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# **Public Administration in Bangladesh**

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# Public Administration in Bangladesh

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**Abstract** The paper examines the structure, reforms and challenges of the contemporary Bangladesh Civil Service. It provides an overview of the public administration system; an evaluation of reforms and innovations that have been “allowed”; the present recruitment procedure; and the extent and impact of politicization. Recruitment and politicization are the key problems identified and discussed. To explore these problems further we conducted qualitative, interview-based primary research with recent university graduates, and entry-level, mid-career and retired civil servants. The second part of the paper reports the analysis of the survey data

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## Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADP	Annual Development Plan
BCS	Bangladesh Civil Service
CSP	Civil Service of Pakistan
DFID	Department for International Development (U.K.)
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
LGED	Local Government Engineering Department
MATT	Management at the Top
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSD	Officer on Special Duty
PARC	Public Administration Reform Commission
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PSC	Public Service Commission
WB	World Bank

## **Public Administration in Bangladesh**

### **Introduction**

Bangladesh bears a colonial legacy in its entire public administration system. Present day Bangladesh was part of the British Empire for almost two hundred years. In 1947 Pakistani rulers replaced the British and dominated the area then known as East Pakistan until a bitter war in 1971 brought about an independent Bangladesh. A colonial imprint persists in Bangladesh especially in political and administrative arrangements. The British tradition helped the bureaucracy to become an essential tool of governance. At the same time, it is accused of following the “Pakistani tradition of involvement in power politics” (Haque, 1995).

The political system of Bangladesh has survived a series of transitions. A few years of democracy were followed by nearly fifteen years of military rule. In 1990, for the first time, Bangladesh achieved a fully functioning democratic structure. Ironically, the nature and role of bureaucracy in both the pre and post-democratic period remained almost the same except for an increase in number of ministries, divisions, departments and statutory bodies (Ahmed, 2002: 323-26).

The role of government has changed in the course of Bangladesh’s development. After independence its focus was the attainment of development in all spheres of life by intervention and the use of administration in a constructive way. Government and administration were seen not merely as a regulator but as a facilitator. However, it can be argued that development, when considered as a multi-dimensional concept, cannot be attained and sustained without good governance. The term “good governance” has acquired tremendous importance in the contemporary world, especially in the context of the developing countries. For example, many developing countries have prepared their own Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Good governance is an essential component in implementing the plans and strategies to achieve the targets set forth by PRSP; but good governance is a component that most developing countries seriously lack.

Merilee S. Grindle points out that when determining their priorities and taking steps to ensure good governance, most developing countries go too far: they chalk out a plan or strategy far beyond the limited capacity of the institutions charged with implementation responsibilities. Grindle suggests redefining “Good Governance” as “Good Enough Governance”, that is, “a condition of minimally acceptable government performance and civil society engagement that does not significantly hinder economic and political development and that permits poverty reduction initiatives to go forward” (Grindle, 2004: 526).

In Bangladesh, a second-generation development challenge is to achieve “good enough governance”. No matter how much a government tries, success will not be attained if it lacks competent institutions to implement policies. Public administration is the key institution for policy implementation. If it is not functioning well, then PRSP targets are unlikely to be met. The state has to make sure that its administrative apparatus is functioning well, so that it can innovate and implement solutions and that

it can ensure that the poor will not be excluded from the process and benefits of development.

From the beginning of the 1990s, the role of government has changed from an intervener to a referee; instead of playing the game, its main duty is to make sure that a fair game is being played. This reinvented role of the government necessitates redefining the role of the bureaucracy.

Bureaucracy can be considered as an “open” system that interacts with or is affected by the environment in which it operates. Traditionally, this environment consisted of only the “domestic economic, political and social context within which the organization is located.” Now, however, “public organizations are more often faced with global threats and opportunities that affect their operations and perspectives” (Welch and Wong, 2001: 372-73). The performance of a public organization depends largely on how the domestic political institution handles global pressures as well as how it interacts with the bureaucracy. In a country like Bangladesh, where global pressure is eminent and the domestic political institutions are ill structured, the colonial legacy places the bureaucracy in a difficult position. As globalization or market liberalization changes both the domestic context and the functioning of the bureaucracy, it is possible—but not necessarily desirable—that the two primary state institutions, politics and bureaucracy, forge an alliance.

### **Rationale of the Present Study**

There is a common perception that civil servants all over the world are more or less apathetic to the needs of the people and that they are even unwilling to listen to them. According to Alkadry, two major reasons account for bureaucrats’ “inability to take action.” First, a bureaucracy is a formal, rule-base organization design to limit the discretion and bound the initiative and empowerment of individual bureaucrats. Second, there is the “bureaucratic experience.” A bureaucrat is subject to a combination of conflicting social, political and other pressures; the bureaucrat learns to contend with these pressures by internalizing organizational norms and avoiding risks. (Alkadry, 2003: 184-88). The situation is no different in Bangladesh; indeed, it may be even worse because an inadequate, faulty recruitment procedure can place a non-qualified person in a formalized organization; and because politicization—the priority of party loyalty—can amplify the pressures a bureaucrat already feels.

These two problems—the defective recruitment procedure and the politicization of the civil service—may be largely responsible for the lack of “good enough governance” in Bangladesh. If recruitment is not fair and competitive, it fails to attract the meritorious and appropriate candidates. It becomes impossible to create a civil service that can handle the global pressures and the challenges imposed by the private sector; and it will be difficult for the nation to have an efficient, innovative and dynamic civil service. Politicization may cause a decline in the morale of the civil servants and reduce their efficiency and effectiveness. Faulty recruitment and politicization may create a vicious cycle: because of politicization fewer interested, meritorious candidates enter the civil service; with fewer meritorious new entrants, the scope for politicization increases; and this further deters the most able candidates from entering the civil service. Eventually this process could corrupt the entire administration.

Recruitment and politicization are the two important challenges of public administration explored in this paper. To explore these problems we conducted qualitative, interview-based primary research. We interviewed 5 members of the Civil Service of Pakistan<sup>1</sup>, 15 mid-level and 20 fresh BCS officers and 50 recent graduates of public and private universities. For the purpose of the study, we consider mid-level civil servants as those who have been in the civil service for more than 5 years and hold a rank no higher than deputy secretary. Fresh civil servants are defined as those with not more than 5 years experience.

This paper has two parts. The first part contains an overview of the public administration system of Bangladesh: its structure; an evaluation of the citizen-oriented service delivery system and innovations that have been “allowed”; the present recruitment procedure; and the extent and impact of politicization. The second part presents the analysis of our primary research data and findings.

## **I The Bangladesh Civil Service: Structure, Reforms and Challenges**

### **The Structure of Bangladesh Civil Service**

The government of Bangladesh has a two-tier administrative system. The upper tier is the central secretariat at the national level consisting of the ministries and divisions to provide policies and to perform clearinghouse functions. The other tier consists of ‘line’ departments/directorates attached to the ministries and divisions that are mainly responsible for general administration, service delivery to citizens and implementation of various government development programs at the sub-national level. (Ahmed, 2002: 327).

At present, the Bangladesh civil service has more than one million civil servants in 37 ministries, 11 divisions, 254 departments and 173 statutory bodies (ADB, 2005). The internal organization structure of a ministry reflects a hierarchical order. A minister is in charge of a ministry and is normally the “political head” of that ministry. A ministry consists of at least one division. A secretary or, in his absence an additional secretary, is considered the “administrative head” of the ministry. He/she conducts and looks after the duties of a division, which includes routine operation, supervision of its staffing and organizational processes. He/she is also the adviser to the minister regarding policy and administrative issues. A division can further be divided into wings. A joint secretary is the head of a wing and has the power to submit cases directly to the minister for decisions. In practice, such cases are first submitted to the secretary/additional secretary for his consideration before being placed before the minister. A wing is composed of branches. The head of a wing—a joint secretary—supervises the activities of the branches within his wing. Each branch is under the charge of a deputy secretary. Below the branch is the section. Headed by an assistant secretary, it is the basic working unit of a division. An assistant secretary disposes all

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<sup>1</sup> A civil servant’s batch—the year one enters the civil service—is central to his or her professional identity. Bangladeshi civil servants who entered the civil service prior to 1971 were recruited and trained in the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP). The CSP was unapologetically elitist and the new Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) was less selective and less elitist. Although serving in the Bangladesh Civil Service, these CSP-trained officers emphasize this distinction by exhibiting their CSP pedigree.

cases based on clear precedents. Below the level of assistant secretary, there are a considerable number of office personnel (Zafarullah, 1998: 83-87).

Departments are also attached to each ministry/division. The departments determine the blueprint for implementing various decisions taken by the ministry/division by providing technical information and advice. Who heads these departments or directorates depends on their importance. In some cases, an officer enjoying the pay grades and benefits of a secretary heads a department while on the other cases it is headed by an official enjoying the pay grade and benefits of a deputy secretary, joint secretary or an additional secretary (Ahmed, 2002: 329).

There are four classes in Bangladesh civil service. Class I and part of class II officers are treated as “gazetted” officers; the rest are considered as “non-gazetted” officers (Ahmed, 2002: 334). The number of Class 1 officers is about 40,000. Of them 70% are recruited into 29 cadres; the rest do not belong to a particular cadre but work in functional areas. Recruitment is conducted by the Public Service Commission (PSC) as per requirement conveyed by the Ministry of Establishment, which is responsible for the personnel policy within the civil service and human resources function, particularly in the administrative cadre (DFID, 2004).

### **Citizen-Oriented Services**

The evaluation of citizen-oriented services depends both on the role and performance of the service providers—the public servants—and also on the satisfaction of service recipients—the citizens. The government provides a variety of services and its service portfolio has changed with development. With rapid nationalization after independence, Bangladesh adopted an interventionist state-centered model of development. Although the government began to shift from that model after 1975, it continued to exercise considerable control over the major socio-economic sectors—education, health, transport, communication, etc. During the early 1990s, the government shifted from a state-centered to a more market-led approach. Under constant pressure from development partners, the government is trying to emulate business ethics such as effectiveness, decentralization, competition, efficiency, value-for-money, and partnership in public services.

Based on the principle of consumer or user rights, citizens are now supposed to be treated as customers. The government, instead of playing an interventionist role in various sectors, is advised to redefine its role and to transform itself into a catalyst of private investors and business institutions (Haque, 2001: 99-103). However, being one of the poorest countries of the world and with a malfunctioning market, the government still has to play an important role in various sectors. In the energy sector, the government provides its service through Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB), Rural Electricity Board (REB), and Petrobangla. For transportation there is Bangladesh Road and Transport Corporation (BRTC); for Telecommunication sector it is Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board (BTTB); and for health sector, the government renders service through its local government bodies, City Corporations and Municipalities (DFID, 2004). In recent years, the government has undergone many restructuring programs to increase the ability, efficiency and quality of the service and to downsize these agencies.



Despite these reform efforts the citizen's perception of the public servants and the quality of the service they provide is negative. Various surveys indicate that citizens consider the public service as "over centralized, unaccountable, inefficient, overpaid, coercive, unethical, and rent seeking" (Zafarullah, 1997). The country's bureaucratic efficiency is rated at 4.7 on a 0 to 10 scale (10=best) (Mukherjee et al., 2001). Individual encounters with officials brought "unnecessary harassment, procrastination in deciding simple problems, discourteous and arrogant behavior, keeping customers waiting for hours before attending to their needs, frequent absence from office, not maintaining appointments, ignoring pleas for reconsideration of a problem, unwilling to correct mistakes, and making unabashed approaches for pecuniary benefits" (Zafarullah, 1997).

According to the World Bank, on an ascending five point scale, the level of public satisfaction with health care is 3.1 for the public health system (3.8 for private health care); 3.5 for government schools (3.8 for private schools). In urban areas, 60% of people are dissatisfied with electricity supplies whereas in rural areas dissatisfaction is 40%. In the case of the telecommunication system, the rate of faults per 100 telephone lines per month is about 49 (World Bank, 1996). Corruption is a part of service delivery by the public sector. A Transparency International survey finds that the police sector is the most corrupt: 97% of households completely or generally agree that it is just about impossible to get help from the police without influence or bribe. For getting an electricity connection, 33% households had to pay bribe. For getting their children in school, 74% households had to use "extra-regular" methods (Mukherjee et al., 2001).

From the above statistics, it is evident that, in general, people are dissatisfied with the quality of the service they receive and the performance of the public servants rendering these services is subject of much criticism. Undoubtedly, the government will undertake more reforms to downsize, restructure and increase the efficiency of public servants. The government faces a competitive market in which citizens are more conscious about their rights. The major challenge for the government will be to cope up with this situation. It will be interesting to see how the government will face the constant pressure imposed by its development partners and, at the same time, ensure access to resources for the poorest of the poor.

So far, the studies conducted in this context focus only on the perception of citizens about public servants and the quality of services they are providing. No study has been done to measure the level of efficiency of the service providers or the expectations of the citizens: What does citizen-oriented service mean to citizens? What do they expect from the government and what are their expectations from the public servants? At present, citizens in many cases are paying bribes but they are likely to be willing to pay the same sum as a service fee if the government were to improve the quality of services or if service provision were outsourced to private vendors. All these issues deserve further systematic investigation.

### **Innovation in the Bangladesh Civil Service**

Bureaucracy in Bangladesh is generally considered as a closed system, which tries to resist change. Every administrative reform committee has tried to introduce substantive reforms and suggested innovations. For example, the last administrative

reform committee, the Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC), proposed the preparation of performance standards and a citizen's charter for three ministries and five important organizations; the constitution of three clusters of closely related ministries—general, economic and socio-political infrastructure; and the creation of three public service commissions—one for general services, another for technical services and a third for education services. It is to be noted that none of these recommendations has been implemented (Report of Public Administration Reform Commission, 2000). However, some innovations in public administration have been successfully implemented recently.

### One Stop Utility Bill Payment System

The PARC proposed allowing the payment of all public utility bills at one place at a one time instead of several payments at different times and places. In 2003, the government introduced the "One Stop Utility Bill Payment System" to remove the hassle, waste of time and harassment of subscribers. Normally subscribers had to pay bills for four utility services—telephone, power, gas and water—to separate banks, running between branches and waiting in long queues for hours. Under the present system, a subscriber can pay all utility service bills at one bank (The Daily Star, September 13, 2003).

### Introduction of e-Governance:

PARC recommended introducing e-governance. The activities of various ministries have already been computerized. A Ministry of Science and Technology was created. Websites containing important information for several ministries were launched. Ministry of Finance developed software for budget planning, sensitivity and impact analysis. Ministry of Communication created a database containing information about contractors and tenders. It also created a project monitoring system for tracking project progress. The achievement of Bangladesh Planning Commission, in this case, is noteworthy. It has a file sharing system through a Local Area Network (LAN), the capability for video-conferencing, and it maintains a digital library. It has also created software for interfacing between development and revenue budgets (Chowdhury and Taifur, 2003: 5).

### The Reform Experience of LGED

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) adopted a participatory approach in designing its local public works projects. In order to determine the location of rural road works and to establish the local markets, the LGED actively solicits the input of local groups. It turns out that in many cases the LGED engineers are persuaded to change plans and priorities based on local consultations (Mukherjee et al., 2001). A development partner proposed this participatory approach.

### **Administrative Reform Efforts**

As noted in the introduction, Bangladesh inherited an archaic and colonial administrative structure. The performance of the bureaucracy has never been beyond question (Khan and Zafarullah, 1985: 45-46). To meet the demands of a changing society, government tried to reform the administrative system. Successive

governments appointed as many as fifteen administrative reform commissions and committees. Each tried to change the administrative system to make it more dynamic, efficient and representative. Two of them, Administrative and Services and Reorganization Commission (ASRC) and Committee for Administrative Reform and Reorganization (CARR) went beyond “the domain of the traditional administrative system and pleaded for democratization of administration and devolution of power to elected local governments”. However, most of the recommendations of the reform committees were never implemented; in a few cases, the recommendations were implemented in a modified form (Ahmed, 2002: 336-37).

The literature on administrative reform suggests that the reform efforts are unsuccessful mainly because of the lack of commitment of the government and the strong resistance posed by civil servants. Most of these reform efforts tried to provide technical solutions and neglected the socio-political dimensions (World Bank, 2002). Nonetheless, the recommendations made by the Pay and Services Commission in 1977 brought some significant changes in the civil service system. For example, it led to the creation of 28 class I services under 14 main cadres in 1981 and constitution of an apex service, the Senior Services Pool, which was abolished in 1989.

The reform efforts by the Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) are clearly influenced by the New Public Management movement. PARC provided some innovative ideas, submitting 70 short-term and 37 long-term recommendations. Considering citizens as customers, the commission urged, among other things, the improvement of public service delivery, reform and downsizing of the civil service, taking measures to combat corruption, among others (GoB, 2000). However, only a few of these recommendations have been implemented so far and in reality things stand more or less where they started.

On the poverty reduction front, the government considers good governance as an important prerequisite. In 2005, Bangladesh prepared its own poverty reduction strategy paper [PRSP], called, “Bangladesh, Unlocking the Future, National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction”. Good governance, including “improving implementation capacity, promoting local governance, tackling corruption, enhancing access to justice for the poor, and improving sectoral governance”, has been deemed as one of the PRSP’s “policy priorities.” Due importance is also given to improving service delivery and enhancing implementation capacity.

Implementation has proved to be the bane of policy and programme initiatives on poverty reduction. A sharper engagement with implementation challenges is a critical necessity for accelerated poverty reduction. Four challenges merit priority attention: freeing the annual development programme (ADP) from the consistent burden of under-completed and underfunded projects; addressing the “incentives and motivation” issue pertaining to the civil service; a mind-set change to ensure a focus on the “little decisions” as much as on the “big decisions”; and, better information flows (PRSP, 2005: xviii).

None of these efforts is possible without an efficient, able, energetic, dynamic and effective administrative apparatus capable of operationalising and implementing the necessary reforms. M. Mahbubur Rahman Morshed makes an interesting comment about administrative reform efforts in Bangladesh.

[I]t is an irony that only bureaucrats—whether present or former—were included as chairmen and members in all the commissions and committees which were constituted by the government from time to time for examining, evaluating and improving public administration who used those commissions and committees only to safeguard their own interest. (Morshed, 1997: 130)

This, in fact, is the main reason for the lack of innovative ideas in the administrative system of Bangladesh. Bureaucrats, in general, are reluctant to change. A review of the literature suggests that, so far, they have succeeded either to resist any reform agenda or to create impediments in implementing it. Resistance has two phases. First, power and authority to make the reform successful is concentrated in the hands of bureaucrats and, second, after taking control, they adopt a non-cooperative or a go-slow approach. A study conducted by Monem on the privatization experience of the country provides a classic example. From the beginning of the privatization experience, “successive regimes placed enormous responsibility and authority for privatizing enterprises in the hands of a group of senior bureaucrats” (Monem, 2006: 114). A number of bureaucrats supported the privatization policy but their main interest was “to get a share of the pie.” Public corporation bureaucrats always resist privatization, as there is every possibility of losing power and authority. By maintaining strong connections with the ministerial bureaucrats, who could not get a share of the pie, the impediment is created. The impediment is manifest by “non-co-operation or slow official actions on privatization affairs” (*Ibid.*: 123).

Reforms that threaten the status of the civil service face even more resistance. For example, the Rules of Business followed in the civil service of Bangladesh was initiated in 1975. Though it has been revised, the bureaucracy has so far been successful in resisting any effort that can pose a threat to its centralized character (Siddiqui, 2006: 118-19). The same response has met the decentralization agendas of various governments. Whatever the method used, the bureaucracy has successfully created impediments to ensuring people’s participation (Morshed, 1997: 166-68).

What, then, explains the successful implementation of the “one stop” payment system, e-governance and LGED? First of all, the “one stop” payment system and e-governance were not a threat to the elitist and authoritative nature of the civil servants. Second, in case of LGED, people’s participation was ensured, as the International Development Agency monitored the entire project. Therefore, implementation of innovative ideas is possible if there is a pressure from the development partners. The World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and other development institutions are making comments and providing concrete suggestions for public sector reform in Bangladesh. The government is feeling the pressure and so are the civil servants. It will be interesting to observe how the civil service copes with these demands for reform.

## **Recruitment**

States that endured the colonial experience exhibit similar social class structures and have bureaucracies that reflect this class structure. During colonial times, the bureaucracy was simply an apparatus of the colonial lords. For their own purposes, the colonial powers placed special emphasis on making the bureaucracy an elite and

organized force totally alienated from the society. At independence, the bureaucracy remained a strong and highly developed state apparatus (Alavi, 1972: 59-62).

In the British colonial period, access to civil service was limited to young university graduates belonging to the rich upper class. This pattern continued during the Pakistani period. After liberation, the Bangladesh constitution established that equal opportunity for all citizens should be the guiding principle in public service recruitment. Based on the constitutional provisions, the government also made special arrangements—a quota system—to create special opportunities for disadvantaged groups. However, no system was developed to regulate the induction of personnel at the base level of the higher civil service until 1977: it was regulated by *ad hoc* arrangements. In 1977 and 1979, the Public Service Commission, the constitutional body, conducted two superior post examinations to recruit candidates through open competition. As per recommendation of Pay and Services Commission, 1977, 14 main cadres (later increased to 29) were created. The first Bangladesh civil service examination was held in 1982 following the Bangladesh Civil Service (Recruitment) rules, 1981 (Zafarullah, 1988: 130-33).

According to the current recruitment policy, there are three means of recruitment: direct recruitment—open competitive examinations; promotion and transfer; and direct lateral recruitment (Report of Bangladesh Public Service Commission, 2004:12). Class I Officers (the key decision makers and roughly 8% of all civil servants) are recruited directly by the PSC through an open competitive examination into 29 cadres and other government services. The Ministry of Establishment gathers staffing requirements from ministries and government bodies to determine the number of new officers to be recruited. It then advises the PSC to conduct the competitive examination and finalise the list of potential recruits. Finally, the Ministry of Establishment appoints officers from the list supplied by the PSC.

Recruitment follows the Bangladesh Civil Service Recruitment Rules of 1981. While Bangladesh largely follows a closed entry system, there is a provision for 10% “lateral” entry into the civil service to more senior grades from outside the service. In addition, the PSC is required to reserves appointment of Class I posts according to the following quotas:

- 30% reserved for freedom fighters or the children of freedom fighters
- 10% reserved for women
- 5% reserved for tribal groups
- 10% reserved for different districts (based on district population density)

This quota system leaves only 45 percent of the posts for recruitment to be filled following a merit-based open competitive system. The current quotas were introduced in March 1997 (DFID, 2004). Previously, the 30-percent reserved quota was for freedom fighters only; it did not include their children. Since 1987 the PSC has recommended modifying the quota system (Ali, 2004:125). The Public Administration Reform Commission of 2000 also proposed gradual abolishment of this system, and development partners like World Bank and ADB concur. The government recently decided that in case of 30-percent reservation for the children of freedom fighters, if suitable candidates are not found, the posts could be filled by

recruitment through merit (Report of Bangladesh Public Service Commission, 2004:13-14).

## **Recruitment Examination System**

When the open competitive examination for BCS recruitment started in 1982, each candidate had to sit for an exam of 1600 marks total. In 1984, the total marks were reduced to 900. However, in 1985, the Public Service Commission (PSC) decided to increase the total marks again. Since then, each candidate had to participate in an exam of 1000 marks: 500 marks for compulsory subjects, 300 marks for optional subjects and 200 marks for viva voce test. The five compulsory subjects were Bangla, English, Bangladesh Affairs, International Affairs and General Mathematics and Science with 100 marks for each. A candidate selected three exams from 64 optional subjects with 100 marks each. The marks distribution for technical and functional cadres had no optional subject exams: instead, 300 marks were based on the candidate's academic attainments (Public Service Commission Report, 2004:17).

In 1998, the PSC initiated a reform of the BCS written examination system to match better contemporary needs. In 2004, the PSC decided to introduce the new BCS examination in 2006 with the 27<sup>th</sup> BCS exam. Now all candidates sit for 900 marks of written examinations in five subjects and 100 marks viva voce. The distribution of marks is as follows: 200 for Bangla, 200 for English, 200 for Bangladesh Affairs, 100 for International Affairs, 100 for General Science and Technology, 100 for Mathematics and IQ, and 100 for viva voce. Professional and technical cadres have the following distribution of marks: 100 for Bangla, 200 for English, 200 for Bangladesh Affairs, 100 for International Affairs, 100 for Mathematics and IQ, 200 for academic results and 100 for viva voce. (The Daily Star, August 11, 2004).

Although the process of direct recruitment is conducted by the PSC, all appointments to the senior civil service (deputy secretary and above) are made by the Prime Minister upon the advice of the Superior Selection Board which is comprised of the Principal Secretary, the Cabinet Secretary, the Secretary of Law Ministry, the Secretary of Home Ministry, and the Secretary of Establishment Ministry (DFID, 2004).

## **Problems in the Recruitment System**

In case of direct recruitment, the literature suggests that the examination system, even the modified one, is sufficient to bring meritorious personnel into the public service. It does not test for creative thinking and analytical ability. Studies show that the civil service examination is not as tough and competitive as it was during the British or Pakistani periods. The BSC exam has become so easy that most candidates memorize study guides, write the answers mechanically and pass. The question papers prepared for the BCS exam are not rich enough to identify deserving candidates for class I positions.

Serious allegations such as the leakage of question papers have been made against the Public Service Commission (PSC). The PSC had to cancel the 24th BCS preliminary test due to the alleged leakage of question papers (The Daily Star, August 11, 2003).

The PSC has not yet to solve this problem or perception, as allegations of leakage continue to emerge at every preliminary and written test. The persistent concern about leakage as well as politicization damages the credibility of the public service examination process and is causing meritorious students to reconsider pursuing public sector careers.

If this problem continues, civil service jobs may lose their prestige. Because of loopholes in recruitment procedures, a large number of incompetent candidates have entered the civil service and the outcome has been embarrassing for the country. The country director of the Department for International Development (DFID), David Wood at a press briefing during a two-day long conference titled “Asia-2015: Promoting Growth, Ending Poverty” questioned the capability of Bangladesh civil servants in implementing foreign aid projects (The Daily Star, July 17, 2006). A senior PSC member confessed that the performance of the civil service is sometimes embarrassing for the government as some civil servants lack basic command of English language and communication skills (The Financial Express, October 29, 2005). The increase in contractual recruitment in the civil service may also reflect the competency problem: the government often has no alternative but to contract because of the insufficient number of skilled public servants.

The problem in the recruitment process is two-fold. The first is structural and includes the lengthy procedure and the inadequate salary structure. The second is political and corruption-related; this includes leakage of question papers and political consideration on the part of the political parties in recruitment. Neither problem is too difficult or complex to solve. Donors are willing to fund reform projects because development assistance is more likely to succeed if there is an effective administrative apparatus. This is why development partners often emphasize capacity building of civil servants. With this in mind, Management At The Top (MATT) has been introduced as training policy with the assistance of DFID. Some 2,000 civil servants at the level of senior assistant secretary and above are to receive intensive training under this program, which will be an "important building block for incremental administrative reform" (The Financial Express, October 29, 2005).

### **Politicization of Bureaucracy**

The national government that came into power immediately after independence tried hard to reform the colonial bureaucracy. It openly showed its antipathy towards the elitist civil service of Pakistan and took measures to eliminate elitism and make the bureaucracy a dynamic organization. To reduce the power of the generalist civil servants, academicians were appointed to the highest posts of the civil service. This effort made the bureaucracy uncomfortable; the government later withdrew from the reform efforts, but the bureaucracy remained in a vulnerable position (Hakim, 1991:9-14). But within a few years, assassination of leaders, coups and counter-coups disturbed Bangladesh; this instability created an opportunity for the relatively bureaucracy to regain its previous status.

In 1972, Alavi commented that there was a chance that in the future Bangladesh might come under military rule and new bureaucratic-military oligarchy would then come into existence (Alavi, 1972: 80-81). This is exactly what happened after 1975. In spite of some efforts made by politicians, no viable, transparent or accountable

political institution developed and, in its absence, an alliance between the civil and military bureaucracies emerged. From 1975 to 1990 there was military rule, in various forms, in Bangladesh. The military authority needed the support of civil bureaucracy; and the civil bureaucracy strengthened its position in return for supporting the military regime. The civil bureaucracy's power continued to expand because its "organizational strength and managerial skills" were essential for supporting successive governments. Thus, the bureaucracy attained considerable autonomy.

When Bangladesh decided to embrace a democratic system in 1991, the bureaucracy found its autonomy challenged. It appeared that political patronage and favoritism threatened to erode the cohesiveness and unity of the civil service. Eventually, the bureaucracy found out a new strategy to overcome this "problem". It was done in two ways. First, after retirement, senior bureaucrats began "infiltrating the ranks of politicians". Second, the bureaucracy allowed itself to be politicized. The political parties did not prevent this, as the bureaucracy's support was necessary to run and manage the country. This gave rise to massive politicization and to an erosion of the traditional values of public service neutrality held by the bureaucracy. (Haque and Rahman, 2003: 404).

The politicization of bureaucracy is not unique to Bangladesh. For example, a debate about the politicization of bureaucracy emerged in the UK during the time of Margaret Thatcher when Sir John Hoskins stated that moderate politicization at the higher level of the bureaucracy would help the government to implement its policy more effectively (Ali, 2004:15-16). In one way or another, politicization is present in the administration of almost every developed country. It exists to allow the political leadership—those who are elected and the advisors they hire or appoint directly—to coordinate with the administrative leadership, senior career civil servants. Reorganizing ministries and transferring selected senior civil servants are political actions, but they can be justified or rationalized as enhancing efficiency and can be considered positive or allowable politicization. In this discussion we focus on the negative aspect of politicization. It exists when personnel management decisions like transfer, promotion, and contractual recruitment depend not on quality and efficiency but on the person's loyalty to a certain political party: the subversion of merit and seniority standards damages the civil service as an institution.

The democratic era in Bangladesh has witnessed massive politicization but it was not to gain efficiency and increase effectiveness. Rather, the primary emphasis was placed on recruiting "party men bureaucrats" irrespective of their qualifications. In first five years of democracy—1991 to 1996—the BNP ruled the country. Politicization appeared in various forms including the placement of party loyalists in important civil service positions. Also, the government tried to manipulate the recruitment process of the civil service by letting in candidates with links to student wing of the party (Zafarullah, 1997). On February 8, 1992, the government decided to promote as many as 654 officials, which created a lot of controversy (The Daily Shangbad, June 2, 2000). Further, from 1991 to 1996, the government issued orders of forced retirement of at least 51 civil servants; most of them were never shown any reason for this order (Karim, 1996: 39).

After coming to power in 1996, the Awami League continued the process of politicization. A number of senior civil servants, in 1996, were directly involved in a



movement to remove a democratically elected government. The Awami League, the party that came to power due to that movement decided to reward to those civil servants by including one of them in their ministry and by promoting the others (Haque and Rahman, 2003: 411-12). In 2001, the government decided to promote as many as 355 officials depriving many competent officials of promotion, as the government was not sure about their political loyalty—a violation of seniority (The daily Prothom Alo, January 14, 2001). Moreover, the amount of contractual recruitment increased significantly through 2000: 174 civil servants were recruited on contractual basis (The Daily Shangbad, August 8, 2000).

In 2001, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party formed the government and has since tried to maintain firm control over the bureaucracy by making it highly politicized. The government has created a new record by appointing 978 officials as “Officer on Special duty” (OSD) (The Daily Janakantha, May 21, 2006). Allegedly, promotion decisions are no longer being made according to seniority or merit; rather importance is given to party loyalty; this is causing a severe damage to the morale of the civil servants. Furthermore, the number of contractual appointments has also increased and most of these appointments, and extensions of contracts, are being made on the basis of political allegiance. It is alleged that most of the secretaries and additional secretaries getting contractual appointment, or extension of contracts, are inclined either toward BNP or Jamaat-e-Islami (The Daily Star, July 17, 2006).

It is reported that the government has initiated a new process of politicization. With the consent of Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), an unofficial cell was created to make sure that no civil servant who is or was sympathetic to Awami League is promoted (Khan, 2003: 402-03). The SSB (Superior Selection Board) is now dysfunctional. The decisions are made by the PMO and the SSB’s only duty is to approve the list supplied by the PMO (The Daily Janakantha, May 5, 2006). A study conducted by the World Bank demonstrated that politicians are indeed influencing the BCS recruitment process (Mukherjee et al., 2001).

The newspaper account below documents the pervasive politicization of the civil service. Promotion should be according to seniority. However, seniority is being circumvented for political purposes, thus ‘depriving’ civil servants of due promotion:

“On June 13, 2002, 170 were promoted to the post of Joint Secretary depriving 200. On February 10 & 16, 2003, 493 were promoted to the post of Deputy Secretary depriving 322. On August 27, 2003, 97 were promoted to the post of Additional Secretary depriving 104. On August 27, 2003, 49 were promoted to the post of Joint Secretary depriving 277. On June 15, 2004, 84 were promoted to the post of Joint Secretary depriving 78. On February 15, 2005, 18 were promoted to the post of Secretary depriving 5. On March 5, 2005, 61 were promoted to the post of depriving 31. On April 21, 2005, 327 were promoted to the post of Deputy Secretary depriving 50. On January 26, 2006, 378 Senior Assistant Secretaries were promoted to the post of Deputy Secretary depriving around 200 others. Interestingly enough, 39 Additional Secretaries were reported to have been promoted to the highest rank of Secretary. Seniority was alleged to have been violated in the cases of 14 civil servants and 30 civil servants were alleged to have been promoted to the highest rank of Secretary in only 3 years. As far as promotion is concerned, the current government has promoted 153 Deputy Secretaries to the post of Joint Secretary as lately as 13 July 2006 depriving around 100 eligible officers along with 5 Additional Secretaries promoted to the post of Secretary.”

Source: *Bangladesh Observer*, ‘Government’s Institution-Destruction Spree’, 22 July 2006.

This massive politicization has an adverse effect on the overall performance of the civil service. Since the return to democratic rule, the bureaucracy has redefined its role to defend its autonomy and character. An alliance has been created in which the bureaucrats let themselves be politicized. There are certain rules and regulations that govern the civil service of Bangladesh. One is The Government Servants (Conduct) Rules, 1979, which regulates the terms and conditions of service in the service of the Republic. The section 25 of this rule states:

- (1) No Government servant shall be a member of, or be otherwise associated with, any political party or, any organization affiliated to any political party, or shall take part, or assist, in any manner, in any political activity in Bangladesh or abroad;
- (2) No Government servant shall permit any person dependent on him for maintenance or under his care or control to take part in or in anyway assist, any movement or activity which is, or tends directly or indirectly to be subversive of Government as by law established in Bangladesh.
- (3) No Government servant shall canvass or otherwise interfere or use his influence in connection with or take part in any election to a legislative body, whether in Bangladesh or elsewhere: Provided that a Government servant who is qualified to vote at such election may exercise his right to vote; but if he does so, he shall give no indication of the manner in which he proposes to vote or has voted (The Government Servants (Conduct) Rules, 1979).

Many civil servants, as well as the government, have started to ignore these rules. A number of civil servants are directly participating in political activities by seeking nomination to participate in the upcoming (2007) elections. For instance, a civil servant appointed on contractual basis after his retirement, has been involved in active politics and is projecting himself as a candidate of the ruling party. This constitutes an offence under the service rule. It has been noted, that after having obtained assurances, he will be given an election ticket from the BNP; the person in question started taking up development projects in a constituency and also started an election campaign showing total disregard to the discipline of the Civil Service (The Bangladesh Observer, May 24, 2006). Another allegation has been made against a divisional special judge pointing out that while on the job, he “has been participating in many public meetings of the ruling party BNP” introducing himself as a BNP candidate for Member of Parliament (MP) in the next election (The Bangladesh Observer, February 14, 2006). These illustrate just a few instances of a broader pattern: the problem of negative politicization has become very common in last fifteen years.

## **II Perception of Bangladesh Civil Service: Analysis of Primary Data**

The conventional view is that the Bangladesh civil service attracts the country’s bright meritorious students and cultivates an elitism that makes civil servants apathetic to the needs of citizens, especially poor. Our review of the existing literature indicates that the conventional wisdom no longer fits the facts: the civil service is losing its appeal as the best career choice for many able candidates. The two major problems discussed in the first part of the paper—defective recruitment and politicization—have contributed to the declining status and appeal of civil service careers.

Our primary research attempts to understand the impact of faulty recruitment procedures and rapid politicization on the status of civil service in general. It also explores the competition between public and private sector jobs. The research questions that we have examined are: Are bright recent graduates from public and private universities still interested in joining the civil service? If not, what are the reasons? If they still want to join the civil service, what factors make the civil service an attractive career option? What do current civil servants and prospective civil servants think about the question pattern of BCS recruitment exams? Is the recruitment process sufficient to select the best candidates? Are the status and power of the civil servants declining? What do civil servants and prospective candidates think about politicization of the bureaucracy? Do civil servants still play the dominant role in designing and implementing policies or, have other actors or forces displaced it?

Our survey instrument is a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of both open-ended and close-ended questions. While our primary focus is on the perceptions of prospective candidates, we also examine whether entry-level and mid-level civil servants share similar perceptions. This part of the paper analyses the qualitative data obtained through interviews with mid-level and entry-level civil servants and potential BCS recruits.

**Table 1: Demographic Data**

Respondents	Age Range				Sex		Total
	20-25	26-30	31-35	35+	Male	Female	
Prospective Candidates	28 (56%)	21 (42%)	1 (2%)		27 (54%)	23 (46%)	50
Entry-level Civil servants		8 (40%)	12 (60%)		16 (80%)	4 (20%)	20
Mid-level Civil Servants			2 (13%)	13 (87%)	13 (87%)	2 (13%)	15
Total and Percentage	28 (33%)	29 (34%)	15 (18%)	13 (15%)	56 (66%)	29 (34%)	85 (100%)

Table one reports the demographic characteristics of our interviewees. Almost all of our potential BCS candidates are below 30 years of age. The entry-level officers—those with less than five years of service—are no older than 35 years of age and mid-level civil servants—those with five or more years of service—are mostly older than 35 years of age. We did not consciously try to keep an equal male-female ratio when selecting our interviewees. Given the time constraints and lack of availability of the civil servants to interview, we followed a snowball method in interviewing willing and available officers. Nevertheless, in the end we found that we have more than 80 percent male respondents among the serving civil servants. This reflects that fact that the representation of women in civil service of Bangladesh is very low. According to UNDP's Human Development Report, 2005, the percentage of women administrators

and managers in Bangladesh is only 8.5. However, we tried to ensure better gender representation when interviewing potential candidates.

### Change in Society's Attitude Regarding Civil Service Jobs

Society is a complex system in which people from different classes and educational and occupational backgrounds interact. In a modern state, people from all walks of life interact with civil servants. Hence, to determine whether a change has occurred in society's perception about civil service is not so easy. However, we have tried to find out is what actually comes into a citizen's mind when they hear the word "civil service". Haque described bureaucracy in Bangladesh as an effective tool of governance (Haque, 1995). Do the citizens think so?

**Table 2: Change in Society's Attitude**

Respondents	Change in society's attitude towards civil service			Total
	Positive Change	Negative Change	No Change	
Prospective Candidates	5 (10%)	43 (86%)	2 (4%)	50
Entry-level Civil servants	5 (25%)	11 (55%)	4 (20%)	20
Mid-level Civil Servants	5 (33%)	7 (47%)	3 (20%)	15
Total and percentage	15 (18%)	61 (72%)	9 (11%)	85 (100%)

We have found that both the prospective and serving civil servants perceive that a change has occurred in society's attitude towards the civil service. The change is not positive. More importantly, we have discovered a high degree of dissatisfaction among the prospective candidates. They described the Bangladesh civil service as a corrupt, politicized and an over-centralized organization where getting things done is almost impossible. In 1997, Zafarullah pointed out that the civil service is over-centralized, unaccountable and inefficient. The prospective candidates agree with this statement. While being interviewed, one job seeker showed his disgust about civil service by describing it as "worthless". Widespread corruption seems to be "the new feather in the cap". Civil service to prospective candidates is "absolutely corrupt and politicized."

Most of the entry-level civil servants agree with this view. They agree that people now "show less respect to the civil servants". Nonetheless, some of them actually think the other way. One of them commented, "Well, it is the digital age. People get more information and they are more conscious. Their consciousness and the pressure of globalization have actually forced the civil service to be more citizen-oriented." They opined that civil service no longer poses an "elitist" character and thus people can rely on them more.

However, the mid-level civil servants' opinion differs on this issue as one-third of them believes that society's attitude has been changed positively towards civil service. This supports the idea that the civil service of Bangladesh is more or less a closed system as slightly more than half of the mid-level officers perceive either that the change has been positive or that this has been no change.

### **What is the most Powerful Group in Society?**

Because of the colonial heritage, Bangladeshis conventionally believe that civil servants are very powerful. During the British colonial period, access to civil service was limited to brilliant university graduates belonging to the rich upper class. The pattern did not change much during the Pakistani era. However, we found that most of our respondents do not perceive a positive change in society's attitude towards civil service, the next question that we asked was: "Who do you think of as the most powerful group in society?"

**Table 3: the most Powerful Group in Society**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Politicians</b>	<b>Bureaucrats</b>	<b>Both Politicians and bureaucrats</b>	<b>A growing nexus between politicians and Businessmen</b>	<b>Total</b>
Prospective Candidates	27 (54%)	17 (34%)	5 (10%)	1 (2%)	50
Entry-level Civil servants	10 (50%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	7 (35%)	20
Mid-level Civil Servants	8 (53%)	3 (20%)	1 (7%)	3 (20%)	15
Total and percentage	45 (53%)	22 (26%)	7 (8%)	11 (13%)	85 (100%)

We have found out that civil servants as well as potential civil servants do not think that bureaucrats are most powerful group in society. Politicians are now considered as the most powerful group in the society; clearly, civil servants are perceived to be losing their influence in political and administrative processes. In an interview, one retired civil servant (CSP) said, "Well, the truth is that the present day civil servants are not courageous enough to take a stand. For instance, during my time as the secretary for the Ministry of Health, I had to take certain measures that made the politicians quite unhappy. They complained to the Prime Minister and at the end of the day I came out being a successful civil servant." The mid-level and entry-level civil servants do not deny that their status is declining. However, one entry-level civil servant made an interesting comment: "Yes, that is true. A lot of heroic stories are heard about our predecessors but the fact is they did not have to work under so much political pressure." To some mid-level civil servants, this situation is quite natural as the form of government is democratic. "Let's face it," one of them commented, "it is a democracy and they (politicians) are people's representative."

An interesting point to note here is though the prospective candidates earlier opined that the society's attitude is negative about civil service, a good number of them (34%) still considers civil servants as the most powerful group. Another important

issue that our research has pointed out is that a new group is emerging—a nexus is growing between the politicians and businessmen and in the near future they may become the most important actors in determining policy decisions. To a number of entry-level civil servants, this will happen eventually. “They (businessmen) have the money and they (politicians) have the power, when these two things match, anything can happen.” However, to our respondents politicians are the most powerful group and they have a certain extent of control even to determine who will join the civil service.

### Perception of Recruitment Process

After Bangladesh decided to embrace a democratic system in 1991, political leaders started taking control over the bureaucracy (Haque et al., 2003). The situation took an important turn after the “*Janatar Mancha*” movement initiated by the civil servants in 1996. Since then, the political party in power tried to prevent repetitions of such movements. The immediate impact was upon the recruitment process. Thus, we asked the respondents what they think about the recruitment process of Bangladesh Civil Service.

**Table 4: Perception about Recruitment Process**

Respondents	Do You Think That The Present Recruitment Process may be corrupt?				Total
	Yes	No	Negligible	No Comments	
Prospective Candidates	41 (82%)	7 (14%)	2 (4%)	0	50
Entry-level Civil servants	15 (75%)	3 (15%)	2 (10%)	0	20
Mid-level Civil Servants	5 (33%)	6 (40%)	3 (20%)	1 (7%)	15
Total and percentage	61 (72%)	16 (19%)	7 (8%)	1 (1%)	85 (100%)

For the purpose of this study, recruitment process means entire procedures of civil service examinations except the question pattern. To both prospective candidates and entry-level civil servants, the recruitment process is highly corrupt. While interviewed, a prospective candidate admitted that he had actually bribed a viva board member to make sure that he could get the job. Leakage of question papers has become common and one prospective candidate said, “I actually got a suggestion before the preliminary test consisting of only 90 questions. When I saw the question paper, I realized about 95% of them had come from that so-called suggestion.” While the current environment is producing a negative perception, the mid-level civil servants interviewed have yet to realize this. Although one third of them agreed that the recruitment process is corrupt, for 60% of them the process is either quite all right or the scope of corruption is negligible.

Political pressure is undoubtedly one of the reasons behind this extensive negative perception regarding civil service recruitment. We find that roughly half of the civil servants interviewed identify the appointment and conduct of the PSC chair and PSC members as responsible for the corruption of recruitment. One retired CSP officer commented, “as long as the senior bureaucrats headed the PSC, the recruitment process was fair. They knew what they were doing. But, you tell me how a university professor from a pure science discipline understands who we need to recruit for civil service.” More over, in our discussion with mid-level and entry-level officers, we found that, to them, the appointment of the chairperson and the members of the Public Service Commission based on their political loyalty is the seed of all misdeeds. They do not play an adequate role and sometimes they join the party in power by infiltrating corruption using their influence. “They are greedy,” one of the entry-level civil servants remarked, “Besides, as they are politically appointed they know they can get away with that.” However, prospective candidates do not think this is the main problem. In fact, many of them do not know much about what the PSC is and have no clear idea what the PSC does.

**Table 5: Sources of Corruption**

Respondents	Reasons behind Corruption in Civil Service Recruitment*			
	Political Pressure	Nature of Appointment & Role Played by PSC Members	No Idea	Others
Prospective Candidates	45 (90%)	5 (10%)	0	0
Entry-level Civil servants	7 (35%)	12 (60%)	5 (25%)	5 (25%)
Mid-level Civil Servants	3 (20%)	5 (33%)	6 (40%)	4 (27%)
Total and Percentage	55 (65%)	22 (26%)	11 (13%)	9 (11%)

(\*Multiple answers were allowed; thus percentages can sum to more than 100%)

### Perception of Question Pattern

A survey conducted by Habib Zafarullah in 1988 revealed that the performance of a major portion of the candidates in the recruitment examination is unsatisfactory as far as their intellect and knowledge are concerned. The structure of the examination, it seems, aims at obtaining university graduates, irrespective of the subject they study. The study concludes that the present structure and nature of the BCS exam tends to favor the “impetuous” and “shallow knowledged” (Zafarullah, 1988:133-35).

In our interviews, we found that the introduction of a new question pattern in written exams is one of the few success stories of the PSC in recent times. We have already discussed the present examination system and the changes that have been brought in question pattern. We asked respondents what they thought about this new question pattern.

**Table 6: Perception about Question Pattern**

Respondents	What Do You Think About New Question Pattern Introduced In BCS Exam?				Total
	Improved & Adequate	Improved but Not Entirely Adequate	Entirely Inadequate	No Idea	
Prospective Candidates	27 (54%)	0	19 (38%)	4 (8%)	50
Entry-level Civil servants	11 (55%)	3 (15%)	5 (25%)	1 (5%)	20
Mid-level Civil Servants	1 (7%)	3 (20%)	9 (60%)	2 (13%)	15
Total and Percentage	39 (46%)	6 (7%)	33 (39%)	7 (8%)	85 (100%)

The prospective candidates and the entry-level civil servants are quite happy about the recent change in question pattern. The mid-level civil servants still think that the question pattern is entirely inadequate; however, we found out that they made this comment without actually knowing about the change. Instead, their comments were based on their own examination experience. For instance, one of them said that to improve the question pattern, “there should be less marks in the viva voce test and provision of optional subject in the written test should be stopped.” In fact, PSC had already made both changes, but the mid-level officers were not aware of it.

### **What Motivates and what De-motivates Potential Candidates?**

Considering all these things, from negatives such as politicization and corrupt recruitment practices, to positives such as the new question pattern, we have tried to find the core factors that may de-motivate future candidates in joining the civil service. We find three core factors: inadequate salary, faulty exam procedure and existing bureaucratic culture.

We have found that there is a difference between the inside-the-job view and the outside-the job view. For prospective candidates the main de-motivating factor is the faulty exam procedure whereas according to mid and entry-level civil servants both inadequate salary and job environment play a vital role in discouraging one from sitting for the BSC exam.

It is likely that once inside the civil service the faulty exam procedure does not seem so significant. However, to the prospective candidates, it is an important de-motivating factor. It is striking though how evenly divided the responses are among the three factors. For civil servants, Exam ceases to matter, and their responses are relatively evenly divided between Salary (28 responses from 35 interviewees) and Job (25 response from 35 interviewees).



**Table 7: De-motivating factors**

Respondents	De-motivating factors in case of sitting for BCS exam*		
	Inadequate Salary	Faulty Exam Procedure	Job Environment
Prospective Candidates	20 (40%)	22 (44%)	18 (36%)
Entry-level Civil servants	16 (80%)	1 (5%)	16 (80%)
Mid-level Civil Servants	12 (80%)	1 (7%)	9 (60%)
Total and Percentage	48 (56%)	24 (28%)	43 (51%)

(\*Multiple answers were allowed; thus percentages can sum to more than 100%.)

Faulty exam procedure includes the lengthiness of the entire exam, the leakage of question pattern, politicization in case of recruitment, an unaccountable viva board, etc. One prospective candidate said, “When I was in the exam hall scanning through the question during the preliminary exam, I looked around and found that almost everybody had got the question earlier. It was so frustrating. Then I decided even if I passed the preliminary test, I would not sit for written test,” and, “well, I passed in the preliminary test and that is the end. I will never sit for BCS again.” On the other hand, another prospective candidate actually enjoyed the preliminary test and written exam. However, “the real horror started when I faced the viva board. All sort of political questions were asked and when they found out that my political view is different from theirs, I realized that that was end of journey for me. Later, I came to know that I was rather lucky. One of my friends was asked why she did not use scarf to cover her head and whether she knew the *Niyot* of prayers. That was too much for her. She got herself out of the room and now we both are private sector employees.” Almost all of them agreed that exam procedure is too lengthy. A few of the prospective candidates supported the present recruitment procedure. To them, “it is the most cost effective way to select the best.” An entry-level civil servant agreed with that, “It is the best the country can offer.”

The three categories of respondents agreed that inadequate salary benefit is a major obstacle in joining the civil service. They also found the job environment too rigid to allow anyone to do something creative. “Taking initiative and coming up with creative ideas is not well appreciated,” commented one entry-level civil servant.

A potentially positive finding is that despite of all its flaws, more than half of the bright meritorious students are still willing to sit for the BCS exam. They still consider civil service jobs as prestigious and attractive. “Whatever happens, civil service is civil service,” remarked one public university graduate. However, the private university students are not at all interested in joining the civil service. In fact, students coming from the private universities have little idea about the civil service of Bangladesh. Seventy percent of them admitted that they are not aware about the salary benefits provided by civil service and have no clear idea about the composition of the civil service or what it does.

**Table 8: Civil Service as Career Choice (Public versus Private University Graduates)**

Respondents	Will You Consider Sitting For BCS Exam?			Total
	Yes, I Will	May be I Will	No, I Will Not	
Prospective Candidates (Public University)	21 (52%)	8 (20%)	11 (28%)	40
Prospective Candidates (Private University)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	6 (60%)	10
Total and Percentage	23 (46%)	10 (20%)	17 (34%)	50 (100%)

Another dimension is rural versus urban background. For meritorious students from urban areas, especially from the capital city, a job in Bangladesh civil service is no longer a lucrative career choice. To them, private sector jobs and doing business have become more attractive. To students from the suburbs or rural areas, however, civil service jobs have not lost their attraction.

**Table 9: Civil Service as Career Choice (Urban versus Rural Background)**

Respondents	Will You Consider Sitting For BCS Exam?			Total
	Yes, I Will	May be I Will	No, I Will Not	
Prospective Candidates (Coming from urban Area)	8 (28%)	4 (14%)	17 (58%)	29
Prospective Candidates Coming from rural Area)	15 (71%)	6 (29%)	0	21

This new trend in career choice among job seekers may in the long run help the country in two ways. First, if the civil service becomes more representative of Bangladeshi demography (more officers coming from rural and suburban areas instead of big cities) it may help eliminate elitism that persists in the civil service. Eventually, the civil service may become dynamic and reliable and more connected to the pro-poor development agenda. Second, it may accelerate the bottom-up approach and the people's voice may be more likely to be heard by the bureaucracy.

Interestingly, though recent graduates willing to join the civil service have a positive outlook about civil service jobs, the opposite is not always true for the graduates who are reluctant to join the civil service. A good number of the latter possess a positive attitude about civil service as a career choice. Their reluctance centers on some institutional failures of the public sector, not on the relative attraction of the private sector. For example, if problems with the exam procedure were rectified (i.e., leakage of question paper, lengthy, politicized exam procedure), more than half of the

prospective candidates would consider civil service jobs as their first choice. Similarly, if civil service salary benefits were made equal to that of the private sector, then 60% of prospective candidates will sit for civil service jobs. According to one respondent, “If salary benefit is increased, I think everyone will go for civil service jobs.”

So far, we have found a mixed picture. The most important finding is that, despite of all these problems, meritorious, bright students are still attracted to civil service jobs. The basic question is: What can the civil service offer that may attract the best candidate on the job market? We found a number of factors and of them the most important is job security. As a number of prospective candidates with working experience in private sector pointed out, “Job security is the main thing; if certain things were changed we would definitely go for public sector.”

**Table 10: Motivating factors**

Respondents	Motivating factors for Joining Civil Service*					
	Job Security	Status/Power	Salary Benefit	Serving the nation	Desire/Suggestion of Family Members	No Idea About Civil Service/ No Comments
Prospective Candidates (Public University)	19 (48%)	6 (15%)	0	3 (8%)	0	12 (30%)
Prospective Candidates (Private University)	2 (20%)	4 (40%)	0	0	0	4 (40%)
Entry-level Civil servants	9 (45%)	11 (55%)	0	7 (35%)	0	0
Mid-level Civil Servants	5 (27%)	2 (14%)	0	0	6 (40%)	2 (14%)
Total and Percentage	35 (41%)	23 (27%)	0 (0%)	10 (12%)	6 (7%)	18 (21%)

(\*Multiple answers were allowed; thus percentages can sum to more than 100%.)

Job security has always been an important factor motivating people to join the civil service. Our data indicate that as a motivating factor its importance is actually increasing. Due to the “horror” stories of politicization or corruption, the status of the civil service is no longer the main determinant. Only 20% students think that at present the status that civil servants enjoy is sufficient to attract prospective candidates; Public university graduates have a more favorable evaluation of the status than private university graduates. An important point to consider is that the flourishing private sector may offer better salary and benefit package and innovative challenges, but it lacks job security. Many prospective employees prefer job security to challenge or competition.

The reason behind joining the civil service has also become more realistic or pragmatic. As society adopts an urban, capitalist structure, its impact is felt in various institutions, especially the oldest one, the family. Our research indicates that for mid-level officials, choice of a career largely depended on guidance from family members. The younger, newly appointed officials are more individualistic. Family plays a role but the basic reasons behind joining the civil service, in their case, are the social status and recognition that civil service can still provide. On the other hand, for the students who are likely to join the civil service, the main reason is the job security that they can enjoy while performing their duties. In fact, from mid-level through entry-level to the prospective applicants of civil service, job security is the only factor that has never lost its importance.

## **Conclusion**

Some politicization of the civil service is unavoidable and even desirable; but beyond this desirable level politicization can easily undermine the reputation and effectiveness of the administrative institutions of the state. The faulty civil service recruitment procedures and the degree of politicization described in this paper are evident to civil servants and university graduates considering careers in public administration. The primary research reported in this paper reveals that the status of the civil service has eroded and bright graduates are now less likely to pursue public service positions than in the past.

To function properly the government needs to maintain an able and efficient workforce. To do so the government must ensure that the civil service remains an attractive career choice. Our interviews reveal that the recruitment process and civil service salaries diminish the competitiveness of a public service career relative to employment in the private or NGO sectors. The Sixth National Pay Scale (NPC VI) provides an entry-level class I officer only Tk. 6800 a month (The daily Star, May 20, 2005). Private sector starting salaries for a similarly qualified individual (university graduate) fall in the Tk. 18000-25000 range. The maximum basic pay, according to NPC VI, is only Tk. 24000. So, the prospects for advancement, in terms of pay, are limited in the civil service. The public sector does offer more job security and more favorable pension benefits than the private sector, but these are not sufficient to close the current salary gap. Improving public salaries may not be particularly difficult. It is largely a budgetary matter; it does not pose a threat to the status quo.

The challenges are to reform the recruitment process, de-politicize the bureaucracy and ensure the civil service promotion system is not tainted. These reforms, if undertaken successfully, would place efficient and skilled personnel in the right positions and attract the best and brightest students to public service careers. There is a large difference between what is necessary and what can be achieved when it comes to the public administration and good governance in Bangladesh. We found in this paper that contemporary public administration is all about politics. Politicians and bureaucrats are the key actors in the management of bureaucracy. Both bureaucrats and politicians have their own interests to preserve.

The standard bi-lateral game between the government (political leadership) and the bureaucracy (civil service, administrative leadership) is becoming increasingly complicated. First, politicization of the bureaucracy blurs the formerly crisp

distinction between government and administration. Second, other actors have entered the game: the private sector, development partners, and civil society organizations. The private sector desires an efficient bureaucracy that will facilitate, or at least not impede, the development of predictable working environment. But the private sector has become integrated into the political elite: this is the often-noted nexus between business and politics. With a politicized bureaucracy well-connected businesses may be content with obtaining public services or approvals through political rather than administrative means, and may therefore not be overly concerned about reform. But less well-connected businesses may advocate more transparency and predictability. Development partners and civil society advocate civil service reforms and a dynamic, “non-procrastinated” bureaucracy. Development partners are particularly influential because they can advance or withhold financing as an incentive for reform.

With more players in the game, the game has changed. The government consists of the party in power and the bureaucracy. Both have their own interests to preserve, and often act as two different and opposed actors. With more players and pressures and increasing politicization politicians increasingly find bureaucrats as allies and together they resist the effective functioning of the government against the pressures of non-governmental actors. The non-governmental actors—development partners, private sector, civil society, and NGOs—each assert pressure on the government. The government tries to pursue its agenda and resist pressure while sustaining support. When the pressures are in alignment, or at least not in direct opposition, a reform initiative can be implemented. The one stop utility bill payment service is an example; but such examples are rare. More common is non-alignment and opposition: the government either terminations or neutralizes reform initiatives. The Anti-Corruption Commission is a neutralized reform. Development partners, civil society and the private sector advanced the idea. The major political parties and the bureaucracy resisted. In the end, the government did create an Anti-Corruption Commission, giving the formal appearance of reform; but the Commission was design with no effective enforcement capacity, thus the substance of the reform was neutralized.

Therefore to enact reforms, effective reforms, the interests of the major actors must be in alignment, otherwise reform will be prevented or neutralized. A challenge for the research community is to help devise reforms with incentives to ensure alignment and successful enactment. If the party in power has the wish, has the “will”, it can arrange for a fair recruitment system, which may again attract bright, meritorious students. If the party in power shows reluctance in bringing about the change, pressure may come from development partners or civil society. We are not saying that it will solve all the problems, but it can be a start. It can make the bureaucracy an efficient, innovative and dynamic one to respond to the needs of the society. We know from previous experiences that a capable bureaucracy can make things happen, can turn dreams into reality.

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