

Reforming *the* civil service

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INDEPENDENT Bangladesh inherited a civil service that still retained many colonial features and rules, although populist and trade union pressures radically narrowed salary grades. It was institutionally weakened and increasingly corrupt. Many reviews and commissions were set up for the reform of the civil service but progress has been slow.

The civil service is perceived as "underperforming, inefficient and weak. It remains a constraint on service delivery and implementation of reforms". (World Bank 2006). There are many competent people within the service but their performance is limited by their work environment, low salary scales, outdated procedures and practices and mismatch of skills with positions held.

In the 21st century, economic efficiency and effectiveness in steering society towards health, education, justice, and entrepreneurial development depends on free market competitiveness within an appropriate regulatory framework. The latter is needed to promote a level playing field and democratically chosen development goals. This means that although the civil service no longer aspires to administer all aspects of the economy, its quality and fitness for purpose remains of immense importance.

Since independence the size of the government has more than doubled in terms of ministries, departments and civil servants. The government has undertaken too many commercial and developmental tasks that can be done better by other agencies. It is overstaffed with people doing too little,

involved in micro-management and causing unnecessary delays and costs.

Reforms are usually undertaken by governments only when the state of affairs gets so bad they become unavoidable. Even then they are resisted and misrepresented by vested interests and often produce pain before they produce results. But, the importance of necessary reform cannot be over-emphasized. For instance, one of the key factors behind Malaysia's economic progress has been a competent and motivated civil service through such reforms as the Panel on Administrative Improvement to the Civil Service (PANEL) in 1986 and an Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit (MAMPO) in the PM's office to monitor implementation.

The Caretaker Government (CTG) of Bangladesh has recognized the central importance of improved governance, including upgrading the civil service. It has attempted to clamp down on corruption in the bureaucracy but has recognized that real reform can only come through a combination of factors including adequate pay scales, institutional accountability and maximum transparency.

Computerization is critical here, as is the abolition of unnecessary regulations which only create opportunities for rent seeking.

The civil service must move away from traditional methods of command, control and mistrust to a culture based on service delivery, transparency, delegation and trust.

Some key areas of reform are set out below



- i) Structuring for efficiency
- ii) De-politicizing the civil service
- iii) Planning for quality service
- iv) Transparency and right to information
- v) Accountability
- vi) Working with NGOs and

the private sector, and
vii) Management of change

Structuring for efficiency

The salary of senior civil servants declined dramatically over the last three and a half decades. With the decline in their purchasing power rent seeking became increasingly a part of life of the civil servants. To attract the finest graduates of the new generation, an adequate salary has to be introduced.

Civil service corruption and inefficiency is not unknown in East Asian and other fast growing economies but the levels of competence is generally higher and adequate salaries are an important factor. In Bangladesh, the weakness of public finances is a major constraint but it is essential to try to ensure salaries and benefits are competitive with the private sector. The working environment and morale is also important. In Singapore the Statutory Board was created to counter the traditional civil service emphasis on regulation and monitoring and structured to encourage talents previously lost to the private sector. Furthermore, merit and performance require to be rewarded by substantial awards and transparent performance appraisal systems.

For professional development civil servants should not only receive in-country training but also be sent abroad for overseas training to improve their skills, to learn about various administrative systems, cultures and to broaden their outlook and work attitudes. Local training organizations, including BPATC, should be upgraded to meet international standard of excellence.

The Public Service Commission (PSC) is undergoing reform and is in the process of presenting its recommendations for further reforms at all levels of government. This is an important step towards a

robust civil service.

De-politicizing the civil service

Sections 30 and 32 of the Government Service Conduct Rules strictly prohibit civil servant from being influenced by political or other influences and those who are so influenced can be subject to the Disciplinary and Appeal Rules of 1985.

But, political neutrality in the bureaucracy has been compromised resulting in poor and weak governance. Mass promotions and partisan recruitment for political reasons has had a debilitating effect on the service. Contractual appointments and extension of contracts based on political affiliation weaken administrative structures. To counter these corrupt practices, effective rules must be present to penalize civil servants for accepting awards for political reasons and to protect them from being victimized.

Planning for a quality service

To ensure a quality service it would be necessary to assess current standards, set standards for the future and plan how to achieve them. The civil service must be service oriented. It needs to stay close to its customers, i.e. the citizens. Therefore, it would be essential to regularly check the experience and views of the public. Quality initiatives orient civil servants towards providing better services to the public and improve internal ways of working as team members. Since quality is achieved through people it is necessary to look at: i) Recruitment process, ii) Induction, iii) Job description, iv) Delegation, v) Appraisal, vi) Training and vii) Promotion. Poorly managed these can become a range of barriers to quality improvement.

A good example of quality service was the development of the Citizens' Charter in Britain which empowers consum-

ers/public by specifying and publicizing their rights to redress, if government services do not meet advertised needs.

Transparency and right to information

Institutional changes to the civil service are not enough without an alert press with free flow of timely and accurate information, an independent and trained judiciary and an educated population aware of its rights and able to hold politicians and civil servants to account. Bangladesh has been slow in these areas. A Right to Information Act would be another ambitious step of the CTG. It would join the independent judiciary, EC and ACC and other reforms; all of which, it must be remembered, are only ordinances which have to be retrospectively confirmed by legislation by elected government.

Accountability

Proper audit and public reporting on the civil service through ministries and departments, exposing to public scrutiny the financial position and performance achieved promotes accountability to public representatives and encourages self examination by those involved in such stocktaking. It may be essential to establish a high powered task force within the civil service to address the issue of corruption and enforceable penalties.

Working with NGOs

With increasing demand for education, health and other services it is necessary for the government to delegate delivery of some essential goods and services to NGOs and the private sector as well as to local elected bodies. The NGO community is vibrant and active in Bangladesh and the private sector is developing quite rapidly. To facilitate and foster private sector enterprises and use the capacity of NGOs as well as the private sector as

service providers will enable the civil service to concentrate on the monitoring and evaluation of services and on good governance.

Management of Change

From the last half of the 20th century phenomenal strides have been taken in the field of science and technology. Among other things, this has given rise to increased rate of technological innovation through the cross cutting nature of technological change resulting in a paradigm shift in styles of administration and management.

Technological development is transforming the opportunities for and methodologies of work. The challenge to the civil service would be to develop institutional capacity to develop, adapt and adopt technologies, including IT, to support socio-economic growth and good governance.

The civil service requires a critical mass of trained personnel backed by appropriate rules that will significantly change the way it functions. This will be based on new relationships with the public. The "new" civil service will be lean, efficient, highly motivated "agents of change" to meet the needs of the 21st century.

The reforms being undertaken by the CTG are designed to strengthen institutions by ordinances which, if implemented and retained by future governments, can reinforce each other to create the environment for an effective civil service and limit partisan political influences and corruption. But the question and challenge remains: how far can all this succeed in a society still containing mass poverty, patronage and an education system based on only 2.2% of GDP?

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