

Restructuring civil services

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UNMINDFUL of the contradictions and conflicts its local government and police systems have caused, the National Reconstruction Bureau is now set to reconstruct the civil services of the country with all their groups, cadres and grades from the federation down the line to the village.

A simple statement which needs to be made here is that the civil services world over with their laws, traditions and values evolve through centuries, and so they have in Pakistan, and cannot be invented overnight. Even if it could be done, the task is too vast and complex for the knowledge, experience and resources that vest in the Bureau.

Amusingly, the NRB wishes to bring the civil services in line with the "administrative structures raised in the wake of devolution" undeterred by the fact that the structures, if any at all raised, are shaky and have created so deep a rift that the devolution plan itself is being subjected to an extensive review.

It can be safely surmised that were the president's approval not required under the 17th amendment to the Constitution, the provinces by now would have repealed or substantially altered the Local Government Ordinance which, along with the Police Order, is the mother of devolution.

Any change in the composition of the services, if at all considered necessary, therefore, must wait till the functions and jurisdictions of the federal, provincial and distinct governments are finally determined.

The overriding consideration in the changed circumstances should be to let the initiative in all matters relating to the services rest with the parliament and the provincial assem-

to use the people thus appointed to obey the directives rather than follow the law. Those who joined on merit were, in course of time, compelled either to fall in line or to fall behind. In this grim choice most chose the former course. Incompetence and corruption, thus, became the inevitable consequence of every reorganization.

The contemplated change in the service structures is bound to cause general commotion and make many despondent, but it will not improve the delivery of services to the people if the rule of competitive merit in appointments and fair play in career placements and promotions were not to be enforced and the compliant but dishonest are preferred to the firm and honest.

The essential point to make is that there is nothing wrong with the structure of the services but everything is wrong with the way the civil servants are treated. This approach combined with the low wages the civil servants get, the declining trend in their calibre and commitment looks irreversible.

In good old days (before East Pakistan went its own way) a young civil servant — the general administrator, engineer, economist and the rest — on first appointment in the most coveted grade would get roughly one-fourth of what his friend who was lucky enough to get a job in a good commercial organization would get.

The importance of a civil servant's duties and the respect he received more than compensated for the lower salary. Today he gets one-tenth of what his friend in commerce gets and yet, in his penury, he feels insecure and unimportant.

It would not be difficult to demolish the existing structures but the point to ponder is whether the new ones erected on their rubble would prove any better if the quality of the people



may have no choice but to suffer its consequences but, more damagingly, the talented youth still inclined to join the government despite low remuneration and lower prestige will be altogether driven away.

The urge to reorganize the civil services is perennial and surfaces on the change of every regime but the intentions are never clear and, at worst, are selfish. Not surprisingly, therefore, the outcome of every such exercise in the past has been a fall in the standards of competence and integrity. The structures were changed, as the NRB plans doing once again in a more drastic manner, when the need was to enforce the rule of merit and discipline, and to protect the public servants from extraneous pressures and temptations within.

Every reorganization opened doors to arbitrary appointments and then

inhabiting them continues to fall. In facing this dilemma, the government and the people alike, based on the past experience, would have good reasons to be wary of the solutions offered by the NRB.

As the services' restructuring scheme makes the rounds of government offices hidden from the public view, some news reports suggest the NRB next would be proposing a plan to end the special status of the tribal areas. Such a plan, if present is considered the right time to contemplate it, should be mooted in open tribal jirgas and not in close bureaus. Nothing excites the imagination of our tribesmen more than a free exchange of banter and invective with their political agents and governors.