

# Generalist – Specialist Conflict in Public Service in Bangladesh : An Overview

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## **Introduction**

In common parlance a generalist is a jack of all trades, master of none. But in administration the term has a deeper connotation. Generalist, in administration, is a person who can think conceptually, capable of analyzing different aspects of a situation in relationship, conceive distant objectives as well as those close at hand, skilled in both implementation and formulation of policies<sup>1</sup>. Such an all-purpose generalist administrator was conceived to be an instrument in the administration of the British India for multifarious purposes such as maintaining law and order, collecting revenues and subserving the imperial interest and displaying pomp and panoply of the British imperial power in India. They were trained in away that inculcated a belief in their mind that they were rulers, not an administrator in proper sense. The generalist bureaucrats not only looked down upon the general public but also subordinated the specialists and technical experts to an exaggerated degree which were supposed to be their equal partner in administration. After partition of India in 1947 Pakistan continued with the same tradition with little soul searching

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which resulted in changes in nomenclature, and nothing else. The *brown sahibs* (CSP) were merely substituted for the white ones<sup>2</sup>. Bangladesh carried the legacy of untrammelled authority of the generalist bureaucrats over other segments of administration from British India through the neocolonial rule of Pakistan. But immediately after liberation of Bangladesh through a sanguinary war of independence the untrammelled authority of the heavenly born generalist civil servants came under lethal attack.

Not that during Pakistani rule (1947-71) any attempt was made to curb the unquestionable elitist position of the generalist bureaucrats the CSPs. Pakistan government even had hired foreign experts like Rowland Egger and Bernard Bladieux who suggested radical reforms like unification of all services into one, enhancement of the role of specialist in administration, common training programme for all civil servants and the abolition of system of reservation of key posts for the CSP officers. But their far reaching recommendations ended in fiasco because of sharp resistance from the top echelon of the administration occupied by the CSPs<sup>3</sup>. The early years of Pakistan badly suffered from the absence of mature political leadership due to the premature death of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan. Consequently, "its strength lay perhaps in the small bureaucracy (CSP) which consisted approximately one hundred competent and dedicated men"<sup>4</sup>. It was a colonial bureaucracy, still very much in the British style.

The omnipotent generalist civil service was created in India (ICS) in a situation in the nineteenth century when functional services were virtually non-existent. But contrasted with the twentieth century, now the demand of the day is the development of technocrats of various kinds like doctors, engineers, agriculturists, planners, economists, etc. for the development of a new nation which aims at social welfare of the people. Consequent upon independence of Bangladesh and increased development activities for rebuilding an war-ravaged economy the services of the specialists have become dire needs of the moment who can shoulder the burden of the situation. Hence the center of gravity

of Bangladesh civil service has to be shifted and new class of technocrats have to be placed in a position of proper status and with capacity to participate in decision making process in the upper echelons of administration.

With that aim in view the Government of Bangladesh since its inception has been trying to do away with the colonial legacy of the generalist domination and the reservation of key posts of administration for one particular class. This innocuous motive was reflected in the recommendations of Administrative and Service Reorganization Committee (ASRC) **1972** and the Pay and Service Commission P&SC resulted in the formation of the long cherished unified civil service structure of Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) and Senior Service Pool (SSP) with a view to establishing an egalitarian apex cadre of senior officers of proven quality drawing from all branches of the civil service on the basis of merit to be tested in an objective manner.

This paper is a modest attempt to reveal the present state of generalist, specialist position in the echelons of administration and to measure the extent of attainment which the major commissions aimed at.

### **Mujib Era**

The Government of Bangladesh under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (**Mujib**) realized the futility of continuing the age-old administrative system, the worth of which had passed long before. The government very soon after assumption of the helm of state authority appointed a high-powered reform body, ASRC **1972**, under the chairmanship of eminent political scientist and the Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University. Professor M.A. Chowdhury, with a comprehensive terms of reference, to restructure the civil service which can meet the demands of an independent welfare state.

The ASRC in course of its examination found that existing services

divided into too many distinct entities with artificial walls built around them with varying career prospects, lacking in professionalism, and too much class - and rank-oriented with very little opportunities to rise to the top who started their career in the lower ranks<sup>6</sup>. The Committee was influenced by the influence of Fulton Report (1966) in the U.K. and recommended.

A. Single classless grading structure covering all services into 10 grades in which there shall be an appropriate number of pay levels of skills and responsibilities and the correct grading for each post should be determined by an analysis of the job.<sup>7</sup>

The main theme of the ASRC recommendations was the abolition of the previous elitist concept of the civil service system. There would be no reservation of any post for any cadre, there would be adequate opportunity for the talented persons to quickly rise to the top from any level of service, provisions would be there for systematic re-exposure of senior officers serving the national headquarters or the field and towards the establishment of a living fellowship of officers with the common man.

The government of the day (Awami League) did not make any statement endorsing the unified service structure of the civil servant recommended by ASRC. The report, like those preceding it in the Pakistani days, was buried unceremoniously at the implementation stage. The total scrapping of the ASRC report may be attributed to staggering political leadership of the government and too much reliance on the generalist bureaucrats in the later part of the regime.

### **Zia Regime**

General Ziaur Rahman (Zia) after assuming state authority appointed a major administrative reform commission entitled Pay and Service Commission (P&SC) 1977 "to conduct a fresh inquiry into the

services and pay structure and suggest necessary reforms". The Commission held the view that the ingrained generalists approach to the shifting of government position and with pattern of uniform pay scales and promotions. The commission argued that a vested generalist class should not be created by reservation of key posts on the basis of single examination<sup>8</sup>.

The fundamental recommendations of the P&SC included amalgamation of all erstwhile services and the creation of an all-purpose civil service to include all functions within the traditional government sector, emphasis on the merit principle in recruitment and promotion, removal of existing barriers between the erstwhile CSP and other services through the introduction of equal pay and provision for equitable scope of advancement towards the top of the administrative hierarchy in the constitution of new apex cadre with talented, efficient, and experienced officers drawn from all functional cadres through appropriately designed tests for providing administrative leadership and high level coordination, the adoption of the cadre concept of the civil service structure for major functional areas in the government and the organization of cadre services at the top tier to constitute the new class of the civil service structure<sup>9</sup>.

The implementation of the recommendations of the formal constitution of the Unified Career Service with 14 functional cadres and 14 sub-cadres under one single service Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) with effect from September 1, 1980 and the Senior Service Pool (SSP) with effect from March 1, 1979.

### **Senior Service Pool (SSP)**

According to Senior Pool Order 1979, all members would ultimately fill posts of the Deputy Secretary. Joint Secretary, Additional Secretary except for (i) 10 per cent of the posts of Deputy Secretary which should be filled by promotion from among Section Officers belonging

to the erstwhile Secretarial Services. CSPs and EPCSs (ii) 50 per cent posts of the Deputy Secretary, Director, and Director General and above (other than the post of Secretary) in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and (iii) 5 per cent of the post of Deputy Secretary and above in the Ministry of Law. According to Section 4 of the Order all officers who have at any time before March 1, 1979 held the posts of Deputy Secretary in the Secretariat or the post of Director and Director General in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are to be considered automatically encadred a SSP officers from March 1, 1979. In addition, the SSP Order also provides that 5 per cent of the senior posts in the Attached Departments, and autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies, and up to 75 per cent of the post of Deputy commissioner in the districts would be filled by the SSP officers having training, qualifications, and experience appropriate for these posts.<sup>10</sup>

**The new civil service structure, according to the official statement** was designed to create a classless bureaucracy which ended the supremacy of one class over the other. It attempted to do away with the closed elitist service structure and to introduce open system of the specialists through the creation of SSP. For the members of the specialist service the creation of SSP was considered to be a virtual liberation from the bondage of the generalist bureaucracy.

Despite egalitarian face of the SSP, in the process of implementation it could not however, do anything more than establishing the elitist position of the generalist bureaucrats in different form. Government constituted two committees with members drawing exclusively from political elements to select members of the SSP without consulting the Public Service Commission foreshadowed a clear deviation from the existing system of appointment of promotion to senior posts. The very composition of these two committees cast grave doubt on their ability to function objectively. <sup>11</sup> As early as 1980, 520 out of 523 officials were automatically inducted in SSP with 15 years of service without having selection test by the Public Service Commission as

indicated in the SSP Order, 1979. They were all generalist bureaucrats. Only three specialists with average experience of 20 years could get into the SSP<sup>12</sup> In fact the automatic encadrement of the generalist officers in the SSP who held the post of Secretary, Additional Secretary and Deputy Secretary before March 1, 1979 left hardly few opportunities for other cadre members to be represented in the new scheme of SSP.<sup>13</sup> Virtually top administrative positions and strategic posts in the administration were monopolized by the generalist civil servants, particularly CSPs. from the early days of Pakistan.<sup>14</sup> The situation as created after the creation of SSP again registered the victory of the generalist over the socialist in the name of creating an apex cadre of senior and talented official. After nine years of its operation SSP was abolished in July, 1989 for creating wider promotion opportunities to senior posts of secretariat for all cadre officials.

### **Ershad Regime**

In order to do away with the anomalies caused by the operation of SSP the government of General Hussain Mohammad Ershad (Ershad) constituted a special committee under the chairmanship of Navy chief in 1985 to examine structural pattern of SSP. The President in principle accepted the recommendations of the special committee and constituted a cabinet sub-committee regarding higher appointments, promotion and structure of services under the convenership of Dr.M.A. Matin, the Deputy Prime Minister to devise the implementation mechanism of the recommendations with regard to representation to higher posts of the Secretariat from all cadres of BCS.

On detailed review of the Report of the Special Committee on the issue of inadequate promotion opportunities in the cadre services Matin Committee recommended that SSP be abolished and in those cadres where the present number of posts above senior (Modified National Scale 3, 4 and 5) amounts to less than 12 per cent of the total manpower, promotion facility should be made at least 12 per

cent by allotting the reserve quota of Joint Secretary and Deputy Secretary to these cadres.<sup>15</sup> On dissolution of the SSP, the posts, including reserves, of Joint Secretary (159 posts) and Deputy Secretary (377 posts) belonging to it may be distributed among all the cadres in accordance with their respective quotas.

A Further 60 per cent (75 Posts) and 65 per cent (245 posts) of Joint Secretary and Deputy Secretary respectively in the Secretariat, including reserve, may be allocated to the BCS (Administration) as their quota. Including all reserves, 10 per cent (16 posts) and 15 per cent (57 posts) respectively of the Secretarial posts.

The reservation of 60 per cent of Joint Secretary and 65 per cent posts of Deputy Secretary for BCS (Administration) in the Secretariat by *Matin* Committee created tremendous discontentment and simmering frustration among the specialist services SSP was based on seniority plus merit. The quota system under MCR threw seniority and merit to the winds. As a result Bangladesh Secretariat turned into a repository of BCS (Administration) cadres, the prevention of which was the basic objective of all committees/commissions that stand BCS (Administration) holds 37 posts of Secretary out of 49 and 28 posts of Additional Secretary out of 42 in the Bangladesh Secretariat.

### **Khaleda Zia Regime**

Following the fall of Ershad regime through mass movement BNP under the leadership of Khaleda Zia ascended to power in 1991 after winning the parliamentary elections and took certain measures to streamline the Secretariat administration and appease generalist-specialist tension. 28 cadre services constituted the BCS Coordination Committee (other than BCS Administration) presented a memorandum to the democratically elected Prime Minister in 1991 which put forward strong demands for uplifting the position of specialist services as against BCS generalist cadre.

In the memorandum they expressed the views that like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the functions of different ministries should be undertaken by the members of its own cadres. Only the posts of the Ministry of Establishment, Cabinet Division and the President/Prime Minister's Secretariat should be filled up by the members of all cadres in the interest of proper management of different Ministries.<sup>16</sup>

A glimpse of the demands put forward by BCS Coordination Committee to the present government are presented below :

to reject all the recommendations of the Matin Committee Report and action taken on the basis of that report.

Abolition of BCS (Administration) cadre and creation of BCS (Land) and BCS (Magistracy) and determination of the number of cadres at the field level on the basis of functions.

Provision has to be made to appoint members from all cadres in the posts of Secretary, Additional Secretary, Joint Secretary, and Deputy Secretary of Cabinet Division, Establishment Division and Prime Minister/President's Secretariat.

"Pay scale is the only determinant of status of the officials working under various cadre services" - the principle that has been declared accepted by the government has to be implemented in the real sense of the term. Accordingly, each pay scale be declared as grade and officials wherever placed be identified in accordance with their grade.<sup>17</sup>

In view of the grumbling of the 28 cadre services government realized that 9 years' personal rule of General Ershad jeopardized the career of many senior officials in respect of promotions to higher Secretariat posts. In order to clear up the stagnancy and promotion jam caused by the autocratic rule of General Ershad the present government promoted 654 officials to the various posts of Secretary, Additional Secretary, Joint Secretary and Deputy Secretary in the Secretariat.

But the process of promotion to the higher posts of the secretariat

resulted in tremendous grievances and suspicion in the mind of affected cadre officials, and alleged that established rules, regulations, orders and in cases even constitutional principles have been violated. In this process of promotion 716 senior and competent officials of various cadres have been superseded by the junior officials.<sup>18</sup>

The causes underlying these anomalies in respect of promotions are nepotism, political influence of ministers and parliament members and the gratification of officials at the level of the **administration**.<sup>19</sup> The State Minister responsible for the Ministry of Establishment admitted that 20-25 percent **irregularities** have been committed in the hasty process of promotion. And the Establishment officials assured the aggrieved officials that the decision of promotion to 654 officials to the various Secretariat posts be reconsidered as soon as possible<sup>20</sup>. But despite the assurance of the government nothing is so far done in this respect that could placate the tensions and grievances of the affected officials. Consequent upon this BCS Coordination Committee strengthened by the support of another association constituted by **doctors, engineers and agriculturists is leading vigorous movement to press home the 17-point demands of the specialist services**.<sup>21</sup>

In order to get rid of the worsening situation and simmering frustration of the civil servants particularly specialist cadres. Public Administration Branch of the United Nations Department of Development Support and Management Services, of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), conducted a thorough **inquiry** into the public service management and suggested for the abolition of the practice of reservation of posts in Ministries for particular cadres and provide for open competition for Secretariat posts from all cadres based on qualifications and experiences relevant to post.<sup>22</sup> This is of the opinion :

In light of the need for superior performance it is necessary to emphasize specific suitability and past performance for placement in the Secretariat posts. The exact cadre of a candidate. Both excellent managers and renowned specialists are needed to policy positions in the Secretariat. The Secretariat needs the best candidates from career tracks.<sup>23</sup>

The Report also argues that progressive cadre distinctions have to be removed specifically by combining similar cadres into a smaller number of cadres in order to open up more promotional opportunities based on merit especially at the top levels and by harmonizing pay systems and conditions of service.<sup>24</sup> The cadre and class system has to be replaced with a personnel management system based on position of classification and cadres for transparent and efficient management of officials in a democratically responsive civil service.<sup>25</sup>

**Table - 1 Perception of Civil Servants of the Cadre System**

Do you think that :	BCS (Admin)		Tech-Funct.	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
civil servants are presently organized in the most efficient personnel arrangement within the secretariat ?	5	25	0	25
all posts in the secretariat have been encadred ?	4	26	1	23
if yes to the previous question) the encadred posts include those of the secretaries, Additional Secretaries Deputy Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries ?	4	0	0	1
the cadre system has contributed to inter-service rivalries, jealousies and bickering?	25	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	17
the cadre system should be abolished altogether ?	0	30	7	18
the cadre system should be continued as it is ?	3	27	1	24
the cadre system should be modified ?	30	0	25	0
civil servants can be grouped into broader categories to provide in-depth sectoral experience (i.e. economic, social, health, education etc.)	19	11	<b>8</b>	17
rank classification should be replaced by position classification ?	21	9	21	4

Source : M. Mohabbat Khan, Research on Civil Service Management, July 1993, *UNDP Report 1993*, p. 64.

The UNDP (1993) team in the course of examining the cadre problems of the various BCS officials developed a questionnaire and distributed it to **30 encadred** civil servants of the Ministry of Establishment (primarily cadres referred to as technical-functional) in other Ministries. All 55 officials were asked to comment on the cadre system and changes that might be made in the government of personnel system. The responses observed are presented in Table - 1.

For the overall upliftment of civil service UNDP Report proposed for the selection and promotion of officials on the basis of merit to be determined in a transparent process and defined as (1) demonstrated competence/expertise and educational attainment for selection, and (2) performance examination and successful completion of mandatory training for promotion.<sup>26</sup>

The UNDP Report could go a long way in the upliftment of civil **service management and resolving** generalist versus specialist conflict in a smooth and peaceful manner provided it is implemented in letter and spirit. But UNDP Report still awaits implementation.

## **Conclusion**

Foregoing analysis reveals that attempts have been made in the last two decades in successive regimes to reorganize the elitist service structure in an egalitarian way so that the specialist services would have equal opportunity of promotion in the service structure and capacity to take part in the decision making at upper echelons of administration vis-a-vis generalist services. Consequent upon this, several major administrative reform **Commissions/Committees** have been constituted and innumerable invaluable recommendations in this regard undertaken. But position of the specialist services remained almost where they had been. From the long experience since Pakistani days it is not an overstatement that whatever be the recommendations, it actually turns other way around at the stage of implementation. In countries where bureaucracy has taken an institutional form rather

than instrumental, and consequently established upper hand in the governance of the state affairs, they resist implementation of the reform measures which can endanger their privileged position in society or get necessary alterations done in the implementation of the proposed reforms. This has been the case in Bangladesh, particularly in respect of implementing any reform measure which is meant for elevating the position of specialist in the services.

As such with a view to minimizing the perennial conflict between the generalists and specialists in the civil service of Bangladesh the following measures would have to be undertaken.

- a) Like the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs, the Functional ministries like Health, Education, Agriculture etc, should be manned by the members of its own cadres. Only the positions in the Ministry of Establishment , Cabinet Division of the Prime Minister's Secretariat should be filled in or headed by the generalist bureaucrats.
- b) In order to ensure the parity of representation in the decision making process at the upper echelon of administration coat should be **fixed** proportionate to their **man** power in **respective** cadre.
- c) Aforesaid recommendations of the UNDP Report (1993) for the civil service management of Bangladesh should be implemented.

The implementation of such reform measures demand whole hearted cooperation of bureaucracy and high level commitment and political strength of government to overcome resistance from any quarter. This view is echoed by J. N. Khosla in the following words :<sup>27</sup>

Administrative reform can be implemented only if they have a high level political support and enlightened public opinion behind them. It is no less necessary to win the cooperation of the bureaucracy, but on the issues where the bureaucracy has a stake in maintaining the status quo, high level political intervention is necessary to give effect to the reforms.

In twenty five year's independence, Bangladesh has achieved little success in other spheres of administration so far as administrative reorganization is concerned, where they seem to have been committed. But the crucial issue of resolving the conflict between the generalist and specialist bureaucrats remains unresolved for decades despite strong recommendations from all major administrative reform commissions/committees. Governmental endeavours, so far in this regard has proved to be more apparent than real. In the age of technological development when the specialists are at the center of gravity for survival and well being of a nation in the whole world, Bangladesh can not remain indifferent to their cause.

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