**The disappointing administrative reforms**

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The bureaucracy is the spinal cord of any government – democratic, autocratic, monarchy or military. It is recognized as the permanent government for it is the custodian of the record, documents and data as laid down in the rules of business and accords continuity to the state policies and programmes irrespective of the nature, complexion and tenure of a government. This defines its instrumentality in the unhindered and smooth management of state affairs.

Notwithstanding the centrality of the bureaucracy in the formulation and implementation of the state policies in the higher echelons, the recent administrative reforms have failed to address the difficulties this critical national institution confronts in shouldering its complex responsibility with the requisite impartiality, efficiency and competence. The reforms ignore the human factor rendering the bureaucracy as much susceptible to the steep decline in good governance marked by justice, meritocracy, fair play and honesty,and concentrate more on setting the delinquent and non-performing bureaucrats on the right path than giving equal importance to the causes leading to the decrease in the standard bureaucratic administration.

The bureaucrats being the public servants – and not the employees of governments- need to be completely depoliticized, posted on merit for a certain and protected tenure with reasonable latitude in discharging their responsibilities in accordance with rules and regulations. If they are made shuttle cocks kicked from place to place or remain without posting for long periods at the behest of the political lords, or packed to successive hard and insignificant stations, their performance would certainly go down. The cause of the falling standards of public service is deeply grounded in the absence of constitutional safeguards for the bureaucrats’ service and tenure, political interference and the blatant disregard of rules and regulations by the political leadership.

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The method of recruitment to the federal and provincial cadre posts has been very effective in bringing forth persons of high caliber who not only shined within the country but pursued successful careers in the international institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the United Nations Organization. Particularly, the Pakistan Administrative Service and the Foreign Service of Pakistan can well be proud of bureaucrats of international repute who emerged out of their ranks. The Ayub era was the golden period for the bureaucrats to display their agility, talent and competence because they had the security of tenure and service with merit-based postings and promotions. The seniors were protective of their juniors in cases of omission in the performance of their duties in good faith.

Within two decades of the independence, the political conditions of the country began manifesting their overall impact on this central institution. General Muhammad Yahya Khan shook the bureaucracy to the hilt by summarily dismissing 303 senior bureaucrats on flimsy grounds in 1969. No one from the senior ranks confronted this arbitrary action. The summary dismissal inflicted a great setback to the confidence of bureaucrats and their faith in the corps d’esprit.This was followed by Z.A. Bhutto dismissing 1700 public servants of lower and higher rank without proper enquiry and scrutiny.

The list of these dismissals ridiculously included officers who had already retired or passed away and petty officials like stenographers. In the first PPP rule, the massive lateral entries and direct appointments; the blatant political interference; the absence of security of tenure and career progression; the bullying and mendacious behaviour of the new democratic lot had an enduring impact on bureaucrats sending them into a self-surviving mode.They lost their agility and initiative being the hallmark of good officers in confronting public problems and resolving them without let and hindrance. Sycophancy crept in to replace competence.

The subsequent regimes of General Zia-ul-Haq, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif or General Pervaiz Musharraf did not bring any respite to the bureaucracy.They consummated cronyism. The Sharifs believed more in sycophancy than merit and took this ill-advised system of spoils to new heights creating demigods in the bureaucratic structures in Punjab and the federation. Financial impropriety of political bosses was bound to taint the credentials of blue eyed bureaucrats. Nothing could stop its seepage into the lower bureaucratic ranks, too. The human acquisitive instinct was on full display from head to toe.

The federal and provincial civil services are two pillars of the administrative structure in the country. At the provincial level, the system of recruitment to the cadre posts was marred by direct appointment or by manipulation of competitive examinations held by the Provincial Public Service Commissions. The other federal units aside, the province of Sindh acquired notoriety in destroying the provincial bureaucratic structure in 1990s when Late Jam Sadiq Ali was imposed as Chief Minister by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. The Late Jam had his single seat in the Sindh Assembly and was nominated as the Chief Minister. With a master stroke, he acquired the required number for a vote of confidence by threats, coercion and inducements using all strong arm tactics through the bureaucracy.

Aided by his Principle Secretary, who jumped from grade 18 to 20 to hold this powerful position as a prize for his chauffeuring the candidate Jam Sadiq Ali in his electioneering in Sanghar when he was the Deputy Commissioner there, the late Jam played havoc with the provincial bureaucracy by horizontal movement of officials to cadre posts, transfers and postings against senior positions in personal pay and grade. Unfortunately, this devastating practice has been unabashedly followed by every successive provincial government to make the bureaucrats a willing partner in the clientele politics or the spoil system.The politicians choose the vulnerable and pliant officers for their fiefdoms to be at their beck and call.

(To be concluded)

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