

ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM IN BANGLADESH: THREE DECADES OF FAILURE

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***ABSTRACT:** All countries strive to reform their administrative systems in response to the challenges posed by socioeconomic, political, and technological environments. Bangladesh is no exception. Since its emergence as a nation-state, Bangladesh has been trying hard to reshape its administrative system. However, despite their perceived importance, administrative reforms in Bangladesh have encountered serious hurdles over the last thirty years. This article argues that lack of political commitment, the incapacity of the state, the clientelist nature of Bangladesh politics, bureaucratic resistance, factional strife in the public service, lack of fundamentals in administration, politicization, and corruption remain as serious stumbling blocks in the implementation of administrative reform programs.*

Bangladesh became an independent country in December 1971 after a civil war with West Pakistan. Independence necessitated a major overhaul of the administrative system that was archaic, anti-people, inefficient, and which led to fragmented economic growth in Pakistan (Ahmed 1980). Since 1972, numerous reform commissions/committees have been constituted in Bangladesh (CPD 2001a, 26-30). Apart from these, a number of studies have been commissioned by international donor agencies.

Administrative reform is particularly important in a developing country like Bangladesh where there are so many priorities at hand. There are uncertainties on the economic front where the role of the state, the private sector, and civil society organizations is crucial. Democratic transition is at a very critical stage, which requires a fundamental change in the administrative system. The delivery system for public services has reached an unprecedented level of inefficiency, which requires devising new ways of providing services to the people. Under these circumstances, the role of administrative reform is very important. Reform programs undertaken so far have aimed at creating an administrative system that would ensure efficiency, professionalism, meritocracy,

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efficiency, accountability, responsiveness, and democratic control of administration by elected officials (Khan 1998).

Despite their perceived importance, administrative reforms in Bangladesh have experienced incessant failures. This article is an attempt to sketch the major administrative reform efforts in Bangladesh in the last three decades, and to analyze why successive governments in Bangladesh have failed to implement reform programs recommended by different commissions/committees and study groups. This article argues that lack of political commitment, the incapacity of the state, the clientelist nature of Bangladesh politics, the politicization of administration, bureaucratic resistance, factional strife in the public service, and corruption remain the serious stumbling blocks in the successful implementation of administrative reform programs.

PERSPECTIVES ON ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Administrative reform is defined as the deliberate use of authority and influence to apply new measures to an administrative system so as to change its goals, structures, and procedures with a view to improving it for developmental purposes (UN 1983, 1). Khan defines it as “those efforts which call for or lead to major changes in the bureaucratic system of a country intended to transform the existing and established practices, behaviors and structures within it” (1980, 57).

Administrative reform is not a new phenomenon in developing countries. However, decolonization after World War II produced a plethora of forces that made administrative reform a necessity. The primary motive behind reform programs was modernization, which reinforced the necessity of a big government (Esman 1988; Caiden 2001). Reform efforts in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s were basically guided by this notion of big government. New institutions and organizations were created while established practices, structures, and behaviors were earmarked for change. Primary inputs for reform came from multilateral and bilateral donor agencies. The activist, interventionist, bureaucratic government was expected to be the universal problem-solver in all developing countries. Its features were set out in 1920 by the German sociologist Max Weber, with strong echoes of other prominent scholars. The politics-administration dichotomy, continuous and predictable administration based on written and unambiguous rules, meritocracy in public employment, functional division of labor and hierarchy were the precepts underscored by Weber (Hughes 1998, 22-30).

However, desired changes did not take place as promised. While the necessity of government and its reform in the development process was recognized, its failures were also evident. Some countries were able to break the shackles; some countries failed miserably.

The 1970s brought about significant changes in the sphere of public administration all over the world. Criticisms focused on two aspects: the role and scope of government and the pattern of administration. The first relates to the post-war idea of the activist, interventionist state. This criticism focused on major economic problems: (a) governments were too large, consuming too many scarce resources; (b) governments were involved in too many activities whereas alternative means of provision existed for many of these; (c) inflation was growing and excessive costs occurred; and (d) excessive bureaucracies

resulted from state intervention (Minogue 1998; Hughes 1998). Government was to be reinvented on the basis of a market economy (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). Prevailing practice was to be replaced by the free market through different means such as deregulation, privatization, contracting out, budget cuts, entrepreneurship, initiative, competition, and other practices leading to economic growth. Expressed in economic terms, the formula was preached by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and so forth (Turner and Hulme 1997).

The second aspect of criticism relates to the pattern of administration. The traditional model of administration was rejected as being inefficient, costly, rigid, corrupt, unaccountable, and unsuitable to an age seeking more dynamic models of social and economic development. The new model, having different names such as New Public Management (NPM) (Hood 1991), market-based public administration (Lan and Rosenbloom 1992), managerialism (Pollitt 1990), reinventing government (Osborne and Gaebler 1992), and post-bureaucratic model (Barzelay 1992), seeks to get rid of age-old bureaucratic practices and replace these by businesslike management principles focusing on structure, processes, and functions (Hughes 1998; Common 1998).

Despite their perceived importance, administrative reforms in the developing world have not been able to break the shackles of administrative inertia. Failure has remained a stark reality in most developing countries. Now the question is, why does the developing world fail to implement its reform programs? There is a large body of literature that identifies numerous factors inhibiting the implementation of administrative reform. Weak state capacity is an important factor that hinders the implementation of administrative reform (Wallis and Dollery 2001; Polidano 2001; McCourt 2002; Sozen and Shaw 2002). This state incapacity is manifested in the institutional, technical, administrative and political arenas (Wallis and Dollery 2001). It is also argued that the applicability of NPM is partly dependent upon the nature of relations between the state and civil society (Sozen and Shaw 2002). Caiden (1988) argues that public pressures and people's expectations of better services have played a significant role in successful implementation of reform programs in the developed world. However, these relations remain problematic in the developing world.

The legitimacy of the state is also a factor to be reckoned with while assessing the applicability of NPM in the developing world (Perez 1991). Walsh (1995, 71) argues that "the more unified and centralized the system of political control and power, the easier it is to introduce new approaches to the management of public services." I will argue that in a developing country like Bangladesh there are other factors, such as clientelist politics, that operate against reforms.

For Kiggundu, there is a lack of strategic visioning in linking public service reform to the broader aspects of countries' political economy. He also identifies a lack of sustaining political and community support, logistics, and positive work values as obstacles to administrative reform (1998). Khan singles out some additional factors, as follows:

- reform measures are ill-conceived and unclear about their objects,
- failure to integrate administrative reform with socioeconomic development,

- politically motivated reforms are geared to partisan or individual interests rather than overall national interests, and
- resistance from civil servants who perceive their interests to be adversely affected as a result of the implementation of the proposed reform (1991, 3-4).

Scholars have also come up with explanations of why a market-based reform program such as NPM should face problems in the developing world (Minogue 2001). In addition to the factors mentioned above, there is a serious concern pertaining to the presence of the market economy in the developing world, which “tends to have an informal economy with relatively weak specification of property rights and other formal processes to regulate economic activity” (Schick 1998, 127). Corruption in administration is a serious problem in the developing world (Quah 1998; Khan 1999). More importantly, it is a serious hurdle in implementing the prescriptions of the NPM model, particularly in the contracting out of public services (Sarker 2001; Polidano 2001; Hughes 1998). The international dimension of reform programs has also attracted attention from scholars, as donor-driven reform programs are counter-productive and may even contribute to reduced performance and political instability (Ray 1999; Turner and Hulme 1997).

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation in 1971 after a bloody war with West Pakistan. After independence, it adopted a parliamentary form of government with the prime minister as the head of the government and the president as the head of the state. Facing mounting economic, social, and political crises the government, through a constitutional amendment, established one-party rule with the president at the pinnacle of state power (Ahmed 1980). The experiment was short-lived, as the government was violently overthrown by a group of military officers in August 1975. From August 1975 to November 1991 the military and quasi-military regimes ruled the country. The military government of General Ershad was overthrown by a popular upsurge in December 1991. Again, through a constitutional amendment in 1991, Bangladesh went back to a parliamentary form of government (Sarker 1991).

Bangladesh has basically a two-tier administrative system. All ministries and divisions are housed in the central secretariat, and they are entrusted with policy and clearing house functions. According to the latest statistics, there are 35 ministries and 52 departments (GoB 2000, 25). On the other hand, government organizations representing the central ministries, divisions and departments at the division level, district, thana (subdistrict), and union levels discharge general administrative, service delivery, and development project implementation functions. With 6 administrative divisions, 64 districts and 498 thanas, their presence is felt all over Bangladesh. The minister is the political head of a ministry. The secretary is the administrative head, assisted by the joint secretary, deputy secretary, senior assistant secretary, and assistant secretary. There are also 178 departments that are responsible for implementing the government’s development programs.

There are also autonomous bodies and corporations (known as statutory organizations) that have been established under special presidential orders, ordinances, and acts. The employees of these organizations are not civil servants. However, many senior civil servants are appointed to the higher positions of these organizations on deputation from the

civil service. All the activities of the ministries, divisions, departments and their affiliated organizations at the division, district, and thana levels are carried out by the civil service.

There are basically two ways to classify the structure of the civil service. Civil services are classified vertically on the basis of the level of responsibility. As such, there are four classes of civil servants. Our main concern here is class 1 civil servants. Civil services are also classified horizontally on the basis of functional responsibility. Following this criterion, the higher civil services have been organized around twenty-nine cadres. Members of these cadres, linked to different ministries, start their careers through open competitive examinations conducted by the Public Service Commission, a constitutional body with substantial autonomy. However, there are many class 1 civil servants who do not belong to the cadre service. Their promotional prospects are limited. The relevant department appoints them with the approval of the ministry. The members of cadre services generally fill up positions in the ministries. Moreover, historically, members of the Bangladesh Civil Service (Administration) have dominated the central secretariat (Ali 1993; Zafarullah, Khan, and Rahman 1997; Ahmed 1986).

The administrative system that Bangladesh has at this moment has evolved over a long period of time. Bangladesh, as part of united India, was under British rule until 1947, when India was split into two independent states: Pakistan and India. Bangladesh was part of Pakistan until 1971. To a large extent, the current administrative system reflects the legacy of the past. A review of contemporary literature (Alavi 1979; World Bank 1996; Khan 1991, 1998; USAID 1989; Huda and Rahman 1989; GoB 2000; Zafarullah, Khan, and Rahman 1997) suggests the following legacies:

- Historically, the role of government is pervasive in all spheres of life. Consequently, the government has been overburdened with too many responsibilities, many of which could be carried out by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector.
- In the absence of political development, the public bureaucracy has remained very dominant in Bangladesh. In other words, the bureaucracy has remained overdeveloped in relation to other institutions in society.
- Questions are raised about the efficiency and effectiveness of public officials.
- The decision-making system is highly centralized, leaving subordinate offices virtually powerless.
- The lack of political and administrative accountability is quite evident.
- There is a culture of secrecy in public service; administrative actions are not transparent.
- The instruments of control and accountability are very weak.
- The administrative system is afflicted with an inefficient public employment system, intercadre rivalry, a lack of favorable conditions for women, and a lack of linkage between performance and reward.
- There are widespread corrupt practices by public officials, caused by poor remuneration and their concomitant low self-motivation.

- There is a high degree of politicization of the civil service. Many administrative decisions are made on party political lines or clientelist nexus. Because of this, existing rules and regulations can't be enforced rationally.
- The union of executive and judicial authority in the hands of officials belonging to the Bangladesh Civil Service (Administration) has further extended the supremacy of the executive branch and undermined the independence of the judiciary.
- As a whole, public officials are blamed for their lack of service orientation. The poor service delivery system has also been aggravated by politicization.

The legacies of the administrative system and culture outlined above have not been uniform over the years. While most of them have been carried over from the past, the magnitude of bureaucratic corruption and politicization of administration and the service delivery system has increased many-fold in post-independent Bangladesh.

ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS IN BANGLADESH

Administrative reform is not new in Bangladesh. Numerous reform programs were undertaken during the Pakistan period because there were widespread criticisms of anti-democratic practices in the service structure. However, reform efforts failed to produce significant results. Bureaucracy, by virtue of its historically strong position, allegedly manipulated all reform measures in its favor (Khan 1980).

Since the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign state, different governments attempted to reorganize the administrative system to suit the needs of their respective policy declarations. Different types of regimes have ruled the country in the last three decades. The first political government was in power only for three and a half years. Military regimes, in different forms, were in power from mid-1975 to 1990. Since 1991, avowedly democratic regimes, elected through impartial elections, have been in power. Attempts have been made during the tenure of all these regimes to reorganize the administrative system. All these endeavors have, however, largely failed to make the administrative system responsive, transparent, and efficient.

The appendix provides a summary of the recommendations of important reform committees/commissions and study groups. It shows that some commissions/committees were constituted by national governments. It also shows that three reports were sponsored by international donor agencies. In two studies, the Public Administration Efficiency Study sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID 1999) and the World Bank-sponsored Bangladesh: Government That Works Reforming the Public Sector (1996), expatriate consultants were also directly involved in preparing reports.

A majority of the reports focused on the civil service structure. The Public Administration Efficiency Study, the World Bank study, and the Public Administration Reform Commission focused on the entire public sector. A few reports concentrated on segments of the civil service system. The Committee for Administrative Reform and Reorganization dealt exclusively with field administration.

In terms of implementation, a sorry state of affairs is observed. Only the 1977 report of the Pay and Services Commission and the 1982 report of the Committee for Administrative Reform and Reorganization were implemented, and even in those cases many distortions were observed. Recommendations of a few commissions/committees (the Martial Law

Committee on Examining Organizational Setup of Ministries, Divisions, Directorates and other Organizations, and the Martial Law Committee on Examining Organizational Setup of Public Statutory Corporations) were also partially implemented. It appears that the recommendations of a majority of the commissions/committees/study groups have never been implemented.

The reports emphasized diverse issues. The issues of the rationalization of the civil service structure, efficiency, managerial dynamism, a merit-based system, solving intraservice conflict, openness, accountability, and decentralization have long been on the agenda of reforms. All the reports have adequately addressed these issues. However, all these still remain elusive in Bangladesh administration.

Although corruption is an old issue in Bangladesh administration, its intensity has increased many-fold in recent years. It has been the focus of a majority of the reports, with particular emphasis in the World Bank study of 1996 and the Public Administration Reform Commission in 2000.

Although the 1982 Administrative Reform and Reorganization Committee dealt with field administration, it had wider implications for the entire public administration system in Bangladesh. As per the recommendations of the committee, thanas were renamed upazilas. An elected local government was installed at the upazila level. A large number of developmental functions were transferred to this elected local body. A large number of government officials were deputized and placed under the elected chairman of the local body. For the first time, democratic governance, though limited in scope, was introduced at the upazila level (Rahman 1994; Sarker 1992). However, the government elected in 1991 abolished the system.

By early the 1980s, the Bangladesh public administration system had reached an unprecedented level of inefficiency. This worried not only national planners but also international donor agencies, which were financing different projects under structural adjustment plans. The pressures from them were mounting. The Public Administration Sector Study, World Bank study and Public Administration Reform Commission report have been categorical about the necessity of NPM-style reforms. Of these, the World Bank study and Public Administration Reform Commission reports are very comprehensive and have covered almost all aspects of the NPM model.

The World Bank study (1996) called for redefining the frontiers of the public sector (expanding the scope of operations for the private sector and nongovernmental organizations): enhancing the level and nature of accountability and responsiveness; streamlining regulations, laws, and processes; and overhauling the rules and processes and maintaining an efficient, committed, and professional public service. A careful analysis of the recommendations of the Public Administration Reform Commission also reveals the presence of NPM overtones. Privatization of public enterprises, contracting out of public services, users' fees, reduction of manpower in the public sector, meritocracy in the public service, professionalism, performance standards, citizen's charter, market-based salary structure, devolution of authority to local elected bodies, e-governance, and combating corruption are some of the recommendations that reflect the spirit of NPM (GoB 2000).

PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

The foregoing analysis makes clear that there have been continuous efforts on the part of successive governments to mold the administrative system to make it more responsive to the needs of the people and to make it more efficient. However, these grand recommendations have either not been implemented or implemented in such a way that the real substance was lost. At present, administrative reforms are in limbo. There is no serious attempt to implement the recommendations of different reform committees/commissions/study groups. At this point, I will focus on major factors that hinder the implementation of administrative reform. Particular attention will be given to an analysis of factors impeding NPM-style reforms in Bangladesh.

Lack of Political Commitment

The commitment of political leadership is a driving force behind implementation of administrative reform efforts. In Bangladesh, the experiences of the last three decades suggest that the political leadership has never been serious in its attempt to overhaul the administrative system (Khan 1998, 173). While campaigning for electoral victory, the major political parties always emphasize reforming the administrative system. After assuming power they never translate their intention into reality. With elections every five years short-run political calculations have dominated decision making, as the political leadership perceives the immediate political costs of administrative reforms to outweigh the longer-run benefits. Therefore, in the Bangladesh context political commitment is circumscribed by clientelist politics, which is responsible for distracting the political leadership from embarking on comprehensive reform programs.

Limited Capacity of Government

Administrative reforms need concerted efforts on the part of the government in power. Unless it can demonstrate its capacity, its reform agenda is bound to fail to deliver the desired results. It is now a fact that successive governments in Bangladesh have miserably failed to demonstrate this capacity. A number of factors can be discerned that have stifled the capacity of successive governments to push through reform initiatives.

The failure in the institutional structure of the state has been quite alarming in recent years. The rule of law is in limbo, crippling public lives in all spheres. The state appears to be a captive to predatory interests. Development agencies constantly break rules and regulations to serve sectional interests (World Bank 1996). Regulatory agencies responsible for maintaining law and order have not performed according to the letter of the law. Massive corruption and underhand deals with criminals have made them virtually ineffective. Moreover, there has been a systematic abuse of the office of the police force by politicians (CPD 2001a). On the other hand, the judicial system is subjected to some fundamental and procedural problems. The union of the police and the criminal justice authority, in the hands of the executive government, has simply eroded their autonomy and bred a tendency to the misuse of power for personal and political gain by members of the ruling party (U.S. State Department 2001).

Administrative failure in the form of inability to provide basic services such as public goods and services, economic infrastructure, law and order, judiciary, etc., is quite evident (Haque 2001a). Increasing administrative failure invites resort to the market (e.g., NPM-style reforms). However, the paradoxical situation is that the corresponding market failure also demands effective state intervention (Sobhan 2002).

Political incapacity is manifested in several areas. In its three decades of existence, the country was under direct or indirect military rule for almost fifteen years. Since the restoration of democratic politics in 1991, the Parliament has remained ineffective. The ineffective performance of parliamentary committees as well as lack of follow-up actions by the executive government is also a common phenomenon. Incessant confrontation between the two major political parties has virtually crippled the prospect of the political transition and agreement on major national issues. Along with this, the criminalization of politics is a serious hindrance to be reckoned with. The use of armed hooligans for political purposes, the patronage of armed extortionists under political banners, and the promoting of social bandits to different political hierarchies are clear manifestations of the criminalization of politics (CPD 2001b; Sobhan 1993; Azad 2002). The unhealthy political process has further been compounded by the absence of effective participation of civil society organizations (CPD 2001a). The state is seen to have lost its moorings and remains directionless. Such a rudderless state is progressively delegitimizing itself in the eyes of its citizens, who mostly see the machinery of the state as part of the problem rather than the solution to their daily concerns (Sobhan 2002; Haque 2001a; Transparency International, Bangladesh Chapter 1999). The erosion in the legitimacy of the state originates in the crisis in governance, which has been perpetuated over successive regimes. The crisis manifests itself in the breakdown of law and order, the nonperformance of administration and the dysfunctional nature of parliamentary democracy (Sobhan 2002). In the absence of a stable democratic political order, the government lacks a strong moral ground to implement a broad-based administrative reform program.

What we find in the case of Bangladesh politics is clientelism. While this was one of the main obstacles in the past, it is likely to create obstacles in the future as well. Clientelism is a subset of relationships pertaining to a wide range of patron-client transactions, which are found in most developing countries (Khan 1989). Khan has identified the nature of Bangladesh politics candidly: "Examples from politics are easy to give, as Bangladeshi politics is largely a process of intermediaries gaining access to resources by organizing pressure. Just as clientelist organization within an enterprise can lead to a pay-off under appropriate circumstances, state decision-makers too, at all levels of state machinery are susceptible to the challenges of clientelist lobbies and would under appropriate circumstances agree to a pay-off" (61).

This also indicates the technical incapacity of the state because of the susceptibility of state decision makers to organized pressures of clientelist groups. The clientelist nature of Bangladesh politics is a serious bottleneck in the reform process in the sense that either the reform programs are not implemented at all, to please the clientelist lobbies, or implemented in such a way that favors clientelist lobbies. No governments have so far taken any initiative in the reform process that is likely to destabilize their own power base. Similarly, it would not be easy to galvanize the civil servants in support of reforms meant to reduce their discretionary authority, privilege, and above all, rent-seeking opportunities. Moreover, the commitment to channel public resources through programs managed by

NGOs and the private sector is bound to cut into strong vested interests (World Bank 1996).

Different aspects of the incapacity of the state as described above have remained serious bottlenecks in the process of reforms in Bangladesh. Particularly, market-based administrative reforms such as privatization and contracting out have been seriously handicapped by these phenomena.

Now let me provide some concrete examples to substantiate these arguments. The first political government could not implement the recommendations of a high-powered reform committee. The recommendations were likely to curb the vested interests of the most powerful group in Bangladesh civil service—the administrative cadre. Moreover, the committee recommended a unified grading system, which meant, *inter alia*, the exact number of positions in each grade. Public-sector employees of all categories resisted this move, as it might have made many employees redundant. Again, this indicates the incapacity of the state to implement a reform program. This incapacity manifests itself in the state's overdependence on powerful clientelist lobbies such as the members of administrative service in general, ex-CSP (Civil Service of Pakistan) officers in particular, and also public-sector unions (Khan 1998, 1989; Sarker 1991). This is indicative of an overriding influence of the public bureaucracy, the influence it has enjoyed during the colonial and postcolonial periods (Alavi 1979; Ahmed 1980).

The avowed objective of the reorganization of the field administration in 1982 by the then military government was marginalized in favor of the parochial clientelist interests of the regime in power. The implicit agenda was to counter the urban political opposition that exploded at the very beginning of military rule, and to create an effective support base. Contemporary evidence suggests that enormous resources poured into the rural areas in the name of upazila development cemented a patron-client relationship between the state and the rural elites. These elites indulged in private accumulation, and in return they extended their support to the military regime (Sarker 1992; Rahman 1994). This exemplifies the susceptibility of the state to a rising clientelist lobby, the rural elites. The same military government also could not fully implement the recommendations of the martial law committee because of the military government's excessive reliance on the civil bureaucracy. The report of the Public Administration Reform Commission in 2000 is also a case in point. The report specifically aimed at introducing NPM principles in Bangladesh public administration. However, neither the previous government nor the present government has shown any serious interest in implementing the reform program. Organized pressures from the civil bureaucracy and public-sector unions have been brought to bear to prevent implementation of the recommendations (Sarker 2001).

On the surface, the Bangladesh state appears to be unified and centralized, and this should be an advantage in implementing reforms. However, the Bangladesh political system contains other features such as clientelism which operate against reforms. The nature of clientelist politics is such that the state (patron) needs to transfer resources to the supporters (clients). As a consequence, any reform programs that pose a threat to politicians' control over patronage are highly resisted.

Bureaucratic Resistance

The issue of comprehensive administrative reform has to be seen in the context of the role and influence of the public bureaucracy. In Bangladesh, administrative reforms have faltered for lack of appreciation and support by the civil servants who are responsible for implementing reforms that are likely to impact on them (World Bank 1996; Khan 1991; Khan and Zafarullah 1982). Most civil servants adopt a protectionist attitude toward the existing power configuration, which usually benefits vested interest groups including themselves. They see reform attempts as downgrading their present status, position, and power and orchestrate resistance to frustrate reform implementation. The tendency of most civil servants to preserve the status quo, and, if possible, extend their zone of influence within the public service system, is very much evident in Bangladesh (Khan 1991, 81). Weak political leadership further bolsters bureaucratic resistance to administrative reforms. This issue is particularly important when the Bangladesh government has an NPM-style reform agenda on the table.

Factionalism in the Public Sector

Instead of implementing broad-based reform programs, successive governments have been interested in playing with the existing factional strife within the public bureaucracy, in maintaining status quo, and in building up their own support base. The deep-seated factionalism has many dimensions: rivalry between the generalists and the specialists, spoils system entrants versus recruits through competitive examinations, freedom fighters versus non-freedom fighters, pro-Awami league versus pro-Bangladesh Nationalist Party civil servants, civil servants with a military background versus civil servants with civilian backgrounds, and factionalism based on district affiliation (Siddiqui 1996, 18-19). All these groups bargain with the political leadership regarding matters affecting their own interests. If the reform program threatens the interests of particular groups, they tend to mount all-out efforts to halt implementation.

Ineffective Basic Public Management Processes

It is known that, in developed countries, NPM is typically used to improve existing institutions where the bureaucracy is already conversant with basic public management processes. However, in most developing countries, including Bangladesh, solid institutional frameworks, rule of law, proper control structures, checks and balances, the civil service system, and accountability systems are all absent or ineffective (Arellano-Gault 2000, 400; Schick 1998). Western countries are now trying to change the precepts of classical organization theory as a way of reinventing government. Despite good intentions, most developing countries have failed in that direction. Commentators argue that the precepts of NPM such as strategic management, performance management, etc., can be effective only when the basics of administration are in place (Kiggundu 1989). Bangladesh public administration has demonstrated its deficiencies in establishing a rule-based system and enforcing a control structure, resulting in numerous dysfunctional consequences (Huda and Rahman 1989; World Bank 1996).

Corruption

Although corruption is one of the areas identified by different commissions, committees, and study groups as needing reform intervention, it may be considered as a factor impeding the reform programs. Bangladesh administration has been plagued by both political and administrative corruption. Corruption is an old phenomenon. However, in recent years, it has reached its peak (Sobhan 1993; Khan 1999). One report suggests that since independence corruption has accounted for a staggering Taka 540 billion in only three sectors of the economy: privatization of industries, banking and insurance, and the upazila parishad (Transparency International, Bangladesh Chapter 1999, 2). In fact, it is difficult to find any sector of the government without corrupt practices (Kochanek 1993, 258-263; Khan 1999). Almost all forms of corruption are found in politics and administration in Bangladesh: bribery, abuse of authority, nepotism, favoritism, patronage, theft, and deceit (Khan 1999; Haque 2001b; Sarker 2001).

Corruption has particular implications for NPM-style reforms. While NPM's prescriptions of contracting out and privatization sound well to curb corruption, it can be argued that in a system that is already corrupt and overpoliticized they will merely increase opportunities for private accumulation and patronage distribution (Turner and Hulme 1997, 233-234; Hughes 1998; Haque 2001a, 2001b). Signs are already evident in the privatization of state enterprises (Akram 1999).

It is really an intractable problem for Bangladesh. While the bureaucratic provision of service as well as state ownership of enterprises are causing serious problems, their outright contracting out and privatization may not solve the problem. A long-serving public servant in Bangladesh put it cogently: "Even in a highly privatized economy, the government will always be required to carry out powerful regulatory measures, and so its responsibilities for raising taxes, maintaining law and order, administering justice, providing primary health care and basic education, implementing environmental code etc. will remain, if not increase. In discharging all these functions, government officials will continue to have ample opportunities to indulge in corrupt practices" (Siddiqui 1996, 23-24).

Politicization of Administration

There is also an unprecedented level of politicization of administration. While this phenomenon is common in almost all countries, it has taken an ugly turn in Bangladesh and its ramifications are detrimental to the basics of administration. There are basically two aspects of politicization. One aspect relates to politicization of the service delivery system in that loyalty based on the clientelist nexus gets preference in the system. The other aspect relates to how public servants are politicized for petty party or sectional interests (Zafarullah and Khan 2001; Khan 1998; Siddiqui 1996). Over the last thirty years since independence, all governments have tried to entice civil servants for petty party interests. In doing so, they have inducted people under the spoils system, promoted people on party or other petty considerations, politicized the Public Service Commission by appointing people to this constitutional body based on party affiliations and tampered with the selection process to choose party loyalists (Zafarullah, Khan, and Rahman 1997; Ahmed

1986; Siddiqui 1996; Sobhan 2002). The culture of partisanship has infected the bureaucracy to a point where professional advancement is unrelated to performance or integrity. This parochial administrative culture has encouraged rank opportunity and protected corruption as well as incompetence. The politicization itself is related to the clientelist nature of Bangladesh politics. With this pattern of politicization, it is an impossible task to reform the public administration system along the NPM model.

The Role of International Donor Agencies

Being an aid-dependent country, Bangladesh has always remained susceptible to the pressures of the international donor agencies in formulating and reformulating its reform agenda. As one Bangladeshi scholar observed two decades ago, "Bangladesh policy makers must wait upon decisions in Washington, London, Tokyo, Bonn and Paris before they formulate their annual development budgets, announce an import policy, formulate a food policy, or even decide how many children should be born. The decision makers of the developed world hold the lifeline of any regime in Bangladesh in their hands and can create havoc in the life of a country in a way that was inconceivable two decades ago" (Sobhan 1981, 345).

Donors' involvement in the reform program is not new in Bangladesh. In fact, it dates back to the 1950s and 1960s when the international technical assistance program contributed to institution building efforts in Pakistan. In the post-independent period, the World Bank funded the public administration project in 1983. It was designed to enhance efficiency in the civil service through improved and expanded training, upgraded personnel management, and better organization and management.

There are both successes and failures of the donor agencies in reform programs. On the success side, there has been relative stability in the macroeconomic dimension. Over the last two decades economic liberalization, privatization, and banking sector reforms have been put on the board, although positive outcomes are yet to come (Chowdhury 2002). The most important success is the creation of substantive space for NGOs in the rural sector. The scope of the NGO operations can be gauged by the extent of program coverage. According to a reliable study, there are 13,000 NGOs in Bangladesh (Begum 2000, 65). However, there are only 1,245 NGOs who receive foreign funds to carry out their operations. Among them, 1,101 are Bangladeshi NGOs and 144 are foreign (Hossain 2001, 31). These NGOs play a vital role in employment and income-generating activities, education, health and family planning, agricultural development, infrastructure development, increasing opportunities for women, and the environment. Although a few NGOs are trying to mobilize resources on their own, the bulk of NGO activities are financed by bilateral and multilateral donor agencies. Over the years, donor agencies have also played a mediating role in resolving conflicts between NGOs and the government by taking a clear stance in favor of NGO operations (White 1999; Quadir and Morshed 2001).

On the other hand, the prescriptions of donor agencies for administrative reforms in Bangladesh have brought few results. A number of factors can be discerned in this respect. First, donor agencies have failed to make the political leadership and the public bureaucracy understand that their prescriptions will bring positive results. Second, a related flaw is the failure of local ownership (Schacter 2000). The World Bank study of 1996 is a case in point. It proposed a comprehensive reform program along the NPM model.

However, it received little support from local political and bureaucratic leadership for the proposed reform program (Khan 1998). Third, there was also little appreciation of local conditions such as the level of corruption, lack of fundamentals in public management, and severe crisis in governance (Sobhan 2002). However, since they enjoy enormous influence over the Bangladesh government, it is expected that the donor agencies will pursue reform programs with a constancy of vision. Of late, they have come to realize that adequate attention must be paid to social and political obstacles in the design of reforms and priorities must be focused on establishing the rule of law, reducing corruption and improving service delivery (*The Daily Star*, 17 January 2002).

LOOKING AHEAD

Administrative reform is not an easy task, particularly in a country like Bangladesh which is confronted with multifarious problems. This does not imply that the government should be indifferent toward reforms. This article proposes certain measures for effective reform implementation. First, the political leadership must commit itself to reform programs, as they are bound to yield both high political and economic payoffs to the government itself. Second, the government must act promptly to restore discipline in the governing system through positive instruments of order, protection, provision, redress, and rule before embarking on microlevel reforms in the administrative system. At this moment, discussions are going on at the policymaking level to establish the Office of Ombudsman, the Human Rights Commission, the Independent Commission Against Corruption, and to reform the judiciary. These all are necessary to establish a firmer basis for the rule of law, and to underpin accountability mechanisms. Third, we endorse the comments of Schick (1998), that the politicians and officials must concentrate on the basic processes of public management. Experiments with advanced management practices will result in more distortions in the administrative structure. Officials must control inputs before they are called upon to control outputs; they must be able to account for cash before they are asked to account for cost; they must abide by uniform rules before they are authorized to make their own rules; they must operate in integrated, centralized departments before being authorized to go it alone in autonomous agencies. Fourth, the role of civil society is very crucial at this moment. There are some signs that civil society bodies like the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, NGOs, and Transparency International, Bangladesh Chapter, are making some headway in pressuring the government to pursue administrative reforms. The government must take measures to empower these organizations to help articulate the voice of citizens in demanding better governance. Fifth, political life in Bangladesh must be reconstructed. The political parties must move away from their confrontational political culture toward a more responsive and representative political culture. Moreover, mainstream political parties must reach a consensus on the necessity of revitalizing the administrative system. The reconstruction of political life will also help depoliticize the bureaucratic machinery. Sixth, the government should adopt an incremental approach rather than a comprehensive and radical approach to administrative reform. It means initiating reforms sequentially and also beginning with pilot programs. This will not only help build up support for reforms by demonstrating their potential benefits, but also provide useful lessons for the future for those managing the process of change. Finally, the political leadership requires a clear, long-term vision, a readiness to investigate and make

explicit the factors that drive behavior in designing incentives to encourage a proactive attitude toward implementing administrative reforms.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have made an attempt to sketch both the historical and contemporary reform efforts in the public administration system in Bangladesh. Public administration reform is not a recent phenomenon in Bangladesh. Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has had a number of administration reform committees and commissions. Apart from these, there have been important studies commissioned by international donor agencies. All these reform efforts have aimed at improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of the administration system. However, no significant results have been achieved from all these reform endeavors. I have argued that grand recommendations are either not implemented or implemented in such a way that the real substance gets lost. In this article, I have identified a number of factors that appear to be stumbling blocks in the process of implementing reform programs. In the last thirty years, successive governments have not demonstrated their commitment to administrative reforms. The government's incapacity is an important factor. This incapacity is further aggravated by the clientelist nature of Bangladesh politics. The reform program is being further thwarted by the absence of fundamentals in the Bangladesh administrative system, a lack of democratic order, the presence of factional strife in the public sector, the politicization of administration, and endemic corruption in the public sector. It is of the utmost necessity that the government address these issues. Certain measures have to be initiated on a priority basis. The political leadership must demonstrate its commitment toward reform programs. Instead of confronting each other, political leaders must reach a consensus on the necessity of reforms. It must also be a priority to restore order and establish the rule of law in the governing system, and to provide basic services to citizens. Experiences of the developed world suggest that NPM-style reforms have succeeded in these countries because their administrative systems were already on sound footing. Bangladesh policymakers must concentrate on the basic processes of public management. Finally, I have argued that the political leadership requires a clear, long-term vision, a readiness to investigate and explicitly identify the factors that drive behavior in designing incentives to encourage a proactive attitude towards implementing administrative reforms.

APPENDIX: MAJOR ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS IN BANGLADESH

<i>Committees/Commissions/ Study Groups</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
Administrative and Services Reorganization Committee, 1972	Civil service structure	Unified civil service structure with a continuous grading system from top to bottom
Pay and Services Commission, 1977	Civil service structure and pay issues	28 services under 14 cadres created within the civil service; establishment of senior services pool (SSP)
Martial Committee on Examining Organizational Setup of Ministries, Divisions, Directorates and other Organizations, 1982	Reorganization and rationalization of manpower in public organizations	Reduction of the size of the government; reduction of layers for decision making; delegation of administrative and financial powers down the hierarchy
Committee for Administrative Reform and Reorganization, 1982	Reorganization of field administration	Upgrading of <i>thanas</i> into <i>upazilas</i> with <i>upazila parishad</i> as the focal point of local administration; empowerment of the local authority in relation to rural service delivery system
Martial Law Committee for Examining Organizational Setup of Public Statutory Corporations, 1983	Public enterprise	Delegation of more financial and administrative powers down the hierarchy; timely release of funds from ministries; rationalization of manpower; preparation of organization charts, manuals, annual activity reports; merit-based promotion
Special Committee to Review the Structure of SSP, 1985	SSP	Continuation of SSP as a cadre; entry into SSP at the level of deputy secretary only through examinations to be conducted by the Public Service Commission; promotion within SSP to be strictly on the basis of merit; fixed tenure for secretaries
Cabinet Subcommittee, 1987	SSP	Endorsement of the recommendations of the Special Committee except the fixed tenure of secretaries
Council Committee on Senior Appointments and Services Structure, 1987	SSP	Abolition of the SSP; filling up positions of deputy secretaries and joint secretaries by promotion on the basis of quota reservation for various cadres
USAID-sponsored Public Administration Efficiency Study, 1989 Civil service structure	Secretariat system; relationship between ministries and departments and ministries and corporations	Reducing Secretariat's operational activities through delegation; reducing layers in decision making; enhancing organization and management capacity; modernization of office equipment; increasing incentives for higher performance; enforcement of merit principle in promotion; expanding practical, problem-solving training; providing appropriate compensation structure for public officials

UNDP-sponsored Public Administration Sector Study, 1993	Civil service	Performance management system; rationalization of civil service structure; elimination of redundant government functions; merit-based selection and promotion; strengthening Public Service Commission
Four secretaries' report, 1993, sponsored by Overseas Development Administration, UK	Civil service	Merit-based recruitment and promotion; improvement of financial management system; incentives for better performance; improvement of accountability and transparency; establishment of ombudsman; strengthening of the audit office; improvement of training programs
Administrative Reorganization Committee, 1993	Structure and reorganization of manpower across ministries, departments, and directorates	Reduction of ministries, departments and agencies; elimination of unnecessary units; separation of accounts from audit; establishment of a secretariat for the supreme court; reduction of the size and role of the planning commission
World Bank study: <i>Bangladesh: Government That Works Reforming the Public Sector</i> , 1996	Civil service, public enterprise, NGOs	Redefining frontiers of the public sector; enhancing level and nature of accountability and responsiveness of public organizations to different stakeholders; streamlining regulations, laws and processes; maintaining an efficient, committed and professional public service
Public Administration Reform Commission, 2000	Administrative structure for improving the quality and standard of service, transparency, and efficiency	Determination of missions of public offices; improving the delivery of services; reforming the civil service; formation of the professional policy-making group (senior management pool); reorganizing institutions and rationalizing manpower; restructuring field administration and decentralization; establishment of an independent commission against corruption; establishment of criminal justice commission; establishment of the Office of Ombudsman; reducing wastage and promoting value for money; strengthening parliamentary oversight; facilitating private investment

Source: GoB 2000; Khan 1991, 1998; Rahman et al. 1993; UNDP 1993; USAID 1989; World Bank 1996.

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