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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE BANGLADESH CIVIL SERVICE - A REFORM PERSPECTIVE

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#### Abstract

This paper focuses on the historical context of Civil Service Reform (CSR) in Bangladesh. Specifically, it explores the genesis and development of the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) Administration cadre, with reference to different reform programs that have been undertaken since independence. This paper will place an emphasis on civil service reform in contextual perspective. In Bangladesh it has been a practice for every new political regime to initiate reform planning through commissions and committees. Nevertheless, most of their recommendations have remained unimplemented for several reasons. As many as 20 committees and commissions on public administration (PA) reform were formed since 1971. International donor agencies have also conducted several inquiries and studies. Both government and donor agency recommendations have called for reforming public sector management, in general, and for reforming different CSR issues, in particular— such as recruitment, training, career management, performance management and retirement. These are the main focal areas in the BCS HRM structure that are within the scope of this paper.

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#### Introduction:-

This paper outlines some of the significant reforms, explores the reasons why these often failed and identifies common challenges to CSR in the context of Bangladesh. According to Schachter (2002), an organisation's culture and operations depend on the legal, social and economic contexts in which it is situated. To contextualise the main research problem, this paper thus briefly profiles Bangladesh as a country, enquires into the BCS and reviews the various CSR efforts that were initiated at different times. The sections that follow Bangladesh's profile and the overview of the BCS will focus on CSR endeavours during the early years of Bangladesh's independence (1972–1975), the first and second military administrations (1975–1982 and 1982–1990) and the democratically elected regimes (1991–2018). Finally, the paper will conclude by providing impressions of the causes of past reform failure followed by a short conclusion.

#### Bangladesh: Country Profile

Bangladesh was first separated from India as East Pakistan in 1947, which marked the end of its British colonial rule of nearly 200 years. It then again seceded from Pakistan in 1971 as a sovereign nation. The country is a multiparty parliamentary democracy, though it has experienced military rule and the features of autocracy more than once. However, the institutionalisation of democracy has been both positive and negative. The executive power of the Republic is vested in the prime minister with ministers being collectively responsible to the Parliament (Article 55

of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh). The president, elected by the members of parliament, is the ceremonial head of the state (Article 48 of the Constitution) and is devoid of executive powers. A Supreme Court consisting of the High Court and Appellate divisions has nation-wide jurisdiction. There are also subordinate courts and tribunals with different territorial jurisdictions and powers.

The headquarters of all ministries and key public agencies are located in Dhaka, the capital city. There is a total of 58 ministries/divisions and 353 departments/directorates/statutory bodies (GOB, 2018, 2020, 2023). Together, these constitute the machinery of the national government along with field-level offices across the country. The country is divided into eight administrative divisions, each of which is further divided into several districts known as zila. There are 64 districts, each administratively subdivided into several subdistricts known as upazila. Most of the public departments have zila and upazila-level offices, which are service delivery windows at the local level. There are 492 upazilas in the country (GOB, 2018, 2020, 2023). The lowest administrative unit is the union council (numbering 4,554) traditionally run by an elective body (GOB, 2018, 2020, 2023). Only a few departments are active at the union level, and they usually deliver service to 20–30 villages under the jurisdiction of a union. The union-level offices of government departments are not necessarily local government offices; rather, they are centrally controlled and have little accountability to the local politicians. Apart from the national-level secretariat and field-level offices, there are other local government institutions—such as city corporations for metropolitan cities, pourashovas (municipalities) for district and subdistrict townships and zilaparishads (district councils), and upazilaparishads (sub-district councils), and union parishads (union councils) for the rural areas.

At the national level, the minister, as the political head of the ministry, generally occupies the office for a term of the regime, while the secretary, a permanent government official supported by other officers and subordinate staff, acts as the administrative head. The BCS Administration cadre is comprised of two layers in the administrative structure—one at the national secretariat level and another at the field-level offices. At the secretariat level, the secretary is in charge of a ministry/division, an additional or joint secretary oversees a wing, a deputy secretary attends to a branch, and a senior assistant secretary or an assistant secretary heads a section and is known as a section officer (GOB, 2014a). A parallel structure also runs in the field administration that covers offices at the divisional, zila and upazila levels. The structure of the BCS Administration cadre is outlined in Table 1:

**Table 1:-** The BCS Administration cadre structure.

National level (Ministries)	Field level (Divisions, districts, subdistricts)
Secretary	Divisional Commissioner (Additional/ Joint Secretary)
Additional Secretary	Additional Divisional Commissioner (Deputy Secretary)
Joint Secretary	Deputy Commissioner (Deputy Secretary)
Deputy Secretary	Additional Deputy Commissioner (Senior Assistant Secretary)
Senior Assistant Secretary	Upazila Nirbahi Officer, and Senior Assistant Commissioner (Senior Assistant Secretary)
Assistant Secretary	Assistant Commissioner (Assistant Secretary)

The bureaucracy in Bangladesh is highly stratified and continues to adhere to the colonial seniority principle as a norm. Junior staff have little opportunity to share ideas with the senior officials, except for giving routine proposals or notes in files or when asked to share their ideas. This 'closed-door' culture blocks the path of innovation and significantly delays decision-making and service delivery (Khan, 2013; Rabbi & As-Saber, 2012). UNDP (1993) identified civil servants' apathy, narrow vision and lack of commitment as the causes of poor bureaucratic performance. In fact, the weaknesses of the civil service system in Bangladesh (e.g., systemic dysfunctionalities, accountability problems, non-transparent operations, ineffective service delivery and all-pervasive corruption) have been highlighted in public discussions, development policies and academic exercises—though the agenda for change has been overlooked (Ali, 2011; As-Saber, Hossain, & Srivastava, 2007; Zafarullah, 2008). The PARC 2000 report endorsed the findings of the World Bank (1996) study, which portrays the Bangladesh government as being preoccupied with routine, over-bureaucratic, discretionary in governing, unusually centralised, devoid of accountability and thus inefficient and ineffective (GOB, 2000, p. 55).

There are provisions in the Constitution for the appointment of an ombudsman, but this constitutional direction has always been neglected. There are different parliamentary committees organised to oversee the functioning of ministries, as well as audit and accounts offices at all levels to control pilferage and misappropriation of public funds. The Public Service Commission manages recruitment, selection and other job-related matters of cadre

officers and some other gazetted employees. The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), established by an Act of Parliament in 2004, and supported by field-level offices, is responsible for vigilance and investigation. However, lack of accountability and widespread corruption pose as considerable hindrances to sustainable development in Bangladesh (GOB, 2012; TIB, 2014; UNDP, 2012). With this background, the following sections will discuss the genesis of the BCS Administration cadre and the reform measures that have been adopted from time to time.

### **Historical Development of BCS**

#### **Genesis of Civil Service Before the Birth of Bangladesh**

The British East India Company first came to India for trading purposes, but it gradually acquired political power. With the *dewani* of 1765 granted by the Mughal emperor of the time, the company obtained revenue collection rights and gradually began exercising executive and ultimately legislative powers (Ali, 2011; Younis & Iqbal, 2000). The company initially ruled India by first using the existing traditional administrative system consolidated by the Mughals and then by appointing European civilians at key positions. Lord Cornwallis abandoned the dual character and introduced the foundation of a colonial bureaucracy consisting of white members only (Islam & Shelly, 2006). The civil service of India was divided into different categories, namely the covenanted civil service, uncovenanted civil service and subordinate civil service. Gradually, the nationalist demands became intense and the Civil Service Acts of 1861 and 1870 were enacted. The Aitchison Commission was formed in 1886 to 'Indianise' the civil service (Ali, 1993; Islam & Shelly, 2006). The title of the Imperial Civil Service was changed to the Indian Civil Service (ICS), but other aspects remained almost unchanged, such as retaining the prerogative of white members in superior positions. The recommendations of the Islington Commission (1912–1915), the Lee Commission (1924) and the Montagu–Chelmsford Report (1918) highlighted the need for 'Indianising' the civil service. For the first time in 1922, ICS examinations were held in India, and the Indian Public Service Commission was set up in accordance with the recommendations of the Lee Commission (Ali, 2004; Rashid, 2008). Though India came under British Crown rule in 1858, the PA system remained similar to what the British East India Company had developed. The Crown's representative—the viceroy—began implementing imperial policies through permanent secretaries and provincial governors who were accountable to the viceroy, not to the public (Ahmed & Ahmed, 1996; Rahman, 2002). During British rule, all government powers, including revenue administration and maintenance of law and order, were concentrated in the hands of the District Collector, later known as the Deputy Commissioner (DC). The Collector, the most basic unit of British Indian administration, was accountable to the Board of Revenue and the Governor-General's Council (Younis & Iqbal, 2000).

The Government of India Act 1935 was a significant development in the field of civil service management (CSM) in India. The Tottenham Committee in 1945 defined job responsibilities for the bureaucrats. With the freedom movement gaining momentum, the Independence Act of 1947 granted India freedom from colonial rule. British India was partitioned into two parts, one of which became Pakistan and had a governor-general appointed by the Crown. The territory that currently comprises the nation-state of Bangladesh was known as East Bengal in British India and for several years after partition but renamed East Pakistan in 1954. Without noticeable changes, the Pakistan civil service inherited the structure that prevailed during British colonial rule (Ali, 1993; Khan & Zafarullah, 2005). With the partition of India, the ICS—as a colonial brand name for the higher civil servants—came to an end and was renamed the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP), which continued until East Pakistan became the independent nation of Bangladesh in 1971 (Islam & Shelly, 2006).

#### **CSR Status During Colonial Period.**

British rulers in India, during the colonial times, instead of reforming the rigid, elitist and centralised character of civil service, moulded and utilised the steel frame of administration as an instrument of control and repression over the native population to strengthen their colonial purpose (Khan, 1980, pp. 71-89). The Indian members of the ICS were carefully chosen from wealthy and influential families as the elite class of civil servants who could afford studies in prestigious universities including Oxford and Cambridge like their British counterparts. The native members of the ICS, although Indian in ethnicity, 'imitated and closely resembled the British in values and norms' (Khan & Zafarullah, 2005a, p. 44). All the key executive and policymaking positions at provincial as well as central levels were reserved for the ICS members, who were inducted on maintaining distance from the community and politicians. So, whatever changes the colonial civil service experienced, including the entry of the Indians to ICS, were not to improve public service delivery rather protect the interests of the colonisers.

After the independence from Britain in 1947, Pakistan uncritically inherited and sustained the same administrative structure and its work procedures that were introduced and developed by the colonial power for an entirely different

purpose. In Pakistan, the ICS was renamed as the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) and retained almost all the traits of the ICS. Like their predecessors, the elitist CSP officers held every vital position in the overall power structure in Pakistan. This generalist cadre occupied the top positions in the field administration of subdivisions, districts and divisions—as well as the central and provincial secretariats. However, there were also members of other specialised elite services such as Pakistan foreign service and services relating to audit and accounts, taxation, customs and excise, military accounts and secretariat and postal services. Elitism in the civil service, inherited from the British Raj era, continued in Pakistan from 1947 to 1971 (Ali, 2011; Khan & Zafarullah, 1978, 2005; Zafarullah, 2007; Zafarullah & Khan 1988). Distinctive elitism was displayed in every aspect of superior service, including recruitment, stratification, training and ethos (Zafarullah & Khan 1988).

Therefore, the CSPs inherited a tradition of elitist arrogance from colonial times and maintained an air of disregard for politicians and the public in postcolonial Pakistan (Alavi, 1982; Rahman, 2001). According to Kennedy (1987), the special privileges that CSPs enjoyed created several longstanding problems, such as unbalanced development in the growth of representative institutions, bureaucratic resistance to administrative reforms and administrative inefficiency. Zafarullah (2006) conducted a comparative study of Bangladesh and Pakistan and found that, until 1971, several concerted attempts failed to reform the administrative system due to stiff bureaucratic resistance while the weak political leadership was unable to champion reforms.

### **CSR Measures Since the Birth of Bangladesh**

After nine months of the Liberation War against West Pakistan, Bangladesh became a sovereign state on 16 December 1971. Since then, the country has witnessed the assassination of two presidents, the two stints of military rules and several democratically elected governments. In Bangladesh, there are more than one million employees in the government service, employed in various ministries, departments and public enterprises (MOPA, 2017). Successive regimes have introduced various reform measures with various purposes and goals (Alam & Teicher, 2012). The first civil service recruitment process was launched in 1973, but it was dented by political influence because the eligibility criterion was loyalty towards the regime rather than merit. In addition, the ASRC 1973 report was shelved, and its far-reaching recommendations remained unimplemented. Further, during two subsequent military regimes, military officers were placed in government departments and were appointed to key policy and administrative positions. Although many commissions and committees were appointed to reform the civil bureaucracy under both military-dominated rule and a democratically elected government, little change has occurred in the administrative system, other than occasional cosmetic alterations on an ad hoc basis (Huque, 2011; Sarker, 2004; Zafarullah, 2008). The failure to implement reform measures can be attributed to 'bureaucratic intransigence and inertia, political insensitivity and inaction, anti-reform sentiment in public sector organisations and alienation of the civil society from the reform process' (Zafarullah, 2002, p. 66).

In the following sections of this chapter, various reform measures that were undertaken in PA in independent Bangladesh are discussed in chronological order.

### **CSR During Early Years After Independence (1972–1975).**

The early years were characterised by attempts to reconstruct a war-ravaged economy and establish a civil service system that was suitable for a newly born country, based on the ideals of nationalism, secularism, democracy and socialism (Ali, 2011; GOB, 1972; Zafarullah & Khan, 2005). Azizuddin (2011, p. 55) observed that 'in line with their political beliefs of socialist ideology and democratic traditions', the then political regime initiated CSR for the nascent nation. The important developments that occurred about CSM include 1) the introduction of a grading system and an attempt to reorganise the existing services; 2) the politicisation of entry-level recruitment into the BCS and some parts of public sector; and 3) the establishment of an interim recruitment policy that considered the representative element (with special provisions for the freedom fighters), with less attention given to merit. The focus was on curtailing the powers of super-elitist civil servants and rendering them subservient to political control (Ali, 2011; Zafarullah & Khan, 2005).

In December 1971, the Civil Administration Restoration Committee (CARC), headed by a former CSP officer, was established for reinstating civilian administration in the independent nation. The Committee did an excellent job outlining the interim set-up of the government at both the secretariat and field administration levels (Ali, 2011). Further, the then PSC hastily recruited the first batch of officers in 1973 based on simple interviews instead of the multilevel competitive examinations system that was introduced and followed for civil service recruitment in British India and during the Pakistan era. More than 2,000 people were recruited, generally on political grounds against the

advertised 300 class-1 vacant posts (Alam, 2003). During the post-independence years, the political leadership failed to ensure an efficient and honest bureaucracy for the establishment of good governance and national growth, since the mass recruitment to the BCS depicted a major merit deficiency in the overall civil service system (Zafarullah, 1994).

The government simultaneously appointed the Administrative and Services Reorganisation Committee (ASRC) and the National Pay Commission (NPC) to diagnose administrative ills and recommend reform measures (Ali, 2011; Khan 1982; Zafarullah, 1987). The ASRC report was submitted to the government in April 1973, and the NPC report a month later. The ASRC's main recommendations were to establish a classless civil service system by abolishing age-old elitism, reorganise the civil administration structure under ten grades of pay and create a top group labelled as the Senior Policy and Management Group. In line with the ASRC's recommendations, the NPC proposed a 10-grade service classification (Ali, 2011; Rahman 2002; Rashid, 2008; Zafarullah, 1987, 1994, 2008). The ASRC reform plan was guided by the 'new social philosophy' of a democratic state with a pluralist polity and a socialist economic system that the bureaucracy with a colonial orientation was not prepared to accept (Khan & Zafarullah, 2005, p. 54). This occurred at a time when the British civil service was implementing the landmark reforms that the Fulton Committee of 1968 had proposed. The reform efforts in the BCS during this time were greatly influenced by the British move, as the Committee's recommendations also included 1) removing the heavy reliance on the generalist administrative cadre, 2) establishing a unified grading system by abolishing classes in civil service and 3) creating more opportunities for the specialist classes. Dowding (1995, p. 10) argued that the Fulton Commission sought to abolish amateurism and mandarinism and develop greater professionalism in the civil service system. In this regard, Zafarullah (2008) observed that:

Taking cues from British Fulton Committee report and acknowledging the views of the government, the ASRC prompted a single classless unified grading structure for the civil service with differentiated functional categories, each representing a specialised orientation. (p. 58)

The role of civil servants was openly downgraded during the process of nation-building through the suggestion that 'they can be neither innovators nor catalytic agents for social change'; however, it was upheld that 'it is only the political cadre which can mobilise the community and transform their pattern of behaviour' (ASRC, 1973, p. 4). This period is often referred to as 'bureaucratic despondency' in the field of Bangladesh PA (Zafarullah, 2007). Conversely, from early 1974, the regime turned back to the bureaucrats when the country faced a rising economic crisis and a deteriorating law and order situation. Civil servants were appointed in most state corporations by removing party nominees and former CSP officers were placed in key secretariat positions (Ahmed 1980; Ali, 2011; Zafarullah 1987). The recommendations of ASRC and NPC reports which were more or less similar, aimed to attune administrative machinery in line with the political philosophy of the government. Both the reports focused on 'a single classless grading structure covering all services in ten grades of pay scales' to reduce income disparity between the highest and the lowest wage earners on the aspiration to establish a socialist economy in Bangladesh (GOB, 1973, pp. 4–5). The first government after independence was led by Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first prime minister of the country. The government was not serious in implementing the recommendations of ASRC and NPC (Khan & Zafarullah, 2005, p. 63). The ASRC's report was shelved by the then political leadership and its recommendations thus remained unheeded for reasons not publicly known. Only a few NPC recommendations relating to salary of lower-level support staff and entry-level junior officers were partially implemented. Scholars often alleged that it might have been due to the objections raised by the senior generalist bureaucrats—the former CSP and EPCS officers—whose interests were at stake (Ali, 2011; Rashid, 2008; Zafarullah 1987; Zafarullah & Khan, 2005). During the post-war years, the government reduced the bureaucracy's powers and privileges to make it subservient to the political leadership (Ahamed, 1980). Zafarullah (1983) observed that during this period and in the name of bureaucratic discipline and accountability, promotion criteria were made redundant, new appointments were made on unnecessary grounds and decisions for removal from service were made arbitrarily. In the early years after Bangladesh became independent, the systems of civil service operation and their recruitment and training virtually collapsed in the war-ravaged new state. Here, the main reasons of failure of this major reform effort are often attributed to gradual alienation of the government from the community and change of the multi-party democracy to one-party polity, an escalating political crisis in the face of violent opposition by leftist parties, famine-like economic depression, deterioration of law and order, bureaucratic resistance and manoeuvres (Ahamed, 1980; Azizuddin, 2011; Zafarullah & Khan, 2005; Huque, 2011; Rabbi & As-Saber, 2012; Sarker, 2004). In order to face the crises, the CSR priority lost its significance when the regime directed all its efforts to its survival (Ahamed, 1980; Ali, 2010; Azizuddin, 2011). Thus, the first opportunity to

reform the civil service system was wasted (Zafarullah & Khan, 2005). Following the assassination of President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by a group of army officers, a new government headed by Khandakar Mostaque was formed. However, it was shortly taken over by General Ziaur Rahman, who introduced the first military rule in Bangladesh.

#### **CSR Measures During the First Military Regime (1976–1981).**

The first military regime established different reform initiatives to stimulate and revitalise the demotivated and demoralised bureaucracy. The government established the Pay and Service Commission (P&SC) in 1976 intending to reform the civil service system. The reform efforts of the regime included the amalgamation of the cadres, restructuring of services, induction of military officers to civil service jobs, creation of the Senior Service Pool (SSP) and changes in the seniority and recruitment policies (Ali, 2011; P&SC, 1977). Zafarullah (2008, p. 60) argued that unlike the first government, the military regime was serious about the P&SC recommendations and swiftly followed up their implementation.

During this period, the BCS administration as a cadre was constituted with the officers of various groups—such as the CSP, EPCS I (East Pakistan Civil Service I), EPCS II (East Pakistan Civil Service II), Central Secretariat Service, Pakistan Military Land and Cantonment Service and the East Pakistan Secretariat Service (Ali, 2010). The number of BCS administration officers thus increased remarkably. The P&SC in 1977 recommended 21 pay grades instead of the 10 grades proposed by the ASRC in 1973. The P&SC also recommended 27 separate civil service cadres (GOB, 1977a, p. 53). Five cabinet committees were constituted to work out implementation strategy for P&SC recommendations. The recommendations relating to pay scales and the creation of different service cadres were implemented (GOB, 1980; Rashid, 2008; Zafarullah & Khan, 2005). As ASRC earlier recommended to create an elite group namely ‘senior policy and management posts’ (SPMP), the P&SC also recommended for the formation of an apex cadre named SSP with the best officers from all cadres. However, the process of selecting the officers from different cadres and maintaining their seniority to en-cadre them into SSP became controversial; it further aggravated the rivalry between the generalist administration cadre and the specialist–technical cadres (Ali, 2010; Azizuddin, 2011; Khan & Zafarullah, 1982; Mamoon & Roy, 1987; Obaidullah, 1999; Zafarullah, 2008). The SSP could thus not be operationalised and had to be abolished in 1989, considering irresolvable debates and a flawed formula for its induction (Ali, 2010; Rashid, 2008; Zafarullah & Khan, 2005).

In 1980, a council committee was formed and headed by the nation’s vice president to select officers to fill civil service cadre posts from ex-military officers—through interviews or other unconventional methods. The Committee was also empowered to select ex-cadre officers of exceptional calibre for lateral entry into civil service positions. Many ex-military officers who were alleged to have been involved in coups and counter-coups were rehabilitated in civil positions—along with other military officers who were repatriated from Pakistan after the war and who faced problems when competing with freedom fighter officers (Ali, 2011). The bureaucracy shared power with the military during this period as the military regime intended to civilianise its rule with the support of the civil bureaucracy.

The Government Servants (Conduct) Rules of 1979 were framed during this period to hold the bureaucracy accountable. However, the accountability of the civil servants could not be enforced, as they played a dominating role in the government in the absence of a robust political set-up (Younis & Iqbal, 2000). Other legislative acts and rules that helped reorganise the services were also implemented, such as the Public Servants (Retirement) Act 1974, the Public Servants (Retirement) Rules 1975, the Government Servants (Seniority of Freedom Fighters) Rules 1976, the Government Servants (Special Provisions) Ordinance 1979 and the Bangladesh Civil Service (Recruitment) Rules 1981.

Although many changes were incorporated in the administrative system based on the P&SC recommendations. Some ministries and departments were reorganised but nothing significant was done to reorganise the archaic form of public administration. Indeed, although the government took important steps to improve the administrative system, ‘their job analysis, job evaluation, performance indicators and other personnel management principles remained obscure’ (Khan & Zafarullah, 2005, p. 64).

#### **CSR Measures During the Second Military Regime (1982–1990).**

After the assassination of Ziaur Rahman by a group of army officers, a civil government headed by Justice Abdus Sattar was briefly in office. After another coup, General Ershad assumed power and sought to gradually civilianise

his regime. He appointed a council of advisors that included military bureaucrats, retired civil bureaucrats, intellectuals, business people and politicians (Ali 2010; Azizuddin, 2011; Zafarullah, 2008). During Ershad's nine years of rule, the bureaucracy extended its support and developed an alliance with the military (Morshed, 1997). Military generals would sit on selection and promotion committees of civil officers and even attend cabinet meetings (Ahmed, 1995). The regime, in order to strengthen and legitimise the military rule over the state mechanism, formed two major reform committees: the Martial Law Committee (MLC), known as Enam Committee for examining organisational set-up of ministries/ divisions/ directorates and other organisations, and the Committee for Administrative Reform/Reorganisation (CARR), known as Khan Committee in 1982 and 1983 respectively (Ali, 2010; Azizuddin, 2011; Zafarullah & Khan, 2005). Upon the recommendations of the MLC, the number of employees in ministries, divisions and departments was reduced. Ministries were thus reduced from 44 to 19 in number and personnel in the secretariat were downsized from 9,440 to 6,118 (Ali, 2010; Rahman, 2002). Upon the recommendations of the CARR, the local government and field administration was reorganised. This period notably experienced the decentralisation of the PA structure as opposed to the centralised colonial legacy. Subdivisions were upgraded as districts and thanas as upazilas, which ultimately expanded the field-level structure of PA and created substantial employment opportunities and service delivery windows at the local level (Ali, 2011). The decentralisation of PA had significant implications on civil service management of the country. Civil servants were placed under the supervision of the elected chairperson in each upazila and more than a dozen subjects were transferred there. The chief executive officer—the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO)—was appointed from the BCS Administration cadre, with the status enjoyed by the erstwhile subdivisional officer (SDO); an upazila magistrate, an assistant commissioner (finance) and an assistant commissioner (land) were three other powerful officers posted from the same administrative service in every upazila. Bulk recruitment was actioned by changing civil service recruitment rules; the BCS examination standards also eroded as the merit criterion became insignificant. Political connection and closeness to the chief executive rather than merit and competency appeared to be the dominant criteria for recruitment and promotion in the civil service field (Rahman, 2002). In 1989, the zila parishad (district council) system was created with 63 MPs (Members of Parliament) as the chairperson of each council where heads of almost all departments in the district were made members of the councils.

Senior posts in the police service were mostly filled by retired military officers. General Ershad filled one-third of diplomatic posts in Bangladesh missions overseas with military personnel, though many of the defence officers were already absorbed in the foreign service cadre. The militarisation of the PA system that started during the Zia regime continued during Ershad time as well (Ahmed & Nazneen, 1988; Ahmed & Ahmed, 1992).

Some of the essential rules and regulations were enacted to consolidate civil service structures and procedures, revise CSM, reorganise civil service training framework, disciplinary systems and management of statutory bodies during the long nine years of this regime. They include the Government Servants (Discipline & Appeal) Rule 1985, the Public Employees Discipline (Punctual Attendance) Ordinance 1982, the BCS Seniority Rules 1983, the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre Ordinance, 1984, the Public Servants (Dismissal on Conviction) Ordinance 1985 and the Bangladesh Civil Service (Examination for Promotion) Rules 1986.

After civilianising his rule, General Ershad continued to exercise tremendous control over the cabinet, ministries, civil administration and judiciary, but the mass uprising in 1990 against his authoritarian rule forced him to resign. This helped restore democratic rule through free and fair elections in 1991.

#### **CSR Measures During the Khaleda Zia Regime (1991–1996).**

After the fall of the Ershad regime, the presidential system was reverted to a parliamentary form of democracy through the 12th amendment of the Constitution. In the 1991 general election, Khaleda Zia, the Chairperson of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) became prime minister, while the president was given a titular role as the head of the state (Younis & Mostafa, 2000). Although, this might have been another rare opportunity to implement CSR for public interest, unfortunately, the regime change was a step towards further politicising the BCS staffing process (Ali, 2011). This regime was marked by the continuation of the previous policies regarding CSM. In fact, it continued to be guided by political considerations rather than administrative or efficiency and merit considerations (Alam, 2003; Ali, 2011). This period experienced serious non-cooperation and conflict between government and opposition parties, but the dominant role in governance remained with the bureaucrats (Choudhury, Hasanuzzaman & Hossain, 1998). During this period, a number of studies and reports were published by international donor agencies including UNDP's Public Administration Sector Study in 1993; British Overseas Development Agency and

British Council's Towards Better Government in Bangladesh in 1993, known as four-secretaries report; World Bank's Government That Works: Reforming the Public Sector in 1996.

Instead of acknowledging the UNDP's recommendations and four-secretaries reports as pursued by donor agencies for implementation, the democratically elected regime appointed the Administrative Reorganisation Committee (ARC) in 1993 headed by the regime's chosen people for the quest of their own style of PA reforms. Though the Committee spent almost three years preparing a report and, when finally submitted it to the new government, their recommendations were not accepted for political reasons as it was initiated by their adversary (Rabbi & As-Saber, 2012; Sarker, 2004; Zafarullah, 2002, Zafarullah & Huque, 2001; Zafarullah & Khan, 2001). In addition to the ARC, the Khaleda regime appointed a cabinet committee to consider the efficiency and salary issues of PA, but their recommendations also remained unimplemented (Khan, 1998; Zafarullah & Khan, 2005). This regime exercised an arbitrary style of selection and promotion that led to the supersession of numerous senior officers. Again, on different occasions, promotions were given without considering the vacancies for such promotions; several officers were subsequently made OSD (Officer on Special Duty)—officers who have no specific job posting but who enjoy all financial benefits. Serious political non-cooperation and conflicts marked the regime's days as the oppositions observed consecutive political actions like hartal and blockade programs to destabilise the government. It was for the first time in the BCS's history that a selection of bureaucrats, including some from the senior level, joined an anti-government political protest known as 'Janatar Mancha' to topple the elected government, 'which shook the power base of the ruling BNP' and thus opened a new avenue for further politicisation culture of CSM (Alam & Teicher, 2012, p. 868).

#### **CSR Measures During the Sheikh Hasina Regime (1996–2001).**

The Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina came to power through a general election that was conducted by a non-party caretaker government that itself was incorporated into the Constitution through an amendment. However, Sheikh Hasina's government did not do anything differently to the previous government and continued managing the bureaucracy to achieve partisan objectives (Ali, 2011). The bureaucracy, including the field administration, was thus further politicised (Mollah, 2014; Zafarullah, 1997). The bureaucrats who had openly expressed their solidarity with the AL's anti-BNP movement prior to the 1996 election were rewarded with key positions (Rahman, 2002). Rahman (2002) further observed that the entire administrative apparatus was repeatedly shuffled and reshuffled by installing party sympathisers in vital positions. In a waning institution, full of factionalism and lacking in esprit de corps, the bureaucracy also welcomed mutual dependency with their political masters.

During this period, the chairperson and members of the PSC were politically appointed for partisan gains. The quota reserved for the freedom fighters was made equally applicable to their children and grandchildren, which further compromised the principle of merit-based recruitment (Rahman, 2002). In line with the previous regime's approach, many bureaucrats were promoted based on their political affinity with the ruling party; seniority and merit, two prime factors for measuring career advancement, were utterly disregarded (IGS, 2008; Rahman, 2002).

The regime by discarding the recommendations of ARC, constituted the Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) in 1997 led by the regime's own sympathisers. The PARC report was submitted in 2000 and within a few months of the report submission the regime changed, and the BNP government came to power again. The PARC made three types of recommendations for administrative transformation: interim, short-term and long-term. These included defining the missions and functions of the public offices; affirming civil service professionalism, result-oriented performance, the delegation of authority to subordinate offices, transparency and accountability, a separation between the judiciary and the executive, parliamentary oversight and civil service incentives; and updating outdated laws, rules, regulations and forms to ensure a high quality of public service (Islam, 2005, 2018; Khan, 1998; PARC, 2000). PARC comprehensively diagnosed CSM problems and corroborated and synthesised findings of earlier reports and recommendations. Guided by contemporary NPM and good governance principles, the PARC proposed for position description in civil service (CS), rationalisation of CS recruitment, reducing quota reservation in Class I and Class II jobs, upholding merit and performance criteria in promotion and placement, reshuffling training structure to enhance skills and bring about attitudinal change, developing professionalism by shunning amateurism and mandarinism, monitoring performance, layering decision-making process, promoting value for money, customer satisfaction by means of citizen charter, decentralising service delivery system, establishing independent ACC to combat corruption, introducing ICT in public sector, lengthening rotation period of the civil servants, introducing competitive examination system for senior positions, clustering ministries based on skill requirements, and creating a senior management pool (SMP) with meritorious officials competitively (PARC,



2000). Many of the PARC recommendations repeat the proposals made by previous committees/commissions and donors' reports. It is significant about PARC that this is the last major reform commission; it is different from most of the reform bodies constituted since independence, as this was the first full-fledged reform commission with detailed terms of reference. However, these PARC recommendations were also not implemented fully, much like others in the past, due to lack of political commitment and bureaucratic resistance as well as other factors responsible (Zafarullah, 2002, 2008).

#### **CSR Measures During Khaleda Zia's Second Term (2001–2006).**

In 2001, the AL government was replaced by a four-party alliance led by the BNP. This regime established the independent Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to curb corruption by maintaining transparency and accountability in all levels of the government (GOB, 2004). However, the politicisation of the administration continued unchecked, as it had been in the previous regime. The regime's game of politics with the civil service can be observed in the installing of party loyalists in important civil service positions, the appointment of a PSC chairperson and members based on political affiliation and the numerous alleged leaks of BCS question papers (Zafarullah, 2002; TIB, 2007). Recruitment that was based on political links, mass in-service promotions of officers who were considered loyal to the ruling party and nepotism all indicate a half-hearted approach to CSM. Non-conformists, or those who expressed their political loyalty to the previous government, were made OSDs and were deprived of their due promotion and other facilities. This policy was used as a method of inflicting punishment, not for administrative reasons (Alam & Teicher, 2012). Between 2001 and 2006, the regime arbitrarily made 978 officials OSDs, causing uncertainty among civil servants (Alam & Teicher, 2012; IGS, 2008; The Daily Jugantor, 2008). The BNP-led government continued appointing military officers and installed 82 generals in various key civil positions (The Prothom Alo, 2010). Conversely, the regime created a few initiatives, such as for the establishment of the tax ombudsman along with the ACC, that had implications for accountability. While these initiatives were highly appreciated, they generally malfunctioned due to lack of required autonomy and an objective approach in their management (Parnini, 2011).

#### **CSR Measures Under the Interim Caretaker Government (2007–2008).**

The political turmoil that ensued at the end of 2006 led the military to intervene and back a caretaker government. For two years, this non-elected government declared war against corruption and was committed to relinquishing power to an elected government. The caretaker government's foremost responsibility was to conduct a free, fair and credible national election and to form the next political government within 90 days; however, it took two years to fulfil this responsibility. This interim government directed its most vigorous efforts at removing corruption from politics and other sectors (Samad, 2008; Zafarullah, 2008). It created some bold initiatives that were much appreciated, such as the separation of the judiciary from the executive, the preparation of reliable voter lists and the reconstitution of public institutions, including the ACC, PSC and the Regulatory Reforms Commission. Local government reform initiatives and the introduction of a citizen charter in public offices were some of the other measures created to enhance the efficient and effective delivery of public goods and services (IGS, 2008). Finally, the parliamentary election was held under the interim caretaker government on 29 December 2008, in which the grand alliance led by the AL won the elections with an absolute majority in parliament.

#### **CSR Measures During Sheikh Hasina's Second and Third Terms (2009–2018).**

During two consecutive terms of the AL government (2009–2013 and 2014–2018), several changes were implemented in social, political and administrative sectors. The politicisation of the civil service continued, as it had been consistently done before. Many officers (434 in total) were made OSDs on political grounds after the 2008 election (Alam & Teicher, 2012). Many officers of different ranks were allegedly promoted several times based on a partisan consideration that disregarded seniority and merit in many cases (Alam & Teicher, 2012; The New Nation, 2010). Until recently, in the BCS's recruitment, the merit quota was only 45 per cent, while the 55 per cent non-merit quota was distributed according to the following percentage: districts (10 per cent), freedom fighters (30 per cent), women (10 per cent) and tribal people (five per cent). In the face of nation-wide student protests against this quota reservation in public employment, the government decided to remove such quotas from the selection process of class I and class II positions in October 2018. However, it remains to be seen how far the merit principle will be revived after the government's decision has been properly implemented (The Banglanews24, 2018; GOB, 2018a).

The government enacted the Right to Information Act 2009 to ensure public access to information and to bring transparency and accountability to the public sector. Additionally, the Whistleblowers' Protection Act 2011 guarantees disclosure of information. To implement Vision 2021, the government has emphasised e-governance and Digital Bangladesh, which is supported by the UNDP's access to information (A2I) program and the governance

innovation unit of the prime minister's office. Further, the government created some important initiatives for improved, transparent and efficient public service delivery—such as the introduction of the Kaizen model through the total quality management project (TQM) under the MOPA; the introduction of a second-generation citizen charter; a one-stop service in government offices; the establishment of the Union Information Service Centre and the NIS; and the introduction of the Annual Performance Agreement (APA), the Public Administration Award for outstanding performance and the Innovation Award (Bhuiyan, 2017). Constituting the 2009 and 2015 National Pay Commissions (NPCs) and implementing increased new pay scales were also noteworthy initiatives.

The regime developed Vision 2021; the Perspective Plan of Bangladesh: Making Vision 2021 a Reality; the National Sustainable Development Strategy; the 7th Five Year Plan and the National Integrity Strategy of Bangladesh. The issue of CSR is incorporated in these national policies. This government further got the Civil Service Act of 2018 enacted by parliament. In its election manifesto 2008, the regime had drafted a long-term plan titled Vision 2021. The 'Perspective Plan of Bangladesh (2010–2021): Making Vision 2021 a Reality', a strategic articulation of the government's development goals to gain middle-income country status by the year 2021 (GOB, 2010), highlighted that:

Vision 2021 on good governance enjoins that institutions of the State and Administration will be freed from partisan influence. The basis of appointment and promotion will be performance, commitment, efficiency, honesty and loyalty to the Republic. The civil service/bureaucracy has a distinguished record of professionalism and commitment, which has suffered erosion because of politicisation. During the Perspective Plan period, the Government will make all out efforts not only to revive but enhance competence and professional ethics in the civil service using sanction for performance. (p. 16)

The completion of Managing At The Top 2 (MATT2) project under MOPA and BPATC in 2013 funded by DFID and completion of Civil Service Change Management (CSCM) Project under MOPA in 2014 funded by UNDP also achieved their project outcomes by imparting CSR-related training interventions and generating updated citizen charters respectively. The creation of BCS Women Network, one-stop service, front desk in DC offices, decentralisation of passport issuance desks down to every district, union information services centre are some of the recent success stories achieved under various donor-funded programs.

The lofty promises and ambitious goals set out in the above document as well as other national policies and strategies are yet to produce any significant outcome. The long-cherished Civil Service Act was passed by the parliament in 2018; however, its proper implementation is yet to achieve any positive results towards CSR although this law is viewed as a compilation of existing legislations and there being no significant new things in it (Zafarullah & Sarker, 2020). In this thesis, some of the selected national plans and policies are evaluated in Chapter 6 for assessing the extent to which CSR issues are incorporated and emphasised in those documents.

### **Donor-Funded Reform Prescriptions**

Apart from various government initiatives discussed above, international development partners often created prescriptions to reform the civil service and public sector management in general (UNDP, 1993, 2004, 2007; USAID, 1989; World Bank, 1996, 2002a). Several reports were published by key development partners, including the World Bank, UNDP, ADB, DFID and the USAID. Three of these are summarised in this section.

The first example of this is the 'Public Administration Efficiency Study of 1989', which was a USAID-funded initiative intended to redesign Bangladesh's governmental structure. The significant areas of reform proposed in this study included the delegation and devolution of authority from secretariat to departments, corporations and subordinate offices; an improved capacity of the senior supervisors through training and development; reducing the number of steps in the decision-making process; ensuring the quality of civil service by introducing a superior service pool; ensuring promotion that is based on merit; and developing training that is based on a needs assessment (Bhuiyan, 2017; USAID, 1989).

The second example is the 'Public Administration Sector Study of 1993'. The UNDP funded it and it offered recommendations relating to a results-based PM system; internal performance monitoring in ministries; a reallocation of business and ministerial reorganisation; efficiency in service delivery; transparency in recruitment; a promotion process that is based on the merit principle; PSC reform and the rearrangement of personnel management grades (UNDP, 1993).

The third example is the World Bank study of 1996, 'Government that Works: Reforming the Public Sector' on reforming the governmental machinery. It aimed to identify the core functions of the government and the necessary services to citizens (Bhuiyan, 2017; Khan, 1998; Zafarullah, 2008). The study recommended rationalising the administrative process and rightsizing the government's coverage; enhancing local governments, the private sector and NGOs; ensuring transparency and accountability; ensuring full autonomy of state institutions; updating the rules and regulations; and maintaining a committed, professional and efficient civil service system (World Bank, 1996). It was a comprehensive document that shared many of the ideas from UNDP's 1993 report and focused on behaviour change beside process change by means of staff training, incentives for quick decisions, protecting decision-makers from undue harassment, establishing ministry-level committees for decision evaluation (Zafarullah, 2008, p. 66).

### **Causes of CSR Failure**

The UNDP (2004) summarised that all major reform initiatives over the past decades were undertaken by ad hoc commissions and committees that were often established to satisfy donor requirements. A permanent and powerful body in charge of reform implementation has been absent. However, instead of making use of strong political leadership to create a better government through CSR, the dominant objective since Bangladesh became a free nation has been the narrow vision of regime consolidation. The drivers for reform were thus made redundant, which in turn made reform initiatives futile (Bhuiyan, 2017; Rabbi & As-Saber, 2012; Zafarullah, 2008).

There are obvious causes why so many reform initiatives in the past failed in most cases. The well-known causes include narrow vision, political inaction, bureaucratic inertia, factionalism in bureaucracy, weakness in implementation and monitoring, lack of shouldering policy ownership, political conflict, lack of institutional capacity, partisan capture of state institutions, lack of adequate legal protection, lack of administrative ethics and existence of all-pervasive corruption (Alam & Teicher, 2012; Azizuddin, 2011; IGS, 2008; Sarker, 2004, 2006; Zafarullah, 2008).

By reviewing Bangladesh's growth and development over time, one will find that the common features of its civil service include maintaining the colonial legacy; the piecemeal reform efforts by regimes of various shades; a military-bureaucracy nexus; the politicisation of the bureaucratic cadres; the absence of accountability; and widespread corruption (Parnini, 2011; Zafarullah, 2002, 2007). The administrative cadre of the BCS that inherited all the cardinal features of imperial bureaucracy still maintains much of the elitist tradition and essentially shields itself from other functional groups (Khan, 2013). Members of this cadre generally hold key positions in the governmental system that can significantly influence policymaking (Zafarullah, 2007). The structure of Bangladesh's bureaucracy has undergone many changes since the colonial era. However, nothing significant has changed in its behavioural character or quality of service delivery to the citizens, except for certain superficial changes in its structural expansion or contraction, or in its increase or decrease in power (Haque 1997; Shelley, 2002; Zafarullah & Khan, 2005).

Bureaucrats in Bangladesh enjoy more than equal power in policy planning and implementation and resource allocation since inexperienced and less capable politicians heavily rely on the bureaucrats for technical advice on state-funded development projects. This advantageous position has led the functionaries to create an alliance with political leaders and business elites by compromising the values of public service neutrality (Alam & Teicher, 2012; Samarasinghe, Alam & Teicher, 2008). Therefore, the promotion, posting and contractual appointment of senior bureaucrats are used as political tools to attract party loyalists (Alam, Coghill & Keddle, 2010). The politicisation of promotion and placement, the uncertainty over promotion—or losing the desired posting—and the rampant corruption that is either overlooked or supported by political masters have entrenched factionalism in bureaucracy (Alam et al., 2010; Alam & Teicher, 2012). An IGS (2008) report reveals that 'the entire bureaucracy in Bangladesh is plagued with deep-seated factionalism and waning spirit de corp' (p. 16). The bureaucratic factionalism, the ineffectiveness of regulatory institutions, the uncertainty of promotion and posting and the opportunity to use an official position in corrupt practices have affected the governance capability of bureaucracy in the form of total demoralisation, serious tension and utter negligence in the bureaucracy's work (Alam & Teicher, 2012; Siddiqui, 2006; Zafarullah, 2005; Zafarullah & Rahman, 2008).

The internal accountability of any bureaucracy is maintained through a hierarchical chain of command but, in Bangladesh, there are instances in which this does not always function. The main reason is the political access that some junior officers have to powerful politicians, or even to the prime minister—this example of the collapse of a chain of command is mentioned by a former 'principal secretary' in an interview (Alam & Teicher, 2012, p. 871).

Another example of the lack of internal accountability can be observed in the rule-bending tendencies that go unpunished. For example, the 2014 Secretariat Instructions specify how long a file should stay at one desk, but many officers disregard such instructions without sanction.

Although constitutionally, Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy with the past experience of both military and civilian rules, its democracy has not been institutionalised. Successive governments, once in power, try to perpetuate their regime and do not hesitate even to amend the Constitution to their partisan advantages. The form of democracy that exists in Bangladesh is often marked as 'prime ministerial authoritarianism', as power is centralised in the prime minister's role (TIB, 2014, p. 6). Parliament cannot be the centre of national consensus due to confrontational politics, a poor parliamentary culture, the ruling party's non-accommodating attitude and the opposition parties' boycotting and hartal culture (Alam & Teicher, 2012). So, confrontational politics impacts policy continuation and any significant reform implementation. There are constitutional provisions for parliament to promulgate laws for regulating the appointment and service conditions of the civil servants—but parliament did not pass a civil service Act to oversee bureaucracy until 14 November 2018, when the Civil Service Act 2018 was enacted (GOB, 2018e). Whether the new Act will become instrumental in implementing the desired changes to the country's civil service system is yet to be determined.

Further, even though the judiciary was formally separated from the executive in 2007, the dominant culture of control and interference perpetrated by the executive and the politicians, as well as by the rampant corruption in the sector, debar the judiciary from playing its role effectively (Ferdous, 2020). The civil service is heavily centralised in terms of service delivery, allocation of resources, procurement of goods and services and the implementation of government policies and projects. The PA system faces enormous challenges, including inadequate pay, lack of accountability and all-pervasive corruption, and the civil servants have been politicised over the years. Consequently, different governments have made many public officials OSDs—specifically those who belong to the BCS Administration cadre—based on political considerations, not on administrative grounds.

Except for those in the senior-scale category who were inducted through PSC examinations, the promotion system for all other higher ranks is non-transparent and politically biased (Sarker, 2004; Alam & Teicher, 2012; Zafarullah, 2008). However, the deprived officers have no opportunities to redress their grievances. The BCS examination system has lost a significant amount of its competitive edge due to the irregularities in the recruitment procedures that were frequently reported. Further, the training institutions deliver outdated training programs that are mainly theoretical and based on the intuitive power of the trainers, not on the participants' needs for skill development. Donor-funded projects are only partially successful because civil servants lack cooperation and the political leadership is indifferent—as their priority lies elsewhere; there is also a lack of coordination and an absence of policy-ownership (Ali, 2010; Khan & Zafarullah, 2005).

### **Conclusion:-**

This paper has explored historical growth of Bangladesh Civil Service. It has discussed various reform initiatives undertaken by different regimes. Due to sociopolitical realities of the country, CSR implementation has encountered challenges and the goal of service quality improvement remained unachieved. In short, the problematic relationship between politicians and the bureaucrats, outright politicisation of bureaucracy, the internal conflict of bureaucracy, undue aspiration for individual advancement, non-transparent human resource management system, lack of accountability and widespread corruption are some of the wicked problems that pose difficult challenges to implementing reforms in Bangladesh Civil Service. The bureaucracy, in general, always remained aloof from the people and thereby became non-responsive to their demands for essential goods and services. Although committees and commissions were formed by various regimes and donor-funded reform programs were undertaken, in the sociopolitical context of Bangladesh, establishing a good governance structure, an accountable and transparent political and administrative culture to support regulatory institutions and good governance practices, has not been a priority.

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