

Doing away with the culture of entitlement An insight into bureaucracy



DR. ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

NO NONSENSE

Politicians who abuse their power and entitlement are the ones who are corrupt as well. The all-encompassing mind-set of these people is one of entitlement, privilege, and winning election at all costs, by silencing the voices of reasons and dissent while disregarding the rule of law and letting the country degrade from lack of everything that spurs growth, governance, and glory. Doing away with entitlements and scaling down perks and perquisites may be a way of driving wheelers and dealers out of politics.

CORRUPT politicians and public servants indulge in two types of malfeasance: (a) the all-inclusive bribes and kickbacks, which have been conferring number one rankings to Khaleda Zia's government, (b) extracting perks and perquisites by entitlements, and then some. This second kind gives the appearance of sleaze when public officials become conceited and abuse their power. Here are some examples:

The lawmakers imported 275 luxury vehicles costing the NBR over Tk 280 crore in tax revenues. Most lawmakers sold the vehicles to business tycoons while evading taxes.

"Giving the lawmakers the benefit to import duty-free cars is against the natural justice and discriminatory. It's illegal and it should be scrapped. And then it's a corruption when the lawmakers sell those cars," former adviser to the CTG Hafizuddin Khan told The Daily Star on April 6.

ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Khan said: "We will discuss the matter and look into the allegation. We will also examine whether a lawmaker can sell the vehicle he has imported being exempted from taxation."

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has been collecting rent (Tk. 50,000 per

month) from a house donated by the state after the assassination of her husband as living quarters for free. Millions of tax payer money has been spent for renovation of this house which is her personal property. She was also donated a mansion in Gulshan for rental income for maintenance of her family at that time.

A sense of probity should dictate her conscience to return all the rent money and renovation expenses (with interest) she has been collecting from the house she never spent a penny to build. She should also return the mansion in Gulshan since she is no longer in financial distress of any kind. Lawmakers should urge the ACC to investigate if Khaleda has been paying properly assessed property taxes on both houses.

Chief Whip Delwar Hossain's use of the parliament cafeteria as the source for his family's groceries, and then justifying it as his entitlement, is simply disgraceful.

Former Supreme Court Chief Justice Latifur Rahman, a true gentleman (with whom I played tennis at the Officers' Club a few weeks before his becoming Chief Advisor to the CTG), has been living in a government house having no clear entitlement or provision. This has set a poor precedent of entitlement for future Chief Advisors

at no intent of Justice Latifur Rahman, which he could certainly do without.

A politician told me "ask not who or how many ministers and MPs are corrupt, ask who and how many are not." Those suffused into corruptions are always spotted riding high in the power circles of the PMO. For example, the Danish Ambassador in Bangladesh brought charges of corruption against Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain. He was also incriminated by a parliamentary body on March 8 for a "mysterious" increase in cost for building an ocean-going ship and misappropriation of funds in the construction of a new container terminal.

Two MPs from the ruling party implicated the communication minister Nazmul Huda of corruption for his involvement in the CNG import scam for Tk 2 billion, and allotment of land for setting up CNG station. Some corrupt ministers who were deposited are still not stripped of their entitlements of perks and perquisites.

The MPs, in addition to a hefty monthly salary, are entitled to daily allowances, travel expenses, and accommodations in the NA building during parliamentary sessions. Apparently those were not enough. So, they have entitled themselves

furnished apartments in the NAM complex and live happily in the capital and lobby around while ignoring the interest of the people who elected them. To avoid the recent HC ruling on paying past telephone bills, the MPs may soon pass a bill of "free telephone use entitlement" in the parliament with retroactive effect.

High ranking public servants are entitled to a full time use of chauffeur driven car. Full time use, in most instances, entails misuse by family members and the officials use a second car to report to work.

The above examples are just a few from an all enveloping official culture, which has been debilitating the economy and along with it the country's image. Most economists would concur that the single most important factor that helps creating the wealth of nations is the rule of law. Countries lacking effective rule of law are places where powerful thugs simply take what they want from others. As a result, productive economic activities are discouraged because once you succeed someone with power will snatch a big bite out of your gain.

Politicians are a class of people considered most opportunistic, self-serving, self-promoting, if not out-

right shameless. On her recent campaign trails (Rajshahi, March 29), Khaleda already started fooling voters by pledging that, if voted to power, she will uproot corruption (See my January 29 DS piece: "Why do politicians lie?"). It seems she wants to ward off the ignominy of corruption of her administration as a trifling matter.

Unethical behaviour, corruption, and associating with convicted felons have apparently become the benchmark and hallmark of wealthy politicians of Bangladesh. In an article E. Messner (American Journal of Psychotherapy, July 1981) wrote: "Observations, by a psychoanalyst who has served as an elected public official, reveal that exposure to conflicting demands from constituents may arouse a sense of depletion." Add to this the mounting pressure from family members to live beyond means. All these drive one to feelings of entitlement and self-indulgent behaviour a possible precursor to political corruption. Messner recommended preventive and therapeutic interventions for these deranged people.

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SYED GIASUDDIN AHMED

THE Bureaucratic Ascendancy: Public Administration in Bangladesh written by Professors Habib Zafarullah and Mohammad Mohabbat Khan provides an accurate reflection of developments which covers different phases of Bangladesh's political history with the spotlight on the bureaucracy and the role it plays in its polity. It analyses the dynamics of the relationships of the bureaucracy with the political structures as well as within it. In fact, this book is a compilation of twelve research papers on Bangladesh public administration and bureaucracy published by the authors jointly or individually in internationally reputed journals and edited books during the period from 1984 to 2001. These twelve papers in twelve chapters in the book, each focusing either on particular issues or on the bureaucracy in general, were actually written as stand-alone pieces for different readerships at different times. However, it appears that the authors have taken great care to place in context some of the facts and information repeated in one chapter to another while preparing their anthology. By doing so they have thus rectified the tautologies which seem typical in papers written on similar or related topics but at different times.

Although this book has a cut-off point and examines events and developments in the first three decades of independent Bangladesh, i.e., those occurring between 1971 and 2001, references are often made to developments taking place after the cut-off point. Obviously this has been done either to complete an analysis usefully, to illustrate a situation, or to assist the reader in forming a fair judgement on any measure of policy and administration which was initiated during the period at issue. The inclusion of references as such has made the book most up-to-date.

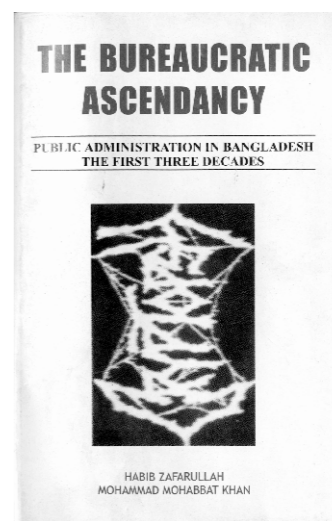
The chapter headings indicate a wide range of public administration topics treated in the book. Yet, they may be deemed categorised into three focus areas considering the commonalities among certain topics, which in effect make one focus area distinctive from another. Thus, the topics, "Political System and Bureaucracy", "Bureaucracy and Public Administration", "Bureaucratic Reforms", "Governance Reforms" and "Bureaucratic Politics" (chapters 1, 2, 3, 11 & 12), form one

BOOK REVIEW

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by Habib Zafarullah and Mohammad Mohabbat Khan

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such area. The focus here is upon the bureaucracy in Bangladesh; the role it plays in politics, governmental structures, bureaucratic and governance reform efforts, and so forth. The topics "National Administration", "Public Service Commission", "Civil Service Management" and "Recruitment and Training" (chapters 4, 5, 6 & 7) form another focus area. The spotlight here is on the structure and organisation of the ministry and government at the national level, functioning of the public service commission, civil service management, and the systems of civil service recruitment and training. Finally, the remainder three topics "Rural Development", "Local Government Planning" and "State Enterprises" (chapters 8, 9 & 10) form the remaining third focus area.

These three topics, related peripherally to public administration though, are considered very important when one underscores the need for alleviating rural poverty, involving the local representatives in local level planning process, and helping the public sector enterprises perform

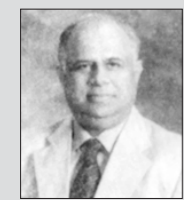
well towards the goal of accelerating economic growth. But the discussions under these topics in the book show that the inability of Bangladesh to get out of the low growth trap is largely due to the weak implementation capacity and inefficiencies of bureaucratic institutions.

The strength of the book lies in chapters 1, 2, 3, 11 & 12 where the bureaucracy in Bangladesh is examined in historical, constitutional, structural and functional contexts. Most importantly, the narrative in these chapters reveals how skillfully the Bangladeshi civil servants manoeuvred themselves into a position of power from where they have been playing a critical role both in policy making and policy implementation, and what is more, how tactfully they have frustrated most administrative reform efforts initiated in the post-independence years. The authors have taken great care to document carefully the politico-administrative changes that have taken place in the years of turbulence in this country's history. While extensive use is made of official documents, reports, and published materials, the contents of most of the chapters in the book are also supported by firsthand information from interviews and surveys conducted at field levels. Chapter 1 (Political System and Bureaucracy) and Chapter 12 (Bureaucratic Politics) are particularly well written and indicate the mastery of bringing into light some of subtle moves of the Bangladeshi bureaucrats to foil any measures that threatened their power and status.

The authors deserve to be congratulated for presenting such a highly informative anthology on the subject. It does have its distinctive strengths. It makes a valuable contribution to existing knowledge about Bangladesh public administration and bureaucracy both in their historical and modern contexts. For someone wanting to gather insightful knowledge on the bureaucracy in Bangladesh, it is indeed a valuable publication available now at the leading bookstores in Dhaka. The academics and practitioners of public administration in particular will find the book an enlightening reading. It may also be useful as a text in training and public administration courses where an emphasis upon the historical origins, structural arrangements and legal systems is required.

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US, South Asia and China



IKRAM SEHGAL writes from Karachi

AS I SEE IT

As a vast internal market, South Asia has an economy of scale with a distinct freight advantage to become a colossal economic juggernaut. That should be the vision for the future, together to be an economic power to surpass what China has now become. In order to overcome the morass we find ourselves in, a pragmatic approach is the need of the hour and India must take the initiative. South Asia could be the number two economic powerhouse in the world. Surely this is not beyond the realms of the impossible?

THE end of the Cold War has brought about a flourishing relationship between the US and the billion and a half people of South Asia, albeit on a pro-rata basis with India as the priority. People in this region value human rights, oppose terrorism, and want to protect their increasingly endangered environment. Free markets in South Asia are relatively new, but economic reform has strong intellectual support, and a growing middle class is committed to opening the economies of the region. A little over a decade ago South Asia was regarded by the United States as a third-class backwater, today it stands on the brink of becoming a major economic and military power. The dependence of many multinational firms on the service sector has made India (and increasingly other regional countries) a permanent priority to American policy makers.

This new US-India nuclear compact puts India on a fast-track emergence as a superpower, it creates new geo-political dynamics in the region. Even though it may not be true, with staunch US ally Israel a "Jewish" state and India primarily a "Hindu" one (despite its secular credentials), one should excuse Muslim apprehension (and imminent rhetoric) about the ganging up of a Christian-Jew-Hindu axis against Islam. A general perception also exists in Pakistan that India has been rewarded for its years of anti-US policies, as usual Pakistan being shunted aside for being loyal to the US whenever the US faces a crisis in the region. In the face of convenience why should we expect morality in inter-state relationships?

The famous May 25, 1965 Chester Bowles Memo analyzed why it was important to support India as a potential strategic US ally to contain China, and to de-link US-Pakistan and US-India relationships with "the eternal triangle" it had become. In a Houdini achievement, having obtained massive military aid from the US after its sharp, short war with the Chinese in 1962, somehow India managed to maintain its non-aligned status. It remained also an unabashed Soviet ally (military and economic) during the cold war era.



Chinese President Hu with US President Bush during the former's visit to USA last month

served to arouse Chinese suspicions. Earlier opinion piece in the People's Daily pointedly asked if it was directed against China, calling it "of special significance that the United States on the one hand presses the EU to keep arms embargo on China and urges Israel to cancel arms sales to China while on the other hand signs a wide-ranging defence agreement with India." Beijing has fears about an American containment strategy. An American strategy that openly attempts to use India to balance China would be counterproductive to the development of the region itself. For India, outright confrontation with China would be expensive and pointless as has been seen in the past.

In the face of all this, a major development in South Asia has been Gen Pervez Musharraf's encouraging both India and Pakistan to move away from their oft-stated positions for the sake of peace in South Asia. Pakistan's major departure of policy, coming from a soldier, was a 180-degree change of direction in the Army's thinking. While recognizing the harsh ground realities, this is

certainly a courageous move to settle this outstanding dispute with India. India's response was rather cool, saying such negotiations should be confidential and through diplomatic channels rather than being debated in the media. India has been challenged to respond with ideas of their own to untangle the proverbial Gordian knot over Kashmir.

South Asia has seen a rise of religious activism, this is quite deep-rooted and can be manipulated by motivated interests. Bangladesh, Pakistan, and various other nations are facing the threat of religious extremism in one form or the other. For example, Muslim protest, which started in sincere earnest against the publishing of the Danish outrage, later was provoked by motivated interests to become an outrage by itself because of the violence it gave birth to. Sectarian violence between the Sunni and Shia communities has portents of spilling over the borders of Iraq to all the territories inhabited by the Muslim Ummah, crossing an already fragile fail-safe line that holds the balance between peace and

strife. Bangladesh is increasingly witnessing a rise of "religious ideology" based terrorism that has challenged the Bangladeshi liberal society more than ever before. The main terror outfit is the Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) that also unleashed the terror of suicide bombers in Bangladesh. Of late, the Bangladesh government has achieved tremendous success in apprehending the two kingpins of JMB who are currently being questioned.

Nepal has been embroiled in a civil war with a Maoist communist insurgency since 1996. Recently the security problem in Nepal became worse as the revolt against the King intensified. Before the country fell to the Maoist rebels, the King restored Parliament. The insurgency has claimed more than 12,500 lives, spreading to almost all of Nepal's 75 districts, and the communist forces nearly surround the capital, Kathmandu. While they supported the movement, they have not been invited to participate in the new

government. An absolute monarch is in some cases no better than a communist dictatorship.

In Sri Lanka the civil war goes on despite the cease-fire. By June 2005 the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers had managed to work out a "Joint Mechanism" for the distribution of tsunami aid, but the agreement appears fragile at best, with very little commitment on either side. The recent attack on the Army Chief triggered widespread reaction from the Sri Lankan Armed Forces, including aerial bombardment. The cease-gire seems virtually all over.

The minimum common requirement for Pakistanis is freedom from want while retaining our sovereignty and self-respect. Pragmatism must govern our policies, including the rush to "unfettered" democracy. As long as the masses can retain their self-respect and pride, they will be willing to compromise their freedoms. If one were to compare political emancipation to economic amelioration, the mass of the people would prefer food on the table for the family and their security than the freedoms one enjoys in a pure, unadulterated democracy.

Our own place in the sun should not hold up India in comparison or vilify the US for choosing them over us. Even if our future is with China, Central Asia, and the Middle East, in that priority, why should we turn away from the US, particularly when there is no reason to? A nation independent of automatic reciprocity will not be hostage to other's foreign policy imperatives. This includes disengaging totally from Afghanistan, a predator country (with a generally predator population) incapable of functioning without hand-outs. Afghanistan needs us, we don't need them, it is as simple as that.

As a vast internal market, South Asia has an economy of scale with a distinct freight advantage to become a colossal economic juggernaut. That should be the vision for the future, together to be an economic power to surpass what China has now become. India, because of its dominance in the region, size-wise and economically, can take the lead and provide the impetus to its neighbours in the South Asian region. In order to overcome the morass we find ourselves in, a pragmatic approach is the need of the hour and India must take the initiative. South Asia could be the number two economic powerhouse in the world. Surely this is not beyond the realms of the impossible!

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

WITH America's trade deficit passing \$ 202 billion in favour of China last year, growing complaint on rampant piracy of intellectual property and violation of human rights in China, the visit of Chinese President Hu Jintao to America from April 18 to 21 did not produce any tangible results. Similarly, China did not succeed to receive categorical assurances from Bush administration to deal with one China theory ignoring the interests of Taiwan. Although China is reported to have stated of "successful visit" by Chinese President, it is clear from the speech of the President at Yale University in Connecticut State it did not have the desired impact on American administration.

President Hu is reported to have said that "China would make its own decisions on political freedom and human rights and not simply copy the model of western countries" while addressing students and members of faculties of the university. Chinese President further stated that differences between China and US could be overcome by cooperation and their shared desire for peace. This speaks of the mind of Chinese leadership in Beijing. As China did not share unilateral pre-emptive doctrine of Bush administration on Iraq, she also did not subscribe to the idea of imposing sanctions on Iran.

Chinese President's visit to America was marred by some small incidents also: angry protest voice at the White House lawn by dissident banned Chinese religious group Falun Gong; Chinese national flags were absent from the lampposts near the White House; the official announcer said that band would play national anthem of the Republic of China - the official name of Taiwan while it should have been the People's Republic of China, etc. These are not all. Bush administration did not accept the Chinese request to treat the visit as State visit while the administration turned down another request of hosting state dinner. May be these were intended to show American administration's lukewarm attitude towards the rising tiger in Asia. But these were wrong signals.

China has a massive economic relationship with USA which appears to be interdependent, not competitive.

US' export to China has increased by 21 percent in 2005 which is quite impressive. It makes China fastest growing export destination of US products. China's economy grows at roughly 10 percent every year and its growth is linked with the open trade and investment regimes of the major economies of the world. Exports account for 40 percent of China's GDP. While visiting Boeing plant in Seattle Chinese President endorsed the view of free trade between China and America and said "it was living example of mutually beneficial cooperation and win-win outcome that China and America have achieved from trade". In Seattle, Chinese President confirmed its pledge to buy 80 Boeing jets. Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates welcomed Chinese President in Seattle. Microsoft has also entered into agreement with China's Lenovo Group Ltd, which turns out to be the world's third largest computer company. Lenovo, which bought America's IBM personal computer businesses last year, is likely to buy \$ 1.2 billion worth of Microsoft wares.

If these implemented, balance of trade even may go in favour of America. The present imbalance of trade between the two countries has caused misgiving in America. Lawmakers in America even threatened to push punitive measures unless China removes its barriers to services and goods from America. On the other hand, China blames American administration because it bars sales to China of high technology items that have military applications. Recently America had to impose embargo on the sale of military equipment by Israel to China. American administration also imposed restrictions on Chinese investments in America. Last year America imposed restrictions on Chinese textiles exports to America. If Charles Schumer-Gram bipartisan bill to slap a 27.5 percent tariff on Chinese imports, which remains on the floor of the Senate without vote because of the visit of Chinese President, is implemented, it would compel American consumers to buy Chinese products of American manufacturing companies at a higher cost.

During official talks with President Bush Chinese President offered rhetoric in support of resolving economic concerns and nonproliferation efforts

keeping both North Korea and Iran nuclear free, but refused to make a serious commitment. President Hu also made promises to address the issues like intellectual property rights and devaluation of Chinese currency: Yuan. In July last year, China raised the Yuan value by 2.1 percent vis-à-vis dollar. It has since risen by another 1 percent, but critics say it is far too little. Although both sides did not reach consensus on many issues, but they expressed desire to continue to discuss differences in a spirit of friendship and cooperation, which marks maturity in Sino-US relations.

This is one side of coin of the relations between America and China. Bush administration has growing suspicion about China's non-transparent build up of military capabilities. Bush administration sees an aggressive arms build up by China as a threat to the region, which India, Australia, Japan share. China's recent trend of piling up unlimited oil reserves is seen as a negative factor by America. The present rising trend of oil price has contributed to large scale imports of oil by China. Today she consumes 7 million barrels a day that makes China world's second largest oil consumer and third largest oil importer after America and Japan. By 2025 China's requirements of oil would be within the range of 14.2 million barrel a day, which means she would import more than 10.9 million barrel a day.

China imports huge quantity of oil from Saudi Arabia. Recent return visit by Chinese President to Saudi Arabia and King Abdullah's visit to China in January, 2006 is seen with suspicion in Washington. While Russia's power in the Middle East is on the wane, China's power and influence is growing in the region. The Chinese are viewed by states in the region as a counterbalance or alternative source of military assistance.

Therefore, policy makers in America have been apprehensive. Hence, military build up by Bush administration has begun in South East Asia, Pacific Ocean and Bulgaria to oversee the Middle East syndrome and contain China in the event of any future conflict in Asia.

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