

BOOK REVIEW

Administrative Reform in Bangladesh

Mohammad Mohabbat Khan, Dhaka : The University Press Limited, 1998, pp. xi+185, Tk. 375.

Most concerned citizens have since liberation been cherishing such illusions as that the colonial administrative pattern inherited from the British days would be adapted to the needs of free Bangladesh - for democracy and development; that law and order state or the night watchman state or the police state would give way to the welfare state; that administration or the civil service would be the instruments of democracy and the welfare state; and that the system of civil service inherited from the colonial rule would not be abolished although, recruitment and training of the civil servants would be oriented to the new context of democracy and development.

There has been almost a national consensus on all these 'illusive' propositions relating to the pattern of our administrative system. However, at the end of almost twenty-eight years of our existence as an independent nation, *disenchantment* has set in about the entire administrative system calling for its *agonising reappraisal*. As things they are, it is most likely for any concerned citizen to ask: What has gone wrong? How can we set right the wrong?

In fact, responding to the above two questions seems to be the main thematic concern of the author, Professor Mohammad Mohabbat Khan, whose book entitled *Administrative Reforms in Bangladesh* is under review in this volume of seminar papers.

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reforms failed in Bangladesh; what lessons can be learned from such failure; and how major reforms can be effectuated within the civil service of this country (chapters 2 & 4). Recognizing the need for a theoretical schema to assess contextually the situations in Bangladesh, the author has endeavoured well to look at administrative reform from a global perspective, focusing both on theoretical and recent developments in the area. He has also sought to describe bureaucratic culture both conceptually as well as its manifestation in Bangladesh context (chapters 1 & 3). Selected dimensions of civil service which have relevance to reform have also been analysed (chapter 4). Major administrative reform efforts of five effective regime rulers of Bangladesh have been critically evaluated (chapter 5). Role of four international donor agencies in the area of public sector reform in Bangladesh has also been analysed (chapter 6). Lastly, lessons from Bangladesh's experience with major administrative reforms have been examined with reference to other Commonwealth countries and specific measures have been recommended to bring about major administrative reforms in the public service system of Bangladesh (chapters 7 & 8).

The study, throughout, is very well written and edited. The writing style is clear, precise and well organized at all times. The study is original and this is its great contribution. It provides a vast amount of useful knowledge on processes and politics of administrative reforms in Bangladesh. It also shows how the major reform efforts failed because of the resistance by the bureaucratic elite.

More specifically, the strength of the study lies in Chapters 1, 3 and 8. In Chapter 1, the author looks at administrative reform eclectically, to focus both on

theoretical and comparative developments, whereas in chapter 3 he seeks to examine bureaucratic culture in conceptual terms as well as its manifestation in Bangladesh - thereby to amplify the theoretical setting of the rest of the study. Chapter 8 appraises Bangladesh's experience with major administrative reforms in the light of recent practical developments in some of the Commonwealth countries. It also includes specific measures in the form of recommendations to bring about major reforms in the public service system of Bangladesh.

While I think that the study has succeeded in achieving what the author planned in the first place. His postulated assumptions seem to have been well checked up. Especially the prescriptions for reform that he has suggested to restructure the civil service (i.e., 'open' or unified grading structure) merit to be taken into consideration by the policy makers of today's Bangladesh.

I believe however that the author should have elaborated his prescriptive schema a bit further to include discussions on the mode of staffing of the Secretariat - a highly coveted but contentious 'edifice' for all civil servants in Bangladesh. Reports in the news indicate that the defunct Senior Services Pool (SSP) might again be revived to be named this time as 'Senior Executive Service'. This reviewer therefore asks the author: Should he be willing to agree to the revival of the defunct SSP?

I think the author knows it very well that the structure of civil service at the federal level in the United States has traditionally been largely 'position-based', 'open' and 'unified'. Yet, the U.S. Congress did initiate in 1979 necessary legislation to provide for a new breed of higher civil service called 'Senior Executive Service' (SES),

encompassing the higher echelons of the American bureaucracy. Primary reasons for the creation of the U.S. SES were to restructure the motivation and incentive system for senior managers, to enhance the flexibility of the personnel management system, and to ensure an improved governmentwide coordination and policy management.

Nevertheless, the study does have its distinctive strengths. For someone wanting to gather insightful knowledge on the process and politics of administrative reforms in Bangladesh, it is indeed a valuable study. It also includes extensive information on administrative reform - its concepts, developments in global terms, and also useful cues for reforms in administration and public services. I am sure the book will have value for policy managers, specialists and scholars interested in Bangladesh's administrative reforms. It will also be useful to all civil servants, and to students of both politics and administration. The author thus deserves our heartiest congratulation for presenting such a highly informative and scholarly book. And for the publisher we do record our deep appreciation for bringing out another fine piece of publication.

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