected bodies adequately empowered. Skill of the local elected representatives especially the women members of the Union Parishad should be developed through proper training.

Bureaucrats as often blamed by the politicians create special obstacles to the functioning of elected governments. In such a situation the civil society should come forward with more boldness to establish bureaucracy as a separate entity independent of political interference. The civil society initiative helps bridging the gap between the political parties and the civil administrators, which can be ensured through various collaboration between the two.

The government should ensure recruitment of quality people at the entry, improve terms and conditions of service, inspire and boost the morale of officials and regularise promotion system and keep bureaucracy free from politicisation. A politicised bureaucracy can only serve the interest of the parties not of the mass people. The standard of the defence services training institutions is better and our defence services impart better training than in many other countries, which has already been recognised by the United Nations. We should also provide at least the same level of training to our civil bureaucracy. Massive reforms in the education system are must because the existing one 'cannot produce quality administrators'. To ensure that only skilled and meritorious people are recruited for public services the traditional system of recruiting process has to be changed.

We have experienced a neutral bureaucracy during the short tenure of caretaker government during the last three general parliamentary elections. But unfortunately the behaviour of the same group of people changes dramat-

ically at the time of political governments. The changes most of the time reflected as inefficiency and inability of the bureaucrats.

There are several countries with dubious distinction of corruption, lack of democracy and frequent changes of government. But the bureaucracy in most of those countries more or less remains stable because the civil administration functions under its own chain of command led by the cabinet secretary. We have almost similar rules and regulations but these are not followed because of frequent interference by political leaders. We must ensure that promotion, posting and recruitment process are free from interference by the political government.

The Public Service Commission should be made fully and genuinely independent and changes to its recruitment system be brought to draw properly qualified persons. The changes should be brought within the earliest possible time to arrest qualitative deterioration of bureaucracy. Damaging erosion in the country's important driving agency can be greatly checked if the existing watchdogs and parliamentary standing committees operate properly. To make the Parliamentary Democracy really functioning with an effective bureaucratic system in place the Parliamentary Committees should be made more responsive and accountable.

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