

Is our civil service in limbo?

Bureaucrats should and must not be used in the political game for implementing certain policies that would favour the party in power or in winning elections. If this happens bureaucracy will lose professional neutrality and be fragmented, and the consequence may again be political biasness, unpredictability and uncertainty in bureaucratic behaviour.

ISHIAQ JAMIL and PRANAB KUMAR PANDAY

THE civil service in Bangladesh is now suffering from an identity crisis hanging between professional neutrality and political loyalty. The democratic governments in Bangladesh since 1991 have repeatedly tried to politicise the civil service in order to achieve their narrow political interests. A service, which once was considered the "steel frame" of the British Empire has eroded to such a state that it now more resembles a pack of cards to be dismantled and assembled at the wishes of the political masters of the day.

In the heydays of the civil service, i.e. during the British and even Pakistani periods, civil servants were chosen on the basis of merit through highly competitive and stringent selection procedure. Their numbers were not large and success to the civil service was held in high esteem in society. It earned them social trust and they were mostly neutral although loyal to the political masters

but their professional neutrality and code of performance guided their performance.

Tadbir or lobbying which has now become a part and parcel of the civil service for promotion, good posting and transfer was unheard of in those days. The practice of tadbir is now widespread in the civil service and is an efficient mechanism for individual gain at the cost of professional norms and universal application of rules.

Now the question is why this identity crisis? What factors contribute to the downfall of civil service in terms of professional norms and moral standards?

The major cause of the downfall of professional norms in the bureaucracy is the politicisation of bureaucracy and making bureaucrats pawn at the hands of the political masters. To obtain higher positions or lucrative postings, they now have to side with either the Awami League or the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Nowadays it is quite common for top ranking civil servants to join a political party after retirement and become advi-

sors. Given their experience, expertise, and access to information they are definitely attractive partners to political parties who take full advantage of this situation to reward or dump some bureaucrats according to their wishes.

One should not blame the bureaucrats for being partisans; rather it's the political parties who have made the bureaucrats' life uncertain and unpredictable. Even those bureaucrats who intend to remain neutral and climb the ladder of success through hard labour and performance are denied this opportunity. Therefore, to rise to top positions in bureaucracy is now hinged on political pendulum and one has to be very careful to swing the pendulum, i.e. which side one chooses may either reward him profusely or cost him dearly.

A bureaucrat must be allowed to operate in the professional sphere with universal norms and code of behaviour rather than in the political arena with narrow political motives and gains. If he becomes a pawn of political manoeuvre to obtain gains then bureaucracy is surely going to lose neutrality and universality and in turn would become biased and clientelistic.

Politicisation also has led to serious erosion of merit in recruitment to the civil service. It is no more a profession, which is considered highly attractive among top achievers at universities. How can high performances be expected from a profession manned and run by mediocre who seldom have

opportunities to upgrade and update their skills? Moreover, promotion is not based on individual performance and the recruitment procedure is not regular.

The civil service exams are not held in time and allegations of corruption are often reported in news media in times of recruitment. The Public Service Commission (PSC), which is a constitutional body and the centralised recruiting agency for all cadre civil servants is now usually manned by political appointees and allegations are sometimes lodged of their preferences for candidates with strong connections to the party in power.

Irregularities in recruitment have also led to tug of war, conflicts and distrust among different batches for promotions to higher posts and eventually fragmentation in the civil service, for example between the 1982 regular and the 1982 special batch (earlier between the 1973 batch -- the so called Mukhtijodha batch -- and the regular batches of 1978 and 1979). The source of conflict is the way they were recruited. This break of professional format for recruitment has now allowed fragmentation and disregard of a batch by others in the bureaucracy.

The integrity and cohesiveness that once were the backbones of the civil service have been gradually broken and it is no wonder that now we find many bureaucrats resorting to tadbir using political and regional connections to get preferred posting and promotion.

Given the above scenario, how can we

expect present day's civil servants to be professionally neutral and citizen oriented? Certain institution building measures are necessary to restore the glory, integrity, social trust, professionalism and dedication of the civil service.

First, the recruitment procedures and selection criteria must be reviewed and updated to recruit the best and competent graduates. This is only possible when the civil service becomes lucrative for prospective graduates. The defence services in Bangladesh have maintained to remain a strict, competitive and lucrative to future cadets. Such reputation and image are necessary for recruiting the best and the competent.

Promotion and posting must be based on performance and relevance. Performance must be measured according to professional standards and fulfilling of responsibilities and assigned targets. Relevance denotes putting the right person in the right place in right time. This would make the life and career prospects of bureaucrats more certain and predictable, and make them aware of what are the criteria for promotion to higher positions as well as what are the "dos" and "don'ts."

Second, bureaucrats must be able to maintain professional neutrality. There is a need to make them professional experts in line with other professions such as the armed personnel. This doesn't mean to make the bureaucracy regimented but a service that maintains and upholds professional norms. There shouldn't be political intervention in the

daily affairs of the civil service.

The major purpose of politics is to guide and frame major policies. The job of implementation of these must rest with the bureaucracy and it be held duly accountable if there is a breach to perform according to rules of conduct and norms. Bureaucrats should and must not be used in the political game for implementing certain policies that would favour the party in power or in winning elections. If this happens bureaucracy will lose professional neutrality and be fragmented, and the consequence may again be political biasness, unpredictability and uncertainty in bureaucratic behaviour.

And, finally, what is most required is a strong political commitment and will to restore social trust and professional norms in bureaucracy. This may again re-institutionalise and rebuild bureaucracy from further erosion and degradation. The party in power must not search for party loyalists to reward them and put them in important positions and on the other hand punish those belonging to the opposite camp.

A bureaucrat's life and career must not be disrupted because he is alleged to belong to a certain political camp. The practice of picking party loyalists for bestowing favour may further fragment the bureaucracy.

Dr. Ishiaq Jamil is Associate Professor, Department of Administration and Organisation Theory, University of Bergen, Norway (e-mail: ishiaq.jamil@uio.no). Dr. Pranab Kumar Panday is Associate Professor and Chairman, Department of Public Administration, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh.

Distortion of history

I wish the reliefs had shown the examples of bravery and courage, how Muslims in Pakistan saved thousands of Hindus as the Hindus did in the case of Muslims in India. A study has been made under the guidance of Ashish Nandy, a leading intellectual in India, and it shows that 50 per cent of targeted victims were saved by the two communities on either side.

KULDIP NAYAR

I have returned from the Wagha-Amritsar border disheartened, not because there is no lessening of martial posture of soldiers at the sunset parade, but because of a new monstrosity that has come up there. The Pakistan authorities have put up 10 reliefs, projecting figures in carving on boards to show how Hindus and Sikhs had killed and looted Muslims during partition. The reliefs have been displayed in such a way that they are visible only from the Indian side. They cannot be seen from the Pakistan side because the back of the reliefs are just blank boards.

The scenes carved out are offensive in expression and deprave in purport. They have been installed in the last two months, probably because the voice of peace with India is gaining strength in Pakistan and because nearly 50 people came to the border, the zero point, for the first time last year to light the candles since independence six decades ago.

I cannot make out why Islamabad -- there must be some agency in the government -- has to devise ever-new ways

to stoke fires of hatred. True, there are mindset bureaucrats and vested interests to promote hostility lest the candles of peace should ever dispel the darkness of discord. But should the history be distorted? Already, the official textbooks in Pakistan begin history from the advent of Islam in India. Mohenjodaro or Taxila has no relevance. Some effort has been initiated by a few intellectuals to correct the history but they have met with little success.

Again, the reliefs put up at the border distort facts. Whatever has been shown happened on both sides. Hindus and Sikhs were victims in Pakistan and Muslims in India. It was the same sordid spectacle in the newly-born countries, neither less in brutality nor more in compassion. Women and children were the main targets.

If someone were to tell me that Hinduism is greater in generosity or that Islam emits more love, I would beg to differ. I saw the followers of the two religions killing in the name of faith. They were raising slogans of Har Har Mahadev or Ya Ali while piercing sword or spear into one another. Some incidents were captured in the books which



Wagha border should not be a site of hatred.

were published at that time. Aur insan mar gaya is the famous book by Ramanand Sagar and Peshawar Express by the eminent Urdu writer, Kishen Chander, to narrate events of how man dies when the Satan in him awakes. Then there are Sadaat Hassan Manto's short stories in Urdu that tell how the two communities touched the depth of crime and callousness. Even the best of friends killed each other.

I myself travelled from my home town, Sialkot, to Delhi. I saw murder and worse. There was no difference in cruelty or brutality. During the journey, I saw the same pain-etched faces -- men and

women with their meagre belongings bundled on their heads and the fear-stricken children following them. They had left behind their hearth, home, friends and hopes.

The tragedy is too deep for words. But to convert it into a Hindu and Muslim question is something pathetic. It was a heinous crime that took the toll of 10 lakh people and uprooted two crore Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. For some biased members at Islamabad to plan and depict in reliefs the tragedy of Muslims is meant to whip up hatred against Hindus who were as much at the receiving end in Pakistan as were

Muslims in India.

I wish the reliefs had shown the examples of bravery and courage, how Muslims in Pakistan saved thousands of Hindus as the Hindus did in the case of Muslims in India. A study has been made under the guidance of Ashish Nandy, a leading intellectual in India, and it shows that 50 per cent of targeted victims were saved by the two communities on either side.

Nothing could be more futile than an argument about who was responsible for the partitioning of the subcontinent. With the sequence of events stretching back for over six decades, such an exercise can only be an academic distraction. But it is clear that the differences between Hindus and Muslims had become so acute by the beginning of the forties that something like the partition had become inevitable. That Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations made them increasingly distant to each other.

For those who still regret the division, I can only say that the British could have probably kept the subcontinent united if they had been willing to ladle out more power in 1942 when Sir Stafford Cripps tried to reconcile the aspirations of the people of India with his limited brief. The Congress Party could also have done it if it had accepted in 1946 the Cabinet Mission proposals of a centre with three subjects -- Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications -- and zones with provincial autonomy. The Muslim League could have stopped relations from snapping if it had not resorted to Direct Action in Calcutta on August 16,

1946. That led to what is known as Great Killing when 5,000 people died.

But the history's ifs are at best hypothetical and at worst subjective. Partition was like the Greek tragedy. All saw what was happening. Still they could do nothing to check it. The climate in the country had become too polluted to escape the carnage and the migration that came in the wake of independence on the night of August 14-15. The speech on August 11, 1947, by Quaide Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a title given by Mahatma Gandhi, that you were either Pakistanis or Indians and that religion had nothing to do with politics could not assuage the parochial feelings which had been advanced to justify the constitution of Pakistan. The mood of fanatics in that country can be judged from the fact that they suppressed the speech.

Has partition served the purpose of the Muslims? I do not know. During my trips to that country, I have heard people say that they are happy that at least they have "some place" where they feel secure, free of "Hindu domination" or "Hindu aggressiveness." Imagine the influence that their numbers -- their votes -- could have commanded in the undivided subcontinent! They would have been nearly one-third of the total population.

The reliefs at the border only widen the gulf between the two countries. Instead of apportioning the blame of partition, it would be far better to deal with the enmity and hatred that has been the fallout, keeping the two countries on tenterhooks.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

10 signs you'll soon be jobless



A second wave of economic bad news is arriving in several places, according to people in finance.

"But instead of sacking people, my boss is adjusting our contracts," grumbled a reader in an email from New York.

I had no sympathy for him. Adjusting their contracts? Pah! In Asian firms, we get sacked all the time, sometimes several times a day.

There are no negotiations. A Singaporean reader told me a true story about a firm which sacked hundreds of people by setting off the fire alarm, ushering them outside, and then disabling their staff cards.

And those are the nice bosses. Others

just use masked death squads in Ninja outfits to ensure staff disappear quietly. (You can now hire these at outplacement firms in Asian cities.)

I've been sacked loads of times. However, now that I am mature and well-adjusted, I get booted out slightly less often than I did when I was irresponsible and naïve in the dim and distant past (ie, last month).

There's a reason for this. These days I know exactly which situations will get me sacked.

To help people who may be in the same situation, here are 10 signs you'll soon be unemployed.

1. You return from a week's vacation to find that you had scheduled this week as vacation, not last week.

2. The email in which you wittily described your boss as "Hitler without the redeeming features" was accidentally cc'd to "All Staff."

3. That cute new employee you unsuccessfully hit on turns out to be head of the

Lesbian Lawyers Alliance and the chairman's daughter.

4. You wake up naked under the boardroom table just as the door opens and the directors file in.

5. Arriving at your destination on a business trip, you check your papers and discover that you have gone to the wrong continent.

6. The milk you "borrowed" from the company fridge in the R and D department wasn't milk and no one will tell you what it was.

7. The bad driver to whom you gave the one finger sign on your way to the office turns out to be the new director of human resources.

8. You take a "sick" day because you were up most of the night watching a TV sports final and the following morning the boss says, "So, I hear you had a late night?"

9. An off-color joke you forwarded to "All staff" contained a Trojan super-virus which shut down company computers worldwide.

10. After your project team gets the company listed on the stock market, you realize that your data had the decimal point in the wrong place.

And that was just my first month! After that, I made some serious mistakes.

But here's the good news: Don't worry. After the first three or four times, being sacked doesn't hurt at all.

This is how it happens. The human resources guy just comes into your office with that look in his eye, and you just say, "Okay, whatever, I'll start packing my stuff." (Sometimes I hadn't finished unpacking it from the previous move.)

But timing is everything. It can be a huge advantage to know exactly when you will receive the white envelope containing your marching orders. In the next posting, I'll tell you how to tell when have achieved the terminal state of employment known as Dead Man Working.

To know more about whether you will be able to keep your job or not, visit our columnist at www.vittachi.com.

pophangover

SPECIAL!

大陸盲槽

FRESH CRAP

\$8.99/LB*