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BUREAUCRATIC REFORMS IN BANGLADESH

A political economy perspective

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A political economy perspective

The genesis of the problem with Bangladesh's civil service: The death knell was sounded when it was born

Soon after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, different reforms were imperative. Consequently, the government undertook various initiatives to streamline and reform the administrative system and structures to make the administration compatible with a newly independent country (Ahmed, 1989). As a first step, an Administrative and Services Reorganization Committee (ASRC) led by the then Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University, Professor Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury, was formed in 1972. With the formation of the ASRC, administrative restructuring and reorganization started. Bangladesh became independent by seceding from Pakistan through a bloody war of liberation. Nevertheless, the government had a substantial role in the economy during the Pakistan regime, but it was, as such, not a controlled economy; instead, it was essentially a liberal economy. Thus, during the Pakistani days, the bureaucracy was practically used to working within a liberal economic framework. Bureaucracy's interactions with market forces shaped its character and behavior- it was more open to different actors while shaping policies and strategies.

However, after its birth as an independent state, Bangladesh opted to become a socialist country and adopted socialism as one of its four state principles. This

ideological transformation profoundly reshaped the state's nature and character- at least visibly, if not essentially- contradicting the experiences of the Pakistani era. This philosophical indoctrination also influenced the bureaucracy, impacting its classical attributes and tenets- recruitment through competition and the non-partisan character (Rahman, 1974). During the Pakistan regime, meritocracy was the hallmark of the bureaucracy; however, due to Bangladesh's commitment to socialism, the bureaucracy was under extreme pressure to be amenable to the political aspirations and expectations of the ruling class. This political shift eventually undermined the merit principle and promoted the politicization of public service in independent Bangladesh. This became the first but the most fatal step toward undermining the growth and sustenance of a professional bureaucracy.

The first Planning Commission of Bangladesh was bestowed with the key role of preparing the country's development policy. The four key members of the Planning Commission, Nurul Islam, Anisur Rahman, Rehman Sobhan, and Mosharraf Hossain, were economics professors. In 1973-74, the four key members of the commission quit their office due to creeping inconvenient relations with the ruling elites (mainly ideological). Later, three of them wrote books, sharing their experiences and

thoughts at the planning commission (Sobhan, 1982; Sobhan, 2021; Rahman, 1993; Islam, 2003). After reviewing their literature, one can conclude that they arguably admitted that Bangladesh's society and administrative structure were unprepared to build a socialist state.

The political dilemmas regarding the approach and consequences of socialism in a newly born country were evident. However, a few planning commission members were stubborn in favor of socialism. As a result, a cold conflict appeared between the planning commission members and the administration, notably the bureaucracy. Moreover, despite having no substantial administrative experience, the commission members were conferred higher official status, equivalent to Minister and State Minister (Zafarullah, 1987). Another reason for such uneasiness was that the commission members perceived that the civil servants performed under the Pakistan government might not cooperate in establishing a socialist state (Rahman, 1974). Nevertheless, like the political leadership, the bureaucracy was also hesitant about the prospect of socialism in the country. Within such confusing and conflicting circumstances, the foundations of the administrative structure of Bangladesh were laid out.

Jahan (1974) and Khanam (1995) observed that the bureaucracy operated with relatively better autonomy from political interference during the Pakistani era. However, this could not happen in Bangladesh; political loyalty overrode merit, and political influence and control over the bureaucracy were prominently

visible. Political leadership was more interested in capturing bureaucracy rather than establishing professionalism and accountability within the bureaucracy. As a result, bureaucrats plausibly had a reason to feel insecure in their jobs and roles- a sense of uncertainty permeated across even the rank and file. In 1973, the first recruitment was held in Bangladesh civil service, which was widely criticized for the gross compromises of the standard recruitment criteria. Hossain (2019) observed that “after the liberation war in 1971, the first and biggest recruitment was held through mere viva voce in 1973. Applicants’ contribution to the liberation war was mainly considered. The recruitment through a regular standard examination started in 1979¹.” Other scholars held the same opinion that the basics of proper recruitment were flouted. Ahmed commented (1989: 273), “It seems, therefore, quite likely that most of the 1972 and 1973 recruits lacked such qualification and personal traits as high academic achievements, calibre, integrity, and leadership generally demanded of a civil servant.”

Consequently, bureaucracy was compelled to emerge as a weak institution in the newly born state. It faced significant challenges during its formative phase. On the other hand, the conflict over pro- and anti-independence affected both military and civil bureaucracy regarding morals and values. Jahan (1973: 200) stated that “The two major instruments of a state apparatus, i.e., the civil bureaucracy and

¹ <https://en.prothomalo.com/opinion/Disarray-in-recruitment-and-promotion-in>

the military, were in disarray at the time of the new state's birth. In the post-liberation period, not only did Bangladesh find itself deprived of the services of its experienced civil and military bureaucracy, but also schism and factionalism affected the morale and discipline of the civil service, and the military left in Bangladesh”.

Those who were against the bureaucracy were seemingly happy as the new government was trying to bring the administration under the control of political leadership. However, they soon realized that postings and promotions were happening without complying with rules or regulations. Even those who did not hold significant administrative positions before independence were suddenly posted to high-ranking posts after the independence of Bangladesh. In an attempt to clean the administration after independence, people were appointed and promoted based on favoritism and political leanings, leading to a unique ‘spoil system’ (Zafarullah, 1987). Apart from political consideration in recruitment and promotion, a Presidential Order, known as PO-9, was issued in 1972. Those employees terminated under PO-9 could not even get a remedy from a court of law. According to point 7 of the PO-9, “No claim, suit, prosecution or other legal proceeding shall lie against the Government arising out of or in respect of an order or action taken under this Order (GOB, 1972). In essence, PO-9 was used as an oppressive instrument to force the bureaucracy to come under the control of the political leadership.

In the First Five-Year Plan (FFYP), the bureaucracy did not appear to be a trusted agenda for the socialist transformation of the country. Instead, the scope and role of the bureaucracy in the national development process seemed to have been reduced compared with the pre-independence experiences. Moreover, the FFYP emphasized creating a specific cadre within the population to establish a socialist society, stating that the political leadership should be responsible for creating such a cadre. Although the FFYP mentioned a merit-based administrative system, there was not much discussion about how meritocracy could be achieved. On the other hand, the overall administrative structure was contextualized within a ‘controlled economic model’- in a socialist framework (GOB, 1973). Under such circumstances, practically there was no opportunity available to build a politically neutral and professional civil service system in Bangladesh. Instead, it opened all the doors for a ‘politically obedient’ civil service system. Civil service recruitment in 1973 validated the politicization intention of the government.

After independence, there was confusion over establishing a socialist state. Therefore, taking advantage of the situation, some politically influential officials took control of the administrative system. Building on the kinship with the top political leader of the country, a section officer-level employee of the former East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCS) suddenly appeared as a key player in bureaucratic recruitment and posting (Rahman, 2003), undermining morality and ethics in administration. As a result, policy implementation became

problematic in many cases. Nonetheless, the Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury Commission Report upheld the institutional importance of civil service in the context of a new state, but the discussions were not more profound. The commission seemingly failed to promote and narrate the strategic importance of a professional civil service for national development and governance. They even ignored the experiences of emerging countries in South and Southeast Asia. One of the commission's contributions was a unified civil service recommendation, which paved the way for undermining the special status of the administrative service. The commission members overlooked the strategic importance of a sound civil service system. The commission instead advised the bureaucracy to commit to implementing socialist policies in the country. Thus, confusion surfaced regarding professionalism and partisanship, leading the civil service toward non-professional and more misleading circumstances.

Moreover, the established structure or services were ignored due to the 1972 commission's overenthusiasm to strengthen the technical services. The commission even described the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) officials in several places in its report in pejorative terms. The commission also ignored the professional importance of the Indian civil service. When Bangladesh became independent, India became a more than twenty years old independent state, and the Indian bureaucracy, under the leadership of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), established itself as a significant, trusted institution; this lesson

should have shaped Bangladesh's policy regime. The overall posture of the ASRC could well convince that its policy was to undermine the administrative stream of the civil service, a stark contradiction with the experiences of the then South and Southeast Asian successful bureaucracies.

The foregoing discussions make it clear that in the formative phase of independent Bangladesh, the bureaucracy started its journey by being exposed to ideological dilemmas and confusion and the lack of political commitment to professionalism. From the beginning, rules and policies were ignored in recruitment and posting in the civil service. It is also observed that Bangladesh's civil service was the victim of 'purging policy' due to intense political influence over bureaucracy.

While Bangladesh's civil service encountered many challenges and constraints, the opposite experience can be observed in India after its independence in 1947. Political leaders, though, initially cast doubt on the members of the colonial Indian Civil Service (ICS). Nevertheless, the continuation of an effective bureaucracy was a topic of extensive discussion at the Constituent Assembly. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel emphasized the importance of an impartial and professional bureaucracy. He was in favor of a strong bureaucratic system to protect the unity of India. He also considered bureaucracy India's 'steel frame' and 'protective ring.' Thus, on October 10, 1949, he delivered a historic speech at the Constituent Assembly about a strong bureaucracy for a post-

colonial India. Not only did he take a position supporting a robust bureaucracy, but he also advocated for an independent bureaucracy. The prudent role of the founding leaders of India not only strengthened democracy but also helped institutionalize the bureaucracy with professionalism and respect for democratic norms. Indian civil service is still considered an institution of people's trust. The founding leaders successfully naturalized the ICS into the national civil service with the IAS as the mainstream feature of the bureaucracy.

The Indian civil service successfully conducted the first-ever general elections in 1951-1952 despite significant challenges. This marked the commitment of the bureaucracy to professionalism, impartiality, and higher ethical standing. In 1951, the literacy rate in India was only 15%, and the rest, 85%, were illiterate. Moreover, the infrastructural facilities in

Importance of political economy approach to public administration studies

Bangladesh has experienced various types of governments, including military, quasi-military, weak democratic, and authoritarian regimes. These governance structures have significantly influenced bureaucracy. Over the past 50 years, several committees and commissions were formed for public administration reforms. Some of them were formed with the direct patronization of development partners. Reviewing the reports of different committees and commissions, it was evident that reforms or public administration reviews were not done 'with adequate understanding' about public administration and the country's

the newly independent India were somewhat impoverished. Despite this, the Indian Election Commission managed to organize the elections efficiently. The election of 1951 was a litmus test for the democracy of India. India succeeded in the test. By holding this election, a strong electoral system and culture were established. After independence, the retired IAS officers played the crucial role as commissioners of the India Election Commission. Both the government and the opposition parties recognized the Commission's credibility.

The Indian leadership wanted to establish a robust bureaucracy and achieve positive results. In contrast, the Bangladesh government wanted a politically influenced subservient civil service. Consequently, the first general election held in 1973 was massively marked by forgery and laid the foundation of rigging (Jahan & Amundsen, 2012).

needs. We have reasons to say that, in most cases, the commission and committee members were less informed. Unfortunately, public administration and or bureaucracy seemed to have been considered a technical tool of the state. Therefore, the strategic role and the crucial potential of the bureaucracy were deliberately ignored and undermined in the analysis of the commissions.

When studying public administration, it is essential to understand a country's political reality. Public administration is not an independent variable. Politics and the quality of politics determine the standards of public administration. Therefore, the foregoing discussions make it clear that the Indian government

made the bureaucracy its "steel frame" as a conscious political choice.

A nation-state is no longer considered a separate phenomenon in the globalized context. A nation-state's national interests and desires are determined and influenced by regional politics, geopolitical interests, international policy frameworks, and development agendas. Therefore, it is almost impossible to understand public administration reforms and reviews appropriately without considering the regional and global realities. Cross-country political and strategic dynamics shape developing countries' political and bureaucratic trajectories. Bangladesh is located in South Asia and is considered a dynamic and emerging region. At the same time, the region is also a conflict-prone area. Regional trade and commerce indicators underline that the trade and commercial cooperation was not as good as expected. The regional cooperation platforms, such as SAARC, have remained ineffective for a long time. On the other hand, the politics of the big powers surrounding the Indo-Pacific have affected the inter-country relationships in the region. Thus, it is imperative to study the state in this evolving national, regional, and international political context, and the same applies to the analysis of the bureaucracy. Bureaucracy requires a recalibration of approaches and strategies in the changing dynamics to ensure that it can protect national interests.

The market plays a crucial role in every state regarding policy formulation and the provision of goods and services. At the same time, the role of the public sector is

shrinking for various reasons. This has created a complex situation in determining the relationship between the state and the market. The ever-increasing influence of the private sector in politics has adversely affected public policies. Politically influential vested quarters often control and capture public policy and state machinery. The question is whether bureaucracy can protect the state from such captures. Or, what kind of bureaucracy is required in such a context? So, understanding the political perspective is very relevant in responding to these questions. Additionally, non-state stakeholders are also becoming important within the state. Their influence is increasing in public policies and development planning (Quibria, 2019; Raihan, 2017). It is further observed that the non-state actors are often associated with Western countries and depend on their grants and financial assistance. However, their leadership (non-state actors) is advanced in education and professional skills. As a result, a new type of elite settlement is taking place in society, which may impact the government and political structure. However, there are concerns about this new settlement as it is neither organic nor pro-people. Therefore, in the new socio-political-economic realities, it is necessary to understand how the bureaucracy will engage with different actors to protect the public or national interest.

The correlation between a weak bureaucracy and a poor democratic system, especially the electoral system, must be analyzed while studying the bureaucracy. If the political elite wants to monopolize the electoral system, it is

natural that they will try to make the bureaucracy institutionally subservient to the political leadership (Rahman, 2023). The ruling elites usually create a populist discourse to attract other like-minded groups whose values are compatible with the ruling elites to legitimize the monopolization process and subsequently establish a monopoly over state institutions. The monopolization results in rent creation for the ruling class. Once politically subservient leadership is established at the top echelon of the bureaucracy, political influence or monopoly becomes automatically profoundly entrenched within the bureaucracy. Following such politicization, bureaucracy prefers aligning with the political elites and allied forces, resulting in ruling classes' arbitrary and unilateral control over national development policies and government institutions, ultimately leading to state capture. The analysis of Bangladesh's past few general elections demonstrates that the political elite class meticulously used the bureaucracy to achieve political goals, ensuring the regime's tenure. When a bureaucracy is used politically, it becomes impossible to maintain its institutional capacity. As a result, there is no alternative for the bureaucracy to be obedient in development policies and geopolitical matters according to the political agenda of the ruling elites. In the long run, such a bureaucracy loses acceptability and legitimacy in the eyes of the people, and state capacity gradually becomes crippled.

The missing points in the study and reforms of bureaucracy in Bangladesh

It has already been mentioned that Bangladesh's bureaucracy has always been viewed within a myopic context. Usually, it is perceived as a tool for implementing government decisions and programs. It has never been considered within the broader context of development policy, national capacity, transnational strategies and relations, democratic development, and coordination with non-state and business elites. Most people are comfortable considering public administration in terms of service delivery through various government departments or field administration. One of the reasons for such a narrow perception is that political leaders, bureaucrats, and other stakeholders are not adequately aware of the value of a professional and credible bureaucracy. Service delivery is an important responsibility of the bureaucracy or government employees. However, acting as an expert in strategic matters and public policies is even more important, and perhaps this is the most crucial role of the bureaucracy in the contemporary world.

Non-state actors in Bangladesh want to hold the bureaucracy accountable for self-interest. Moreover, they want to limit the strategic role of the bureaucracy to only service delivery. One of the primary motivations for the non-state actors (elite civil society) to do so is to perpetuate their influence on the government's administrative architecture and policy framework through their political alignment and engagement with the ruling class. In the meantime, they have largely been successful in certain areas

to realize some of their objectives. The elite civil society receives support from Western development partners and other affiliated forces, including the media, to promote their agenda of containing the role of the bureaucracy. Therefore, a negative narrative has been created about the bureaucracy in Bangladesh. On the contrary, there is no analytical discussion on the importance of a professional bureaucracy. Since there are no proper elections in Bangladesh and establishing a caretaker government seems the way out for elections, the elite civil society, as part of its internal agenda, criticizes the bureaucracy for accessing such caretaker governments moving forward. It is noteworthy that Bangladesh's elite civil society, committed to implementing the programs of powerful Western countries, is not truly a watchdog like other countries' civil societies but looks to the opportunity to become part of the establishment. Experiences of the several caretaker governments in the past substantiated this observation.

In the post-World War II era, several new countries in the Global South emerged with the potential for economic development, and many of these countries achieved significant success. The bureaucracy of those prosperous countries has become a subject of interest for researchers. Economists began researching the role of institutions in economic development. Japan was heavily damaged during WWII but was able to rebound its economy quickly. American political scientist Chalmers Johnson wrote a groundbreaking book in 1982 titled "MITI and the Japanese

Miracle" (Johnson, 1982), and he discussed Japan's economic growth and development policies in the book. He concluded that, along with other factors, the Japanese bureaucracy played a significant role in Japan's development and transformation process. To highlight the bureaucracy's role in the development journey, Johnson characterized the Japanese bureaucracy as an "economic bureaucracy."

Following the success of Japan, some other Asian countries that subsequently identified as Asian tigers also achieved spectacular economic progress. Among them, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan were notable. These countries were called developmental states in Southeast Asia. It was not the market but the government that played a prominent role in these countries' development, and bureaucracy was the key implementation instrument. The World Bank recognized the development of these countries, publishing a book titled 'The East Asian Miracle' in 1993 (WB, 1993). This book analyzed the developmental history of these countries. Many reputed economists and political scientists researched developmental states. They find that a bureaucracy that was 'politically neutral' but 'expert on economic policy-process' played a key role in economic development in these countries (Evans, 1995; Cheng, Haggard, Kang, 1998; Wade, 1990). Later, these emerging economic tigers transformed themselves into strong democratic states. Even second-generation

development states such as Malaysia and Indonesia are moving with development and democracy in parallel. Evans and Rauch (1999) analyzed the economic development of 35 countries from 1970-1990 and emphasized the importance of an efficient bureaucracy in economic development. In 2018, McKinsey & Company analyzed the economic development of 71 emerging countries over 50 years. They found that the bureaucracy played a good role in 18 countries, achieving long-term progress. Similarly, Besley, Burgess, Khan, and Xu (2022) have found a positive correlation between professional bureaucracy and development.

Modern states move through various national, regional, and international equations and situations. In such a situation, the state's overall and policy capacity depends on an efficient bureaucracy. The state primarily expresses its power or capacity through bureaucracy. A weak bureaucracy bequeaths the policy leadership to development partners and their consultants (Rahman, 2011, 2018, 2024; Rahman & Quadir, 2018). To build institutional capacity, OECD countries regularly conduct research and reform activities on bureaucracy (OECD, 2017). In these countries, separate services called Senior Civil Service or Executive Service have been created to provide prudent policy support to the government (OECD, 2008; Rahman & Quadir, 2018). The role of bureaucracy in Singapore's development is widely recognized. For this reason, the bureaucracy has been described as a "virtuous cycle" in Singapore (Saxena, 2011). The United

Nations also emphasizes the importance of an efficient and professional bureaucracy in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The experiences of developmental states and OECD countries demonstrate that bureaucracy has been contextualized vis-a-vis state and policy capacity. However, in the case of Bangladesh, this perspective seems very weak. Here, bureaucracy is considered within the service delivery framework and activities of district administration. Political neutrality and professionalism are the main characteristics of civil services in developed countries, but politicization has become the primary determinant for Bangladesh's bureaucracy. As a result, civil service cannot be considered an effective component of the state, ultimately undermining the dignity and influence of civil service in society. A strong civil service is a key factor for development and, in many cases, a **soft and strategic power** of the state. It is observed that among the developing countries, the Indian civil service gets respect from other countries and stakeholders. The main reason behind the undermining condition of Bangladesh's civil service is that it has lost its dignity domestically. The politicians ignored the bureaucracy's pride, prestige, and values. Instead, they tried to dominate them based on political interests. The undermining of the bureaucracy has eventually brought down the state's capacity.

Future reforms: The issues that should get priority

The change in August 2024 landed Bangladesh at a crossroads. The interim government formed various commissions on development, governance, and constitution. Following the implementation of these commissions' recommendations, Bangladesh is expected to emerge as a democratic state with respect for human rights. Civil service reform is one of the top priorities. A commission has also been formed for this purpose. Past experiences suggest that recommendations made without correctly understanding the context can be self-defeating. Therefore, some important points are presented below that can help build a professional and efficient civil service and improve overall public administration.

- **Structural and theoretical aspects**

Understanding the importance of professional bureaucracy and making bureaucracy a political agenda within the geo-political setting of Bangladesh

Bangladesh is situated within a complex region of South Asia. Both potentials and conflicts go hand in hand here. Therefore, Bangladesh's bureaucracy should be considered in the context of overall state capacity, dignity, and ability to uphold national interest rather than a mere administrative phenomenon.

Policymakers should understand this extended role and the complex context of bureaucracy, and accordingly, effective initiatives must also be undertaken. Just like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who protected the Indian bureaucracy in 1949, Bangladesh needs such leadership today that understands the bureaucracy's

importance. Considering the ever-changing global phenomenon, bureaucracy should be built as a 'strategic asset' and 'soft power.'

Given this changing scenario, we should consider the horizon of bureaucracy beyond the limited perspective of district administration or field-level service delivery. A professional and efficient bureaucracy is closely linked to safeguarding national sovereignty. The moral and intellectual standards of the bureaucracy must be raised to a level where all stakeholders are comfortable interacting with government officials with respect and dignity. Political commitment is necessary to establish such a kind of bureaucracy. More importantly, establishing an enterprising and professional bureaucracy must be a political agenda. Countries like South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, and Rwanda have made professional bureaucracy a political commitment. We can consider Rwanda as a case for us (Box-1).

Reclaiming policy leadership and state capacity

The policy leadership in Bangladesh has been mainly in the hands of development partners and consultants for a long time. The bureaucracy needs to be ethically and professionally developed to the point where it can reclaim policy leadership. Reclaiming policy leadership will enhance the state's capacity. One of the conditions for reclaiming policy leadership and strengthening national capacity is to allow the bureaucracy to work independently/autonomously within the framework of ethics and accountability. The recruitment process

for administrative and foreign services needs to be more competitive and skill-based. It needs to be more analytical than the current process. The recruitment processes of developed countries and institutions can be examined, and relevant lessons should be localized. Policy leadership cannot be established if the bureaucracy does not have robust professional competence. If a state is not independent in formulating its development policies, it will face questions about its true sovereignty.

Another point to remember is that the private sector is now the main driving force of Bangladesh's economy. Therefore, the bureaucracy must

private sector and the market towards public interest.

Restoring non-partisan and merit-based public service

The public service must be strictly depoliticized, and a culture of discipline and rule-based governance must be established through a strong legal regime. To make the bureaucracy and public administration professional, a culture of ethics must be firmly established in the workplace. Therefore, transparency and merit must be ensured in recruitment, transfer, and promotion, and these values must be protected. If necessary, an independent merit protection

Box 1 Why should Rwanda make sense for us?

After the end of the civil war in 1994, when government activities resumed in July 1994, only seven employees joined the Ministry of Finance. The rest of the employees were either victims of genocide or had fled the country. Rwanda started its new journey from such an almost wholly destroyed situation. Decades later, Rwanda appears to be a wonder to the world as its development and governance have attracted international attention. Rwanda has deliberately established discipline in all sectors as part of its political reforms. Rwanda is a developing country, but it represents the features of a developed nation in terms of good governance. A dignified, rule-based, merit-based, and professional civil service has played a role in such stellar performance (Chemouni, 2021). The World Bank says, "Rwanda's establishing a rule-based, law-abiding public sector is a remarkable development achievement and deserves to be highlighted in its own right as well as for the lessons it can offer other countries struggling to contain corruption from a starting point of limited public sector authority and competency, shallow private sector markets, and fractured and fragmented civil society (WB, 2020, p. 4)." This achievement has resulted from the wisdom, courage, and independent policies of the political leadership.

proficiently lead the market or the private sector. The private sector's capacity is now very high. The market system may be distorted if such a capable private sector is not led correctly. Southeast Asian development states were able to lead the

commissioner should be appointed. The promotion process should be completely public. If someone is not promoted, they should be informed about the reasons for not getting the promotion and the conditions for future promotion. If recruitment and promotion are

depoliticized, many constraints in civil service professionalism will be resolved automatically. The current Civil Service Act needs to be reformed to achieve this goal.

Establishing morality and ethics as a core value of a professional civil service

The impact of ethics on the Bangladesh bureaucracy is not very encouraging. Therefore, ethics must be legally strengthened within the bureaucracy. A strong 'conflict of interest' law should be enacted to promote ethical practices. Personal interests and ambitions must not influence the decision-making process. Accepting any honorarium other than salary should be prohibited for serving civil servants. The freedom of expression of junior colleagues must be ensured, and the arbitrary power of seniors in decision-making must be limited.

• **Some practical issues**

(1) Investment in public service capacity building should be increased to enhance the skills of bureaucracy and overall public administration. Salary should be at par with that of private sector professionals to attract meritorious people and make them feel honored in public services. All other financial fringe benefits (such as honorarium) beyond salary should be prohibited. Honorarium practices have adversely affected bureaucratic morale and decision-making.

(2) Transparency and accountability must be firmly established at every level of the public administration. For this, a realistic structure should be developed and

implemented. We can consider the Singapore model in this regard. Annual statements of assets of all public officials should be submitted. After retirement, high officials (9 grade and above) should be barred from consulting with the development partners for at least three years.

(3) The existing rules and regulations should be updated to ensure transparent service delivery. Human resources and activities/tasks of all directorates and departments should also be reviewed and updated.

(4) The number of cadres/services should be reviewed and modified considering the current context. For this, the civil service structure of different countries, especially South Asian countries, can be considered.

Conclusion

The global experiences teach that no state can be stable and developmental without institutional capacity. One of the main reasons for Bangladesh's periodic political instability is the failure to develop competent political leadership and bureaucracy. To survive in the challenging global system, Bangladesh must prioritize the establishment of a professional and ethical bureaucracy. India manages elections for over 1.5 billion people with just three Election Commissioners (who are always former IAS officers). But for a country of only 180 million people, we have had to create a separate electoral administrative structure, which incurs regular expenses from the national treasury. This is a failure of the bureaucracy. The main reason for the destruction of Bangladesh's electoral

system is the opportunity for politicians to control the bureaucracy politically. Therefore, there is no alternative to a highly ethical and efficient bureaucracy to create a sound electoral system, advance economic development and growth, and establish good governance.

Analyzing the role of Bangladesh's elite civil society in the geopolitical context of South Asia, it is clear that they will never prioritize the establishment of a professional bureaucracy in Bangladesh as an important agenda. They highlight the negative aspects of the bureaucracy and suggest limiting its scope. These elites are not reasonably aware of the value of the bureaucracy. On the other hand, a professional bureaucracy might pose a challenge to them, so they do not promote the agenda of a professional bureaucracy. Therefore, local civil society, ordinary people, and responsible political parties must establish the issue of a professional bureaucracy as a political agenda. It must be remembered that development and consolidation cannot be achieved without competent and creative bureaucracy. We must analyze the bureaucracy of developmental states and take steps to restructure Bangladesh's bureaucracy accordingly.