

*Abdur Rob Khan*

## **ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH**

Most of the newly independent least developed and developing countries of the Third World may apparently be characterised as administrative states<sup>1</sup> where the state machinery not only carries out the traditional role of collecting revenue, enforcing law and order and meting out justice but also addresses itself to broad economic, social and cultural issues and institutions. And such all-encompassing and ambitious approach is justified indeed since there is conspicuous absence of private initiative and mass-based leadership for carrying out the mammoth developmental task needed in these emerging economies. But empirically, such developmental needs have put a challenge to the administrative organs of these states bearing the legacy of the colonial era. Leadership, initiative and flexibility are concepts incompatible with this type of bureaucracy so carefully nurtured and preserved over time. At conceptual level, this demanding role of the emerging states vis-a-vis their poor performance in mobilisation of internal resources and effecting participation in development process by mass population gave rise to the debate in the early sixties: should the existing public administration be replaced or supplemented to by a new system called development administration<sup>2</sup>? Needless to say, such poor performance by the state machinery was ascribed as much to the system of administration as to the urban-biased growth-based development model itself. Thus one finds the concomitant growth

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1. For details on administrative state, see Gerald E. Caiden, "The Challenges to the Administrative State," *Politics, Administration and Change* (Dacca), Vol. V (July-Dec. 1980.) No. 2.
  2. See K. M. Das, "Concept of Development Administration with a Short Reference to Bangladesh," *Administrative Science Review* Vol. IX (March 1979) No. 1. P. 114.

of the concepts of development administration and development economics, both committed to the process of development.

To be precise, these developing countries have attempted at carrying out administrative reforms to suit the needs of development. But in most cases the commissions set for such reforms could not deviate from the norms and practices of existing system and as such they ended up recommending old wine to be 'preserved' in new bottles. Moreover, whatever cosmetic changes appeared to have developmental tinge, they were not carried through. Thus, while, need for new structures, set-ups and programmes, some on immediate basis, arose and external assistance was also flowing in for such purposes, the state machinery through which the resources were funnelled and which was supposed to carry out development, could not be geared to the need for development. The consequences were:

- (i) mismanagement and squandering of resources
- (ii) communication gap between the administrators and the common people
- (iii) slow growth of indigeneous skill and expertise in planning, implementation of development programmes
- (iv) lack of institution building
- (v) conflicts between politicians and bureaucrats, and
- (vi) conflicts between Western principles and indigeneous values and practices

Given such a scenario, it is pertinent that the present administration in a least developed country like Bangladesh be given a critical look from the perspective of development administration. This paper intends to review the present administration in Bangladesh and suggest some policy alternatives.

But before proceeding, it would be worthwhile to put the role of development administration in proper perspective. What would exactly be the role of development administration in developmental process? Development, be it economic, social, political or cultural, is always internalised. It grows from within and cannot be imposed. And it is such imperceptible changes in mode of life, attitude, values and behaviour that cannot be measured by any technical indicators. Thus, it would be naive to pretend that any external



agency can 'develop' an area, country or people. What it can do is to address itself to the parameters of development, create favourable ground for development and act as change agents for growth of internal resources and leadership. And this is where the role of development administration comes in.

## II

### Concept of Development Administration

Social scientists consider development administration as the political aspect of modernization that focuses on organization-influenced change toward progressive political, economic, and social objectives where the administrator would be viewed as a policy-maker and advisor, interest-aggregator and articulator, political communicator, adjudicator and socializer.<sup>3</sup> This definition, however, is all-encompassing and rather demanding on the part of the administrators in developing countries where social integration among various interest groups is at a very low level. Development administration is expected to involve the organization of new planning and development agencies, the reorientation of existing nation-building agencies, and the creation of an administrative cadre to provide leadership in stimulating and supporting development programmes.<sup>4</sup> Development administration, as opposed to conventional public administration or bureaucracy, is said to have the following characteristics:

- (i) administration of economic development and planning or use of administrative instruments to facilitate economic and social development;

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3. See Milton J. Esman, "The Politics of Development Administration," J.D. Montgomery and W.J. Siffin (eds.) *Approach to Development, Politics, Administration and Change* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), cited in H.M. Zafarullah, "Institution Building and Development: A Conceptual Overview". *Politics, Administration and Change*. (Dacca). Vol. V, (July-Dec. 1980), No. 2, P. 109.
  4. See C.F. Grant, "A Note on Applications of Development Administration." *Public Policy*, Vol. XV. 1966. pp. 200-201 cited in *Ibid*.

- (ii) change agents acting toward social engineering in national integration process;
- (iii) involvement in field problems and rural development;
- (iv) involvement in institution building;
- (v) participation by the community in nation-building works;
- (vi) transition from traditional values to progressive view;
- (vii) consultation with people.

It may be argued that the existing top-heavy administrative system is biased toward building superstructure rather than infrastructure and tends to dissipate much of the resources and efforts. This, in effect, results in administration of resources rather than administration of real development works. The administrators have control over the resources for development but are not oriented to and interested in carrying out genuine development works. Besides, the bureaucratic organization is such that there is scope for self-preservation and action without having to show tangible outcomes. Accountability is not achieved and the consequences are quite predictable.

The next question is: can an appropriately designed development administration substitute the traditional public administration? The answer is apparently no. It is argued that while ministries like Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, Manpower, Local Government Rural Development and Cooperative, Industries, Social Welfare, Public Works etc, are development oriented, ministries like Foreign Affairs, Home, Defense, Law and Parliamentary Affairs etc apparently have no development contents. But a ministry to be development oriented need not as such have development content. They may otherwise provide the broad parameters of development. In fact, the role of Defence, Home and Foreign Affairs towards development can hardly be overemphasised. Thus development administration can easily replace public administration without having to jeopardise the traditional role of the state.

### III

#### **State of Administration in Bangladesh**

The present administrative system of Bangladesh is the legacy of the past, both British period and Pakistan period. Reform measures were undertaken from time to time. But these reform measures were



not committed to bringing about the desirable changes. In most cases, the measures were confined to reorganization of the hierarchies of administration, pay and services conditions rather than effecting fundamental change in bringing the administration down to actual development works. To put it differently, in the name of making the administration people-oriented, self-interest and elitism of the bureaucracy were preserved at any cost and some of the measures even led to infighting among several micro-interest groups in the system.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the findings and recommendations of various administrative commissions on making the administration biased in favour of development were not put to action. The findings of the three such commissions<sup>6</sup> on administrative system during early Pakistan period were:

- (i) illogical grouping of functions and units of administration.
- (ii) improper sub-divisions of functions;
- (iii) lack of distinction between line and staff works;
- (iv) over centralization;
- (v) excessive inter-departmental referencing;
- (vi) slow decision making in the Secretariat;
- (vii) lack of development orientation

But most of these findings were not given serious consideration for removing the anomalies existent in the administration.

A few rural development programmes, however, were introduced since early 1950s without reorganising the administration suitable for development works. The rural development programmes included Village Agricultural and Industrial Development (V-AID) programme, Basic Democracy (for local bodies), Rural Works Programmes and the Comilla approach to agricultural and rural development geared to the concept of "green revolution." But

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5. For details see J.K. Ray, "Administrative Restructuring and Development: Bangladesh," *Asian Affairs* (Dacca). Vol. III, (June 1981), No. II pp. 134-157.
  6. The commissions were: the first Reorganization Committee headed by a British Officer, the first Administrative Enquiry Commission and Egger-Gladieux Commission, See K.M. Das, op, cit. p. 122.

because of the mutuality of interests between bureaucrats and the rural landed peasantry, the development efforts ended up benefiting the rich. Another tendency was to build up more facilities and superstructures at upper administrative levels than at lower field levels. The front workers were ill-trained and ill-paid. Lack of coordination aggravated the situation. Finally the outcomes of the development programmes like Rural Works Programmes, 'Green Revolution', etc, helped build up rural infrastructure and agricultural productivity more in the then West Pakistan than the then East Pakistan because of bias in allocation of resources and seriousness in implementation. The leading role of the development works was given to the bureaucrats who were mainly of West Pakistani origin.

While institutionalisation of the planning process through creation of the Planning Commission contributed to the process of building development administration, the structure and process of the Planning Commission had a fundamental flaw of lasting significance—the centralization of the planning process. This centralization defeated the very purpose of grass root planning and reinforced the control of the bureaucrats over the resources for development.

In the immediate post-independence period, the massive flow of external assistance<sup>7</sup> for relief, reconstruction and development was coincidental to growth of political control as opposed to bureaucratic control over resources. But unfortunately, the political control was not matched with institution building and institutionalisation of the process for utilisation of the resources. It was a shift of control of resources from an organized self-seeking group to a group who had no serious commitment to and previous experience in development works. Consequently there was massive squandering of resources. The process of political control was going to be institutionalised through the creation of 61 districts and an equal number of District Governorship that would control the existing district administration.

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7. For quantum and other details, see Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, External Resources Division, *Flow of External Resources to Bangladesh (as of June 1979)*, (Dacca: Government of Bangladesh, 1979).



Following the political change in 1975, attempts were made to give a development bias to the administration through various measures, the Self-help Mass participation (under Swanirvor programme). Canal Digging and Own Village Development (OVD) programmes being the main. The bureaucracy was made to be involved in various rural infra-structure development programmes. But strictly speaking, these were more of the character of piecemeal and isolated projects rather than comprehensive programmes having institutionalised processes and support. Attempts at institution building like the formation of the Gram Sarker (village government) were also half way through and lacked clear definition and policy statements. As a result the benefits of most of the programmes could not be reaped. Some of the programmes which envisaged involvement of bureaucrats in rural development works needed follow-up for subsequent institutionalization. Some preliminary evaluation studies<sup>8</sup> showed encouraging results with the Own Village Development programme. But in the absence of any coordinated local planning and institutionalization of the process, visits by bureaucrats to their own homes, say, three times a year, would look like holidaying rather than pursuit of any serious development work. Also role of district, thana and local officials vis-a-vis this programme was not properly defined.

Having made a quick review of the efforts made so far in making administration development oriented, the major bottlenecks in the present administration may now be identified and be related to the needs and process of development activities.

- (i) **Red Tape-ism and Procedural Complicacies:** Red tape-ism in administration has resulted from clumsy and complicated administrative procedure, hierarchical rigidities and inter-departmental wranglings. Sometimes red tape-ism is used as a ploy to protect group identity and indulge in self-seeking pursuits. On the contrary, development activities require quick decision, immediate action and flexibility which is conspicuously absent in the procedure-crazy administration.

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8. See Dr. Shaikh Moqsood Ali, "Public Servants as Change Agents: an experiment with OVD Programme", *Administrative Science Review*. Vol. IX (March 1979) No. 1, pp. 1-24.

- (ii) **Lack of Accountability:** Lack of accountability is a very tangled issue and its origin may be traced to the existing social and political conditions of the society. It is argued that lack of accountability results from factors like lack of clear delineation of responsibility, inter-departmental tussle, laxity in the enforcement of rules and regulation at the top, tendency to use discretionary power much more than is warranted and lack of appropriate mechanism for enforcing accountability. But in most cases it is laxity in enforcement that becomes critical in explaining lack of accountability. Equally important are complicated legal procedures for administrative cases and lack of precedence.
- (iii) **Self-Seeking Pursuits or Corruption:** Corruption in public offices is a deep-rooted problem requiring detailed socio-economic and psycho-anthropological studies. However, some presumptuous remarks may be made. The major reasons of indulgence in corruption are moral degradation and collapse of existing value system. But operationally, both personal and institutional factors are responsible for corruption. Among personal factors, general poverty, lack of legitimate means and process for realising needs are prominent. On the other hand, meagre developmental resources, control of resources and opportunities by privileged minority, faulty administrative rules, lack of enforcement of accountability or input-output measures, insufficient compensation in relation to market prices etc are institutional factors that could be held responsible in explaining self-seeking pursuits by officials. To obviate this deep-rooted social problem it is essential that the type and magnitude of corruption, and cause of corruption be ascertained case by case to have deeper insights into the problems.

It is argued that so far low paid employees are concerned, inadequacy of the existing pays and service benefits to meet basic requirements forces the employees to indulge in self-seeking pursuits. Though this is a valid general statement, data on to what extent the officials and employees of various categories are affected by the inadequate pays and benefit in relation to cost of living is scanty. However,



the case of Nepal may be cited. A study on the negative behaviour of bureaucrats in Nepal showed that 70 per cent of the civil servants maintained themselves on advance drawing of salary.<sup>9</sup> Another study also on Nepal, showed that 95 per cent of the low level workers have drawn advance upto six months salary to be paid in 12 instalments.<sup>10</sup> Consequently the paybill that the employees receive can hardly meet their basic requirements. Things would not be much different for Bangladesh. Existing law forbids the employees to go for side business or part-time employment.

- (iv) **Decentralisation and Delegation of Authority:** Decentralisation in administration may take three forms: geographical, structural and functional. Geographical decentralisation may be achieved in two ways: diffusing head quarters to appropriate places and ensuring wide coverage through establishment of field offices at various levels. In the context of Bangladesh, the first type of decentralisation is yet to be effected though decision was taken in this direction in recent years. Field offices of major development agencies have by now reached the thana level. Taking at face value, this is no mean achievement. But when other aspects of decentralisation, namely delegation of function and authority are taken into consideration, one tends to conclude that development administration in Bangladesh is yet to reach the door step of the people. The thana administration and development agencies are dependent on the head quarters for disposal of cases, decision on development projects and use of resources. Such tendency is anything but congenial to local planning and mobilisation of resources for local development.
- (v) **Duplicity and Anomalies:** Lack of coordination and rationalisation in administration and development of

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9. See Prachanda Pradhan and Ramesh Dhungel, "Negative Bureaucratic Behaviour and Development with reference to Nepal", *The Journal of Development and Administrative Studies*, Vol. 2 (June-Dec, 1980) No. 1 and 2. pp. 98-120.

10. Ibid.

agencies has gone to the extent where there are more than one development agencies rendering the same services. In there any need for a Thana Irrigation Office when BADC unit office also engages itself in irrigation ? Similar cases of duplication at upper levels can also be found. But when total quantum of resources is limited, it is natural that duplicity in one area must leave other areas uncovered or partially covered. It is felt that by mere reorganisation through ensuring fair distribution and rationalisation in functions of departments much resources can be saved and better results could be attained.

- (vi) **Participation in Development Process:** Participation is a function of objectives of the programme concerned, target group, process of implementation, communication and delegation. Though most of the development programmes are targeted for the poor, the process of implementation normally does not involve them any way. Their needs are perceived at upper levels, projects, if any, for them are formulated at upper level and implemented without them. There is hardly any scope of local participation excepting contribution of labour. Thus rigidities and limited scope for non-conventional mobilisation of resources may be said to be contributing factors for poor participation. Communication gap is wide and the common people develop an apathetic attitude toward the programmes.

Again the 'scarce resource' theory may be applied here. The rich and the landed peasantry in the rural areas appropriate the scarce resources earmarked for the benefit of the poor. The local power structure also plays deterministic role in this respect.

- (vii) **Poor Monitoring and Evaluation:** One mechanism for assessing accountability is monitoring and evaluation of activities and programmes. But in the case of Bangladesh, the process of monitoring and evaluation is rather faulty as it take the amount invested or spent as index not the achievement of targets *per se* for which the investment is made. This provides scope for evading accountability



and most often the gap between target and achievement is tremendous.

The existing planning and evaluation cells of the ministries are neither adequately staffed nor decentralised to accomplish this task.

The upshot of the above discussion is that the structure and orientation of the existing administration is not appropriate for administering development programmes. The entire administration needs immediate reorganisation from the point of view of decentralisation, rationalisation, accountability, local planning and participation and last but not the least, pay and services condition.

#### IV

### Some Policy Alternatives

This section attempts at raising debate and discussion on some tentative policy alternatives. Since piecemeal approach and delay or slackness in implementation may dilute the good effects of any policy measure, the approach to administrative reform or reorganization should be comprehensive and prompt. Any experiment must run its full course before valid conclusions can be derived from it.

- (i) **Accountability:** It would be too optimistic to expect accountability to be established as a norm in the administration with one stroke of policy measure. It is felt that accountability must first be established at the higher echelons. The hierarchy of the administration is such that accountability in the higher echelon will automatically ensure accountability at the lower levels. However, flexibility to administer exemplary punishment or reward must be present in the administration, although the appropriate measure of strictness should persist all throughout without any sign of laxity.
- (ii) **Rationalisation:** Rationalisation in administration could be effected through removing existing anomalies in rules, procedures and legislation. Duplicity in agencies, geographical coverage, position and functions should be

minimised. Administration at lower levels should be simplified while greater coordination should be effected at higher levels.

- (iii) **Pay and Services Condition**: It is desired that pay and services condition should be improved to ensure minimum needs of the employees. It should be pegged with the market condition, though it would be a very difficult task to make pays and benefits reflect the cost of living at any given point of time. Provision should be there to review the pays and services condition at regular intervals. Also it is required to ensure stable prices and remove bottlenecks in supply of goods and services.
- (iv) **Balance of Power**: Unbridled growth of executive power should be curtailed through balanced growth of the legislative and the judiciary. In particular the judiciary should be independent of executive control.
- (v) **Decentralisation**: It has been observed earlier that development agencies have reached upto thana level. But all the agencies are not adequately functional in any given thana. Their impact on mobilization of local resources and formulation of local planning is minimal. It may also be observed that these organizations are ill-staffed and some times duplicated. This suggest that the thana level agencies should be further strengthened through delegation of more authority and control over resources. The number and type of agencies of operative should be determined by need of the thana concerned, inter-departmental coordination should be effected under the leadership of the Thana Council Chairman who would be an elected representative.
- (vi) **Bridging the Gap between the Government and the People**: It has been argued that traditional administration as obtaining to in Bangladesh has the basic flaws of communication and coordination gap between the administration and the people.

Under the present circumstances the administrators can not inject changes in knowledge, attitude and horizons



of people. The gap between to administrative elites and "the rising mass of the nation" could be bridged by establishing and strengthening local institutions and system in which people can solve their own local problems. These local insititutions, say, village based 'Gram Sarker' or Gram Panchayet' should be hierachically linked with the higher level institutions starting from the Union Parishad. At local level the voluntary organisations could be made more programme-oriented through control, legislation and incentives. These organisations could then work as change agents for the people. Another dimension of bridging the gap between the Government and the people is by effecting greater interaction and cooperation between the bureaucarts and the elected representatives at all levels. Attitude of mistrust, grudge and unhealthy competition between these interest groups undermine interest of the common people.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Of all non-economic aspects of development now being subjected to critical analysis, none is attracting greater interest than the issue of government machinery or the administration. There is an impressive consensus that the poor quality of public administration has acted as a heavy restraint upon Government's proclaimed intentions of rapidly accelerating economic and social progress, and that shortcomings in this area have probably been more directly responsible than anything else for the shortfalls in development plan implementation. It appears that combination of more resolute leadership with greatly increased measures of responsible popular participation in the political process through which administrative directions is carried can contribute greatly towards an effective development administration. While discipline and accountability has to be established, flexibility and delegation of authority through decentralisation should also be attained. And finally a working relationship through social engineering has to be established between the administrators and the administered.