

Democratic Versus Bureaucratic Management: A Quarter Century of Experimentation in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Two major power wielders - the democrats and the bureaucrat share political power in varying degree in running the state machine called public administration. In theory, this dualism has been duly recognized. It ranges from no real problem in securing a civil service carrying out the will of the political masters to the little that can be done about bureaucracy as a fact of modern life. Gaetano Mosca, however, came up with a concept of independent countervailing power of trained citizenry to moderate both democratic and bureaucratic power.

This paper attempts to explain the theory in terms of the administrative initiatives undertaken by the five top persons in government - Mujib, Zia, Ershad, Khaleda and Hasina - as affecting the structure and functioning of public administration in Bangladesh.

The Nature Of The Issue

Managing a democratic administration in terms of providing goods and services to the people brings two major power wielders - the democrats and the bureaucrats - in close interaction. It will be naive to suppose that the democrats decide the policies and the bureaucrats turn those policies into action. Both participate in defining, managing, and evaluating policies and action and both groups share in varying degree the power of running the state. Hence, a dualism is inherent in the phenomenon of government and public administration¹.

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In the theory, this dualism has been duly recognized. In the theoretical and philosophic debate on bureaucracy and democracy, three extreme positions² have been identified.

Position 1:

The liberal tradition in Political Science has tended to assume that there are no real problems in securing a civil service that carries out the will of its political masters without question. Mill and Bagehot recognize the dangers of bureaucratic governance, but they see the political system as supplying protection against them.

Position 2:

Bureaucratic power is a fact of modern life about which little can be done: "In a modern state, the actual ruler is necessarily and unavoidably the bureaucracy" (Weber)³. "The permanent bureaucracy channels the currents that temporary political masters buck at their peril" (Snow)⁴.

Position 3:

Marxists view that in capitalistic societies, both representative institutions and administration are effectively controlled by the bourgeois and bureaucracy (administration) is unproblematic in socialist society.

A challenge to the Marxist view came from Weber. Weber regards the development of bureaucratic administration as intimately associated with the evolution of modern industrial state. Bureaucratization is seen as a consequence of the development of a complex economic and political system, and also as a phenomenon that has helped to make these developments possible. Therefore, in his view, it is a

phenomenon with which exponents of theories of representative government must learn to come to terms.

Weber stressed the importance of the authority system whereas Marx was concerned with the production system. Weber implied that the bureaucracy gave the state power to shake itself free of bourgeois control. But he went further to express skepticism about the Marxist claim that the state would "wither away" under socialism. According to Weber, the "socialization of the means of production would merely subject an as yet relatively autonomous economic life to the bureaucratic management of the state."⁵ A careful study of the development of this phenomenon would convince any reader that the civil society has hitherto been unable to effectively control both the bureaucratic and democratic power wielders with uncertain consequences for democracy as a system of government. In other words, it is closer to the Position 2 - i.e. little or nothing can be done. Nonetheless, the concern continues via alternative considerations.

Position 4:

A fourth position is offered. It follows Mosca's concept⁶ of independent countervailing power of trained citizenry to moderate both democratic and bureaucratic power, keeping the objective realities of Bangladesh in view and seeking to increase the non-leaders' control over leaders.

Focus of this paper: This paper explores the dynamics of the debate in terms of political institutions developed to enable the people or their elected representatives to participate in policy making, management, and evaluation of programmes vis-à-vis the bureaucrats who actually run these programmes through rules sanctioned by the politicians. Here again a dualism should

be noted. A special emphasis is placed in this paper on the top person in government (TPG) who largely defines the policies and provides guidelines for bureaucrats to act accordingly. The assumption is that in a small country with a history of foreign rule, the TPG is in a position to identify systemic modification, focus attention and mobilize popular support to it. It may be crucial to study the modifications from the viewpoint of the TPG, which is termed the administrative philosophy of the TPG.

An administrative philosophy approach: It appears to the author that every top person in government (TPG) - whether elected or unelected - develops and nurtures a peculiar way to handling administrative matters which may be termed his/her administrative philosophy. It further appears that to the extent he/she is able to put it in practice, his/her administrative philosophy affects the visions of the administrators who carry on the day - to - day administration. These two statements seem interrelated in terms of their meaning, content and application with consequences for the entire administration and resultant weal or woe for the people. This presupposes that the TPG brings with him/her an administrative philosophy and to the extent he/she is able to do so, provides an administrative doctrine for the guidance of the operating administrators.

The paper now attempts to identify the administrative philosophy of five TPGs, viz., Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1972 - 75); Ziaur Rahman (1975 - 81); H.M.Ershad (1981- 91); Khaleda Zia (1991 - 96) and Sheikh Hasina (1996 - todate) and whether or how much such philosophies affected the structure and functioning of public administration and the resultant consequences for the people (also see Table 1):

Sheikh Mujib: Mujib represented a democratic administration. Given his political orientations, Mujib could hardly have been otherwise. He was out and out a democrat. He suffered all his life so that democratic institutions could develop and mature. His rule was a short one - nearly three years - and his was an uphill task building a new administration from almost a scratch. Yet, in spite of all odds, Mujib sought to build a democratic administration. It may be relevant here to refer to Vincent Ostrom's *The Intellectual Crisis in American Public Administration* (1971), where a distinction is made between "democratic" and "administration" paradigm. The people or their representatives would run the administration at all levels. As the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in article 11 declared: "The state shall be democracy in which..... effective participation by the people through their elected representatives in administration at all levels shall be ensured."

Logically, Mujib proceeded to set up and strengthen new democratic institutions with a view to letting the people "participate in administration at all levels" (in letter and spirit of the Constitution). Some examples may be useful for elaboration.

Mujib's Relief Committees: Immediately after liberation, Mujib formed Relief Committees in each Union with nominated party members with the responsibility of distributing material benefits to the people affected during the war. This was an American political "Spoils System" for a model of "Let the People Rule". The administrative tradition in this country had so far been bureaucratic - i.e., the government officers - Relief Officers, Circle Officers and other government functionaries - at local level distributing relief materials. Here, for the first time, a

paradigm change took place - politicians, not bureaucrats taking charge in times of crisis.

To add tailpiece however, it is difficult to explain why Mujib nominated members of an elected body - the Union Parishad (UP) at the Union level - and why elections for UPs, Thana and Zila Parishads were never held despite promises.? For the democrat, the normal hypothesis would have been invigorating these elected bodies and thereby letting democracy at the local level to strike roots and appreciate administrative problems by working with government officers at local level. This would have been a valuable experience for both groups.

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) was the symbol of British administration and also of Pakistan rule. The DC represented the government in a district. The DC was a bureaucrat, not a representative of the people. Himself a bureaucrat, and heading all other bureaucrats, the DC was the pivot around whom the entire district administration revolved. As a result, the DC was the source of all power - political, economic and social. The people would look up to the DC for help and succour, whether corporate or personal. With the national flag flying on his residence, his car bearing nameplate number 1, police escorting him - the DC was the real symbol of power. He could direct any body in the district to come in aid of his direction. Such a model was bureaucratic and Mujib wanted to replace it with a democratic one who is closer to the people politically and who can be looked to as the local political leader in all matters - political, administrative and cultural. Such was the rationale for the District Governor in which the top person in the district would be a local politician not a bureaucrat. The District Administration Act of 1975 was issued and 17 District Governors were nominated in accordance with this Act, and they were given training at the National Institute of Public

Administration (NIPA). Before the District Governors could join, Mujib was killed in a military coup. Mujib replaced all bureaucrats as members of the Planning Commission and put academics in their place. The estranged bureaucracy reacted by withholding necessary cooperation. As Professor Nurul Islam of the then Planning Commission himself put it:

The appearance appeared to the bureaucracy as an indication of the inroad which was being made into the old order and their hegemony. Firstly, it heralded the intrusion of outsiders. Bangladesh inherited a status-conscious society where the effectiveness of a person in a particular job and his relationship with the other agencies and officials, his equals as well as his subordinates, depended to a great extent upon the formal status he enjoyed in a hierarchy of the government.

Throughout the first years of the Planning Commission, the status accorded to its personnel was a constant source of friction in dealing between the bureaucracy and the Planning Commission. the fact that by its influence on or persuasion of the Prime Minister the Planning Commission occasionally got certain changes introduced or certain decisions taken, in spite of the opposition of the bureaucracy, did not improve matters⁷.

Mujib once said, "Any political party worker is better than a government officer. Unless the political organization is made stronger, the country's welfare cannot depend merely on government officers. There must be a balance....."⁷.

Bureaucracy was the most dominant political sector. This is for the first time that a TPG was arguing for a balance between the two major forces - political and bureaucratic - in a system where there are no other countervailing forces. This time a political party was asserting itself and asking to be considered a

co - equal. This was too much for the bureaucracy to digest and it may be reasonable to assume that bureaucracy - both in its civil and military forms - might have been instrumental in Mujib's downfall.

With Mujib's departure, the democratic vs. bureaucratic conflict ended as the successive TPG realized that the two century old strong bureaucracy in Bangladesh must not be challenged, but somehow to be allowed to continue and tolerated, if necessary.

Zia: A freedom fighter himself, Zia came to power through a military intervention and understandably chose a middle - of - the - road style. Unlike Mujib, Zia did not touch the bureaucracy structurally, he sought to dilute their authority functionally.

Like Mujib, Zia too sought to maintain a balance between politicians and bureaucrats. He appointed 20 District Development Coordinators (DDC) with responsibilities to assist in the development activities, implementation of projects, hearing of allegations and meeting appropriate measures (see *The Daily Sangbad*, November 15, 1979). In effect, such arrangements created two power centres in the district - the DDC and the DC - and the government did not clarify the relation between the two. The DC considered DDC as an unnecessary addition to the district administration. The DDC realized that while he had a list of responsibilities, the necessary power lay with the DC as before. All previous dyarchies fell and so did the DDC.

In the same vein, the Ambassadors' Pool created by Zia with 53 MPs who were to visit foreign countries with the status of ambassadors, and assist in economic development. Again,

like the DDC, the Ambassadors' Pool had the status, but no power. So it too fell.

At the district level, Zia appointed a District Census Committee with the DC as its Chairman and local MP a member. Before long conflict ensued. The MPs were made "advisors", but matters did not improve. Many MPs complained about their dependence on the DC even for permission to stay at Government Circuit Houses.

Ershad: Himself a military officer Ershad came to power in a bloodless coup in 1981. Although he sought to win a semblance of legitimacy for his regime in elections, Ershad allowed both military and civilian bureaucrats to maintain their strongholds. Every new government office created was headed by a bureaucrat with necessary power to control the lives of the common man. There was one notable exception - the thana level administration - was headed by a democratically elected Chairman. The Upazila Chairman - as he was called - was responsible for the administration at the thana level with necessary powers. He was heading a Upazila Parishad with Union Parishad Chairmen as voting members and the Upazila level bureaucrats as nonvoting members. A senior officer called Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) was made the Secretary of the Upazila Parishad to assist the Upazila Chairman in carrying on the Thana level administration. The national government enabled the thana administration to function with the necessary financial aid and provided bureaucrats to serve under the overall direction of the Upazila Chairman. The Thana Parishad was a democratic political institution under an elected representative, which was never seen before in Bangladesh. It worked reasonably well via initial difficulties. This was an example of the democratic administration that Sheikh Mujib wanted but

could not live to see through. The people could see that their problems were being locally solved. They could come and approach the local government and the government officers at the thana level were made to work in cooperation with the elected Chairman.

Khaleda: One of the first things she did upon coming to power was to strike the thana level democracy and replace it with bureaucratic administration. Perhaps the Upazila Parishad bore the shadow Ershad and Khaleda could not personally stand it. She abolished the Upazila Parishad but could give no substitute.

As a result, the thana level administration reverted to its good old days - a bureaucracy with no locally elected representative to direct and control their activities. The TDCC (Thana Development and Coordination Committee) now in place of the Upazila Parishad - is a bureaucratic committee with the Union Parishad Chairman serving as its nominal rotating Chairman, leaving all effective power in the hands of bureaucrats.

At the national level, however, Khaleda regime saw to it that the meetings of the 11 Parliamentary Standing Committees and 35 Ministerial Committees were held regularly (see Table-2), thus giving an opportunity for democrats and bureaucrats to exchange views on administrative problems, and agree on necessary action. The follow - up action was unfortunately not as regular as the meetings.

Hasina: Daughter of a democrat, bred in democratic tradition, the wife of a civilian, Hasina represents democratic tradition with election manifestos to make her government "accountable" and "transparent".

Nowhere is the attempt at increasing accountability and transparency of administration more visible than at the village level. Below the Union Parishad, there has been no elected structure to organise government rendering of goods and services for the people. Hasina focused on this vital area - where the ordinary/common people mostly live.

The Gram Parishad (Village Council) appears to be a serious attempt to take democracy to the doorsteps of the villagers. With the Union Parishad, voters are electing 1 UP Chairman, 9 male and 3 female members. The 9 members representing 9 wards in each ward will be chairmen of Gram Parishads automatically. The Gram Parishad will have three functions, viz. (i) conduct socio - economic survey; (ii) record births and deaths, and send information to UP; and (iii) look after water and forest resources.

Applied to the task, the Gram Parishad - i.e., the villagers acting through their elected representatives - will have a taste of government power and functions and responsibilities. Surely they will come in increasing contacts with government officials and appreciate one another's problems at work.

Previous regimes attempted it but with little or no success. However, democratic demands will certainly not stop at the village level and will ask to be extended at the Thana, District, Division and National levels too. That will be a crucial test for Hasina.

Conclusion: The combined effect of all such political education and limited participation in managing government programmes by working side by side with the bureaucrats might lead to a civil society/trained citizenry. Such civil society may serve as "eternal vigilance" for democracy at all levels.

Gaetano Mosca in *The Ruling Class* (1939) apprehends that either the permanent bureaucrats will enjoy a powerful position relative to the politicians or that politicians will become in effect bureaucrats rather than servants of the people. While the actual institutional structure may vary, the ultimate tendency will be for politicians and bureaucrats to become indistinguishable, and as far as democracy is concerned, it will matter little whether what has happened has been the "bureaucratization of the politicians" or the "politicization of the bureaucrats". To prevent this happening, the monopolization of political power must be checked. Hence, both the politicians and the bureaucrats' power must be checked by independent institutions - citizens groups, voluntary associations - offering a "countervailing power".

In Bangladesh, a countervailing power of the citizens groups and other independent institutions has been rather slow in coming. Cultivating democracy at all levels however slow and insufficient holds promise for a sustainable political system in Bangladesh.

A pertinent question at this point will be: who else are the potential countervailing forces in Bangladesh besides politicians and bureaucrats? The NGOs growing in large number and increasing activities show some promise. However, their tendency to show quick results and financial orientation might stand in the way of enabling them to act as a countervailing institution. Their relationships with the government both at national and local level need to be studied thoroughly in terms of impact for democracy and bureaucracy. Concerns have been expressed that in some areas the NGOs tend to bypass the local government institutions. Such concerns will rise with the Gram Parishad, Union Parishad, Thana Parishad and Zila Parishad functioning with increasing support of the national government in both political and bureaucratic terms. With such a situation,

the local government institutions will lessen their dependence on the government for both finance and personnel, and act as self-supporting and self-sustaining units.

Interestingly enough, the government at the centre because of pressure from donors has come forward to propose that certain projects such as those of Water Resources Ministry have participation of the concerned people not only in identifying projects, but also in implementing, monitoring, evaluating, operation and maintenance stages - - thus giving the common man a voice in administration.

However, another question remains. With their poverty, lack of education, and interest, peoples' participation in government sponsored projects might turn out to be more ornamental than useful. Such a situation calls for political education and skills training for the common man especially those affected by government projects so that citizens groups through participation in selected projects learn to appreciate the difficulties of working with government officials and vice versa.

Prime Minister Hasina's oft-repeated calls for "transparency" and "accountability" of her administration may face some crucial tests in this regard.

So this brief survey confirms the theoretical dualism outlined in this paper but notes that it has been sought to be diluted to make government and administration more democratic in Bangladesh. The participation of various civic groups is a necessary condition in this gigantic effort. Moscas's insistence on independent institutions, citizen groups, and voluntary associations makes sense in offering a countervailing power to moderate both democrats and bureaucrats. This effort must continue endlessly. For "Democracy is a form of government

that is never completely achieved..... Democracy grows into its being " (R. M. Maciver, *The Web of Government*. New York: Macmillan, 1947, p132.)

Table 1: TPG's Administrative Philosophy, Institutions and Consequences for Democracy.

TPG	Administrative Philosophy	Institutions	Consequences for Democracy
Mujib	Democratic	1. Relief Committees 2. District Governors 3. Planning Commission by Academics	1. The concept of "Let the people rule" was popularised 2. Provided a direct link between the national and district administration at the political level conceptually, but could not be implemented. 3. Served to alienate the entrenched bureaucracy & install political control.
Zia	Diluting bureaucratic power	1. District Development Coordinators (DDC) 2. Ambassadors' Pool 3. District Census Committee	1. Created a dyarchy at district administration with DDC - a lot of responsibilities but no actual power to carry those out. The real power lay with the DC as before. 2. Political ambassadors had the status but no powers, like the DDC. 3. District level leadership was still with the DC but somewhat diluted with MPs attending as members and later as advisors.
Ershad	Increasing democratic - bureaucratic interaction at local level	1. Upazila Parishad	1. Elected chairman as head of Thana Level body with UP chairmen as voting members and Thana level officers as nonvoting members - a new concept of democracy-bureaucracy coordination for managing local affairs. The commonman's approach to government goods and service delivery made easy and local.
Khaleda	Bureaucratic at local level and democratic at the national level	1. Abolishing Upazila and replacing it with TDCC 2. Holding of 46 Parliament Committee Meetings (SC - 11; MC - 35=46)	1. Reverting to bureaucratic management at the Thana level of administration with bureaucrats running the show with no visible signs of democracy. 2. No headway at District Parishad administration either. 3. Parliament Committee meetings provided a regular contact between democratic and bureaucratic power wielders (228 Standing Committee meetings and 1097 Ministerial Committee meetings held in the Fifth Parliament.)
Hasina	Grassroot Democracy at village level	1. Gram Parishad	1. Carrying democracy to the village level and enabling the villagers together with their elected Ward Chairman in rendering goods and services to the villagers. It may be a potential democratic institution which may ask to be extended in other spheres and levels also.

Source: The author's own understanding of the administrative philosophy of 5 Top Political Persons in Government of Bangladesh and its manifestation in political institutions acted to share authority and functions. SC: Standing Committees, MC: Ministerial Committees.

Table 2: Meetings of the Parliamentary Standing Committees and Ministerial Committees as indices of increasing democrat - bureaucrat interaction

Standing Committees	Number of Meetings held
1. Business Advisory	46
2. Privileges	23
3. Rules of Procedure	15
4. Parliamentary	20
5. Estimate	27
6. Public Undertaking	48
7. Government Assurance	04
8. Private Members Bills & Resolutions	23
9. Public Accounts	50
10. Petition	27
11. Library	05
Total	288

Table 2 continued

Ministerial Committees	Number of meetings held
1. Defense	27
2. Foreign Affairs	28
3. Law & Parliamentary Affairs	46
4. Home	25
5. Communications	34
6. Establishment	28
7. Planning	35
8. Finance	23
9. Education	47
10. Energy & Mineral	39
11. Religious Affairs	36
12. Agriculture	29
13. Civil Aviation & Tourism	42
14. Jute	28
15. Parliament Sectt.	31
16. Textile	46
17. River Transport	39
18. Health	27
19. Women & Children	36
20. Industries	27
21. Environment & Forest	34
22. Housing & Public Works	33
23. Local Govt., RD & Co-op.	34
24. Youth & Sports	21
25. Commerce	39
26. Cultural Affairs	42
27. Social Welfare	32
28. Food	31
29. Irrigation, Water Resources & Flood Control	25
30. Fisheries & Livestock	37
31. Information	26
32. Disaster & Relief	24
33. Land	15
34. Science & Technology	08
Total	1097

Source: Bangladesh Parliament (Law Section 1 & 2) for information on the meetings of 11 Standing Committee and 35 Ministerial Committees during the 5th Parliament 1991 - 96. Note that these 46 Parliament Committees holding 1385 meetings point up the fact that the meetings in themselves were an example of regular democratic-bureaucratic interaction at the Parliament Committee level. The Ministerial Standing Committees owe their existence to Art. 76 of the Constitution and their activities have been specified in the *Rules of Procedure of Parliament*, 1992.

Notes

1. "In theory, ministers decide policies, and civil servants carry out their decisions. This is strictly true from constitutional standpoint but in reality it is a conventional half-truth. Ministers seldom have the time or knowledge, and sometimes not the skill, to formulate policy unaided. They must rely on their senior officials for advice, and still more for knowledge of basic facts and figures on which policy must be based. They have a right to expect that civil servants will do their utmost to make proposals which will reflect, or at least be comfortable with, the political philosophy and the programme of the party in power". W.A. Robson, "Bureaucracy and Democracy" in W.A. Robson, ed., *The Civil Service in Britain and France* (London: Hogarth, 1956), p.8.

Similar comparable comments have been offered by others as well. John Stuart Mill regarded reconciliation of the function of the expert and overhead control by the representatives of the people as the problem of government (see his *Representative Government*, Everyman's ed., 1910). Yet Mill emphasized how "salutary is the moral part of instruction afforded by the participation of the private citizens, if even rarely in public functions.

Carl Friedrich set forth a dual standard of administrative responsibility....the first standard 'objective', 'technical' or 'functional' responsibility of the permanent administrator. The second standard was 'political' responsibility. To Friedrich 'political responsibility' had been, even in Great Britain, a noble goal rather than an actual achievement, and 'functional responsibility' was "the new imperative" (see his *Problems of the American Public Service*, 1935).

Herman Finer objected to this and felt that the functional responsibility led toward a new despotism of administrative government. He upheld the responsibility of the representatives of the people. He believed that these should determine "the course of action of the public servants to the most minute degree that is technically

feasible, and that the various drawbacks of political control can be remedied". (see "Administrative Responsibility in Democratic Government". *Public Administration Review*, 1. Summer, 1941, pp. 335-50). Finer's objective was that the administrator shall be responsible to the people's representatives and Friedrich's objective was that the administrator shall be responsive to popular sentiment. Also see Eva Etzioni - Halevy, *Bureaucracy and Democracy: A Political Dilemma* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, rev. ed., 1985); Emmette Redford, *Democracy in the Administrative State* (New York: Oxford, 1969); and Ledivina V. Carino, *Bureaucracy for Democracy* (College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines, 1992).

2. Michael Hill, *The Sociology of Public Administration* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1972).
3. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds. (Berkeley, CA., University of California Press, 1968); *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, A.M. Henderson & Talcott Parsons, Tr., (New York: Free Press, 1947).
4. C.P. Snow, *Corridors of Power and Science and Government*, (Harvard University Press, 1960).
5. Weber, *ibid*.
6. Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class* (New York; McGraw Hill, 1939)
7. Nurul Islam, *Development Planning in Bangladesh* (London; C. Hurst & Co., 1977), p. 59.
8. For Mujib's ideas on democracy vs. bureaucracy, see *Parliamentary Debates* vol.2 no.12. 3 October 1972, p 429: একটি আলাদা জাতি বা শ্রেণী হিসাবে..... আমলাগণ রক্ষাকবচ ভোগ করতেন। স্বাধীন বাংলাদেশে এই ক্লাশ রাখতে চাই না..... জনগনই আপনাদের বিরুদ্ধে রক্ষাকবচ একজন সরকারী আমলার চাইতে যে কোন পার্টি ওয়ার্কর ভাল। রাজনৈতিক সংগঠন শক্তিশালী না হলে দেশের কল্যাণ শুধুমাত্র সরকারী অফিসারদের উপর নির্ভর করতে পারে না। একটি ভারসাম্য থাকতেই হবে।..... *দৈনিক ইত্তেফাক*, জুন 20, 1975]