

POLITICS OF DECENTRALIZATION
THE CASE OF UPAZILA REFORM IN BANGLADESH

by

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Abstract

Political and economic decentralization of governance structure and the promotion of self-governing local administration have been considered as high priority public policy issues in the developing countries in recent years. Conventional literature on decentralization focuses only on the managerial and economic dimensions of the process. It generally ignores the analysis of political feasibility of implementing such policies.

I chose to focus on the political dimension of decentralization policy. More specifically, I analyze the political use of a major decentralization in Bangladesh by a military dictatorship and the reaction that this policy provoked among bureaucrats and politicians both at the central and local level. My discussion of the Upazila (Sub-district) reform of general Ershad regime (1982-90) shows that, success and failure of reform from above, depend upon the nature of resolution of the conflicts among various actors inside and outside the state. Authoritarian but politically weak regime of general Ershad, failed to implement substantive changes in the political and administrative structure of the Upazila level government., the reason being the lack of legitimacy of the regime in the civil society and also its heavy dependence on the civil bureaucracy to implement reform. The bureaucracy resisted reform because it was threatened by loss of power at the local level of administration.

Bangladesh experience tells us that, establishment of local self-governance needs more than one particular regime's strategic political interest. Local autonomy can only be ensured through changes at the macro level of political and administrative structure (changes in the constitution to provide legal basis for the local government, major reform of intergovernmental relations to create an accountability structure through elected representatives rather than the bureaucratic chain of command). and also by strengthening and expanding the economic basis of the local government (more productive tax base, greater control over local economic development plans).

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes the political obstacles to decentralization of governmental structure in developing countries. I discuss the case of Upazila (sub district) decentralization policy in Bangladesh, as an example. By focusing on the political imperatives and motives of the ruling regime that initiated the process of decentralization, I argue that, decentralization necessitates changes in administrative structures that create conflicts among various interest groups, within the state including cadres in the civil service and elected representatives. I explore these issues in the context of a recent local government reform in Bangladesh, in particular, the decentralization policy of Ershad regime (1982-1990) and the creation of the Upazila system. The central thesis of my argument is: that the success or failure of a decentralization policy in fostering political and administrative autonomy for the local governments, is largely determined by the outcome of the conflicts among the three dominant groups--the political executives of ruling regime, the different cadres of central and local bureaucracy, and the elected representatives at the national and local level.

METHODOLOGY

Information for this paper has been collected from a range of secondary materials though one work in particular (Ali 1986) served as a primary source. The author was actively involved in the policy formulation process of the reform as a member of different policy making committees. This study

is significant because it provided information and insights into the nature of conflicts among various actors inside and outside the state. Specifically, Ali's detailed discussion of the decision making process inside the reform committees was very helpful for the analysis of the state actors political interest. Also the author, who was a senior member of the civil service, strongly defended the traditional role of the generalist civil service in the context of intergovernmental relationship. His partisan view was helpful in understanding the motivation of one the important actors involved in the decision process.

To overcome the limitation of relying on secondary literature, I have used various sources to cross check information. Also I was in Bangladesh during the critical period of the reform (1982- 1986) and I had the opportunity to closely observe the reform process. In 1984, as a Masters student at the University of Dhaka, I did an intensive case study of one Upazila. Although I was not able to use that study for this paper, experiences of that field study helped me to look at the secondary literature with a critical eye.

In writing this paper I have relied on three key concepts that need to be defined. These are: **decentralization**, **deconcentration** and **devolution**. The concept decentralization means the sharing of political and administrative powers and responsibilities between the levels of government. Specifically, political analysis of decentralization refers to the territorial distribution of power that concern with the extent to which power and authority are dispersed through the spatial hierarchy of the state. It also refers to the

institutions and processes through which such dispersal take place (Smith 1985).

The term deconcentration indicates delegation of administrative responsibility to a subordinate administrative entity **without any transfer of legal power and authority**. Dispersal of a certain headquarters' branches from the capital city to a provincial city is an example of deconcentration.

Devolution involves dispersal of **legal powers and authority** from central to local levels of government. Through devolution, authority to make final decisions is transferred to the local levels of administration, even when the power is limited and circumscribed by central government regulations (Siddiqui 1984).

STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

The paper is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, I discuss two theoretical approaches to decentralization, namely, techno-economic and politico-institutional. This chapter also includes, a theoretical discussion of these issues: barriers to implementation of decentralization program; inter-governmental relations and the relation between politicians and bureaucrats. The second chapter is focused on the case study. It includes a description of the structure and functions of the Upazila administration in Bangladesh and changes that were recommended as result of the decentralization policy. I also analyze here the bureaucratic and political barriers to Upazila reform. The analysis focuses on (i) political motives and imperatives of the military

regime, (ii) military's control over the decision process, (iii) the nature and extent of central bureaucratic control over the Upazila administration, and (iv) the conflict of interest between the national and local level politicians.

The third chapter deals with the political and institutional issues in central-local relations. The issues here are, the forms of politics and their impact on the local government's autonomy, the relationships between the types of regime and the nature and extent of local autonomy and institutional instability as a barrier to the development of local self-governance. The third chapter ends with a general conclusion where I discuss some theoretical implications of the Bangladesh case and present some tentative recommendations.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO DECENTRALIZATION

This section will include two approaches to the analysis of decentralization policy that are commonly used in the reform related literature. These are (a) **techno-economic** approach and (b) **politico-institutionalist** approach. I will define and critique the first approach and explain the necessity of adopting the second approach as a pragmatic framework for analyzing decentralization policy. In addition, I discuss some major **institutional and political barriers to reform**. The chapter ends with a theoretical note on **inter-governmental relations and politician-bureaucrat relationship**.

Techno-Economic Approach

This approach combines the public administration and management perspective with neo-classical finance theories. The emphasis is on the identification of the sources of local government revenue, assessment of the equity implications and strength of these revenue sources. The approach also examines the dependence of local government on central government transfers, identification of bottlenecks in the system of revenue generation and financial management, and explore appropriate mechanisms to stimulate greater local resource mobilization (Schroeder 1989; Bahl and Miller 1982). The techno-economic approach generally argues in favor of decentralization of administration at the local level, especially financial decentralization, and emphasizes the need for strengthening local government. But the focus here is only economic. Decentralization is necessary because it improves the

resource mobilization capacity of the local government, through streamlining the administrative decision-making process. Efficiency is meant here as “technical efficiency associated with lower costs of making decisions and economic efficiency which focuses on maximizing local welfare.” (Schroeder 1989; p.3) This approach also treats administrative and organizational aspects of decentralization, from a techno-rational point of view. For example, the emphasis is on organizational and administrative arrangements, staff training, rationalization of budget making procedure etc. (Samoff 1990)

No doubt these issues are essential for a decentralization measure to produce desired economic benefits, specifically central governments are facing financial crisis, as in most of the third world countries. There is indeed logic behind the emphasis on local resource mobilization to strengthen institutional and revenue generating capacity of local governments. But the problem with the techno-economic approach is that it tends to ignore the political imperatives behind most of the decentralization measures in developing countries and their impact on reform efforts. As a result, the recommendations regarding reforms that come from this perspective, lack political realism. Such analysis tends to ignore the political motives of the ruling regime and the possibility of conflicts among interest groups due to restructuring of the administrative system.

In contrast, an approach, that takes into account political interests and conflicts as central to any public policy, would consider the problem of political feasibility as a point of departure in its analysis.

An example of policy recommendation in the tradition of techno-economic paradigm, in the context of Upazila decentralization, would be the

recommendations of the Metropolitan Studies Program regarding local government finance in Bangladesh (Schroeder 1989). A significant assumption behind their recommendations was that the Upazilas will have increased taxing powers as a result of decentralization. But a careful analysis of the political imperatives behind the creation of Upazila and more importantly an analysis of the civil bureaucracy's, specifically of the generalist cadre's interest to retain the central control over fiscal administration, would suggest, that the apolitical assumption of automatic relation between decentralization and increasing local control over revenue generation cannot be taken for granted. If this is true, then the logical approach would be to leave aside, for the time being, the techno-economic recommendations related to rationalization of the fiscal administration and to shift the analytical focus on the questions of unequal power distribution and conflicts of different groups within the state apparatuses.

Politico-Institutionalist Approach

In contrast to the techno-economic approach, the politico-institutionalist approach emphasizes the fact that any reform effort or decentralization measure, whether central or local, must be carried out within an institutional setting, composed of political, legal, administrative and cultural elements (Cochrane 1983; Bahl et al, 1984; Smoke 1989; Rondenelli et al, 1989). Administrative decentralization measure has both direct and indirect impact on local government institutions and the nature and extent of this impact

will be determined by the nature of the decentralization measure itself. This in turn is determined by the objective behind the policy formulation in the first place. For example, from a techno-economic perspective, the dominant objective for decentralization is usually better planning and management of local resource mobilization programs. In this case, government will probably pursue the policy of deconcentration. If the objective is to initiate participatory development process then some degree of devolution of administrative power to the local authorities will be necessary. When "popular participation" becomes a functional requirement for local resource mobilization, it would be necessary to strengthen the local government institutions and make them more accountable to the local people. In this case central government must initiate devolution of not only administrative power but also of political power, which means increasing the autonomy the representative institutions at the local level (Hye 1985).

But the crucial point is that the kind of policy a government will pursue, or more importantly, will be able to pursue, depends on the nature of the state power both at the central and local level. By the nature of the state power, I mean whether the polity is democratic or authoritarian, the specific nature of balance in class forces in the greater society, and the extent to which the political executives of the state have the relative autonomy from the civil bureaucracy in carrying out substantive policies. These variables together will determine the capacity of the regime in formulating and implementing major decentralization policies.

In a liberal democratic polity, with multi-party system, it may be difficult to implement major decentralization of administrative power at the local

level. If the regime in power has the necessary support base in the local area, it may be willing to decentralize political power at that level. But if the regime is not sure about its power base at the local level, it probably would resist any reform effort. In practice, it would prefer the participation to be effected through the party hierarchy (Hye 1985).

Paradoxically, in an authoritarian polity, government may find it convenient to promote participation of the local elites by strengthening the local government institutions. This strategy might create a grass-roots support base for the regime. Moreover there is little risk of losing the local institutions to opposing political forces at least in the short run. As we will see later in this paper, General Ershad's decentralization effort during the martial law period is a good example of this.

Since the political imperative behind decentralization policy is important, the policy statement of governments usually contains explicit and implicit objectives (Conyers 1985). Explicit objectives are those that are stated in public documents or declarations associated with decentralization. They can be political or managerial, but they are always "positive" objectives. These objectives are positive in the sense that they are essentially designed to legitimize the decentralization policies in the eyes of the general public and often the international donor community (Conyers 1985). For example, objectives that are formally related to public participation, are always stated in terms of rhetorical language, like "power to the people", "bringing government closer to the people" and so on.

Implicit objectives, on the other hand, are the objectives that are the outcome of government's political maneuvering and these are not made

public. But these are the real objectives that usually set the nature and direction of the actual reform effort. For example, Conyers mentions the case of the Zambian decentralization reform of 1980 that shows the impact of implicit objectives on the explicit ones. The objectives of decentralization, as officially stated by the Zambian government, were, for example, "bringing government closer to the people", better coordination among different branches of the government at the district level, and establishing facilities for efficient planning and implementation of development programs, specifically in the countryside (Conyers 1985). But, as she points out, the most important motivating factor behind the decentralization policy, which was not publicly stated, was the political intention of the government to strengthen the role of ruling party at the district and local levels. The implication of this was that the government subsequently made changes in the composition of the district councils, and finally it turned out that the whole thing was not decentralization of any kind but centralization in the sense that it in effect strengthened the presence of the central government.

BARRIERS TO DECENTRALIZATION

Despite the current popularity of decentralization, actual reforms in developing countries has almost everywhere fallen short of declared objectives. The reasons behind this are many and vary from one situation to another according to the specific nature of political and economic situations. But studies of various reform efforts have pointed out several reasons why decentralization policies are difficult to implement (Smith 1985; Rondinelli 1981).

One barrier is **top-down administrative manipulation**. Although central authorities formally adopt a policy of devolution, in reality they continue to make adjustments in the composition of the local administration, assigning, for example, central government nominated decision makers to monitor the locally elected representatives. This kind of central control actually transforms the policy of devolution (transfer of legal authority) into a policy of deconcentration (delegation of administrative responsibility without transferring any legal authority).

Significant devolution of political and administrative power may be thwarted through the **conscious design of a policy that provides the local governments with only a very limited role** like a limited tax base and few social welfare oriented administrative functions.

Another way of maintaining central control is to keep the "decentralized" local units **financially dependent** on the central authority. Various studies have shown that central government rarely decentralizes revenue generating

authority to the local governments, even when there is a substantial devolution of administrative power.

One of the most important barriers in the implementation process of decentralization policy is the **conflict that emerges between different interest groups, especially between the politicians and the bureaucrats**. As experiences with reforms have shown (Smith 1985), due to this conflict, the policy outcomes sometimes deviate significantly from the initial policy intent.

A THEORETICAL NOTE ON INTER-GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS AND POLITICIAN-BUREAUCRAT RELATIONSHIP

Conventional theoretical analysis of intergovernmental relations, generally focuses on the relationship of power and influences between central and local governments as expressed through the formal mechanisms of control (legislative, judicial and administrative). The emphasis is on the tools of administrative control like power of approval, appointment and sanction. But empirical studies show that intergovernmental relations and conflict resolution are more structured by "informal" mechanisms like negotiations and persuasions, rather than the use of sanctions (Smith 1985). Local governments may not always be passive recipients of central directives. The methodological implication of this is that it opens up new avenues (understanding of the political context and differential capacity of various state actors engaged in conflicts) to the analysis of intergovernmental relationships. Instead of assuming the state is monolithic, policy analyst can explore the possibility of fragmentation within the central and local state, and

the power resources that each actors can deploy in negotiation and bargaining processes. Is there a common interest among different cadres of the central government? Are they able to use all the time the formal control they possess? Unlike conventional analysis, the new approach to intergovernmental relations, emphasizes **competition, collusion** and **cooperative** dimensions of the process. It abandons the focus on the formal hierarchies of authority and attempts to explore the networks of antagonistic but interdependent actors who are engaged in the process of bargaining and formation of alliances (Thoenig 1978).

Another useful theoretical dimension in the study of intergovernmental relations, is to look at the resource of power with which the various actors are initially endowed. Inter-organizational and also intra-organizational politics essentially center on the employment of strategies by actors to preserve this power. In their strategic interactions, coalitions and interdependent relationships are formed. The nature of distribution of power and the structure of interdependency are determined by several major types of resources. These include finance, political access and support, political expertise, technical specialization and control over information (Rhodes 1981).

Control over or access to a particular combination of these resources influences the nature of bargaining between actors and determines the characteristics of intergovernmental relations. For example, in developed countries, local actors have specialized information and technical expertise that strengthens their power vis-a-vis the central authority even when they are formally subordinated to it (Stoker 1991). On the other hand, lack of these

resources may undermine the formal power that actors might have in self governing local state. This is the reality in most of the developing countries (Rakodi 1986).

In public policy and planning literature, theoretical analysis concerning the relationship between bureaucrat and politician has been traditionally based on Weberian "Formal-Legal" model. This approach counterposes policy decision and policy implementation, the responsibility of the former rests on the elected representatives and latter on the bureaucrats. The division of labor between them is clear cut and the role of the bureaucrats is supposed to be "value-free" (Peters 1987; Reis 1982). Whatever its value as an ideal type, the model does not reflect the reality of policy making, especially in the context of developing countries. The reality of policy making in developing areas rather, fits what Guy Peters calls "The Adversarial Model". This model depicts a situation in which political executives and bureaucrats are engaged in a competition for power and control over policy. The model does not take seriously the idea of a **politics-administration dichotomy**, which is a basic assumption of the classical public administration literature. Rather these two activities are seen as intertwined and the state actors (politicians and bureaucrats) trespass both realms (policy formulation and implementation) in their struggle for control. The common scenario of politician-bureaucrat interaction as portrayed by this model is the following: political executive trying to recapture the organization from the bureaucrat and the latter resisting on the ground that it is a technical realm where "non-specialist" politician is totally unfit to perform the task (Peters 1987). This approach also argues that, the degree to which the bureaucrats will become

politicized and partisan, depends upon the nature and extent of the administrative reform and to the extent to which they think their privileges would be threatened by the proposed changes.

Another important theoretical dimension to the politician-bureaucrat conflict is the assumption that these **actors are not monolithic entities**. As the case of Upazila reform in Bangladesh clearly shows, both politicians and bureaucrats had conflicting factions among themselves and the policy outcomes reflected these conflicts. The theoretical observation that can be derived from various cases of reform is that, politicians and bureaucrats rarely confront each other in policy activities as monolithic entity. Given the conflicts of interests within each group, the usual scenarios are of alliances and coalition building among different factions and the policy outcomes are highly contingent upon these processes (Reis 1982; Van Donge 1978).

CHAPTER TWO
THE CASE STUDY

The Upazila Decentralization: Structure and Functions

One of the most important policy initiatives of the decade of 1980s in Bangladesh, is the upgrading of a relatively unimportant tier of the local government--"Thana Parishad" (literally meaning police station but actually a lower administrative unit with a police station under its jurisdiction) to an important one--"Upazila Parishad" (Sub district council). The rationale for decentralization and expected benefits as stated in the policy statement of the government are:

"Government has decided to delegate authority and devolve administrative and development functions at the grassroots level. The main objective is to induce faster and appropriate development at the local level through direct participation of the local people. This will help in identification, planning and implementation of development projects, which will benefit local people most, more easily than before." (Quoted in Schroeder 1989; p,20).

The "Thanas" were upgraded to "Upazilas" in the sense that more administrative and political power, authority and functions were devolved, from the central government to the Upazila level. Also geographically, one typical Upazila included 3 to 4 previous Thanas (see table 3 and 4). The Upazilas were extremely heterogeneous in terms of their sizes and population. According to one study, Upazilas area varied from 55 square miles to 245 square miles. Population in each Upazila varied from 100 thousand to 400 hundred thousands. The number of union in each Upazila

varied from 2 to 28 and number of villages varied from 34 to 480 (Siddiqui 1984).

Local government at the Thana level was first introduced in 1959 and it was known as "Thana Parishad" (Thana Council). It was composed of centrally deputed officials and locally elected representatives who were responsible for co-ordinating the activities of all Union Councils (see table 1) within its jurisdictions. In reality, Thana Council had a very limited role to play, since it lacked any independent source of revenue and received very small amount of grants from the central government (Aziz 1984).

In contrast, after the reform, Upazila became the most important tier of the local administrative system in Bangladesh. For example, ten new officers were deputed to the Upazila level to carry out the expanded developmental role of the Upazila administration. These officers are: (i) Upazila Nirbahi Officer (Upazila Executive Officer), (ii) Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer, (iii) Upazila Education Officer, (iv) Upazila Agriculture Officer, (v) Upazila Engineer, (vi) Upazila Cooperative Officer, (vii) Upazila Livestock Officer, (viii) Upazila Fishery Officer, (ix) Upazila Finance Officer and (x) Upazila Social Welfare Officer.

Also the status of the officers was elevated. In the pre-reform administrative setup, Thana level executives used to be classified as "class 2 officer" who were non-college graduates. They were under the supervision of "class 1" officers of the higher levels of the administrative hierarchy-- subdivision or district (see table 3). Under the Upazila system, all centrally deputed officers were "class 1 officers" who had at least a bachelors degree. They were all placed under the formal control of the Upazila Chairman. The

rank and status of the Chief Executive Officer were also upgraded significantly. This position had a pay and rank that were above the former Sub-divisional officer and much above that of the former Circle Officer (McCarthy 1987; Faizullah 1987).

Following the reform, the Upazila government was made responsible for various new functions ("**Transferred Subjects**"). The most important function was planning and execution of development programs within the Upazila. Other important functions included, promotion of the local economy, fostering industrial and agricultural growth at the local level and creation of employment (for complete list of the transferred subjects, see table 1).

In contrast to the Thana Council, the Upazila administration received substantial amount of development funds. Central government allocated block grant to finance the Annual Upazila Development Plan (AUDP). Also to expedite the local level development functions, the Upazila administration was given the authority for the final approval of the AUDP. Previously, the "Thana Council Development Plan" had to be approved by the district level authority. The Upazila administration was given the authority to decide how much and where to spend, although this authority was very much restricted, since the central government set forth various guidelines regarding the nature and priorities of sectoral allocations.

The central government, however, retained the direct responsibility for "Regulatory Functions" and development activities of national and regional importance ("**Retained Subjects**"). These functions included, among others, magistracy, police and para-military forces, collection of land revenue and

compilation of national statistics (for complete list of regulatory functions, see table 2).

The former Thana administration did not have any tax base. But the Upazila administration was given the authority to levy taxes. The following revenue sources constituted its tax base:

(i) Lease money on Jalmahals (rivers and ponds for fish cultivation), (ii) Tax on profession and trade, (iii) Tax on dramatic and theatrical shows and other entertainment and amusement, (iv) Street lighting tax, (v) Fees for agricultural and industrial shows and also exhibitions, (vi) fees for license and permits granted by the Upazila Parishad, (vii) Toll on services and facilities maintained by the Upazila Parishad and (viii) Lease money from specified hats (weekly rural market), bazaars (markets) and ferries.

In terms of political autonomy, the most important change from the previous system was the creation of Upazila Parishad (Upazila Council). The chief executive of the former Thana Parishad used to be a career bureaucrat (Circle Officer). With the establishment of Upazila Parishad, an elected representative was made the chief executive (Upazila Chairman) for the first time in local government system in Bangladesh.

The Upazila Parishad was a corporate body and its membership included both elected representatives and also technical and professional functionaries, appointed by the central government. The chief executive of the Upazila Parishad (UZP) is the UZP chairman, who was elected by the local population of the Upazila. Other than the UZP chairman, the Parishad had the following members:

- (a) Representative members
- (b) Chairman of the Upazila Central Cooperative Association
- (c) Three Women members
- (d) One nominated member
- (e) Official members

The representative members were the locally elected chairmen of the **Union Parishads** (the next lower tier in the local government system) within a particular Upazila (see table 4). The number of representative members in a particular UZP, depended upon the number of Unions that each Upazila has. The central government nominated three women who were residents of the Upazila and also the one nominated member. The official members were the officers in charge of development activities in the Upazila administration. These were centrally recruited bureaucrats. They, however, did not have voting rights.

The UZP had the coordinating power of all the activities in the Upazila. According to the provision of the Upazila Ordinance, the officers dealing with the retained subjects, except the Munsiff(Judge) and the Magistrate, were "answerable" to UZP. The officers responsible for the transferred subjects, were "accountable" to the UZP for their activities and also for their conducts. The chairmen of the UZP had the authority to write the Annual Confidential Report (performance evaluation report) of all the officers at the Upazila level (Faizullah 1987; McCarthy 1987).

TABLE 1

FUNCTIONS OF UPAZILA PARISHAD

1. All development activities at the Upazila level, formulation of Upazila level development plans and programmes and implementation, monitoring and evaluation thereof.
2. Preparation of Upazila Development Plans on the basis Union Development Plans
3. Giving assistance and encouragement to Union Parishads in their activities.
4. Promotion of health, family planning and family welfare.
5. Provision for management of environment
6. Training of Chairmen, Members and Secretaries of Union Parishads
7. Implementation of Government policies and programs within the Upazila
8. Supervision, control and coordination of functions of officers serving in the Upazila, except Munsifs, Magistrate and Officers engaged in regulatory functions
9. Promotion of socio-cultural activities
10. Promotion and encouragement of employment generating activities
11. Such other functions as may be specified by the government from time to time
12. Promotion and extension of c-operative movement in the Upazila
13. Assistance to Zila parishad in development activities
14. Planning and execution of all rural public works programs
15. Promotion of agricultural activities for maximizing production
16. Promotion of educational and vocational activities

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)**17. Promotion of livestock, fisheries and forest**

**Source: Resolution on Reorganization of Thana Administration,
Cabinet Division, October 1982 (Reproduced in Ali, 1986)**

TABLE 2**LIST OF REGULATORY AND MAJOR DEVELOPMENT FUNCTIONS
RETAINED BY THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT**

1. **Civil and Criminal judiciary**
2. **Administration and Management of central revenue income tax, customs and excise, land revenue, land tax, etc.**
3. **Maintenance of law and order**
4. **Registration**
5. **Maintenance of essential supplies including food**
6. **Generation and distribution of electric power**
7. **Irrigation schemes involving more than one district**
8. **Technical education and education above primary level, viz, agricultural, engineering, medical, etc. High School, college and University education.**
9. **Modernized district hospitals and hospitals attached to the Medical colleges**
10. **Research organizations like Council of Scientific and Industrial Research(C.S.I.R.) Laboratories**
11. **Large scale seed multiplication and dairy farms**
12. **Large scale industries**
13. **Inter-district and inter-upazila means of communications, viz., posts, telegraph, telephones, railways, mechanically propelled road and inland water transport, highways, civil aviation, ports and shipping**
14. **Flood control and development of water resources**
15. **Marine fishing**
16. **Mining and mineral development**

TABLE 2 (CONTINUED)**17. Compilation of national statistics**

**Source: Resolution on Reorganization of Thana Administration,
Cabinet Division, October 1982 (Reproduced in Aziz 1984)**

Table 3
PRE- UPAZILA REFORM
ADMINISTRATIVE SETUP

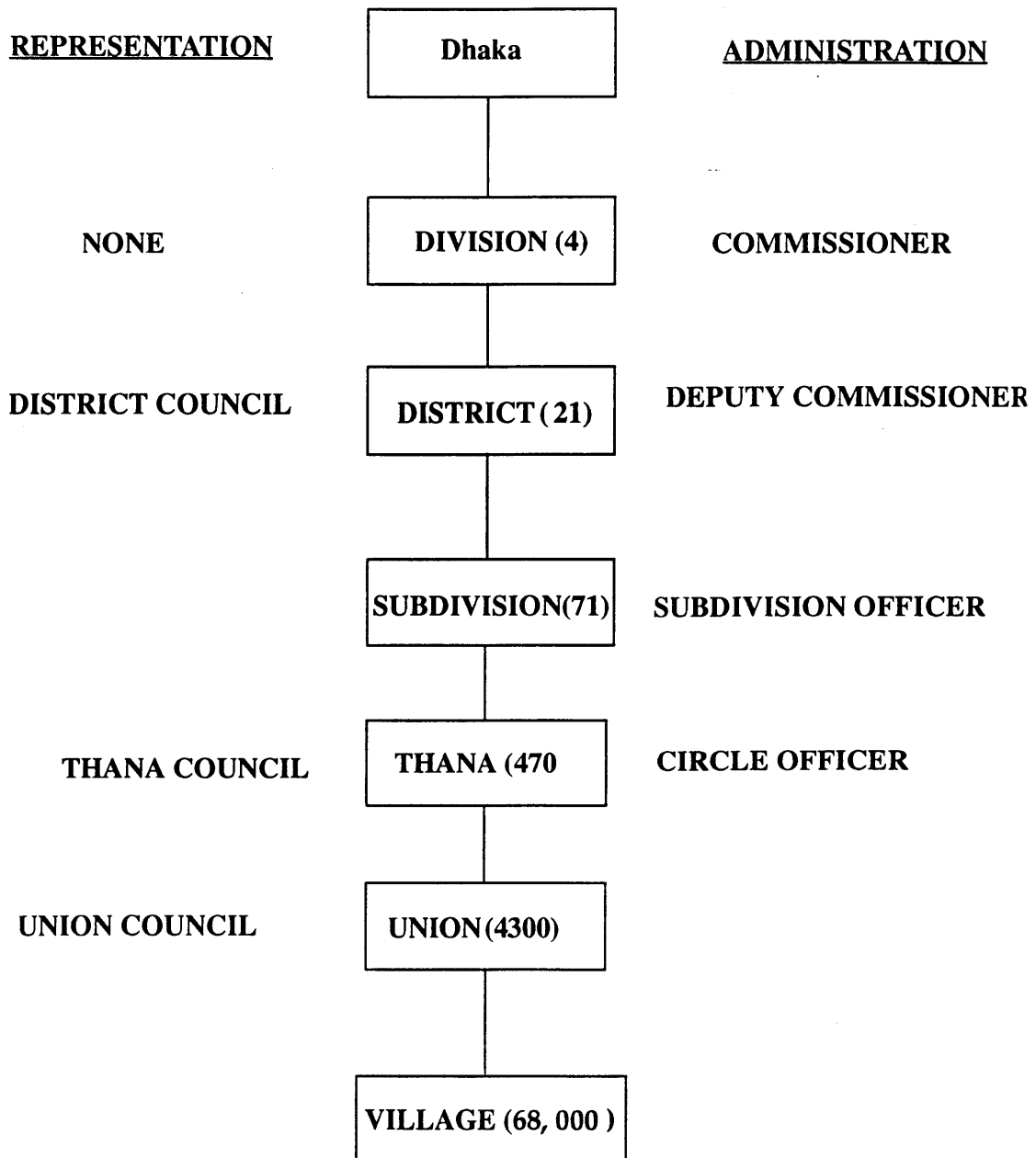
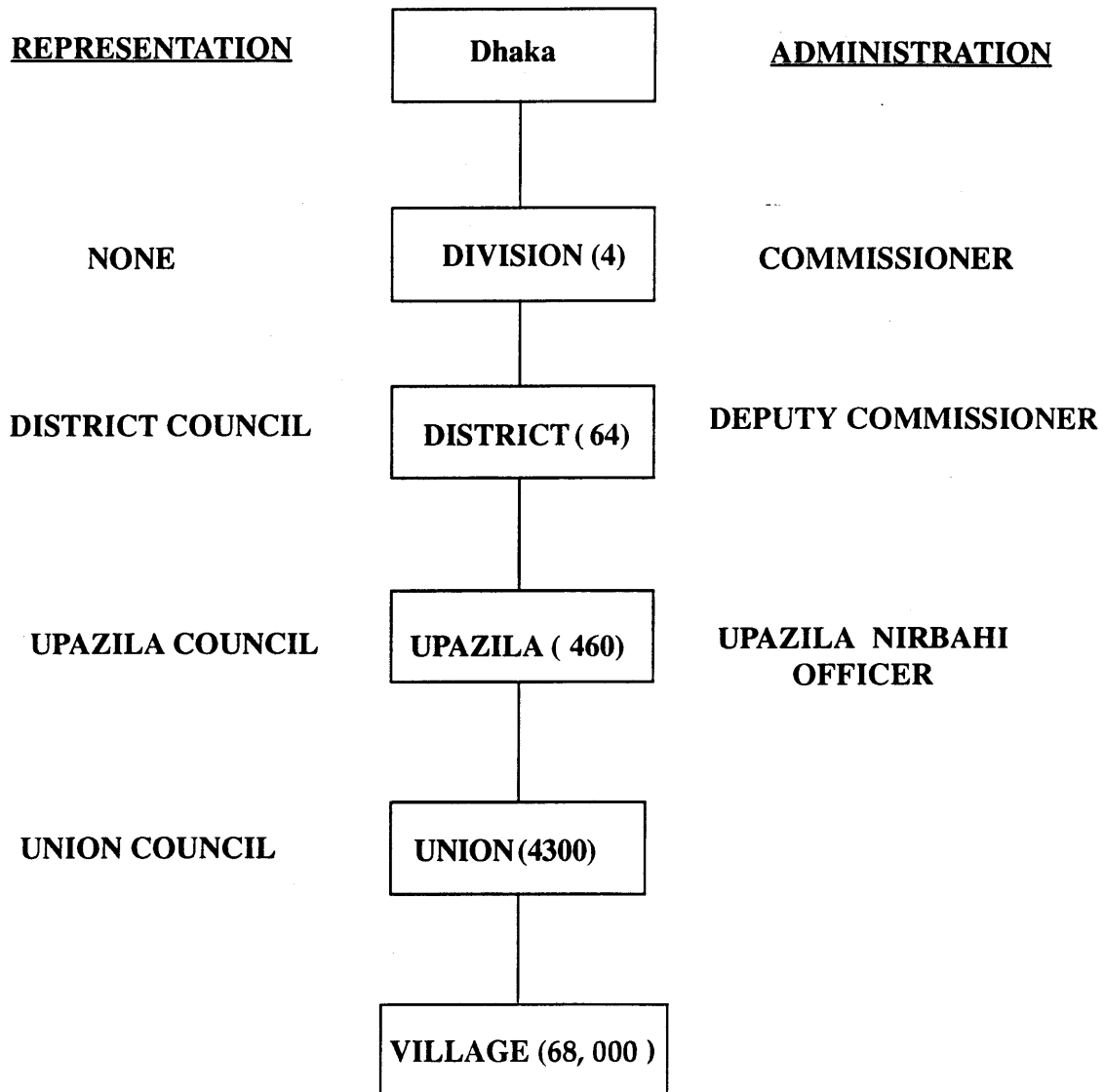


Table-4
POST- UPAZILA REFORM
ADMINISTRATIVE SETUP



BARRIERS TO UPAZILA REFORM

The Upazila reform, by devoluting political and administrative power to the local level elected representatives, created conflicts among different cadres of bureaucracy at the local and also at the central level. Since their power and privileges were threatened by the reform, the generalist cadre of the bureaucracy, attempted to control and define the nature of it. In this section, I discuss, how the political motives of the ruling regime (the military junta) and other institutional manipulations, by the civil bureaucrats, shaped the nature of the reform and created barriers to the development of self-governing local administration. The discussion focuses on, (1) political motives and imperatives of the military regime, (2) military's control over the decision process, (3) the nature and extent of central bureaucratic control over the UZPs and also (4) the conflict of interest between the national and local level politicians.

Upazila System--Local Control and Challenge to the Local Bureaucracy?

Initially, there was much enthusiasm and optimism among official spokespersons and academics regarding Upazila system. The reform was hailed as "a massive program of devolution of powers", that would take administration nearer to the people and "bolster rural local bodies" (Faizullah 1987). The most optimistic view regarding Upazila reform came from McCarthy (1987), who did extensive field studies of five Upazilas. She found the impact of reform very significant in terms of local political control and also inevitable decline of bureaucratic "hegemony". She argued that this

reform had politicized the development delivery systems into the rural areas which would give a new focus to the national party politics. The politics of resource allocation in the rural areas would eventually be so competitive due to the reform that it might not be possible for any central regime to control the politics very easily. McCarthy also considers the introduction of the Upazila system as a major challenge to the civil service that would undermine the bureaucratic control at the Upazila level. Her observations were essentially based on the formal changes that were made from the previous system. She emphasized the point that the Upazila system dismantled the bureaucratic administrative chain of command. This involved the weakening of a part of the traditional administrative hierarchy, for example, the district administration, and the result was a de-linking of local unit of governments from the super-ordinate control.

McCarthy's most significant and I would say, the most controversial observation is her argument that, "At the District level what is occurring is the systematic marginalization of the role of the District Commissioner and the diminution of the power and authority of the Ministries District officers."(McCarthy 1987;p,11) According to her, the major administrative and political implication of Upazila reform is the fragmentation of government administration and control at that level. She also points out two important changes in the local level bureaucracy due to the reform. These are the breakdown of the solidarity among the civil service cadres and the delegation of the responsibility of writing the personnel Annual Confidential Reports (ACR) of all officers at the local level.

How did the bureaucrats react to these formal changes in the administrative system that McCarthy mentions? This is one of the major issues that I would try to explore in the following sections..

Political Imperatives and Motives Behind the Creation of Upazila System

General Ershad, before seizing the power, publicly demanded that Bangladesh armed forces must have formal participation in the political and administrative decision making of the country. He asked the politicians "to consider important constitutional changes which will involve the military in the country's affairs and ward off future coup attempts."(General Ershad quoted in Huque and Akther 1989) Just before taking over power, he had sent a few senior army officers to survey the administrative structure of Indonesia and to collect first-hand knowledge "about the functioning of a government with a strong military element"(Far Eastern Economic Review 19 March 1982; Quoted in Huque and Akther 1989). After the coup d'état, the military junta pursued a policy of large scale infiltration of army officers into top and mid level of civil administration, public corporations and foreign services. This policy and the rule of martial law in general, created strong resentment among the urban middle classes and the opposition wasted no time capitalizing on it. In response, the military regime totally suppressed the urban political movement and initiated local government reform with much publicity. In addition to the local government administration, the judiciary was also reorganized by creating high court benches at the divisional level of the national administrative hierarchy and also establishing civil courts at the

Upazila level. The rhetoric was to bring the judicial system and the government closer to the people. But the real reason was to neutralize the political activities of the Dhaka based lawyers. The military junta hoped to force these urban based lawyers to move to the countryside, breaking one of the most important and articulate urban opposition group and lessening the impact of the urban middle classes in national politics (Moten 1987).

Though the military regime continued the ban on politics in general it quickly moved to empower the Upazila chairmen through election ("non-partisan" election at the local level only). The strategic reasons behind this decision were, a) since the Upazila Parishads (UZP) were heavily dependent on the central government for development funds (the reform did not make any substantive changes to lessen fiscal dependency as subsequent discussion will show), they could be forced to be loyal to the military regime and b) the elected Upazila chairmen could be used as vote banks to elect a military backed president and the members of parliament in the future (Ali 1986).

The regime's strategy paid off. A tightly controlled "non-partisan" election was held in 1985. Numerous candidates ran as "independents", only joining the government-backed party in the post-election period (see table 5). Approximately eighty percent of them eventually became nominal members of the government party (McCarthy 1987). Later the elected chairmen publicly supported the policies of the military government.

The military government reciprocated this support. The term of office of UZP chairmen was extended from 3 to 5 years. Their status was equated with that of a deputy secretary of civil administration and major in the army. Benefits like housing and travel allowances and telephones at home and at

the office were provided (Khan 1987a), unusual material incentives for a rural elite in Bangladesh. A solid patron-client relationship was thus established.

Military Junta's Formal Control Over the Policy Making Process

Powerful decision making committees for reform and reorganization were formally controlled by the military junta. Senior army officers provided the leadership of the two most important committees, the Martial Law Committee (MLC) and the Committee for Administrative Reorganization/Reform (CARR) (Khan 1987a). The MLC, as a martial law committee, was essentially a committee of senior army officers. It had one mid-ranking civil bureaucrat but his role was marginal in the committee. The chairperson of CARR was the Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrator and chief of the naval staff. In the junta's hierarchy he was second to Ershad. There were nine other members in the committee and some of them were bureaucrats and academics. But because of formal power and status of the navy chief and other senior army officers and since the country was under martial law, the non military professionals naturally had little influences in the committee. The military infiltrated not only policy making committees like the aforementioned, but also major implementing committees including the Committee for Finalization of the Reorganization of Ministries/division and Public Statutory Corporation and the National Implementation Committee for Administrative Reorganization/Reform (NICARR). These were headed by a Major General and the navy chief respectively (Khan 1987a).

With this formal control of different decision-making committees, the military junta hoped to ensure that the formulation and implementation of reform policies would be in accordance with their short and long term political needs. Shawkat Ali, who was a member of the NICARR and a civil bureaucrat by profession, acknowledged that army officers tried their best to monitor the implementation process (Ali 1986). Other senior members of the junta like Zonal Martial Law Administrators (ZMLA), used to participate in the committee meetings and they had the official responsibility of supervising the implementation process. The authority and scope of supervision of ZMLAs were extensive, ranging from substantive issues like reorganization of district administration to petty issues like selection of sites for the morgues (Ali 1986).

Because of high priority of creating political base in the countryside, the military junta decided not to follow the "gradualist approach" of reform as initially suggested by the committees. Upazilas were set up rapidly and General Ershad himself immediately started visiting different Upazilas with an aim of political mobilization of the chairmen. The political pampering of the chairmen by Ershad went to the extent that they felt they are the most privileged class, and only accountable to General Ershad (Ali 1986).

Upazila--Decentralization or Extension of Central Bureaucracy?

Since the military junta wanted to establish a solid political base among the rural elites, they tried their best to design a decentralization policy that would give the elected representatives a fair amount of political and administrative autonomy vis-a-vis the local bureaucrats. For that reason, the military junta consciously attempted to marginalize the role of civil bureaucracy in the formulation and implementation process. But there was a limit to the marginalization of such a powerful social actor like civil bureaucracy, especially the generalist cadre. Though the junta maintained formal control over the reform committees it was unable to bypass the bureaucracy in actual implementation of the reform programs. Reform Commission like NICARR was ultimately not made responsible to supervise the implementation process. This important role was played by three divisions/ministries of the central government, which were essentially controlled by the generalist cadre of the central bureaucracy. These were the Cabinet division in the President's Secretariat, Local Government division in the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives and Planning Commission in the Ministry of Planning (Khan 1987 b). Within the bureaucracy it was the Cabinet division that played the most influential role (Ali 1986).

When civil bureaucracy is threatened by loss of power and control due to administrative reforms, it generally tends to defend the status quo and attempt to extend its zone of influence by applying any bureaucratic means under its control. This phenomenon was very much evident during the

implementation process of Upazila decentralization. The civil bureaucracy created unnecessary positions, encouraged loyalties based on narrow service affiliations and most importantly, spawned a plethora of guidelines, rules and ordinances (Khan 1987 a).

In the reform committees, specially in the National Implementation Committee for Administrative Reorganization/ Reform (NICARR), senior bureaucrats lobbied for the creation of new positions for their particular cadres. As a result, 39 redundant positions were created. Also sectarian loyalties were encouraged among different cadre services, evident during the placement of centrally recruited officials at the Upazila level(Khan 1987a; Ali 1986).

As I mentioned earlier, the most powerful means that the bureaucracy utilized to retain its control, was the proliferation of rules, guidelines and ordinances. For example, the previous Thana system was administered by only one ordinance--the "Local Government Ordinance of 1976". In contrast, the Upazila system had four ordinances, four rules, one resolution, five guidelines and instruction and one hundred and seventy four orders and notifications (Khan 1987a). Since the civil bureaucrats were the one who formulate and interpret all these rules and ordinances, they naturally acquired an advantage over other actors in the administrative process. Moreover, excessive rules and regulations had a constraining effect on the maneuvering capacity of elected chairmen of the UZPs.

The Nature and Extent of Control of the Central Government over Upazila Parishad

Although the military junta wanted to devolve a reasonable amount of power to the UZPs, a closer examination of the central-local relationship reveals that the central bureaucratic authority retained extensive powers to control the UZP in various administrative ways. For example, according to section 26 of the Local Government Ordinance, the government had the right to transfer any institution or service retained by the UZP to itself (Ahmed 1991). The central government had overriding control over the activities of the UZPs. This legal control had two major aspects: First, the central government, "shall exercise general supervision and control over the Parishads in order to ensure that their activities conform to the purposes of this ordinance." (section 49 of Local Government Ordinance, 1983; Quoted in Huque 1986;p,87) Also the ordinance specified, " If the Government is satisfied that anything done or intended to be done by or on behalf of the Parishad is not in conformity with law, or is inconsistent with or contrary to national policy, the Government may, by order: a) quash the proceedings; b) suspend the execution of any resolution passed or order made by the parishad; c) prohibit the doing of anything proposed to be done; and d) require the Parishad to take such action as may be specified." (ibid. section 50)

The second aspect of control gave the central government the authority to initiate an inquiry into the affairs of UZP based on a complain by any individual or in its own initiative. On the basis of the result of the inquiry, the government was authorized to dissolve the UZP for a period which

should not exceed more than one hundred and eighty days , within which time the dissolved Parishad should be reconstituted (Huque 1986; Ali 1986).

UZPs were empowered to levy taxes, fees and tolls but with the prior sanction of the central government. As one research report on local government finance in Bangladesh pointed out, Upazilas had a limited capacity to raise revenues. Most of the revenue sources had not yielded substantial revenue in the past and were not expected to do so in the future (Rahman et al. 1984). This is a typical case of politics of fiscal decentralization in the developing countries, where central government retains the productive revenue sources and "decentralizes" the unproductive ones to the local government (Smoke 1989), a very practical mechanism to ensure dependency relationships with the central government.

One of the important official objectives of Upazila decentralization, was to establish a decentralized planning and budgeting system so that the local government could plan and implement projects of their own and can avoid the unnecessary delays that are a general characteristics of a centralized planning system (Huque 1989). But in reality, the central government retained extensive control over the local level planning process. This was done by the provision of sanctions, approval, supervision etc. For example, a consistent source of funds for the Upazila from the central government was the Annual Upazila Development Program (AUDP) block grant. UZPs had little freedom to decide how to utilize that grant. The central Planning Commission in consultation with other ministries, provided detailed guidelines indicating the areas of investment, sectoral priorities etc. (Huque 1989). There was a guideline issued by the Planning Commission in 1983,

specifying in detail the manner in which the development grant was to be allocated among different Upazilas and within Upazilas among different economic sectors. Upazilas' developmental activities were restricted to nine broad areas. When undertaking those activities, the UZPs were told to be aware of the objectives and priorities of the national plan. Upazilas were advised to initiate project that could be completed within two years. They were also required to form a project selection committee, a project evaluation committee and tender committee and the nature of membership and specific functions of these committees were all indicated by the central authority. UZPs were prohibited from utilizing their development funds in twenty different types of work (Khan 1987b). Also there was central control over financial operations including local budgeting (Khan 1987b).

UZP's lack of expertise and knowledge regarding development planning was cited by the central authority as the reason for maintaining central control and guidance. But this does not seem to be a valid explanation, not at least after the Upazila reform. Thousands of officials, of both generalist and specialist cadres were posted at the Upazila level and, as I mentioned earlier, a large number of unnecessary positions were created as a result of competition between the different administrative services of the two cadres. So logically there should be a surplus of expertise at the local level. In fact the official planning document acknowledged the fact that UZPs, were "... capable of planning, designing and implementing national projects."(Government of Bangladesh, The Third Five Year Plan; quoted in Huque 1989;p,157) Instead central bureaucratic control seems to be an important reason behind all these guidelines.

There was another significant control--the continuation of a traditional supervisory control over the local government by the Deputy Commissioner (popularly known as DC)--the chief executive officer of the district level administration. The DC's control and influence go back to the colonial administration (the linkpin of colonial field administration) and no reform efforts have ever seriously attempted to change his dominant role in the administration, except the most radical reform of Sheik Mujib (1972-75).

In the administrative hierarchy of local self- government, Zila Parishad (District Council) is at the district level (see table 3) and in 1988, with a new Local Government Ordinance, this Parishad was made responsible for reviewing and auditing the implementation of development projects undertaken by the UZPs (Huque 1989). The DC and a member of the Public Service Commission were given the authority to inspect and receive statements of accounts and budget from the UZPs. The DCs submit performance evaluation reports on UZPs to the ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives (MLGRDC).

Most of the reports sent by the DCs on the performance of the UZPs were negative in nature that showed growing conflicts between the local elected representatives and the local bureaucrats. In the reports submitted during 1987-88, DCs provided negative evaluation of performance of 132 UZPs (total number of UZP was 460). The ministry took swift decision on the reports and removed several UZP chairmen from their offices. The reports of 1989, showed numerous allegations against the UZP chairmen. These include, misappropriation of funds, **assault on officers of the government**, irregular award of contracts, substandard level of performance, **withholding salaries**

from officials, corruption, **authoritarian acts**, and negligence of duties. The DCs also objected to "illegal" decisions taken by the elected UZP chairmen and they even canceled many decisions (Huque 1989; emphasis mine).

The nature of accusations that I have emphasized show that it is not just administrative discipline that the DCs were concerned about, but they were trying to contain an increasing assertiveness on the part of the UZP chairmen. A recent study of Upazila pointed out that DCs regularly and systematically inspected and monitored the Upazilas in their respective districts. Also they were successful in most cases in removing the conflict between the Upazila Executive Officer and the UZP chairmen. According to the DCs, the reasons behind their successes were " ...confidence in the reputation and tradition of the Deputy Commissioner in providing good leadership; **authority and control over law and order by the district administration; and the authority of the district administration over revenue matters.**" (Ahmad 1991; p,35 emphasis mine)

The continuation of the traditional influential role of the DCs and their reimposed disciplinary and supervisory control over elected representatives at the Upazila level, contradict the assertion of McCarthy that at the district level there was a "systematic marginalization" of the DC's power and authority. (McCarthy did her field study in 1987. The role of DC significantly changed by 1988). Actually to reinforce DCs' dominant role over the UZPs was a major demand of the generalist cadre of the civil service, since the early stage of the reform (Ali 1986).

As previously discussed, military junta, in their attempt to build up a solid political base among the rural elites, seriously wanted to empower them, to a

certain extent, with formal control over administration and economic decision making at the local level. The junta was willing to bypass the civil bureaucracy if necessary. But the civil bureaucracy, specifically the generalist cadre saw this as a major threat to their continued dominance and lobbied vigorously in the reform commissions to maintain the status quo. This attitude was clearly reflected in the remarks of Shawkat Ali, a civil bureaucrat of the generalist cadre and a member of the NICARR. He argued that it is essential that the regulatory administrative aspect of the Upazilas and the responsibilities related to the monitoring and supervision of UZPs should be in the hands of the district administration and that it should have the necessary power to carry out those responsibilities "without fear or favor, affection and illwill". The common argument that this would mean domination of civil bureaucracy over public representatives should "not blind us to the need for smooth working of the inter-governmental relationship."(Ali 1986;p,181) Similar bureaucratic hegemonic sentiments have also been expressed by another bureaucrat, Fayeuddin Ahmad, joint secretary in charge of Upazila Monitoring and Evaluation. He argued that efficient local level planning would fail if district level officers are not given any important role to play (Ahmad 1991).

It was not only the civil bureaucracy that struggled for the control over the UZPs. A group of urban political elites, who organized themselves in a military junta backed political organization, Jatiyo (National) Party, raised the issue of a formal role of the members of the national parliament(MP) over the functioning of the UZPs (Ali 1986). The pro-government elites at one point, went as far as to cooperate with the anti-government political elites, i.e.

the leaders of opposition political parties, to launch a petition movement against the government for a structural change in the Upazila system. This obviously created a conflict between the MPs and the UZP chairmen, who naturally did not want urban elites' control over the politics of resource allocation at the level of the Upazilas. Moreover, they were heavily pampered by the President and they got the impression that they were, "too near to the President". So the battle over controlling the UZPs was between three social actors: the civil bureaucracy, the urban political elites and the UZP chairmen. By 1988, with the passing of the new Local Government Ordinance, which strengthened the supervisory role of the DCs, the balance of power actually tilted towards the civil bureaucracy*.

* It is interesting to note here that, the military junta, in 1987, tried to penetrate the district administration itself. The pro-government Jatiyo party, moved a bill in the parliament, which would provide for the representation of armed forces in the district council. The political opposition parties initiated a nation wide extra-parliamentary movement against the passing of the bill. Eventually the government was forced to change its decision (Huque and Akhter 1989).

TABLE 5
PARTY AFFILIATION OF UPAZILA CHAIRMEN
(AS OF JUNE 13,1985)

Name of Parties	No. of UPZ Won	%
Janadal (later Jatiyo Party)	207	45.00
Awami League	53	11.52
BNP	34	7.39
JSD (S-R)	19	4.13
Muslim League	8	1.74
BAKSAL	4	0.87
UPP	3	0.65
NAP	6	1.30
JSD (M-S)	2	0.43
INDEPENDENTS	124	26.96
TOTAL	460	100.00

Source: The Ittefaq (a Bengali Daily), June 13, 1985
(Reproduced in Ali 1986)

CHAPTER 3

**POLITICAL AND
INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES IN
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM**

POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES IN CENTRAL-LOCAL RELATIONS

In this section I will discuss various broader institutional and political issues that structure the nature of central local relationship. The discussion focuses on, (1) forms of politics and their impact on the local autonomy, (2) relationships of various regime types to local autonomy and (3) the institutional instability as a barrier to the development of local self-governance.

FORMS OF POLITICS AND THEIR IMPACT ON LOCAL AUTONOMY

Critical but conventional discourse on the politics of local government reform argues, in developing countries, real decentralization of power does not take place because central governments are not willing to set up local government system that might transform into an institution, which would be capable to compete and effectively oppose the central government (Leemans 1970). Another common argument is that, the ruling elite is often afraid of the fact that if local governments are given significant autonomy, they might become a "formidable weapons" in the hands of the opposing political forces in challenging the ruling regime (Huque 1986b)

These observations do not seem to be valid for Bangladesh. It is difficult to understand how local governments with formal administrative autonomy would be in a position to compete and oppose the central government, given the extreme resource constraints that these local governments experience and

the fact that they remain, to a large extent, dependent on the center for development finance. Even if maximum fiscal decentralization takes place, local governments in Bangladesh do not have the necessary resource base to run their own economic affairs (Blair 1989).

The argument that autonomous local government could be used by the opposition group, is also not valid in the context of Bangladesh. There are two major reasons for this: First, the **specific nature of the politics** in Bangladesh. All reform measures, since the birth of Bangladesh in 1971, have taken place within the context of authoritarian polity. During the reform process, political activities were either totally banned at the national and local level or legally controlled by the regime in power. So there were very little opportunity for the opposition parties to infiltrate the local governments. Moreover, electoral politics at the local government level in Bangladesh are formally "**non-partisan**"(Ahmad 1987). This mechanism insulates local government from national politics. In the case of urban local government, there are possibilities of take over by the opposition parties and that has happened several times in Bangladesh (Huque and Akther 1989). This can be explained by the existence of well organized party machinery in the urban areas and also of middle class intelligentsia, who being professionals like lawyers, doctors and business people can oppose the ruling regime and survive economically. This is a luxury that the rural elites can hardly afford. Even then, there are cases where elected public officials from opposition parties in urban local governments, have been either removed or co-opted into the ruling party by the ruling regimes. These have been done by arbitrary

measures like delaying the sanction of development funds and harassment of elected council with frequent visits by central inquiry commissions.

A second reason could be found in the **nature of patron-client politics** in Bangladesh, the political structure that links the national ruling elites with the local elites. Because of pragmatic reasons, the local elites have always aligned themselves with the regime in power (Arn 1982; Moten 1990; Ali 1986; Blair 1985; Westergaard 1979). Political control over resource allocation at the local level is the life blood of local politics and this can only be ensured by being loyal to the governing elites at the center. This explains why it is so easy for the ruling elites to enlist support of the local elites--the clients. The relationship is of course symbiotic. Elites in the opposition, are obviously at an extreme disadvantage in this regard.

I believe the most important reason behind the failure of real decentralization of power to the local elites was not due to insincerity of the ruling regimes, as most of the conventional analyses would suggest. It is the absence of relative autonomy of the ruling regimes within the state apparatus, which explains the failure. There are **political imperatives** in Bangladesh society which make it logical on the part of the ruling regimes to attempt for decentralization of administrative and political power at the local level.

For example, all regimes in Bangladesh, from Mujib to Ershad, had three things in common: **a) authoritarian mode of rule, b) alienation from the urban middle class and c) heavy reliance on generalist elite bureaucracy.** These regimes also realized the infeasibility of an authoritarian rule for a long period of time. They also did not see any hope of winning over the

urban middle classes in the short run (Moten 1990).. The only alternative they could see was to build up support among the rural elites, which they hoped, would provide them, with the much needed rural mass support in the long run. This was the substantive rationale behind the successive local government reform efforts (Siddiqui et.al. 1985). The various structural and functional changes that have been formally introduced at the Upazila level, if those could be enforced in practice, would have empowered the elected UZPs to a reasonable extent.. But Ershad regime failed in its attempt to enforce those structural changes due to the opposition from the powerful sections of the bureaucracy.

REGIME TYPES, STATE BUREAUCRACY AND LOCAL AUTONOMY

The analytical understanding of the role of bureaucracy, as a powerful interest group in state initiated reform process, leads us to the discussion of the relationship among variables like the nature of state power, the relatively autonomous role of state bureaucracy and local autonomy.

For example, in the context of intergovernmental relations, it is theoretically useful to ask questions like, is there any relationship between the nature and extent of local autonomy and regime type (dictatorship, competitive parliamentary, strong or weak state etc.)? Mahwood (1987), reflecting on African situation, basically argued that, autonomy of local government is negatively related to competitive democracy ("severe party competition") at the national level and is positively related to stable and secured national government. In Africa, autonomous and democratic local

government were first established under monolithic colonial government, but they declined or collapsed during the post-colonial phase, when the polities were characterized by competitive democracy. Interestingly they were revived under the military government of Nigeria and one party state of Tanzania.

It is too tempting to theorize, as Mahwood did, on the basis of too broad an empirical pattern. But one should be careful about causal variables, because there is always a possibility of the existence of one or more intervening variables (for example, specific interest of a particular agency, weakness or strength of national or local level elites etc.), which might produce a particular outcome, in the absence of which, that outcome may not have occurred or could have taken a different form. Local government decentralization in South Korea is an interesting example in this regard. It is a relatively stable regime with an authoritarian polity. Following Mahwood, one would expect more autonomy for the local government. But Korean local governments are hardly autonomous. One reason could be the impact of the dynamics of developmental state, the logic of which is comprehensive centralized coordination of market economy. But one study suggests, micro-institutional reasons may also be equally important. Instead of looking at the South Korean state as a monolithic rational entity, this study focuses on the state manager's interest as an important intervening variable in the policy outcome (Jung 1987). Officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs particularly resisted and created various obstacles in a recent attempt by the government to formulate a decentralization policy to strengthen local self-government. The Home Ministry was apprehensive about the fact that, decentralization

policy would allow local elected officials to take over the local chief executive position or at least to control it.

An understanding of success and failure of reform efforts in Bangladesh, cannot avoid the analysis of **hegemonic and relatively autonomous role of the generalist cadre of the civil bureaucracy**. The historical and sociological basis of bureaucratic hegemony go back to the colonial social formation of Bengal. A huge colonial bureaucratic state apparatus was created to serve the need of the colonial economy and for efficient management of law and order (Alavi 1972). In terms of efficiency and organizational capacity it was well advanced in relation to other underdeveloped social sectors of the colonial society. Like many other post-colonial society, Bangladesh has inherited this colonial bureaucracy. Since the liberation of Bangladesh, the generalist cadre of the bureaucracy has successfully resisted several administrative reform efforts (the first reform commission report could not even be published), which aimed at democratizing the administrative system by giving the specialist cadre equal status in it and dismantling the elite civil service structure, which was inherited from the Pakistan civil service system. It has also blocked implementation of an industrial policy, which proposed greater managerial autonomy of the public sector corporations from the Ministry of Industry (Khan and Zafarullah 1982; Ahmed 1980; Sobhan and Ahmed 1980; Khan 1989; Hakim 1991). As I have mentioned earlier, authoritarian regimes have relied heavily on the generalist civil bureaucracy in running the country. This has only reinforced its hegemony.

INSTITUTIONAL INSTABILITY AS A BARRIER TO REFORM

In the development of institutions, time is an important factor. Over time things change what seem impossible in the short run. Blair in his study of Upazila system, mentioned the case of an Indian province Bihar (Blair 1985). Both Bangladesh and Bihar had much similarities twenty years ago in terms of rural poverty, extreme economic dependence of local governments on the center and rural elite's dominance over the local councils. Over time, in Bihar the reality has changed significantly. Elite domination has given way to mixed coalition of the rich and middle peasants and even the so called backward castes are successfully competing for local council positions.

Will time have the same impact in the case of Bangladesh? In contrast to Bihar, Bangladesh never experienced genuine parliamentary democratic rule for a long period of time. Successive local government reforms did not get sufficient time because of abrupt changes in the system with the frequent changes in government, often by violent means (Siddiqui et.al. 1984). For example, after the fall of Ershad regime, the new government in power, abolish the Upazila system (Gisselquist 1992).. One reason behind this decision was that the new regime did not want to continue the institutional legacy of a rival political group.

The fragility of the local government system in Bangladesh also has its roots in the constitution of the country. The legal basis of all local government reforms were Presidential Orders and Ordinances that did not need to be ratified by the parliament (Siddiqui et.al. 1984). When the present constitution was first adopted in 1972, it provided for a legal basis of the local

government.* But in 1975, with the 4th amendment of the constitution, that legal basis has been abolished. The changed constitution has only one sentence on local government in clause number 9 of chapter II, which says, "The state shall encourage local government bodies composed of representatives from relevant areas and in these bodies, there shall be as far as possible, special representations of peasants, workers and women." (quoted in Siddiqui 1984) This change in the constitution has made it very easier for successive regimes, to drastically change local government forms through Presidential Orders and other Ordinances.

* Article 59 of the Constitution states:

"(i) Local government in every administrative unit of the Republic shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with law.

(ii) Every body such as is referred to in clause (i) shall, subject to this Constitution and any other law, perform within the appropriate administrative unit, such functions as shall be prescribed by Act of Parliament, which may include functions relating to-

- (a) administration and the work of public offices;
- (b) the maintenance of public order
- (c) the preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development" (Quoted in Rahman et. al. 1984).

Article 60 states:

"For the purpose of giving full effect to the provision of article 59, Parliament shall by law, confer powers on the local government bodies referred to in that article, including power to impose taxes for local purposes, to prepare their budgets and to maintain funds."

(Quoted in Rahman et. al. 1984)

CONCLUSION

The Upazila reform in Bangladesh reminds us yet again that decentralization measures are not apolitical public policies or managerial strategies that can be designed and implemented in a technocratic fashion. These are political acts from the early stage of policy formulation to the final outcome.. In fact, one of the reasons that decentralization is popular even among the authoritarian regimes, is its potential as a strategy for the establishment of political legitimacy (Samoff 1990).

The military regime of General Ershad, reacting to a volatile urban democratic opposition, carefully designed and attempted to implement swiftly a decentralization policy that, the regime hoped, would bring solid support from the vast rural constituencies. Locally elected UZP chairmen were given reasonable amount of administrative and political powers, the majority of who were aligned to the military regime. But the implementation process of the decentralization policy generated tensions and conflicts among different cadres of the civil bureaucracy. The generalist cadre, in particular, fearing loss of administrative power and status at the local level, put up strong resistance to changes.

But how could civil bureaucracy which is formally subordinate to the political authority resist reforms that are politically crucial to the ruling regimes? I think this is an interesting issue that has important implications for planning theory and practice. The question of the autonomy of the state vis-a-vis dominant social classes and international actors was a popular issue in the political science literature during the decade of eighties (Grindle and

Thomas 1990; Jessop 1990). But as a student of planning, we need to discuss this issue by discussing the autonomy of the policy actors (i.e. different cadre services of the national and local level bureaucracies and political executives of the state) internal to the state. How can reformist governments (political executives of the state) attain the capacity to maneuver within the state apparatus and successfully implement reforms?

For example, the Bangladesh case, allow us to explore the **nature of state power and its relation to the success and failure of administrative reform from above**. Specifically it is a case, where important actors, within and outside the state struggled to define the nature of reform to suit their own interest. This case also shows, **what happens to a major reform when the regime in power is authoritarian but politically weak and lacks legitimacy in the civil society**.

Since the military regime lacked legitimacy among the urban constituents, it did not have the option to mobilize these forces to build up a populist power block in the civil society and neutralize the resistance of the generalist cadre of the bureaucracy. Also the military junta was heavily dependent on the civil bureaucracy for the implementation of the reform and therefore could not insulate itself from this important state actors or to maneuver successfully among various factional interests.

Bangladesh experience tells us that successful reform from above cannot be automatically expected from authoritarian regimes. Success requires **“strong”** state (in the sense that political executives are capable of insulating themselves from competing pressure groups inside and outside the state), and more importantly, solid support bases among different groups in the civil

society. As theoretical studies in the context of East Asia have shown, “efficient” states are not only “strong” but are **socially embedded** (i.e. having symbiotic links with various social classes and professional interest groups outside the state) in the civil society from which they draw their strengths (Evans 1992; Wade 1990). This is the notion of “embedded autonomy”, that opens up interesting avenue for further research in state initiated reform policies. How and under what conditions state can build linkages with key social actors and at the same time manage to maintain its relative autonomy from them?

This theoretical understanding of the state also has important policy implication for planners. Once we recognize the fact that reform policies are initiated within a **governance structure that is not monolithic but ridden with factional and conflicting interests**, then the nature of the policy outcomes should be expected to reflect those conflicts and be significantly influenced by them. In this situation, from the planning point of view, the issue of practical importance is to explore the possibility of the development of “**policy space**” for the pro-reform state actors (Grindle and Thomas 1990). This policy space (i.e. the space for maneuver), enables these state actors to push for changes in policies that strengthens the reform further (Fox 1990).

For example, the Upazila reform initially delegated the responsibility of preparing the Annual Confidential Report (performance evaluation report) of all the officers (at the Upazila level) of both generalist and specialist cadres to the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (Upazila Executive Officer). This officer belonged to the generalist cadre and was the senior-most executive at the Upazila level. The officers of the specialist cadre, at the local level, were

willing to be evaluated by the elected UZP chairmen but they vigorously protested their sub-ordination to an officer of the generalist cadre. At one point they called for a strike against the military government and was supported by the specialist cadre at the central level. The military government took advantage of this intra-bureaucratic conflict and changed the policy. The elected UZP chairmen were given the responsibility to write the Annual Confidential Report for the both cadres of the Upazila level bureaucracy (Blair 1985). This case also shows, how conflict among the elements of the bureaucracy itself can create space for public representatives to gain power even in an authoritarian context.

As the discussion in chapter two shows, actual control of central bureaucracy over Upazila administration was extensive, despite the formal authority of the elected representatives of the Upazila Parishad. This control was imposed in two ways: (i) through central guidelines that limited the freedom of the Upazila Parishad in making policy decisions. For example, although the Upazila Parishad had the authority for the final approval of the Annual Upazila Development Plan, but its freedom to plan was constrained by the central guidelines that set the limit of the resource allocations. Also (ii) Upazila Parishad's autonomy was curtailed by the heavy presence of centrally deputed bureaucrats at the local level. They controlled most of the routine administrative functions and also the tasks related to implementation process (Siddiqui 1984).

The central bureaucratic control can be minimized through changes in the intergovernmental relations. For example, (a) the number of centrally deputed officers should be reduced as much as possible. As discussed earlier

in the paper, the number of these central bureaucrats increased dramatically due to the inter-cadres competition over local control. This is a serious barrier to the development of local self-administration. At the same time, necessary changes should be made in the structure of the administrative accountability, so that the centrally deputed officers at the local level are accountable to the elected representatives and not to their parent departments.

Also (b) controlling authority of a particular tier of local government should be at the next higher level of that tier, instead of having one authority at the central government level. Moreover, this controlling authority should be an elected body rather than field representatives of the central government. In the Upazila case, detailed guidelines were imposed from the central authority and, increased supervisory control over Upazila was given to the Deputy Commissioner, who was a field representative of the central bureaucracy at the district level. But there was a democratic alternative to this bureaucrat dominated intergovernmental structure. Authority to supervise Upazila administration could have been given to the Zila Parishad (District Council), which was an elected body at the district level. The elected chairman of the Zila Parishad, given his/her political legitimacy among the constituents and also greater administrative and political powers, could have substantially eroded the century old hegemony of the Deputy Commissioner over the local government system.

A significant central control over the local government is exercised through Law enforcement and Judicial functions. For example, Home Affairs Ministry in Bangladesh controls police throughout the country and it had the

authority to appoint police chief at the Upazila level. Also the Judicial system at the Upazila level was completely under the control of central government. Local self-governance can be promoted substantially if local governments are given the power to prosecute and discipline individuals who break laws, specifically if such power can be use to discipline local level officials.

Creating institutional structure to facilitate cooperation and collaboration among different local governments can significantly advance local autonomy. In Bangladesh, there are no formal or informal arrangements of cooperation among local governments at the same level (Siddiqui 1984). Such cooperation can be fostered by creating national or regional level associations of elected representatives of a particular tier of the local government.

This cooperation is important because, (a) various local governments would be able to identify and solve their common problems, (b) this would facilitate pooling and sharing of scarce financial resources, expertise and experiences for providing certain services, for example, public health, public works, tax assessment and collection, waste disposal, large scale irrigation, staff training and civil defense etc., (c) dispute resolution among local governments would be possible without central bureaucratic intervention and (d) in terms political autonomy, it is only through the collective strength of the local governments that they would be in a position to challenge their marginalized status in the national political structure.

Balance of power in intergovernmental relations is affected by the relative size and number of the higher or lower level of the governments (Gisselquist 1992). Local governments may be more vulnerable to the domination of central government when they are numerous and small.

For example, after the national parliament election in 1991, the new government in power was easily able to abolish the Upazila system. Small size and large number of Upazilas (size of Upazilas varied from 55 square miles to 245 square miles and the total number of Upazilas was 460) was probably one of the factors that contributed to their weaknesses. The existence of an association of the elected representatives of the Upazilas could have made it difficult for the new government to reverse the decentralization policy overnight.

Autonomy of the local governments can be strengthened further by changing the tax bases. Although Upazila was given authority to tax (which the previous Thana Council lacked entirely), but the revenue potential of Upazilas' tax base was extremely low (Rahman 1984). For example, taxes on amusement, street lighting, license and permits etc. did not generate substantial revenue in the past and they were not expected to be major sources of revenue in the near future. If higher revenue generating tax sources (for example, property tax) can be included in the tax base of local governments, local resource mobilization capability would increase correspondingly at the local level. This would reduce financial dependence on the center to some extent--a little step forward towards more political autonomy.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the constitutional basis of local government is very weak in Bangladesh. Local government's autonomy can be protected and institutionalized through constitutional laws that guarantee autonomous status of the local governments. In contrast to Presidential Ordinances and Administrative Orders, constitutional provisions are difficult

to change that typically require two third majority in the national parliament. Even a dictatorial regime would be discouraged to tamper with the constitutional provisions for the fear of political opposition it might provoke.

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