

A runaway bureaucracy

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

IN 1972, shortly after liberation, I used to work in the Prime Minister's secretariat in a small cubbyhole of a room that was hardly big enough for one desk and two chairs. I did not make much of the small space as I was one of many government officers back then who were crammed in one floor of a small secretariat building. Next to my room was my senior's office, who was a deputy secretary, which was slightly larger than mine. Very often I would have to be in his office for consultation.

One day, I heard to my delight that my senior colleague had been promoted to joint secretary (many of his juniors were already joint secretary because they had crossed over to India during the Liberation War). When I went to his office, I found a small wall mirror, a new towel, and a small package of soap on a chair next to his desk. I asked him if he had bought these for his home. He said these were government supplies given to him. Amazed I asked why. He replied as joint secretary he was entitled to a private bathroom, but as there was a dearth of rooms with private bathrooms, the general supplies department had no alternative but to give him at least the toilet materials. Apparently, there were more joint secretaries than there were office rooms to accommodate them.

I am talking about a period when joint secretaries did not crowd the corridors of the Secretariat nor were there secretaries and additional secretaries a dime a dozen. That time there was dearth of space as the secretariat was built for a provincial government but not of work. Now there are more high positions in the government than there is actual work for all of them.

From 1972 to 1982, the number of secretaries and additional secretaries was held to a reasonable level, consistent with the requirement of government and expansion of government functions. But then began an onward rush to promotions to create a politically pliable bureaucracy and accommodate ever increasing intakes in the civil services that were mostly ill-planned.

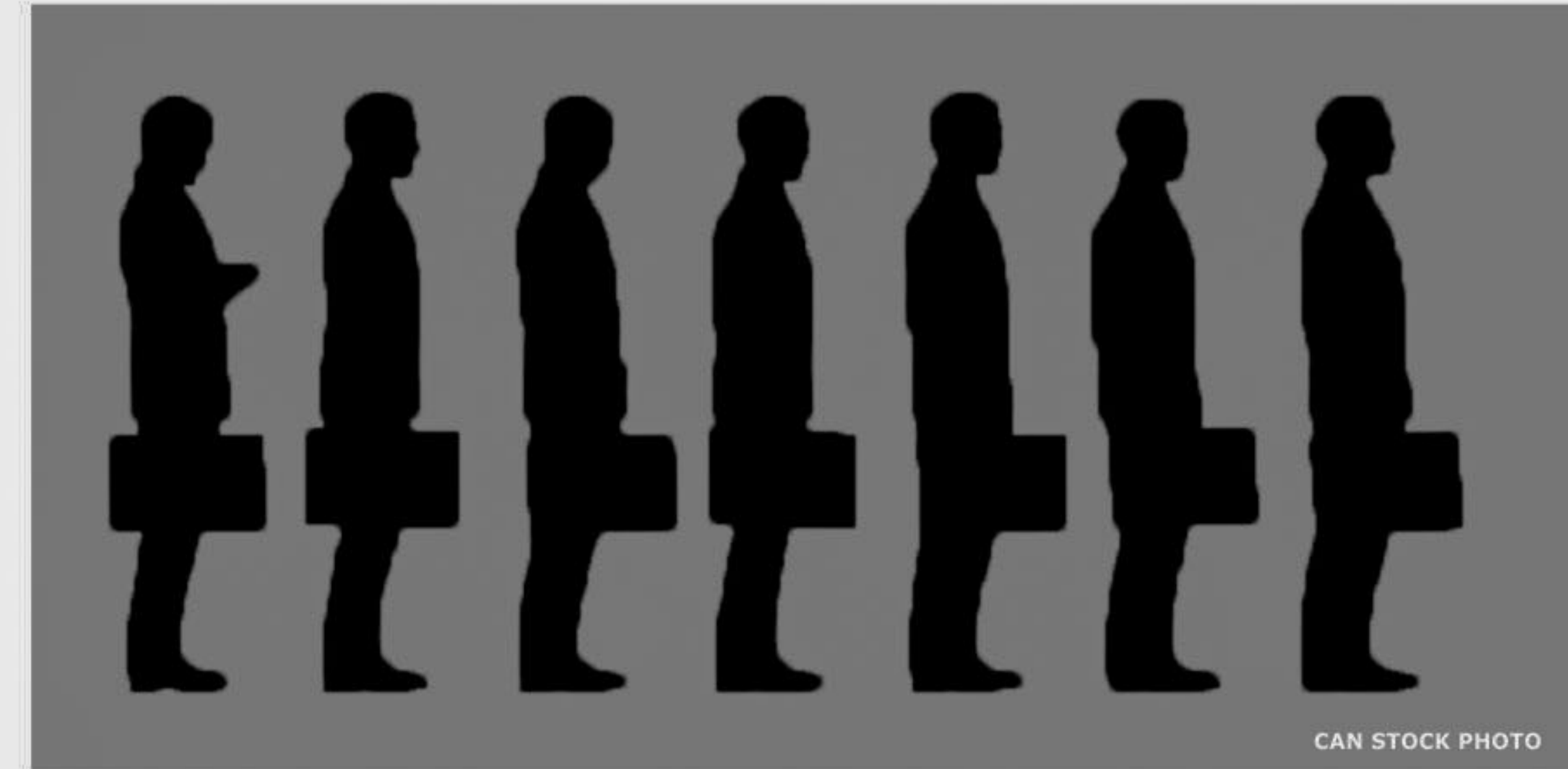
In the mid-eighties, there were more recruits in the services than the total intake in the country's first decade. Since promotions in the civil services are mostly based on the number of years spent in the job rather than merit, the recruits of each year clamoured for the next rung in the hierarchy as time passed. The government also yielded since politics had infiltrated the management of bureaucracy, and patronage ruled the bureaucracy rather than the objective criteria of personnel management based on merit and performance. So as the government expanded, the opportunities for promotion also grew. There are now at least 72 government officials at the rank of secretary or equivalent (including eight senior secretaries), 382 additional secretaries or equivalent and 888 joint secretaries or equivalent. Many of the newly promoted

moved up in grade without having any new assignment.

Growth in government is indispensable in a country where the government controls most of the functions that regulate public life and services, as well as manages development. But governments everywhere face a daunting paradox. On one hand, they operate in an increasingly complex environment and must deliver on an expanded set of policy objectives. On the other hand, governments are hampered by shrinking budgets, rising costs, and increasing demand for public services. Most governments try to meet this paradox by observing the golden rules of management of a simple organisation structure, managing demands through innovation and training employees with new techniques and skills. In our country, however, the response to higher demand and expansion in

in hierarchical organisations, personnel are promoted up to the point when their incompetence becomes manifest. Ironically, the more incompetent the bureaucracy becomes, the more is the need for people to manage work, thus leading to more promotions. That is why we have a disproportionately higher number of people at the top to the point that they virtually have nothing to manage.

Political scientists have observed that when a bureaucracy becomes too big, political power may be gathered undesirably by bureaucratic hands. The administrative apparatus becomes so large that it becomes immune from popular control. These are not the only problems that arise because of a bureaucracy that has run out of control; an unwieldy bureaucracy leads to the ultimate transfer of real power from democratically elected representatives to an unaccountable administrative team.



CAN STOCK PHOTO

government function has been higher recruitment and an expanding organisation with more people at the top, managing or supervising functions of others below them by following Parkinson's Law.

Two key features of Parkinson's Law are: 1) The Law of Multiplication of Subordinates, and 2) The Law of Multiplication of Work. According to the first law, an official wants to multiply subordinates, not rivals; and according to the second, officials make work for each other. When a top official feels overburdened, he does not share his work with another colleague, he instead demands that the work be done by two or three others who will report to him. This inevitably leads to the second law when work that was done by one person is now being performed by three others.

Bureaucracies grow because work and personnel expand to consume the available resources. According to a research,

Massive promotions will not rid us of our bureaucratic inefficiencies or an unresponsive government; these will only fester the problems that the country faces. The greatest rewards that the government can give to its employees are job satisfaction, job security, and of course, adequate compensation.

Employees will not seek political patronage for promotion if they know that their career growth is dependent on merit and performance, and not on loyalty tests. The way to avoid massive promotions in jobs that do not exist is by ensuring that recruitment and promotions are made on a need basis, not on political exigencies or the desire to placate a disgruntled group of civil servants.

The writer is a political commentator and analyst.

Did we hear you right Mr. IGP?

We had hoped not

WE thought we had misread the comments of the inspector general of police, but double-checking a remark of his carried in this newspaper yesterday, we don't think we did. The IGP's statement, reportedly at a seminar in Sylhet on Saturday, that if a cop commits a crime, it's his responsibility and that an individual's offence is not the responsibility of the police department, is quite shocking. Though he added that if departmental investigation proves the accused's guilt he will not hesitate to dismiss the offender, his previous statement leaves us confused.

A policeman is part of a force and his job is to provide safety and security to the people. The statement in question will send the wrong signal to its members, in particular to those errant ones, albeit a handful only, whose activities have defiled the image of the police as a whole and caused public confidence in them to sap.

Ensuring discipline in an organisation is a function of command of the heads of every department of that outfit. And we accept that while the organisation may not be held collectively culpable for the action of any of its members, it certainly cannot absolve itself of the responsibility for each and every action of theirs. Breach in the norm of behaviour, or actions that amounts to a cognizable offense, by members of police is perhaps a malfunction of the system either in terms of training, motivation or recruitment. And if the organisation chooses to wash its hands off the matter it will do so at the risk of giving leash to the bad apples of the organisation to indulge in more such crimes we have witnessed in the recent past. We urge the IGP to take a more proactive stance on discipline of his force.

Forest department fells 266 trees

Shouldn't it protect nature, not destroy it?

IN less than a week of reports of unrestrained tree plundering in the reserved area of Kadirgrah National Park in Mymensingh, we are yet again confronted with the news of 266 trees being felled, allegedly in violation of related laws, in Tebaria union of Natore. We are astounded that the deforestation was undertaken by none other than the forest department itself, whose prerogative should be to protect our greenery, not destroy it. What astonishes us even more is that the trees were planted as part of a social forest project 13 years ago, with locals playing an integral part in planting and taking care of the trees. What is the point of planting trees if they are cut again as soon as they have matured?

Worse still, there are allegations that the trees were "sold" by the district forest department to a businessman without following proper procedures. Apparently, no tender was floated before the department sold the trees for Tk. 2.5 lakh. Though the charge of corruption was denied by the forestry officers, the union chairman admitted of some irregularities, as the trees had been sold at a lower price than the market price. We urge the authorities to investigate the allegations of corruption and take stern action taken against anyone found guilty.

Furthermore, we remind the forest department that it should not treat trees planted through community participation as commodities, but as valuable natural resources that should be preserved and protected. Its members should not be allowed to take undue advantage of their position and make decisions that hamper the environment and community at large.



MAHMOOD HASAN

FROM A BYSTANDER

WOES of the old content do not seem to end. In recent times, it was first the common currency crisis that almost sank the Euro; then Greece's debt

crisis threatened to break the European Union; later came the refugee crisis with which Europe is still grappling. And now Brexit - Britain has threatened to exit the 28-nation Union.

Britain's Conservative party has always been sceptical about the European Union. Its election manifesto (May 2015) promised to hold a referendum by 2017 on whether Britain should stay or leave the European Union. But before the referendum, Prime Minister David Cameron wants to renegotiate the terms of Britain's membership with the EU. If he gets the reforms he wants, he will campaign for UK to remain with the EU. Britain joined the then EEC in 1973 but did not join the Eurozone established in 1999.

In his letter on November 10, 2015 to Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, Cameron clearly set out the reforms he wants for Britain. At the European Council Summit in Brussels from December 17-18, 2015, Cameron developed four main areas, which set off serious negotiations between UK and the EU. They are summarised below for readers' convenience.

Economic Governance - recognise that the EU has more than one currency; ensure that countries outside the Eurozone are not disadvantaged - key issue for the City of London; non-Eurozone members will not have to contribute to support Euro; if Eurozone decides to create a banking union, it should be voluntary for non-Euro countries. Competitiveness - focus on economic

growth to generate jobs; look into creating a Capital Markets Union; set targets to scale back unnecessary regulations that are a burden to business; promote the single market which would help add 3percent to EU GDP and boost competitiveness and productivity.

Sovereignty - it is the central issue of the debate, as EU regulations are not made by the European Parliament but by the European Commission; Britain wants to end working for an "ever closer union"; giving greater powers to national parliaments to block EU legislation; EU has to respect British Justice and Home Affairs protocols; national security needs to remain sole responsibility of member states, but they need to work together that affect the

published studies arguing that Britain will be better off by quitting EU. Britain's trade will flourish and its growth will accelerate.

Europhiles say that exiting EU will be a blunder as Britain will become poorer and lose its pre-eminent position in the world. Some argued that if Britain quits EU, then Scotland and Northern Ireland will secede from Britain. Many predicted that Britain's exit will prompt other members, particularly the weaker economies not in the Eurozone, to also leave. What will be the actual impact of Brexit is still an issue of debate.

The narrative regarding the formation of the EU is interesting. In the early 1960s, Europe was clearly divided between the "Inner Six" (France, West

1973, under Conservative PM Edward Heath, a staunch supporter of European integration. By then, de Gaulle had resigned (1969) and Georges Pompidou had become President of France.

There were good economic reasons for Britain to join the EEC. It wanted to avoid economic decline. UK's per capita GDP compared to the EU6 members declined steadily from 1945 to 1972. However, it was relatively stable between 1973 and 2010 (Nauro F. Campos & Fabrizio Coricelli).

David Cameron has put the European Council on tenterhooks. Donald Tusk on February 2 unveiled a series of proposals to help persuade Britons to stay with EU. European Commission Chief Jean-Claude Juncker on February 3 said, "The settlement that has been proposed is fair for the United Kingdom and fair for the other 27 member states. It is also fair for the European Parliament. We have addressed the Prime Minister's concerns while respecting the EU treaties". Cameron said that the plan showed "real progress". Euro sceptics have greeted the plans with scorn, particularly UK Independence Party (UKIP) leader Nigel Farage dismissing them as "pathetic".

What is amazing is that at a time when nation states are keen to form or join regional economic blocs, Britain wants to leave the largest powerful economic bloc in the world. Cameron knows that by being inside, Britain can influence the decisions of EU, but Brexit will deprive him of all the levers of pressure. Even with some reforms, he will campaign with Britons to stay in the European Union. Ultimately, Brexit is all about flexibility and money.

The joke that made the rounds in the 1970s was that Britain could not divide the EEC from outside, so they had to get inside to make a pig's breakfast of the whole thing. Let us hope that David Cameron will not ruin the European project.

The writer is former ambassador and secretary.

The threat of a Brexit

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security of all.

Immigration - the current rate of immigration of over 300,000 per year, particularly from within the EU, has put tremendous strain on British schools, hospitals and other public services; to stop the abuse of free movement, immigrants from the EU must live in UK and contribute to the economy for four years before they qualify for social benefits.

Since the announcement of the referendum, there has been a flurry of studies on the pros and cons of Cameron's gamble. Euro sceptics argue that Britain pays more to the EU in the form of membership fees, than what it gets back from the EU. Sceptics have

Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg) and the "Outer Seven" (Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom). Inner Six (EU6) included founder members of the European Economic Community (EEC), which was gradually moving towards integration. Outer Seven formed the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), but was not making much headway.

Britain eschewed EEC membership in the 1950s, but when it applied for membership in the 1960s, it was snubbed by the redoubtable French President Charles de Gaulle. After being rebuffed twice by de Gaulle, Britain finally became a member on January 1,

COMMENTS

"A JOURNEY WITH PRIDE"
(February 6, 2016)

Lima

Our best wishes to The Daily Star on its journey. Go ahead, The Daily Star!

"Bangladesh elected WFP board member" (February 4, 2016)

Quazi Minhajuddin Ahmed

Another accolade for Bangladesh. We should just work hard and then see the result.

Sujan Mia

Congratulations! It is the recognition of the present government's performance.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters@thedailystar.net

A master of deception

From the February 2, 2016 issue of The Daily Star, we have learned that Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad has softened his stance on the issue of resignation of three JP Ministers from the Sheikh Hasina-led cabinet.

We are not surprised as we knew it was coming because we are familiar with all the tricks of HM Ershad. He seems to be a master of deception. His past



activities are responsible for his public image.
Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Iowans rejected Trump's racism

Iowans rejected Mr. Trump's xenophobic and ultra-nationalistic ideology by voting against him on the first Republican primary caucus on February 1 for the 2016 presidential election. Donald Trump was overconfident about the outcome of the first primary because of his money and immigrant bashing, which incites working class whites who think that

the government is treating them badly and immigrants are taking over their jobs. Iowans again have proved that there is no place for fascism and racism in this twenty-first century.

We congratulate the Iowans for giving their sensible verdict against Mr. Trump.
Nawfal Taulkhdar
On e-mail

Ensure tight security to the fair area

This year's Ekushey book fair has started. Book-lovers wait all the year for this event. Last year, blogger Avijit Roy was murdered in the fair area which was a great shock for everyone. The authorities concerned should ensure tight security to the entire fair area.

Amina Begum
Amina Mansion, Barisal



PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH