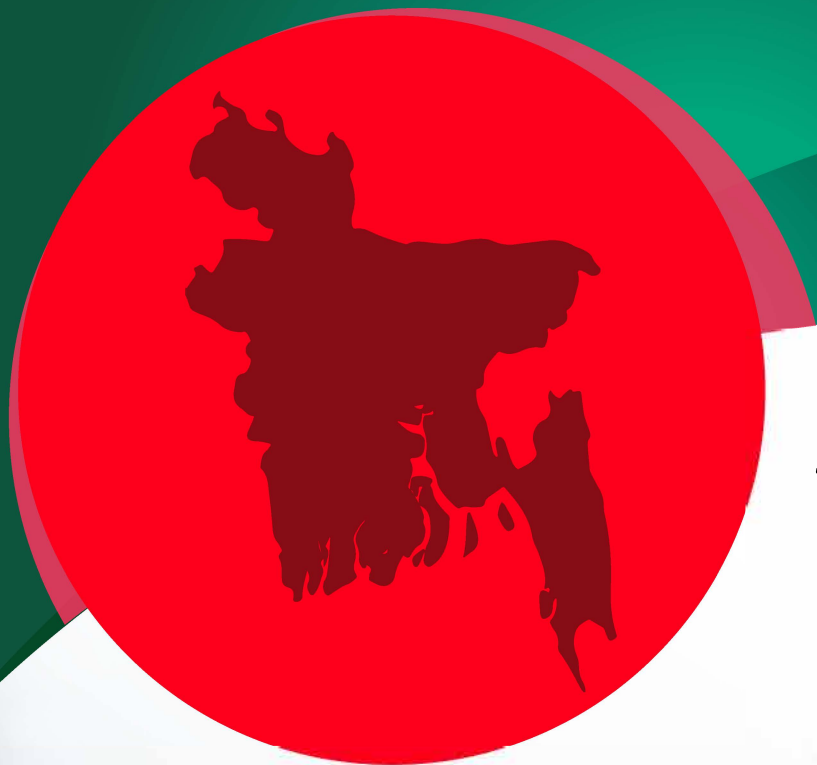


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CONTENTS

- *From the Editor*
— Syed S. Andaleeb
- *Six-Point Policy Priorities for Bangladesh: 2009-2013*
- *The Ganges Treaty: Parsing the Dynamics of the Final Negotiations — What have we learned from it?*— Main Paper by Tariq Karim
 - Commentary by Y. M. Bammi
 - Commentary by Sudhir Devare
- *Understanding Inflation in Bangladesh*
— Zahid Hussain and Sanjana Zaman
- *Can Proportional Representation Help Stabilize Democracy in Bangladesh?*
— Nazrul Islam
- *The Vicious Cycle of Administrative Politicization in Bangladesh*
— Ferdous Jahan and Asif Mohammad Shahan
- *Population Growth Projections for Bangladesh from 2000 to 2025: Policy Implications for Education*
— Halimur R. Khan

Editor: *Dr. Syed Saad Andaleeb*

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The Vicious Cycle of Administrative Politicization in Bangladesh

Ferdous Jahan
and
Asif Mohammad Shahan

Abstract

The paper argues that the excessive and extra-legal practice of politicization in public service recruitment system in Bangladesh creates a vicious cycle of incompetence: because of politicization, fewer competent candidates enter the civil service; with fewer competent new entrants, the scope for politicization increases; and less-competent civil service and politicization together deter the most able candidates from entering the civil service.

Introduction

Present day Bangladesh was part of the British Empire for almost two hundred years until 1947 and then was under Pakistani rule until 1971. Consequently, colonial and Pakistani imprints still persist in political and administrative arrangements of Bangladesh. The British tradition helped the bureaucracy to become an essential tool of governance and the Pakistani convention encouraged bureaucrats to get involved in power politics (Huque 1997). After its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has experienced a series of political transitions. A few years of democracy were followed by nearly fifteen years of military rule. In 1990, Bangladesh again adhered to a democratic structure that was in place until January 11, 2007. However, the nature and role of bureaucracy in both the pre-democratic and democratic period remained almost the same except for an increase in number of ministries, divisions, departments and statutory bodies (Ahmed 2002). But, at the same time, the nature and the role of government have changed. For example, after independence its focus was on the attainment of development in all spheres of life by direct state intervention. From the beginning of the 1990s, adhering to the market economy principle forced the government to change its' role from an intervener to a referee; instead of playing the game, its main duty has been to make sure that a fair game is being played. This reinvented role of the government necessitated redefining the role of the bureaucracy. Bureaucracy should be considered as an "open" system interacting with domestic, economic, political, and social environment as well as with global threats and opportunities (Welch and Wong 2001). The performance of a public organization depends largely on how the domestic political institution handles global pressures as well as how it utilizes its bureaucracy to this end.

However, it may be difficult for the bureaucracy to

adapt to global needs as fast as it needs to do. There is a common perception that civil servants are more or less apathetic to the needs of the people and that they are unwilling to listen to them (Alkadry 2003). In a country like Bangladesh, where global pressure is imminent and the domestic political institutions are ill-structured, the colonial legacy places the bureaucracy in a more intricate position. Consequently, it is possible—but not necessarily desirable—that the two primary state institutions, politics and bureaucracy, forge an alliance. This alliance, however, may make the bureaucracy more inefficient and ineffective. Undue and extra-legal politicization in public service may pollute the civil service recruitment process by selecting a non-qualified person in a public office. Eventually, it may cause a decline in the morale of the civil servants and reduce their efficiency and effectiveness. Thus, faulty and politicized recruitment 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. This paper argues that this vicious cycle existed in Bangladesh Civil Service during the 1991-2006 period.

To understand and explore the extent and nature of problems related to politicization in civil service recruitment process, we conducted qualitative, interview-based primary research. We interviewed 5 members of the Civil Service of Pakistan,¹ 15 mid-level and 20 fresh BCS officers, and 50 recent graduates of public and private universities. For the purpose of the study, we consider mid-level civil servants as those who have been in the civil service for more than 5 years and hold a rank no higher than deputy secretary. Fresh civil servants are defined as those with not more than 5 years experience. In this paper, we first provide an overview of the public administration system of Bangladesh and analyze the

existing recruitment system of the Bangladesh civil service and describe the process and problems of this system. The next section deals with the growth, nature and extent of politicization in the civil service of Bangladesh. The fourth section contains an analysis of our primary research data and findings. Efforts have been made to analyze the impact of the existing recruitment procedure and the practice of politicization on the career choice of recent university graduates. The final and concluding section describes and scrutinizes the reform efforts made so far by the Care Taker Government (CTG). We argue that the CTG is in an unique position to initiate reform efforts to break the vicious cycle of recruitment problems and negative politicization. However, through analyzing the reform efforts undertaken so far by the Caretaker Government (CTG), this paper concludes that these reforms are cosmetic in nature and are unlikely to bring any systematic change to the existing civil service status-quo.

The Bangladesh Civil Service: Structure and Reform Efforts

The Structure of Bangladesh Civil Service

The government of Bangladesh has a two-tier administrative system. The upper tier is the central secretariat at the national level consisting of the ministries and divisions to provide policies and to perform clearinghouse functions. The other tier consists of 'line' departments/directorates attached to the ministries and divisions that are mainly responsible for general administration, service delivery to citizens and implementation of various government development programs at the sub-national level (Ahmed 2002). At present, the Bangladesh civil service has more than one million civil servants in 37 ministries, 11 divisions, 254 departments and 173 statutory bodies (ADB 2005). The internal organization structure of a ministry reflects a hierarchical order. A minister is in charge of a ministry and is normally the "political head" of that ministry. A ministry consists of at least one division. A secretary or, in his absence an additional secretary, is considered the "administrative head" of the ministry. He/she conducts and looks after the duties of a division, which includes routine operation, supervision of its staffing and organizational processes. He/she is also the adviser to the minister regarding policy and administrative issues. A division can further be divided into wings. A wing is composed of branches. The head of a wing—a joint secretary—supervises the activities of the branches within his wing. Each branch is under the charge of a deputy secretary. A section is the lowest level of

administration headed by an assistant secretary (Zafarullah 2005). There are four classes in Bangladesh civil service. Class I and part of class II officers are treated as "gazetted" officers; the rest are considered as "non-gazetted" officers (Ahmed 2002).

Administrative Reform Efforts

Bangladesh inherited an archaic and colonial administrative structure. The performance of the bureaucracy has not been beyond question (Khan and Zafarullah 2005). To meet the demands of a changing society, successive governments tried to reform the administrative system by appointing fifteen administrative reform commissions and committees. Each tried to reform the administrative system to make it more dynamic, efficient and representative. Two of them, Administrative and Services and Reorganization Committee (ASRC-1973) and Committee for Administrative Reform and Reorganization (CARR-1982) went beyond "the domain of the traditional administrative system and pleaded for democratization of administration and devolution of power to elected local governments". The reform efforts by the Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC-2000) were clearly influenced by the New Public Management movement. PARC provided some innovative ideas, submitting 70 short-term and 37 long-term recommendations. Considering citizens as customers, the commission urged the improvement of public service delivery, reform and downsizing of the civil service, and taking measures to combat corruption, among others (GoB 2000). However, most of the recommendations of the reform committees were never implemented; in a few cases, the recommendations were implemented in a modified form (Ahmed 2002).

The literature on administrative reform suggests that the reform efforts were unsuccessful mainly because of the lack of commitment of the government and the strong resistance by the civil servants. Most of these reform efforts tried to provide technical solutions and neglected the socio-political dimensions (WB 2002). Moreover, bureaucrats, in general, are reluctant to change. A review of the literature suggests that, so far, they have succeeded either to resist any reform agenda or to create impediments in implementing it. Resistance has two phases. First, power and authority to make the reform successful is concentrated in the hands of bureaucrats and, second, after taking control, they adopt a non-cooperative or a go-slow approach. A study conducted by Monem (2006) on the privatization experience of the country provides a classic example. From the beginning of the

privatization experience, “successive regimes placed enormous responsibility and authority for privatizing enterprises in the hands of a group of senior bureaucrats” (Monem 2006, p. 114). A number of bureaucrats supported the privatization policy but their main interest was “to get a share of the pie.” Public corporation bureaucrats always resist privatization, as there is every possibility of losing power and authority. By maintaining strong connections with the ministerial bureaucrats, who could not get a share of the pie, the impediment is created. The impediment is manifested by “non-cooperation or slow official actions on privatization affairs” (Monem 2006, p. 123). Reforms that threaten the status of the civil service face even more resistance. For example, the Rules of Business followed in the civil service of Bangladesh was initiated in 1975. Though it has been revised, the bureaucracy has so far been successful in resisting any effort that can pose a threat to its centralized character (Siddiqui 2006). The decentralization agendas of various governments has met the same response. Whatever the method used, the bureaucracy has successfully created impediments to ensuring people’s participation (Morshed 1997).

Politicization of Bureaucracy

The national government that came into power immediately after independence 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). Within a few years, assassination of leaders, coups and counter-coups disturbed Bangladesh; and this political instability created an opportunity for the 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). 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 bureaucracy; and the bureaucracy strengthened its position in return for supporting the military regime. The 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.

When Bangladesh decided to embrace a democratic system in 1991, the bureaucracy found its autonomy challenged. 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 process 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 (Huque and Rahman 2003).

However, the politicization of bureaucracy is not unique to Bangladesh. 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. 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 damage 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” irrespective of their qualifications.

In the first five years of democracy—1991 to 1996—the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) ruled the country. Politicization appeared in various forms including the placement of party loyalists in important civil service positions. The government also tried to manipulate the recruitment process of the civil service by letting in candidates with links to the student wing of the party (Khan, Rahman, and Zafarullah 1997). On February 8, 1992, the government decided to promote as many as 654 officials, which created controversy. Further, from 1991 to 1996, the government issued orders of forced retirement of at least 51 civil servants, most of whom

were never shown any reason for the order (Karim 1996). 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 government decided to reward these civil servants by including one of them in their ministry and by promoting the others (Huque and Rahman 2003). In 2001, 355 officials were promoted depriving many competent officials of promotion, as the government was not sure about their political loyalty (The Daily Prothom Alo, January 14, 2001). Moreover, the number of contractual recruitment increased significantly through 2000: 174 civil servants were recruited on contractual basis (The Daily Sangbad, August 8, 2000).

In 2001, the BNP formed the government and maintained firm control over the bureaucracy by making it highly politicized. The government created a record by appointing 978 officials as “Officer on Special duty” (OSD) (The Daily Janakantha, May 21, 2006). Allegedly, promotion decisions were no longer being made according to seniority or merit; rather importance was given to party loyalty. Furthermore, the number of contractual appointments also increased and most of these appointments, and extensions of contracts, were made on the basis of political allegiance (The Daily Star, July 17, 2006). It was reported that the government 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 was sympathetic to Awami League was promoted (Khan 2003). The SSB (Superior Selection Board) was made dysfunctional as the decisions were made by the PMO and the SSB’s only duty was to approve the list supplied by the PMO (The Daily Janakantha, May 5, 2006). These examples illustrate just a few instances of a broader pattern: the problem of negative politicization had been very common between 1991-2006.

Civil Service Recruitment: Process, Problems and Politicization

During colonial times, the bureaucracy was simply an apparatus to govern the country as per the requirements of the colonial lords. Special emphasis was on making the bureaucracy an elite and organized force totally alienated from the society (Alavi 1972). 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 ascertained that equal opportunity for all citizens should be the guiding principle in public service recruitment and special arrangements were undertaken to create opportunities for disadvantaged groups. According to the current recruitment policy, there are three means of recruitment: direct recruitment—open competitive examinations; promotion and transfer; and direct lateral recruitment (GoB 2004). 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 28 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 finalize 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 reserve 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.

In case of direct recruitment, the literature suggests that the examination system is not sufficient to bring meritorious personnel into the public service. It does not test for creative thinking and analytical ability. Most candidates memorize study guides, write the answers mechanically and pass. The questions are prone to favour the “impetuous” and “shallow-knowledged” candidates (Zafarullah 2005). Moreover, since the beginning of the democratic era, the PSC itself became both a victim and a tool of political manhandling. Whereas in the past, people with the highest integrity and competence were appointed as PSC Chairs and Members, during this period, inclination towards the ruling party substituted integrity, and absolute loyalty to that party replaced competence as the criteria required for appointment in these constitutional posts (Jahan and

Shahan 2008). These political appointments had a number of consequences. First, it allowed the ruling political party to take control over the recruitment procedure. Second, a number of politically appointed Chairs and Members engaged in corruption to accommodate political appointees as well as for their own gain. It was alleged that the PSC Members and Chairs got involved in ‘selling’ different cadre service posts at different prices, tampering with the mark sheets of the BCS examination and also in giving away the question papers to the activists of the ruling party. These practices eventually tarnished the image of this constitutional body (IGS 2007). The PSC had to cancel the 24th BCS preliminary test due to alleged leakage of question papers (The Daily Star, August 11, 2003). In fact, 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. 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. In a number of occasions, the capability of Bangladesh civil servants in implementing foreign aid projects has been questioned (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 a basic command of the 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.

Perception of Bangladesh Civil Service: Analysis of Primary Data

In the previous sections, we have found that the civil service has been politicized negatively by successive regimes and recruitment of entry-level officers has not been free from faulty recruitment process, politicization and corruption. On the other hand, the conventional view is that the Bangladesh civil service attracts the country’s meritorious students and cultivates an elitism that makes civil servants apathetic to the needs of citizens, especially the poor. A review of the existing literature indicates that the

conventional wisdom may no longer fit the fact: 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 system and politicization—have contributed to the declining status and appeal of civil service careers.

Our primary research attempts to understand the impact of faulty recruitment procedures and rapid politicization on the status of civil service in general. The research questions that we have examined are: Are bright recent graduates from public and private universities still interested in joining the civil service? If not, what are the reasons? If they still want to join the civil service, what factors make the civil service an attractive career option? Is the recruitment process sufficient to select the best candidates? Are the status and power of the civil servants declining? What do civil servants and prospective candidates think about politicization of the bureaucracy?

Our survey instrument is a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of both open-ended and close-ended questions. The interviews were conducted during July-November 2006. While our primary focus is on the perceptions of prospective candidates, we also examine whether entry-level and mid-level civil servants share similar perceptions. This part of the paper analyses the qualitative data obtained through interviews with mid-level and entry-level civil servants and potential BCS recruits.

Table 1 reports the demographic characteristics of our interviewees. Almost all of our potential BCS candidates are below 30 years of age. The entry-level officers—those with less than five years of service—are no older than 35 years of age and are mid-level civil servants—those with five or more years of service—are mostly older than 35 years of age. We did not consciously try to keep an equal male-female ratio when selecting our interviewees. Given the time constraints and lack of availability of the civil servants to interview, we followed a snowball method in interviewing willing and available officers. In the end we found that we have more than 80 percent male respondents among the serving civil servants. This corresponds with the fact that the representation of women in civil service of Bangladesh is very low. According to UNDP’s Human Development Report, 2005, women

Table 1: Demographic Data

Respondents	Age Range				Sex		Total
	20-25	26-30	31-35	35+	Male	Female	
Prospective Candidates	28 (56%)	21 (42%)	1 (2%)		27 (54%)	23 (46%)	50
Entry-level Civil servants		8 (40%)	12 (60%)		16 (80%)	4 (20%)	20
Mid-level Civil Servants			2 (13%)	13 (87%)	13 (87%)	2 (13%)	15
Total and Percentage	28 (33%)	29 (34%)	15 (18%)	13 (15%)	56 (66%)	29 (34%)	85 (100%)

administrators and managers in Bangladesh is only 8.5 percent. However, we tried to ensure better gender representation when interviewing potential candidates.

Change in Society's Attitude Regarding Civil Service Jobs

Society is a complex system in which people from different classes and educational and occupational backgrounds interact. In a modern state, people from all walks of life interact with civil servants. Hence, to determine whether a change has occurred in society's perception about civil service is not easy. However, we tried to find out what actually comes into our interviewees' mind when they hear the word "civil service". Haque described bureaucracy in Bangladesh as an effective tool of governance (Huque 1997). Do the interviewees think so?

We found that both the prospective and serving civil servants perceive that a change has occurred in society's attitude towards the civil service. The change is not positive. More importantly, we have discovered a high degree of dissatisfaction among the prospective candidates. They described the Bangladesh civil service as a corrupt, politicized and an over-centralized organization where getting things done is almost impossible. In 1997, Zafarullah pointed out that the civil service is over-centralized, unaccountable and inefficient. The prospective candidates agree with this statement. While being interviewed, one job seeker showed his disgust about civil service by describing it as "worthless". Widespread corruption seems to be "the new feather in the cap". Civil service to prospective candidates is "absolutely corrupt and politicized."

Most of the entry-level civil servants agree with this view. They agree that people now "show less respect

to the civil servants". Nonetheless, some of them disagree. One of them commented, "Well, it is the digital age. People get more information and they are more conscious. Their consciousness and the pressure of globalization have forced the civil service to be more citizen-oriented." They opined that civil service no longer poses an "elitist" character and thus people can rely on them more.

However, the mid-level civil servants' opinion differs on this issue as one-third of them believe that society's attitude has been changed positively towards civil service. This supports the idea that the civil service of Bangladesh is more or less a closed system as slightly more than half of the mid-level officers perceive either that the change has been positive or that there has been no change.

Perception of Recruitment Process

During the post-1991 democratic era, political leaders started taking control over the bureaucracy (Haque et al., 2003). The situation took an important turn after the "*Janatar Mancha*"² movement initiated by the civil servants in 1996. Since then, the political party in power tried to prevent repetitions of such movements. The immediate impact was upon the recruitment process. Thus, we asked the respondents what they thought about the recruitment process of Bangladesh Civil Service.

For the purpose of this study, recruitment process means entire procedures of civil service examinations except the question pattern. To both prospective candidates and entry-level civil servants, the recruitment process is highly corrupt. While being interviewed, a prospective candidate admitted that he had bribed a viva board member to make sure that he could get the job. Leakage of question papers has

Table 2: Change in Society's Attitude

Respondents	Change in society's attitude towards civil service			Total
	Positive Change	Negative Change	No Change	
Prospective Candidates	5 (10%)	43 (86%)	2 (4%)	50
Entry-level Civil servants	5 (25%)	11 (55%)	4 (20%)	20
Mid-level Civil Servants	5 (33%)	7 (47%)	3 (20%)	15
Total and percentage	15 (18%)	61 (72%)	9 (11%)	85 (100%)

Table 3: Perception about Recruitment Process

Respondents	Do You Think That The Present Recruitment Process is Corrupt?				Total
	Yes	No	Negligible	No Comments	
Prospective Candidates	41 (82%)	7 (14%)	2 (4%)	0	50
Entry-level Civil servants	15 (75%)	3 (15%)	2 (10%)	0	20
Mid-level Civil Servants	5 (33%)	6 (40%)	3 (20%)	1 (7%)	15
Total and percentage	61 (72%)	16 (19%)	7 (8%)	1 (1%)	85 (100%)

become common and one prospective candidate said, "I actually got a suggestion before the preliminary test consisting of only 90 questions. When I saw the question paper, I realized about 95% of them had come from that so-called suggestion." While the current environment is producing a negative perception, the mid-level civil servants interviewed have yet to realize this. Although one third of them agreed that the recruitment process is corrupt, for 60% of them the process is either quite all right or the scope of corruption is negligible.

Political pressure is undoubtedly one of the reasons behind this extensive negative perception regarding civil service recruitment. We find that roughly half of the civil servants interviewed identify the appointment and conduct of the PSC chair/members as responsible for the corruption of recruitment. 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." Moreover, in our discussion with mid-level and entry-level officers, we found that, to them, 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. "They are greedy," one entry-level officer remarked, "Besides, as they are politically appointed they know they can get away with that." The prospective candidates though did not identify the role and nature of appointment of PSC members as the main source of corruption; however, they agreed that political pressure indeed played a major role in the case of civil service recruitment. One prospective candidate recalled, "Facing the Viva board was really a horror experience for me. All sort of political questions were asked and when they found out that my political view was different from theirs, I realized that that was the end of the journey for me. Later, I came to know that I was rather lucky. One of my friends was asked why she did not wear a *hijab* to cover her head and whether she knew the *quranic* verses needed for prayers. That was too much for her. She walked out of the room and now both of us are private sector employees." Another prospective candidate said, "Well, we all know about the leakage of question paper, but let me tell you something, the real beneficiaries of this question leakage practice are the activists of the student wing of the ruling party. It is they, who got hold of the question paper and it is they who circulate it." He further added, "Now, tell me, if the examination is designed in such a way that it would favor alone a certain group of people, how can I depend on my

Table 4: Sources of Corruption

Respondents	Reasons behind Corruption in Civil Service Recruitment*			
	Political Pressure	Nature of Appointment & Role Played by PSC Members	No Idea	Others
Prospective Candidates	45 (90%)	5 (10%)	0	0
Entry-level Civil servants	7 (35%)	12 (60%)	5 (25%)	5 (25%)
Mid-level Civil Servants	3 (20%)	5 (33%)	6 (40%)	4 (27%)
Total and Percentage	55 (65%)	22 (26%)	11 (13%)	9 (11%)

(*Multiple answers were allowed)

merit only to pass the BCS examination?”

What Motivates and what De-motivates Potential Candidates?

We tried to find the core factors that may de-motivate future candidates in joining the civil service and we found three: inadequate salary, faulty examination procedure and existing bureaucratic culture. There is a difference between the inside-the-job view and the outside-the job view. For prospective candidates the main de-motivating factor is the faulty examination procedure whereas according to mid and entry-level civil servants, both inadequate salary and job environment play a vital role in discouraging one from sitting for the BCS examination. It is likely that once inside the civil service the faulty examination procedure does not seem significant. It is striking though how evenly divided the responses are among the three factors. For civil servants, examination ceases to matter, and their responses are relatively evenly divided between salary (28 responses from 35 interviewees) and job environment (25 responses from 35 interviewees).

Faulty examination procedures includes the length of the entire examination process, the leakage of questions, politicization in case of recruitment, an unaccountable viva board, etc. One prospective candidate said, “When I was in the examination hall scanning through the question during the preliminary test, I looked around and found that almost everybody had gotten the exam questions earlier. It was so frustrating. Then I decided even if I passed the preliminary test, I would not sit for the written test,” and, “well, I passed in the preliminary test and that was the end. I never sat for the BCS examination again.” On the other hand, another prospective candidate enjoyed the preliminary test and the written examinations. However, “the real horror started when I faced the viva board. I was asked no academic questions rather; the chairman of the viva board, in front of everyone, told me that if I wanted to get my

desired cadre, I had to ‘spend’ something. He even asked me to see him after the viva voce. I ignored his request and after a few days, he called me up and told that if I said that if I was interested in spending money, he would see that I got my desired cadre.”

Almost all of them agreed that the examination procedure was too lengthy. However, a few of the prospective candidates supported the present recruitment procedure. To them, “it is the most cost effective way to select the best.” An entry-level civil servant agreed, saying, “It is the best the country can offer.”

The three categories of respondents agreed that inadequate salary benefit is a major obstacle in joining the civil service. They also found the job environment too rigid to allow an individual to do something creative. “Taking initiative and coming up with creative ideas is not well appreciated,” commented one entry-level civil servant.

A potentially positive finding is that despite all of its flaws, more than half of the bright meritorious students are still willing to sit for the BCS exam. They still consider civil service jobs as prestigious and attractive. “Whatever happens, civil service is civil service,” remarked one public university graduate. However, the private university students are not at all interested in joining the civil service. In fact, students coming from the private universities have little idea about the civil service of Bangladesh. Seventy percent of them admitted that they were not aware about the salary benefits provided by civil service and had no clear idea about the composition of the civil service or what it did.

Another dimension is rural versus urban background. For meritorious students from urban areas, especially from the capital city, a job in the Bangladesh Civil Service is no longer a lucrative career choice. To them, private sector jobs and having their own business enterprise have become more attractive. To

Table 5: De-motivating factors

Respondents	De-motivating factors in case of sitting for BCS exam*		
	Inadequate Salary	Faulty Exam Procedure	Job Environment
Prospective Candidates	20 (40%)	22 (44%)	18 (36%)
Entry-level Civil servants	16 (80%)	1 (5%)	16 (80%)
Mid-level Civil Servants	12 (80%)	1 (7%)	9 (60%)
Total and Percentage	48 (56%)	24 (28%)	43 (51%)

(*Multiple answers were allowed)

Table 6: Civil Service as Career Choice (Public versus Private University Graduates)

Respondents	Will You Consider Sitting For BCS Exam?			Total
	Yes, I Will	May be I Will	No, I Will Not	
Prospective Candidates (Public University)	21 (52%)	8 (20%)	11 (28%)	40
Prospective Candidates (Private University)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	6 (60%)	10
Total and Percentage	23 (46%)	10 (20%)	17 (34%)	50 (100%)

Table 7: Civil Service as Career Choice (Urban versus Rural Background)

Respondents	Will You Consider Sitting For BCS Exam?			Total
	Yes, I Will	May be I Will	No, I Will Not	
Prospective Candidates (Coming from urban Area)	8 (28%)	4 (14%)	17 (58%)	29
Prospective Candidates Coming from rural Area)	15 (71%)	6 (29%)	0	21

students from the suburb or rural areas, however, civil service jobs have not lost their attraction.

This new trend in career choice among job seekers may in the long run help the country in two ways. First, if the civil service becomes more representative of Bangladeshi demography (more officers coming from rural and suburban areas instead of big cities) it may help eliminate elitism that persists in the civil service. Eventually, the civil service may become dynamic and reliable and more connected to the pro-poor development agenda. Second, it may accelerate the bottom-up approach and the people's voice may more likely be heard by the bureaucracy.

Interestingly, though recent graduates willing to join the civil service have a positive outlook about civil service jobs, the opposite is not always true for the

graduates who are reluctant to join the civil service. A good number of the latter possess a positive attitude about civil service as a career choice. Their reluctance centers on some institutional failures of the public sector, not on the relative attraction of the private sector. For example, if problems with the examination procedure were rectified (i.e., leakage of question paper, lengthy, politicized exam procedure), more than half of the prospective candidates would consider civil service jobs as their first choice. Similarly, if civil service salary benefits were made equal to that of the private sector, then 60% of prospective candidates would sit for civil service jobs. According to one respondent, "If salary benefit is increased, I think everyone will go for civil service jobs."

Table 8: Motivating factors

Respondents	Motivating factors for Joining Civil Service*					
	Job Security	Status/ Power	Salary Benefit	Serving the Nation	Desire/ Suggestion of Family member	No Idea About Civil Service/No comment
Prospective Candidates (Public University)	19 (48%)	6 (15%)	0	3 (12%)	0	12 (30%)
Prospective Candidates (Private University)	2 (20%)	4 (40%)	0	0	0	4 (40%)
Entry-level Civil Servants	9 (45%)	11 (55%)	0	7 (35%)	0	0
Mid-level Civil Servants	5 (27%)	2 (14%)	0	0	6 (40%)	2 (14%)
Total and Percentage	35 (41%)	23 (27%)	0 (0%)	10 (12%)	6 (7%)	18 (21%)

(*Multiple answers were allowed)

So far, we have found a mixed picture. The most important finding is that, despite all these problems, meritorious, bright students are still attracted to civil service jobs. The basic question is: What can the civil service offer that may attract the best candidate on the job market? We have found a number of factors and of them the most important is job security. As a number of prospective candidates with working experience in private sector pointed out, “Job security is the main thing; if certain things were changed we would definitely go for public sector.”

Job security has always been an important factor motivating people to join the civil service. Our data indicate that as a motivating factor its importance is actually increasing. Due to the “horror” stories of politicization or corruption, the status of the civil service is no longer the main determinant. Only 20% students think that at present the status that civil servants enjoy is sufficient to attract prospective candidates; Public university graduates have a more favorable evaluation of the status than private university graduates. An important point to consider is that the flourishing private sector may offer better salary and benefit package and innovative challenges, but it lacks job security. Many prospective employees prefer job security to challenge or competition.

The reason behind joining the civil service also reflects a more realistic or pragmatic bent. As society

adopts an urban, capitalist structure, its impact is felt in various institutions, especially the oldest one, the family. Our research indicates that for mid-level officials, choice of a career largely depends on guidance from family members. The younger, newly appointed officials are more individualistic. Family plays a role but the basic reasons behind joining the civil service, in their case, are the social status and recognition that civil service can still provide. On the other hand, for the students who are likely to join the civil service, the main reason is the job security they can enjoy while performing their duties. In fact, from prospective through entry-level to mid-level applicants of civil service, job security is the only factor that has never lost its appeal.

Trends in the Administrative System in Bangladesh

Existing literature as well as analysis of the empirical study findings reflect a certain trend regarding the administrative system in Bangladesh that existed during 1991-2006. Politicization, i.e. partisan control of the bureaucracy, became the order of the day and the recruitment procedure became a major source of enforcing partisan control. During this period, it became evident that linkage with the student wing of the ruling party could provide one with a place in the once-elite civil service of Bangladesh. In fact, the PSC turned into a gateway of the party loyalists

within the civil service. As a result, it might have allowed many not-so-competent personnel to get into the civil service.

Due to this unbridled politicization in the recruitment process the meritorious and competent candidates with no political linkages had accepted the fact that the civil service had no entrance for them. As the data show, meritorious students with an urban background were reluctant to join the civil service, whereas, students coming from the rural areas were still interested. It is highly likely that if the existing trend continues, soon they will lose all their enthusiasm. At the end of the day, the government will be left with a few “on the verge of losing interest” meritorious candidates and “many keen to join the civil service” political loyalists. This trend will provide the government an opportunity to further enhance its political control over the civil service. Thereby, a vicious cycle has been created as reflected in the following diagram.

The diagram shows that ‘efforts’ taken by the party in power to politicize the recruitment process highly discourage the meritorious and competent candidates to join the civil service. This trend increases the scope of politicization as the keen-to-politicize government would grab this opportunity to include the party loyalists within the civil service. The cycle continues as this scope results in further political control of the recruitment procedure.

Considering these trends, the civil service presents a grim scenario. The civil administration has become an ineffective instrument of governance where politicization has destroyed the expected level of efficiency, faulty recruitment procedure marred the expected level of competence and the apparent rule-bound framework followed by the civil service does not allow the practitioners to exercise the little creativity left within them. The result is a decline in the ‘thinking capacity’ of the government.

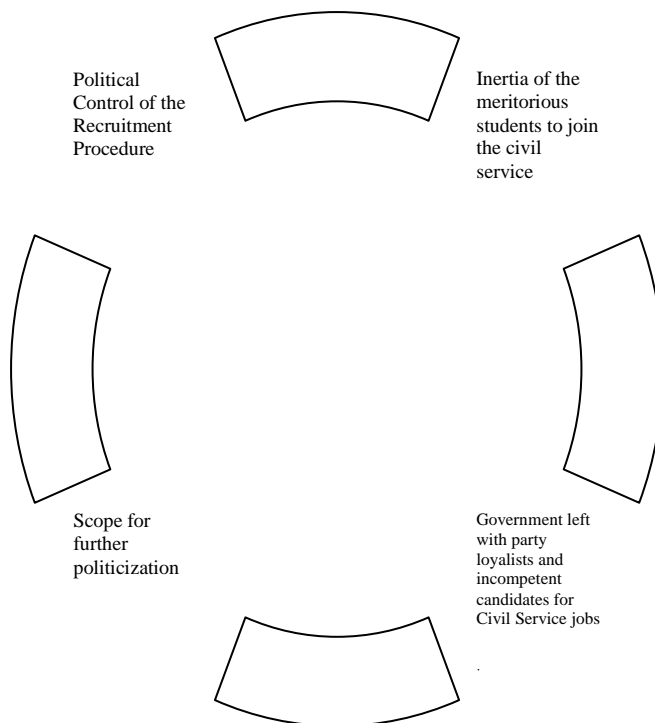


Fig 1: Vicious Cycle of Politicization in Civil Service Recruitment

Therefore, reform efforts should be directed primarily at:

- Ensuring neutral competence at the highest level of the government
- Encouraging meritocracy in the recruitment procedure through both bringing change in the examination pattern and offering incentive package
- Emphasizing efficiency and output rather than input

It was thereby expected that the present Caretaker Government (CTG) will take initiatives to bring these changes into the civil service.

Reform Efforts Initiated during the Tenure of the Caretaker Government

So far, the CTG has restrained itself from directly intervening in bringing changes in the recruitment system. The CTG's attempts have been limited to bring change in leadership in the constitutional body (PSC). Later, the PSC introduced a number of initiatives to bring reforms both within the PSC and in the existing BCS examination system. It has already submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Establishment which once implemented, will be followed for the upcoming 28th BCS examination (IGS 2008). The key changes outlined in the proposal are:

- Disclosure of marks for any specific subject to the candidates and a possibility of re-examining the marks on payment of an additional fee.
- Amendment of the Bangladesh Civil Service Recruitment (Age, Qualification and Examination for Direct Recruitment) Rules, 1982. Formerly, the application forms were verified by the PSC employees and a minor mistake caused cancellation of the application forms. The PSC now will verify the application forms in four phases- first by the Deputy Director, then by the Director, then by a PSC Member, and finally by the Chair. Moreover, the Commission will not cancel any application if 'late' or 'designations of freedom fighters' before parents' names are not mentioned.
- Providing telephone and cell phone numbers on the application form will be prohibited as it provided an opportunity for corruption in the past enabling the PSC employees to contact applicants directly.
- In the past, if the number of applicants was less than 100, the PSC held only *viva voce*. From

now on, written examination will be held by the PSC regardless of the number of applicants for the vacant posts.

- Redesigning the preliminary test by introducing negative marking for wrong answers in the multiple choice questions.
- Formation of *viva* boards comprising of newspaper editors, bureaucrats, teachers of both public and private universities and heads of corporate organizations.

However, most of these proposed changes are incremental and preventive in nature. Instead of bringing a radical change to the examination system, they aim to prevent corruption in the existing examination procedure. The PSC, so far, has not taken any initiatives to abolish or revise the quota reservation policy for recruitment and to modify the recruitment policy of the PSC's in-house employees, or to design any measures to increase their efficiency. The reform efforts so far are unlikely to bring any radical changes to the existing bureaucratic structure of the civil service.

At the same time, the CTG has not taken any initiative that may threaten the status-quo of the civil service. Though at times, it has followed a procedure of reshuffling the administration, so far it has not taken any initiative to ensure the freedom of the civil servants from the grasp of the politicians. Moreover, no effort has been taken to devise a systematic transfer or promotion policy. It seems that rather than agitating the civil service the current government is more to build a partnership with the civil service.

Conclusion

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. Our literature review and empirical study reveal that partisan control of the recruitment process diminishes the competitiveness of a public service career.

Therefore, 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. However, there is a large difference between what is necessary and what can be achieved when it comes to public administration and good governance in Bangladesh.

We found in this paper that contemporary public administration in Bangladesh is all about politics. However, the standard bi-lateral game between the government (political leadership) and the bureaucracy (civil service, administrative leadership) is becoming increasingly complicated for a number of reasons. First, politicization of the bureaucracy blurs the formerly crisp distinction between politics and administration. Second, other actors have entered the game: the private sector, development partners, and civil society organizations. The private sector desires an efficient bureaucracy that will facilitate, or at least not impede, the development of predictable working environment. Development partners and civil society advocate civil service reforms and a dynamic, “non-procrastinating” bureaucracy. Development partners are particularly influential because they can advance or withhold financing as an incentive for reform.

With more players, the game has changed: politicians increasingly find bureaucrats as allies and together they resist the effective functioning of the government against the pressures of non-governmental actors. The non-governmental actors—development partners, private sector, civil society, and NGOs—each exert pressure on the government. The government tries to pursue its agenda and resist pressures while sustaining support. When the pressures are in alignment, or at least not in direct opposition, a reform initiative can be implemented.

Therefore, to enact or implement reforms, the interests of the major actors must be in alignment, otherwise reform will be prevented or neutralized. This alignment, which was almost impossible during the democratic period of 1991-2006, can very well be structured during the tenure of the present government. The CTG, due to its unique set-up, does not have to play the role of a patron to any particular group. This allows it to become more reform-friendly. Thus bringing reform, even the radical long-sought ones, like redesigning the recruitment system, or injecting new public management principles in line with political and administrative reality should become much easier. Unfortunately, the CTG so far has not made any significant attempt to bring reform to the administrative arena.

The problem is, without an efficient and accountable bureaucracy, development goals may remain neglected. Leaving the bureaucracy unscathed may bring back the semi-autonomous bureaucratic reign. It seems like the current CTG is driving itself towards this trap where a political cleansing may bring inexperienced leadership at the top and if they have

to depend on an “un-reformed” bureaucracy, the repercussion can be catastrophic.

A famous satirist of this subcontinent once wrote a story about a crazy man who loved to bang his head on the wall. When asked about the reason, the man answered, “Well, when I stop doing so, it feels great.” The current caretaker government has to solve this “crazy man’s dilemma.” It has to make a choice--whether it wants the continuation of ‘feeling great’ where this feeling can be short-lived or go for comprehensive treatment. The choice will have consequences down the line.

Endnotes

1. Bangladeshi civil servants who entered the civil service prior to 1971 were recruited and trained in the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP). The CSP was unapologetically elitist and the new Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) was less selective and less elitist. Although serving in the Bangladesh Civil Service, these CSP-trained officers emphasize this distinction by exhibiting their CSP pedigree.
2. In 1996 AL created the *Janatar Mancha* movement as a platform for citizens and civil society to oppose the incumbent Government's decisions.

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