

Politicization of Bureaucracy, Declining Status of Public Institutions and Crisis of Governance in Bangladesh

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The performance of a public organization depends largely on how the domestic political institution handles global pressures as well as how it interacts with the bureaucracy. In a country like Bangladesh, where global pressure is eminent and the domestic political institutions are ill structured, the colonial legacy places the bureaucracy in a difficult position. As globalization or market liberalization changes both the domestic context and the functioning of the bureaucracy, it is possible—but not necessarily desirable—that the two primary state institutions, politics and bureaucracy, forge an alliance (Jahan:2006). This paper deals with two important current challenges of public administration focusing on politicization of bureaucracy and recruitment process in Bangladesh.

Key Words: Politicization, Bureaucracy, Governance, Bangladesh

I . Background

The civil service system in Bangladesh is modelled on the British colonial tradition of

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neutrality and anonymity, transformed only marginally during the last half a century (since 1947) to suit the needs of an independent developing country. All the elements of the Weberian ideal type bureaucracy are extant together with other properties like elitism, paternalism, closed complexion, policy parochialism, and political adventurism, which have been either inherited from British rule or acquired during the Pakistan and post-independence period. The bureaucracy, firmly entrenched in society, is a cohesive political institution, still largely insulated from the people, with a distinctive outlook and enjoying considerable sub-system autonomy. Basically, it operates in the present era of parliamentary democracy in the same manner as it did in the days of strong authoritarian presidential rule (Zafarullah et al: 1997)

In the post-colonial period (1947-1971), the bureaucracy in Pakistan, the forerunner of the Bangladesh civil service, held a pre-eminent position in the political system of the country. Taking advantage of the political squabbles of the time and the incompetence and inexperience of politicians, the bureaucracy usurped political power and in collusion with the military, after the coup d'etat of 1958, effectively governed the country until its dismemberment and the secession of Bangladesh in 1971. While the seeds of politicization were sown and germinated in the pre-independence period, only a few Bengalis (later Bangladeshis) belonging to the bureaucracy in Pakistan were infected by the politicization syndrome. Most were junior officers deployed at sub-national levels, and as such had no direct links with the inner circle of the bureaucracy that effectively governed Pakistan with the military generals by their sides. Nonetheless, their indoctrination and training and their exposure to the ways their senior colleagues operated at the political level, had remarkable influence on the development of their perceptions, attitudes and outlook about statecraft and their future (political) role (Zafarullah: 1997).

During the war of independence, many of these bureaucrats played a very influential role in managing the civil administration. Their close association with the politicians who formed the government-in-exile in India and provided leadership to the war, opened the bureaucracy 'to direct political influence (and made) bureaucrats politically ambitious' (Khan and Zafarullah, 1991: 657).

With the capture of state power by the military regime in the mid-1970s, the bureaucracy gained a new lease of life. Senior bureaucrats began freely treading the corridors of political power. A new coalition was forged, similar to the military-civil bureaucracy alliance of 1958-71 period. The nature of civil-military relations changed; bureaucrats were made advisors and ministers in military cabinets (Islam, 1988: 123). Many of the key positions in the country's strategic institutions were occupied by civil and military bureaucrats.

The accession of democratic rule in the 1990s, contrary to expectations, did not signal the end of bureaucratic dominance. On the other hand, the public administrative system was further politicized. During the rule of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP between 1991-96), politicization took many forms: placement of party loyalists to important positions in the civil service, appointment of diehard supporters as key functionaries (including the chairman) in the Public Service Commission, with whose help the BCS recruitment process was manipulated in favor of candidates having links with the student wing of the party, and large-scale promotion of officers apparently loyal to the establishment. By the mid-1990s, the bureaucracy became clearly factionalized on party lines; some senior civil servants openly defying the government while others lending their support.

The former were punished by 'demoting' them to trivial positions, while the latter were rewarded for their services with jobs in important ministries. The opposition Awami League decried, both inside and outside parliament, these politically-motivated moves of the BNP government. Nonetheless, when it came to power in 1996, it wasted no time to reward those civil servants who violated civil service codes by openly supporting the AL in its agitation against the BNP. It is widely believed that the strategy to bring down the government was designed by the ALfaction in the bureaucracy. The person who led this faction has been recompensed for his unequivocal support with a ministerial position, even though he is not an elected legislator.

There is a common perception that civil servants all over the world are more or less apathetic to the needs of the people and that they are even unwilling to listen to them. According to Alkadry, two major reasons account for bureaucrats' "inability to take

action." First, a bureaucracy is a formal, rule-based organization design to limit the discretion and bound the initiative and empowerment of individual bureaucrats. Second, there is the "bureaucratic experience." A bureaucrat is subject to a combination of conflicting social, political and other pressures; the bureaucrat learns to contend with these pressures by internalizing organizational norms and avoiding risks (Alkadry, 2003: 184-88). The situation is no different in Bangladesh; indeed, it may be even worse because an inadequate, faulty recruitment procedure can place a non-qualified person in a formalized organization; and because politicization—the priority of party loyalty—can amplify the pressures a bureaucrat already feels.

These two problems—the politicization of the civil service and the defective recruitment procedure—may be largely responsible for the lack of "good governance" in Bangladesh. If recruitment is not fair and competitive, it fails to attract the meritorious and appropriate candidates. It becomes impossible to create a civil service that can handle the global pressures and the challenges imposed by the private sector; and it will be difficult for the nation to have an efficient, innovative and dynamic civil service. Politicization may cause a decline in the morale of the civil servants and reduce their efficiency and effectiveness. Faulty recruitment and politicization may create a vicious cycle: because of politicization fewer interested, meritorious candidates enter the civil service; with fewer meritorious new entrants, the scope for politicization increases; and this further deters the most able candidates from entering the civil service. Eventually this process could corrupt the entire administration (Jahan: 2006).

The performance of a public organization depends largely on how the domestic political institution handles global pressures as well as how it interacts with the bureaucracy. In a country like Bangladesh, where global pressure is eminent and the domestic political institutions are ill structured, the colonial legacy places the bureaucracy in a difficult position. As globalization or market liberalization changes both the domestic context and the functioning of the bureaucracy, it is possible—but not necessarily desirable—that the two primary state institutions, politics and bureaucracy, forge an alliance (Jahan:2006). This paper deals with two important current challenges of public administration focusing on

politicization of bureaucracy and recruitment process in Bangladesh.

II. The Structure of Bangladesh Civil Service

The Public Sector in Bangladesh currently numbers around one million people. Around 30,000 are employed in public enterprises whilst 700,000 are employed in various ministries, Departments and other Government Offices. This latter group is termed the "Civil Service" These officers staff 41 ministries, 15 administrative divisions and the offices of the President and Prime Minister (DFID:2004)..

The Bangladesh Civil Service is structured horizontally into four classes, Class 1 being the professional or officer class and others performing a variety of supporting functions. Class 1 numbers about 40,000 officers, 70% of whom are recruited into cadres whilst the rest work in functional areas that are not "en-cadred" (i.e. do not belong to a particular cadre). Some non-cadred posts and hierarchies have existed for decades and, for those in this position, their status is a cause for much dissatisfaction and frustration. On average, between 1,200 and 1,800 Class 1 officers are recruited each year. There are 29 cadres each comprising officers with particular skills or qualifications. Most cadres are confined to a single Ministry, for example most, if not all, members of the Nursing, Family Planning and Health cadres work in the Ministry of Health and Family Planning. Cadre arrangements are also complicated by the development of non-cadred posts. These are often funded from development monies and do not attract the benefits (promotion opportunities, pension, security of employment etc) associated with sanctioned posts in cadres. Although most cadres populate a particular ministry or directorate, the Administrative cadre provides the officers for the Ministry of Establishment, the Civil Field Service, the Secretariats to all Ministries and the Secretariats for the Cabinet Office and the Prime Ministers. Administrative cadre officers are also deputed to key positions to run autonomous and other constitutional organisations such as the Public Service Commission (DFID:2004).

With rapid nationalization after independence, Bangladesh adopted an interventionist

state-centered model of development. Although the government began to shift from that model after 1975, it continued to exercise considerable control over the major socio-economic sectors—education, health, transport, communication, etc. During the mid-1980s, the government shifted from a state-centered to a more market-led approach. Under constant pressure from development partners, the government is trying to emulate business ethics such as effectiveness, decentralization, competition, efficiency, value-for-money, and partnership in public services (Jahan: 2006).

Based on the principle of consumer or user rights, citizens are now supposed to be treated as customers. The government, instead of playing an interventionist role in various sectors, is advised to redefine its role and to transform itself into a catalyst of private investors and business institutions (Haque, 2001: 99-103). However, being one of the poorest countries of the world and with a malfunctioning market, the government still has to play an important role in various sectors. In the energy sector, the government provides its service through Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB), Rural Electricity Board (REB), and Petrobangla. For transportation there is Bangladesh Road and Transport Corporation (BRTC); for Telecommunication sector it is Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board (BTTB); and for health sector, the government renders service through its local government bodies, City Corporations and Municipalities (DFID, 2004). In recent years, the government has undergone many restructuring programs to increase the ability, efficiency and quality of the service and to downsize these agencies.

Despite these reform efforts the citizen's perception of the public servants and the quality of the service they provide is negative. Various surveys indicate that citizens consider the public service as "over centralized, unaccountable, inefficient, underpaid, coercive, unethical, and rent seeking" (Zafarullah, 1997). Individual encounters with officials brought "unnecessary harassment, procrastination in deciding simple problems, discourteous and arrogant behavior, keeping customers waiting for hours before attending to their needs, frequent absence from office, not maintaining appointments, ignoring pleas for reconsideration of a problem, unwilling to correct mistakes, and making unabashed approaches for pecuniary benefits" (Zafarullah, 1997).

III. Nature and Extent of Politicization of Bureaucracy

The national government that came into power immediately after independence tried hard to reform the colonial bureaucracy. It openly showed its antipathy towards the elitist civil service of Pakistan and took measures to eliminate elitism and make the bureaucracy a dynamic organization. To reduce the power of the generalist civil servants, academicians were appointed to the highest posts of the civil service. This effort made the bureaucracy uncomfortable; the government later withdrew from the reform efforts, but the bureaucracy remained in a vulnerable position (Hakim, 1991:9-14). But within a few years, assassination of leaders, coups and counter-coups disturbed Bangladesh; this instability created an opportunity for the relatively bureaucracy to regain its previous status.

In 1972, Alavi commented that there was a chance that in the future Bangladesh might come under military rule and new bureaucratic-military oligarchy would then come into existence (Alavi, 1972: 80-81). This is exactly what happened after 1975. In spite of some efforts made by politicians, no viable, transparent or accountable political institution developed and, in its absence, an alliance between the civil and military bureaucracies emerged. From 1975 to 1990 there was military rule, in various forms, in Bangladesh. The military authority needed the support of civil bureaucracy; and the civil bureaucracy strengthened its position in return for supporting the military regime. The civil bureaucracy's power continued to expand because its "organizational strength and managerial skills" were essential for supporting successive governments. Thus, the bureaucracy attained considerable autonomy.

After the democratic transition in 1991, the bureaucracy found its autonomy challenged. It appeared that political patronage and favoritism threatened to erode the cohesiveness and unity of the civil service. Eventually, the bureaucracy found out a new strategy to overcome this "problem". It was done in two ways. First, after retirement, senior bureaucrats began "infiltrating the ranks of politicians". Second, the bureaucracy allowed itself to be politicized. The political parties did not prevent this, as the bureaucracy's

support was necessary to run and manage the country. This gave rise to massive politicization and to an erosion of the traditional values of public service neutrality held by the bureaucracy. (Haque and Rahman, 2003: 404).

The politicization of bureaucracy is not unique to Bangladesh. For example, a debate about the politicization of bureaucracy emerged in the UK during the time of Margaret Thatcher when Sir John Hoskins stated that moderate politicization at the higher level of the bureaucracy would help the government to implement its policy more effectively (Ali, 2004:15-16). In one way or another, politicization is present in the administration of almost every developed country. It exists to allow the political leadership—those who are elected and the advisors they hire or appoint directly—to coordinate with the administrative leadership, senior career civil servants. Reorganizing ministries and transferring selected senior civil servants are political actions, but they can be justified or rationalized as enhancing efficiency and can be considered positive or allowable politicization. In this discussion we focus on the negative aspect of politicization in the context of Bangladesh over last 15 years across three regimes which were in charge of government and administration. It exists when personnel management decisions like transfer, promotion, and contractual recruitment depend not on quality and efficiency but on the person's loyalty to a certain political party: the subversion of merit and seniority standards damages the civil service as an institution.

The democratic era in Bangladesh has witnessed massive politicization but it was not to gain efficiency and increase effectiveness. Rather, the primary emphasis was placed on recruiting "party men bureaucrats" at times ignoring their qualifications. In first five years of democracy—1991 to 1996—the BNP ruled the country. Politicization appeared in various forms including the placement of party loyalists in important civil service positions. Also, the government tried to manipulate the recruitment process of the civil service by letting in candidates with links to student wing of the party (Zafarullah, 1997). On February 8, 1992, the government decided to promote as many as 654 officials, which created a lot of controversy (The Daily Shangbad, June 2, 2000). Further, from 1991 to 1996, the government issued orders of forced retirement of at least 51 civil servants; most of them

were never shown any reason for this order (Karim, 1996: 39).

After coming to power in 1996, the Awami League continued the process of politicization. A number of senior civil servants, in 1996, were directly involved in a movement to remove a democratically elected government. The Awami League, the party that came to power due to that movement decided to reward to those civil servants by including one of them in their ministry and by promoting the others (Haque and Rahman, 2003: 411-12). In 2001, the government decided to promote as many as 355 officials depriving many competent officials of promotion, as the government was not sure about their political loyalty—a violation of seniority (The daily Prothom Alo, January 14, 2001). Moreover, the amount of contractual recruitment increased significantly through 2000: 174 civil servants were recruited on contractual basis (The Daily Shangbad, August 8, 2000).

In 2001, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party formed the government and has since tried to maintain firm control over the bureaucracy by making it highly politicized. The government has created a new record by appointing 978 officials as "Officer on Special Duty" (The Daily Janakantha, May 21, 2006). Allegedly, promotion decisions are no longer being made according to seniority or merit; rather importance is given to party loyalty; this is causing a severe damage to the morale of the civil servants. Furthermore, the number of contractual appointments has also increased and most of these appointments, and extensions of contracts, are being made on the basis of political allegiance. It is alleged that most of the secretaries and additional secretaries getting contractual appointment, or extension of contracts, are inclined either toward BNP or Jamaat-e-Islami (The Daily Star, July 17, 2006).

It is reported that the government has initiated a new process of politicization. With the consent of Prime Minister's Office (PMO), an unofficial cell was created to make sure that no civil servant who is or was sympathetic to Awami League is promoted (Khan, 2003: 402-03). The SSB (Superior Selection Board) is now dysfunctional. The decisions are made by the PMO and the SSB's only duty is to approve the list supplied by the PMO (The Daily Janakantha, May 5, 2006).

The newspaper account below documents the pervasive politicization of the civil

service. Promotion should be according to seniority. However, seniority is being circumvented for political purposes, thus ‘depriving’ civil servants of due promotion:

“On June 13, 2002, 170 were promoted to the post of Joint Secretary depriving 200. On February 10 & 16, 2003, 493 were promoted to the post of Deputy Secretary depriving 322. On August 27, 2003, 97 were promoted to the post of Additional Secretary depriving 104. On August 27, 2003, 49 were promoted to the post of Joint Secretary depriving 277. On June 15, 2004, 84 were promoted to the post of Joint Secretary depriving 78. On February 15, 2005, 18 were promoted to the post of Secretary depriving 5. On March 5, 2005, 61 were promoted to the post of depriving 31. On April 21, 2005, 327 were promoted to the post of Deputy Secretary depriving 50. On January 26, 2006, 378 Senior Assistant Secretaries were promoted to the post of Deputy Secretary depriving around 200 others. Interestingly enough, 39 Additional Secretaries were reported to have been promoted to the highest rank of Secretary. Seniority was alleged to have been violated in the cases of 14 civil servants and 30 civil servants were alleged to have been promoted to the highest rank of Secretary in only 3 years. As far as promotion is concerned, the current government has promoted 153 Deputy Secretaries to the post of Joint Secretary as lately as 13 July 2006 depriving around 100 eligible officers along with 5 Additional Secretaries promoted to the post of Secretary.”

Source: Bangladesh Observer, ‘Government’s Institution-Destruction Spree’, 22 July 2006.

This massive politicization has an adverse effect on the overall performance of the civil service. Since the return to democratic rule, the bureaucracy has redefined its role to defend its autonomy and character. An alliance has been created in which the bureaucrats let themselves be politicized. There are certain rules and regulations that govern the civil service of Bangladesh. One is The Government Servants (Conduct) Rules, 1979, which regulates the terms and conditions of service in the service of the Republic. The section 25 of this rule states:

- (1) No Government servant shall be a member of, or be otherwise associated with, any political party or, any organization affiliated to any political party, or shall take part, or assist, in any manner, in any political activity in Bangladesh or abroad;
- (2) No Government servant shall permit any person dependent on him for maintenance

or under his care or control to take part in or in anyway assist, any movement or activity which is, or tends directly or indirectly to be subversive of Government as by law established in Bangladesh.

- (3) No Government servant shall canvass or otherwise interfere or use his influence in connection with or take part in any election to a legislative body, whether in Bangladesh or else where: Provided that a Government servant who is qualified to vote at such election may exercise his right to vote; but if he does so, he shall give no indication of the manner in which he proposes to vote or has voted (The Government Servants (Conduct) Rules, 1979).

Many civil servants, as well as the government, have started to ignore these rules. A number of civil servants are directly participating in political activities by seeking nomination to participate in the elections. For instance, a civil servant appointed on contractual basis after his retirement, has been involved in active politics and is projecting himself as a candidate of the ruling party. This constitutes an offence under the service rule. It has been noted, that after having obtained assurances, he will be given an election ticket from the BNP; the person in question started taking up development projects in a constituency and also started an election campaign showing total disregard to the discipline of the Civil Service (The Bangladesh Observer, May 24, 2006). Another allegation has been made against a divisional special judge pointing out that while on the job, he "has been participating in many public meetings of the ruling party BNP" introducing himself as a BNP candidate for Member of Parliament (MP) in the next election (The Bangladesh Observer, February 14, 2006). These illustrate just a few instances of a broader pattern: the problem of negative politicization has become very common in last fifteen years.

IV. Bangladesh Public Service Commission: The Lost Image and Status

During colonial times, the bureaucracy was simply an apparatus of the colonial lords. For their own purposes, the colonial powers placed special emphasis on making the bureaucracy an elite and organized force totally alienated from the society. At independence, the bureaucracy remained a strong and highly developed state apparatus (Alavi, 1972: 59-62).

In the British colonial period, access to civil service was limited to young university graduates belonging to the rich upper class. This pattern continued during the Pakistani period. After liberation, the Bangladesh constitution established that equal opportunity for all citizens should be the guiding principle in public service recruitment. Based on the constitutional provisions, the government also made special arrangements—a quota system—to create special opportunities for disadvantaged groups. However, no system was developed to regulate the induction of personnel at the base level of the higher civil service until 1977: it was regulated by ad hoc arrangements. In 1977 and 1979, the Public Service Commission, the constitutional body, conducted two superior post examinations to recruit candidates through open competition. As per recommendation of Pay and Services Commission, 1977, 14 main cadres (later increased to 29) were created. The first Bangladesh civil service examination was held in 1982 following the Bangladesh Civil Service (Recruitment) rules, 1981 (Zafarullah, 1988: 130-33).

According to the current recruitment policy, there are three means of recruitment: direct recruitment—open competitive examinations; promotion and transfer; and direct lateral recruitment (Report of Bangladesh Public Service Commission, 2004:12). Class I Officers (the key decision makers and roughly 8% of all civil servants) are recruited directly by the PSC through an open competitive examination into 29 cadres and other government services. The Ministry of Establishment gathers staffing requirements from ministries and government bodies to determine the number of new officers to be recruited. It then advises the PSC to conduct the competitive examination and finalise the list of potential

recruits. Finally, the Ministry of Establishment appoints officers from the list supplied by the PSC.

Recruitment follows the Bangladesh Civil Service Recruitment Rules of 1981. While Bangladesh largely follows a closed entry system, there is a provision for 10% "lateral" entry into the civil service to more senior grades from outside the service. In addition, the PSC is required to reserves appointment of Class I posts according to the following quotas:

30% reserved for freedom fighters or the children of freedom fighters

10% reserved for women

5% reserved for tribal groups

10% reserved for different districts (based on district population density)

This quota system leaves only 45 percent of the posts for recruitment to be filled following a merit-based open competitive system. The current quotas were introduced in March 1997 (DFID, 2004). Previously, the 30-percent reserved quota was for freedom fighters only; it did not include their children. Since 1987 the PSC has recommended modifying the quota system (Ali, 2004:125).

V. Problems in the Recruitment System

In case of direct recruitment, the literature suggests that the examination system, even the modified one, is sufficient to bring meritorious personnel into the public service. It does not test for creative thinking and analytical ability. Studies show that the civil service examination is not as tough and competitive as it was during the British or Pakistani periods. The BSC exam has become so easy that most candidates memorize study guides, write the answers mechanically and pass. The question papers prepared for the BCS exam are not rich enough to identify deserving candidates for class I positions.

Serious allegations such as the leakage of question papers have been made against the Public Service Commission (PSC). The PSC had to cancel the 24th BCS preliminary test

due to the alleged leakage of question papers (The Daily Star, August 11, 2003).

The PSC has not yet to solve this problem or perception, as allegations of leakage continue to emerge at every preliminary and written test. The persistent concern about leakage as well as politicization damages the credibility of the public service examination process and is causing meritorious students to reconsider pursuing public sector careers.

If this problem continues, civil service jobs may lose their prestige. Because of loopholes in recruitment procedures, a large number of incompetent candidates have entered the civil service and the outcome has been embarrassing for the country. The country director of the Department for International Development (DFID), David Wood at a press briefing during a two-day long conference titled "Asia-2015: Promoting Growth, Ending Poverty" questioned the capability of Bangladesh civil servants in implementing foreign aid projects (The Daily Star, July 17, 2006). A senior PSC member confessed that the performance of the civil service is sometimes embarrassing for the government as some civil servants lack basic command of English language and communication skills (The Financial Express, October 29, 2005). The increase in contractual recruitment in the civil service may also reflect the competency problem: the government often has no alternative but to contract because of the insufficient number of skilled public servants.

The problem in the recruitment process is two-fold. The first is structural and includes the lengthy procedure and the inadequate salary structure. The second is political and corruption-related; this includes leakage of question papers and political consideration on the part of the political parties in recruitment. Neither problem is too difficult or complex to solve. Donors are willing to fund reform projects because development assistance is more likely to succeed if there is an effective administrative apparatus. This is why development partners often emphasize capacity building of civil servants. With this in mind, Management At The Top (MATI) has been introduced as training policy with the assistance of DFID. Some 3,000 civil servants at the level of senior assistant secretary and above are to receive intensive training under this program, which will be an "important building block for incremental administrative reform" (The Financial Express, October 29, 2005).

The conventional view is that the Bangladesh civil service attracts the country's bright meritorious students and cultivates an elitism that makes civil servants apathetic to the needs of citizens, especially poor. Our review of the existing literature indicates that the conventional wisdom no longer fits the facts: the civil service is losing its appeal as the best career choice for many able candidates. The two major problems discussed in the first part of the paper—defective recruitment and politicization—have contributed to the declining status and performance of civil service and other public institutions.

VI. Recruitment Process: Common Perceptions

After the democratic transition in 1991, political leaders started taking control over the bureaucracy (Haque et al., 2003). The situation took an important turn after the "Janatar Mancha" movement initiated by the civil servants in 1996. Since then, the political party in power did not try to prevent repetitions of such movements. The immediate impact was upon the recruitment process. Over last 15 years, during the period of successive last three regimes (1991-2006) the recruitment process has become highly politicized hence corrupt. There had been many reports in the newspapers that many candidates had bribed a viva board member to make sure that he could get the job. Leakage of question papers also became common phenomena. Over last 15 years, people have developed a negative perception regarding civil service recruitment and political pressure is undoubtedly one of the reasons behind this. One retired CSP officer commented, "as long as the senior bureaucrats headed the PSC, the recruitment process was fair. They knew what they were doing. But, you tell me how a university professor from a pure science discipline understands who we need to recruit for civil service." Besides, the appointment of the chairperson and the members of the Public Service Commission based on their political loyalty is the seed of all misdeeds. They do not play an adequate role and sometimes they join the party in power by infiltrating corruption using their influence. Moreover, as they are politically appointed they know they can get away with that.

VII. Restoring Trust in Public Institutions: The Recent Initiatives

It can be argued that certain level politicization of the civil service is unavoidable and even desirable; but beyond this desirable level politicization can easily undermine the reputation and effectiveness of the public institutions. The paper reveals that the status of the civil service has eroded and bright graduates are now less likely to pursue public service positions than in the past. To function properly the government needs to maintain an able and efficient workforce. To do so the government must ensure that the civil service remains an attractive career choice.

The challenges are to reform the recruitment process, de-politicize the bureaucracy and ensure the civil service promotion system is not tainted. These reforms, if undertaken successfully, would place efficient and skilled personnel in the right positions and attract the best and brightest students to public service careers. There is a large difference between what is necessary and what can be achieved when it comes to the public administration and good governance in Bangladesh. We found in this paper that contemporary public administration is all about politics. Politicians and bureaucrats are the key actors in the management of bureaucracy.

The current Caretaker Government (CTG) took over power in early 2007 and since then it has shown genuine interest in restoring the lost images and status of public institutions. The CTG is working relentlessly to de-politicize civil service and thus bring back order and trust in the service. It has already reconstituted the Bangladesh Public Service Commission with a new Chair and members-who have neutral images and who are known for their integrity and efficiency. The government is focusing on developing the Bangladesh PSC into a modern, trustworthy and capable Public Service Commission with high public esteem that helps to put right person on the right place. The CTG is also taking necessary measures with a view to reforming civil service in a way that it can foster good governance. The current government has already drafted a new Civil Service Act with a special focus on increasing integrity, ethical standards and performance of the civil service to ensure good

governance. However, the effectiveness of these measures remain to be seen with the passage of time.

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