

Pride and performance in the public service: three Asian cases

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Introduction

In general, the issue of pride in the public service involves both the public and public servants — the general public must be proud of their public service and public employees must feel proud to be associated with it. First, the people's pride depends on their perception of the public service as it is influenced by leading political figures and the media, their satisfaction with the delivery and quality of various services, and their feeling about the behavior and attitude of public servants. Second, the pride of public employees depends on their own view of the public service in terms of its social status and public respect, their perception of whether the public service serves the greater public cause or narrow business interests, and their appreciation or recognition from the general public. To a large extent, the pride of public employees is shaped by the greater public image and perception of the public service. Third, this sense of pride among public servants has critical implications for the motivation and commitment required by public organizations. According to Perry and Wise (1990: 368–71), among various intrinsic incentives, a major source of motivation among public employees is their pride in participating in broader public policies, serving the greater public interest, and actualizing a sense of patriotism and benevolence. Finally, adequate motivation, because of its impact on public service pride and employee morale, is essential for effective job performance. Beyond the capacity of the public sector in terms of adequate financial, technological, and human resources, its performance greatly depends on the motivation and commitment of its employees based on their sense of pride. On the other hand, the level of public service performance perceived by citizens often shapes the public's perception of the service, which is crucial for maintaining a sense of pride. Thus, in the public service, pride and performance are mutually interdependent.

Given the unprecedented scope and intensity of contemporary reforms in the public service, there is a serious need to evaluate the current status of perform-

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ance and pride. As mentioned earlier, the sense of pride among public servants and the public image of public institutions represent the intrinsic sources of motivation or commitment that eventually affect public servants' performance. There is a relative lack of evaluative studies in this regard, but there is no dearth of self-advertising reports published by national governments and speculative and overgeneralized claims made by international agencies regarding how the recent market-driven reforms have improved the performance and image of the public service. Among the more balanced studies, a report of the Volcker Commission (1990) showed how the pride, image, and motivation of the public service were adversely affected by the recent public sector reforms in the US. More recently, in Canada, a federal government project known as *Rediscovering Public Service: Recognizing the Value of an Essential Institution* (Kernaghan, 2000) used roundtables to publicly debate the newly emerging significance and challenges of the public service, especially in terms of its pride and performance.

In the Asian context, although similar forums and studies are needed to explore the status of the perception, pride, and performance of the public service after its recent restructuring, there are few national or regional initiatives in this regard. This article attempts to examine this issue of pride and performance in public governance in Asia with special reference to three cases: Bangladesh from South Asia, the Philippines from Southeast Asia, and South Korea from East Asia. Based on available information, it presents the prevailing public image and public perception of the public service in these three countries. The article also analyses public sector performance — including its performance as perceived by the public and its performance in terms of the post-reform socioeconomic scenario — in order to re-emphasize the significance of its image and pride. Before venturing into this domain of pride and performance, however, a brief overview of the major features of public service reforms in these three Asian countries is in order.

Contemporary changes in the public service: an overview

There are significant differences among Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines in terms of their sociohistorical origins, demographic features, political patterns, and socioeconomic conditions. Despite this diversity in various contextual factors, a common post-colonial feature of public governance that emerged in these countries since their independence was the interventionist state-centered model of development pursued by various regimes during the period between the 1950s and the early 1980s. Although the mode and degree of state intervention might vary, the major socioeconomic sectors — including agriculture and industry, trade and commerce, education and health, and transport and communication — were incorporated into the structure of control and regulation through an expansive public sector.

However, the period since the mid-1980s has seen an increasing shift in the mode of governance from this predominantly state-centered approach to a market-led policy agenda in all three countries. With such a shift in the macro-policy agenda of the state, the governments in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the

Philippines pursued the restructuring of the public service in compliance with the overall promarket agenda. In terms of recent initiatives for restructuring the public service, Bangladesh adopted the Public Administration Reform Commission (1997), the Administrative Reorganizing Committee (1993–96), and the Public Administration Sector Study (1993) (Shelley, 2000: 176). In addition, the World Bank made policy recommendations for transforming public governance in Bangladesh in its publications such as *Government That Works* (1996) and *An Agenda for Action* (1997). In the Philippines, the government launched the program called *Panibagong Sigla 2000* (Renewed Vigor 2000) under which the recent administrative reforms have been pursued. Similarly, in South Korea, the current government created the Government Administration Reform Committee to study and plan necessary administrative changes (PUMA, 2000).

These are a few examples of reform initiatives undertaken by the government in these three countries. What major changes have been brought about by these reforms? First, in terms of the primary mission of the public service in Bangladesh, there is increasing emphasis on economic growth based on market forces, which represents a transition from the earlier state mission stressing social progress, human development, nation-building, and self-reliance through long-term development plans implemented by various public agencies (World Bank, 1996: xviii; Zafarullah et al., 1997). Similarly, in South Korea, one of the main objectives of current public sector reforms has been to dismantle interventionist state-led development, and to enhance economic growth and competitiveness through market institutions (Choi, 1998). The Philippines, on the other hand, introduced another kind of rhetoric to justify the mission of market-led growth. For instance, the Ramos government (1992–98) expanded privatization, deregulation, and liberalization under the façade of reducing corruption (Talisayan, 1998).

Second, in line with this overall mission of public service to enhance market-driven economic growth, there have been institutional and structural changes in the public sector. A new set of institutions has emerged in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines with a view to expanding market forces. Some examples include the Privatization Board and the proposed Deregulation Commission (proposed by the World Bank) in Bangladesh; the Investment Service Center, the Deregulation Commission, and the Fair Trade Commission in South Korea; and the Committee on Privatization and the Asset Privatization Trust in the Philippines. These newly created institutions, although they belong to the state and represent a part of the public sector, are engaged in downsizing the state and streamlining the public sector through privatization, deregulation, and corporatization. On the other hand, the remaining (post-privatization) public sector institutions have been restructured in order to make them behave like business corporations. In all three cases, a major common feature of such restructuring is the increasing emphasis on managerial autonomy in public agencies with regard to financial and personnel matters.

Third, in line with the new mission of the public service to expand the market

forces for economic growth, its roles and duties are being redefined in terms of transforming it into a catalyst or facilitator of private investors and business institutions. This is certainly a new development in the three Asian cases where the public sector used to play the leading, interventionist role in socioeconomic activities. In Bangladesh, there is a clear indication that the role of the public service is to promote and facilitate rather than regulate and control the private sector and its economic management (World Bank, 1996; Zafarullah et al., 1997). In the Philippines, the government has opted for similar changes in the role of state bureaucracy from an active change agent to a facilitator of market forces (Halligan and Turner, 1995). In South Korea, the government has repositioned itself to reduce its role in the economy and play a more supportive role in favor of the private sector, especially the foreign firms (MFAT, 1999). Such a business-friendly transition in the public service from a leading actor to a facilitating agency is reinforced further by the growing intensity of public-private partnerships.

Finally, the administrative systems in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines have undergone some transformation in terms of their professional ethics and service orientation. In Bangladesh, where the private sector itself hardly complies with business norms and principles, the government has been advised by the World Bank to emulate business ethics such as competition, efficiency, value-for-money, and partnership in the public service (see World Bank, 1996). In South Korea, the recent restructuring of government departments and agencies has been predominantly guided by the norms of productivity, efficiency, transparency, and competitiveness (Kim, 1998; PUMA, 1999). Similarly, in the case of the Philippines, the guiding norms of administrative reforms have been criteria such as efficiency, economy, productivity, effectiveness, quality, and partnership (Haque, 1998a). Although the use of such business-like values began with the Aquino government, it became more prevalent under the Ramos administration, especially under the state-initiated development campaign known as 'Philippine 2000' (Endrigo, 1997; Haque, 1997).

In terms of its service orientation, the public service has moved away from the provision of public sector services based on citizens' entitlements, and has increasingly shifted towards the notion of 'customer' based on the principle of consumer or user rights. Another dimension of the contemporary shift in the public service's orientation is its increasing emphasis on international actors, including transnational corporations and foreign investors, rather than domestic social forces. In fact, there is a tendency in many developing countries to mobilize the whole state apparatus to satisfy the demands of these international customers often at the expense of the needs of their own citizens. Such a trend can be observed in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines. All these business-like public sector changes in these three countries have been based on the rationales that the public service is expansive and inefficient, that its public image or perception is largely negative, and that its performance is disappointing. Have these recent market-driven reforms pursued since the mid-1980s improved the

perception and performance of the public service? This question is addressed in the next section of this article.

Public service pride and performance: the current situation

As previously mentioned, pride in the public service includes the feelings of both the public and the public employees, and it largely depends on the public image or perception of the public service. This public perception, in turn, is determined by the level of people's satisfaction with the services provided by the public sector and the treatment they receive from public employees. On the other hand, such public perception and satisfaction often depend on the level of public service performance as perceived by citizens. This section of the article explores the prevailing public image and perception of the public service in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines. It also examines the performance of the public sector in these countries — including its performance as perceived by the public, and its performance understood in terms of various socioeconomic indicators.

Public perception and satisfaction

Status of public perception. Whether citizens in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines are proud of their public servants is a matter of how they perceive the overall public service. In the case of Bangladesh, unfortunately, the public's perception is quite unfavorable. With regard to public perception about the major ruling parties (the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party), a recent opinion poll shows that 47 percent of Bangladeshi people feel that the party members do not place national interest above their party interest (*The Daily Star*, 1997). According to a 1999 survey, 64 percent people in Bangladesh feel that the legal framework adopted by the ruling parties does not protect their rights (Human Development Centre, 2000). With regard to the image of the public service, various surveys indicate that, in general, the majority of Bangladeshis have a stereotypical view that their public service is relatively overcentralized, unaccountable, unresponsive, inefficient, overpaid, coercive, unethical, and rent-seeking (World Bank, 1996; Zafarullah et al., 1997).

In South Korea, the public image or perception of the public service is not very favorable either. According to one survey, only 12.4 percent of Koreans believe that their civil servants are ethical and 55.2 percent feel that civil servants are less than ethical in terms of professional integrity (Kim, 1997). The same survey shows that while 41 percent of Koreans perceive the civil service as overstaffed, 27 percent disagree with such a perception; while 37.4 percent consider the civil service reliable, 23.2 percent perceive it as less than reliable (Kim, 1997). The status of public perception in South Korea appears better than that in Bangladesh. Similar public perceptions of the public service exist in the Philippines. According to a survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations (Philippines), about 25 percent of Filipinos perceive their civil servants as arrogant, 16 percent as indifferent, and 16 percent as dull, while 27 percent consider them as efficient, 25 percent as courteous, and 21 percent as responsive (see Endriga, 1997). In terms of

trends, however, it has been observed that the public impression of the government was favorable only for a year of the Aquino administration, has worsened since 1987, and that there is a growing public cynicism toward public administration (Endriga, 1997).

Level of public satisfaction. With regard to the level of public satisfaction with the public service — which affects its public perception — there are significant variations among these three countries. In Bangladesh, public satisfaction with essential public sector services is quite low, and the common citizens are quite unhappy with the indifferent, discourteous, arrogant, and corrupt behavior of public servants (Zafarullah et al., 1997). In terms of sector-specific services, the World Bank observes that on a five-point scale, the level of public satisfaction with health care is 3.1 for the public health system (compared to 3.8 for private care); the level of satisfaction with education is 3.5 for government schools (compared to 3.8 for private schools); and the level of public dissatisfaction with electricity supply is about 60 percent in urban areas and 40 percent in rural areas (World Bank, 1996).

In comparison with this dismal scenario in Bangladesh, the status of public satisfaction is much better in South Korea. According to a 1999 survey of 1,750 citizens conducted by the Seoul Development Institute, about 71.2 percent of respondents made positive comments on the attitudes and kindness of city officials or civil servants; 79.7 percent commented favorably about their integrity; and 71.1 percent expressed overall satisfaction with the civil service (Public Relations Department, 2000). More specific data from this survey show that on a hundred-point scale, the level of public satisfaction with civil servants was 73.6 with regard to information and processing of approval permits; 73.9 for the kindness shown in responding to applicants; 70.9 in terms of attitudes in handing duties; and 65.8 regarding professional knowledge or expertise (Public Relations Department, 2000). Another survey provides a more unfavorable picture about public satisfaction in South Korea. In this survey, about 41.6 percent of respondents found Korean civil servants to be arrogant; 50.9 percent considered them less than responsive; 42.9 percent thought unfavorably about their fairness; and 33.7 percent found them unaccountable (Kim, 1997). Despite this variation in findings, the Korean situation looks much better than that in Bangladesh.

In the Philippines, the Social Weather Station conducts regular surveys on the level of public satisfaction with various public (political and administrative) institutions. Its recent survey shows that the 'net public satisfaction' with the senate — in terms of the percentage of people satisfied minus the percentage dissatisfied — changed from 20 percent in 1992 to 11 percent in 1995 to 23 percent in 1998; for the House of Representatives, the percentage changed from 22 percent in 1992 to 6 percent in 1995 to 18 percent in 1998; and for the Supreme Court, the change was from 22 percent in 1992 to 19 percent in 1995 to 25 percent in 1998 (Social Weather Station, 2000). It appears that public perception of both legislative and judicial institutions worsened between 1992 and 1995, but improved considerably between 1995 and 1998. A similar scenario exists with regard to

public administration. According to the same survey, net public satisfaction with the overall national administration changed from 31 percent in 1992 to -2 percent in 1995 to 18 percent in 1998 (Social Weather Station, 2000) although in this case, the improvement in 1998 still remained far behind the level of satisfaction in 1992.

Performance of the public service

The level of public satisfaction discussed above largely depends on the performance of the public service as perceived by citizens, which in turn is shaped by its actual performance. However, existing studies mostly focus on public sector performance as perceived by the public while there is a relative dearth of adequate empirical studies on the actual performance of various public agencies in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines. In this section, the perceived performance of various public services is discussed, and the actual performance of the public sector is examined on the basis of available empirical sources. In addition, the public sector performance in terms of some macro-socioeconomic indicators is also pointed out.

Perceived performance of the public service. In Bangladesh, according to a 1999 survey, the quality of state-run primary education is satisfactory for 37 percent of respondents, but unsatisfactory for 63 percent (Human Development Centre, 2000). Similarly, the quality of health care is satisfactory for 27 percent of respondents, but not satisfactory for 73 percent; and the quality of general infrastructure is satisfactory for 36 percent of respondents, but unsatisfactory for 64 percent (Human Development Centre, 2000). Thus, the perceived performance of various public agencies is quite dismal in Bangladesh — the quality of major public sector services is not up to the mark for 63–73 percent of citizens.

In the case of South Korea, one survey shows that only 16.6 percent of respondents think that their civil service is efficient, 43.7 percent are neutral, and 39.7 percent consider it less than efficient (Kim, 1997). The same survey shows that 54.6 percent of Koreans are not impressed by the creativity level of civil servants, 45.9 percent are unhappy with delay in service delivery, and 51.2 percent do not believe that civil servants are informative. In other words, a significant percentage of the Korean population do not consider their civil servants efficient, creative, and informative. The situation is, however, much worse in Bangladesh.

On the other hand, the perceived performance of the public service in the Philippines is relatively satisfactory. According to a survey conducted in 1994, the performance of government institutions received a reasonably good rating in terms of its role in maintaining social peace and creating opportunities for common citizens, although the respondents were relatively unhappy with the government's failure to keep promises and fight corruption and inflation (Endriga, 1997). Respondents to an earlier survey believed that higher-level government officials were not suitable for the positions they held (Endriga, 1997).

Empirical findings about actual performance. According to the World Bank (1996: xvii), compared to countries such as Singapore and South Korea, the

performance of the Bangladesh government is much poorer, especially in terms of the cost, efficiency, and quality of services. The Bank specifically mentions that in Bangladesh it takes at least 12 days to have customs clearance of imported inputs used for export products, 7 days to complete documents related to export, and 58 days to get a refund (Harun, 2000: 369). One relevant example of lower level performance in Bangladesh is its public telecommunication system. The rate of faults per 100 telephone lines per month in Bangladesh is about 49, which is much higher than the rate of 25 in Sri Lanka, 18 in India, nine in Pakistan, and three in Indonesia (Hossain, 2000).

In the cases of South Korea and the Philippines, it has been found that in terms of national economic competitiveness, South Korea ranks 22nd and the Philippines 33rd, which is much lower than ratings for other Asian countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Malaysia (World Economic Forum, 1999). According to a very recent assessment of government performance in East and Southeast Asian countries, the World Bank ranks South Korea as high and the Philippines as low in terms of budget formulation; South Korea as high and the Philippines as medium in terms of timely audit; South Korea as medium and the Philippines as low with regard to competence-based hiring and promotion; South Korea as high and the Philippines as low in terms of political neutrality of civil service; South Korea as high and the Philippines as medium in respect of managerial accountability; and South Korea as high and the Philippines as medium in terms of overall performance of civil service institutions (World Bank, 2000a: 101–7). It shows that with regard to various internal administrative procedures, the performance of public service in South Korea is much better than that in the Philippines.

Performance in terms of socioeconomic indicators. Since the governments in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines have recently adopted unprecedented public sector reforms in the name of better economic performance, it is relevant to assess how successful they have been in improving the situation. Some of the recent reports indicate that socioeconomic conditions are not very favourable in any of the three countries, although there are significant variations among the relatively high-income and high-performing South Korea, the medium-income and high-performing Philippines, and the low-income and low-performing Bangladesh. In terms of poverty, Bangladesh still remains one of the poorest countries of the world with 42.7 percent of its population below the poverty line, and the Philippines has 40.6 percent below the poverty line (World Bank, 2000b: 236–7). Even in South Korea, despite its higher levels of income and growth, it is estimated that about 19 percent of its urban population lived below the poverty line in 1998 (*The Korea Herald*, 1999).

The level of poverty is accentuated further by the worsening condition of unemployment. By April 1999, the rate of unemployment increased to 11.8 percent and underemployment to 22.7 percent in the Philippines (Briones, 1999). In South Korea, the unemployment rate increased from 2.3 percent in 1991 to 2.4 percent in 1994 to 6.8 percent in 1998 (National Statistical Office, 1999). In terms

of Human Development Index, South Korea ranks 30th, Philippines 77th, and Bangladesh 150th (UNDP, 1999:146–8). This suggests that the human condition in Bangladesh is quite alarming while it is a matter of great concern in the Philippines, and requires much improvement in South Korea. Although these adverse socioeconomic conditions are outcomes of many internal and external factors unrelated to public governance, the role of the public sector in reproducing such adverse outcomes or conditions cannot be ignored.

It is clear that the people's perception of the public service is extremely unfavorable in Bangladesh, which may have to do with its perceived very low level of performance. The empirical evidence also demonstrates that the public sector's performance in Bangladesh is quite disappointing, and various socioeconomic indicators lead to the same conclusion. In the case of South Korea, the level of public perception and satisfaction is reasonably good, which reflects a relatively better performance of the public service in terms of its perceived and actual accomplishments. However, in respect of socioeconomic indicators, the performance has not been that impressive in South Korea despite its high rate of growth and efficiency, although these indicators are much better than those in Bangladesh and the Philippines. The situation in the Philippines is quite mixed: while public perception of the public service is not that disappointing, the evidence shows a relatively lower-level performance of public sector institutions in terms of both administrative activities and socioeconomic indicators.

Major recent issues affecting perception and performance

After examining the status of public perception, the level of public satisfaction, and the degree of perceived and actual performance related to the public service in these three countries, it is necessary to explore some of the contemporary factors affecting perception, satisfaction, and performance. However, it needs to be pointed out that the issues raised below — including the atmosphere, commitment, capacity, and integrity of the public service — are discussed only in terms of their potential rather than their empirically proven impacts on perception and performance.

Public service atmosphere

Public perception of the public service is often shaped by the prevailing politico-ideological atmosphere. In advanced capitalist nations, especially the US and the UK, there has emerged since the late 1970s a common tendency among major political parties and leaders to demonize the public service. This has considerably tarnished the service's public image and perception (Haque, 1998b). Although politicians in developing countries such as Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines are not as aggressive as those in developed nations in bashing public bureaucracy, in recent years, an anti-bureaucratic sentiment has gained momentum in these countries, especially as a result of various policy statements made by presidents, prime ministers, and ministers. Their market-led policies and re-

forms — including privatization, rationalization, deregulation, liberalization, and corporatization — are largely based on anti-public-sector rhetoric and assumption.

In Bangladesh, it is not only the centrist political parties such as the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Jatiya Party that endorse market-led reforms, it is also the Awami League that has moved away from its earlier position of state-led planning and accepted the globally popular market ideology (Zafarullah et al., 1997). As previously mentioned, under the influence of international funding agencies, the current government has expanded market-driven programs that are supposed to expand the private sector at the expense of the public sector. In South Korea, the promarket policy statements made by the two most recent presidents (Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung) showed their strong support for expanding the role of the private sector and restructuring the public service to enhance its business-like efficiency. In the Philippines, all three reform-minded governments (Aquino, Ramos, and Estrada) expressed concern about the inefficiency of the public sector, adopted policies to diminish its scope and role, and introduced market-driven reforms. The rationalization of these business-friendly policy changes and public sector reforms has largely been based on a negative assumption about the public service (in terms of its alleged inefficiency) and a positive assumption of the ‘market miracle’.

Such an anti-bureaucratic and pro-business atmosphere, reinforced by political leaders, has critical implication for the public service in terms of worsening its public image and reinforcing its negative public perception in these countries. In addition, international agencies such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the UNDP have been engaged in advising and pressuring top policy-makers to introduce radical market-led reforms, convincing them of public sector disasters, publicizing market ideology, and influencing public sentiment against the state and its bureaucracy (Haque, 1999). All these national and international actors, therefore, may have worsened the public image and perception of the public service in the three Asian cases. Such a negative image or perception, in turn, is likely to create adverse impacts on the morale and commitment of public employees, and thus on their performance (discussed later).

Public service commitment

The negative image or perception of the public service often represents a serious challenge to its employee morale. Traditionally, the public service in Bangladesh already had a very low public image inherited from its colonial past when its elitist nature and paternalistic role became deep-rooted. As found earlier, the scenario has hardly changed during the post-colonial period even after the recent two decades of market-led public sector reforms. Similar experiences of a colonially inherited negative image of public bureaucracy can be found in South Korea and the Philippines, although compared to Bangladesh, these two countries have made some improvements. The point, however, is that this pejorative image of the public service, which usually has an adverse effect on employee morale

and commitment, is likely to worsen due to the previously mentioned challenge posed by the current anti-bureaucratic and promarket atmosphere.

Another contemporary trend that may have a negative impact on public servants' commitment is the diminishing distinction between the public and private sectors and the eroding identity of the public service (Haque, 1996). It has already been noted that since the mid-1980s the governments in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines have introduced basic changes in the objectives, structures, roles, and norms of the public service in order to transform it into a business-like institution. Following the examples of private corporations, they have redefined and restructured the public sector, so that it can realize the objective of productivity and growth, play the role of a market facilitator, revamp the structure in favor of managerial autonomy, and reinforce the norms of efficiency, competition, and value-for-money. This trend represents the loss of the unique public nature of the public service, which, as discussed earlier, has been a major source of public employees' intrinsic motivational incentives in all societies. In developing countries, there are many committed public employees in various sectors who feel proud to serve the public and be a part of greater national cause.

In the cases of Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines, one needs to realize that the material incentives for public employees, including compensation and working conditions, are much poorer than those in the private sector. Despite the extremely low compensation and benefits for public employees in Bangladesh, there are always some devoted employees, including teachers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, and judges, who still work for the public sector because of their sense of pride in being public servants. As the public service itself is transformed into a business-like institution, such pride, motivation, and commitment may come under challenge. In fact, even the material incentives of public employees are in trouble due to the growing job insecurity caused by the divestment and downsizing exercise discussed below. The fear of losing jobs is quite severe in countries such as South Korea where the government has launched aggressive divestment and retrenchment programs. One recent survey on public sector unions in South Korea discovered that although the privatization exercise would increase corporate profit and management power, it would worsen the employment, welfare, and participation of employees (Kang, 1999). In addition, the current prescriptions for open recruitment and contract-based appointments to high-ranking positions, especially in South Korea and the Philippines, may perpetuate job insecurity. All these newly emerging disincentives in the public sector — including the negative public image, loss of public service identity, and decline in job security — constitute a challenge to the commitment of public employees. Such a loss of commitment among public employees, on the other hand, is likely to have a negative impact on public sector performance.

Public service capacity

The performance of the public service depends not only on the commitment of its employees but also on its capacity in terms of financial and human resources. In recent years, however, such public sector capacity has come under challenge due to the emerging threat to these resources caused by market-led policies and reforms such as privatization, downsizing, budget cutting, and retrenchment. During the past two decades, Bangladesh has privatized important sectors and enterprises, especially through its Privatization Board (World Bank, 1997). The recent regimes in the Philippines also undertook an active policy agenda for privatization implemented through institutions such as the Committee on Privatization and the Asset Privatization Trust. In the case of South Korea, by 1998, 25 out of 109 state enterprises had been privatized, and 89 subsidiaries of 30 parent enterprises were scheduled for privatization or corporatization (MFAT, 1999). Although the privatization transactions have generated immediate revenues, they have undermined the possibility of future government incomes from some of the profit-making state enterprises, not to mention the cost of privatization in terms of job losses and worsening unemployment. In addition, the current trend of streamlining public expenditure also implies increasing financial constraints for the public sector. In other words, the current market-driven policies of divestment and streamlining in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines tend to diminish the financial capacity of various public agencies and thus to constrain their performance.

In terms of human resource capacity, there is a similar trend of downsizing the public sector. In Bangladesh, for instance, the government has pursued the downsizing or rightsizing exercise to eliminate the 'ghost workers', especially under the influence of the World Bank (1996). In South Korea, the current government has reduced the number of minister-level officials from 33 to 24, abolished 230 high-level positions, and plans to retrench 26,000 public employees (16 percent of total government employment) by the end of 2001 (Shin, 1999; PUMA, 2000). Similarly, the Philippine government has used the rhetoric of 're-engineering bureaucracy' and improving administrative efficiency to reduce the number of public employees (IMF, 1998). Although there is no doubt that many public agencies in these countries have been overstaffed, the current downsizing exercise has gone beyond the objective of need-based personnel planning in the public service, and has become an end in itself. As a result, many public agencies may encounter human resource constraints in carrying out their objectives and, therefore, their performance may suffer.

Public service integrity

In addition to the previously mentioned problems in the public service, there is a serious problem of integrity among public employees that helps to account for the current status of the public service's image and performance in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines. More specifically, the integrity of public service is compromised due to various forms of political and bureaucratic corruption

that exist in these countries. In Bangladesh, the level of corruption among political leaders and public servants is extremely high. According to a 1999 survey, about 76 percent of Bangladeshis consider their political leaders to be corrupt (Human Development Centre, 2000). With regard to corruption committed by public servants, there are certain variations among different professional groups. According to one TI-Bangladesh survey, the police is considered corrupt by 95 percent of respondents, customs by 91 percent, income tax by 90 percent, and the judiciary by 77 percent (TI-Bangladesh, 1997). Irrespective of minor differences among professions, the figures demonstrate that the level of government corruption is extremely critical in Bangladesh. It is, therefore, not surprising that the public perception of public service is highly negative in this country.

In the case of South Korea, the level of corruption is relatively moderate compared to that in Bangladesh. According to the Anti-Corruption Index prepared from an opinion survey of those applying for public sector services, the overall score was 60.8 (out of 100) for housing, 63.6 for sanitation, 69.5 for fire fighting, 58.7 for construction, and 60.8 for taxation (TI-Malaysia, 2000). These figures indicate that in these government sectors the anti-corruption status of Korean public servants is above average. In the Philippines, the situation is much worse than in South Korea but similar to Bangladesh. An earlier survey shows that 89 percent of respondents considered corruption a formidable obstacle to the realization of the Philippines' vision for development (Endriga, 1997). According to the recent (1999) ranking of various developed and developing countries in terms of people's perception of corruption in their countries — measured by the so-called Corruption Perceptions Index or CPI — the rank of South Korea is 50 and the Philippines 54 (Transparency International, 2000). Thus, although the corruption surveys conducted on each of the three Asian cases show that the Korean situation is much better than the Philippines, this cross-national comparative study demonstrates that the situation in South Korea is almost as bad as that in the Philippines.

The extent of corruption in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines indicates that the level of public service integrity is very low in these countries, although according to some national surveys, the situation in South Korea appears relatively better than the other two countries. The point here is that the low level of public service integrity, in the form of severe corruption, has considerable impact on the service's public image and perception. In this regard, public employees cannot always blame others for their diminishing public respect — they themselves contribute by their corrupt practices to the negative public perception of public service. Corruption also affects public service performance in terms of its lack of transparency, abuse of power, unequal treatment of clients, avoidance of responsibility, consciously planned delay in decision making, and misuse of public money. In short, the prevalence of severe official corruption in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines has adverse implications for the performance and public perception of the public service in these countries. Unfortunately, the current context of business-like reforms in the public service

may have created more avenues for corruption through massive business deals involved in privatization transactions, contracting-out processes, public-private partnerships, and the new financial autonomy of executive agencies (Haque, 2001).

Conclusions

In this article, a main focus has been on the implications of contemporary reforms on the public image and performance level of the public service in Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines. There is no doubt that there were problems in the public sector prior to the recent business-like reforms, and that these reforms have certain positive outcomes such as the elimination of waste and inefficiency, reduction in bureaucratic rigidity, change in bureaucratic style and attitude, emphasis on innovation, and infusion of a sense of responsiveness (Haque, 1997). In the case of Bangladesh, the current reforms might have weakened the degree of bureaucratic elitism by exposing public servants to more competition and making them move vulnerable. In South Korea, according to some observations, the market-led policies and reforms have reduced the coercive treatment of the business sector by the government (Talisayon, 1998). In the Philippines, the reforms have replaced state monopoly with market competition (Hutchcroft, 1996).

However, these reforms have been so guided by market principles, so imitative of the business-management model, and so much affected by ideological predilections and vested political interests that the citizens' democratic rights and entitlements have been compromised in the name of efficiency and competition, public accountability has been replaced with managerial autonomy, and political neutrality or objectivity has been eroded by a politico-ideological agenda. With regard to the political rather than the rational nature of reforms, it has been found in Bangladesh that the newly adopted reform in the banking sector has often been used by politicians — including 46 percent of the cases by ministers, and 35 percent of the cases by members of parliament — to acquire loans for their favored persons (*The Daily Star*, 2000). In the case of South Korea, Kim (1997) points out that public service reforms have been publicized and used by the government to turn people's attention away from their concerns about democratic governance and political legitimacy. In fact, there have been many public protests against the current market-driven reforms in South Korea due to the perceived detrimental impacts of these reforms on the working class (Ching, 1999). In the Philippines, there are cases of leading political figures using the divestment program to benefit their relatives (Briones, 1995: 88).

As a result of the turbulent and confusing nature of contemporary reforms — hasty reform decisions and their implementation, policy rationales superimposed by ideological beliefs, economic objectives integrated with political interests, and national self-reliance juxtaposed with international demand — citizens find it hard to assess the outcomes and achievements of public sector activities. In this regard, it is necessary to emphasize that many of the current surveys and opinion polls on public perception, public satisfaction, and government performance are

quite suspect, they need a more careful assessment. This is especially necessary because there is a growing trend among the advocates of market-led reforms to evaluate the performance of a government in terms of how many enterprises it has privatized, how many services it has contracted out, how many public employees it has retrenched, how many regulations and tariffs it has eliminated, and so on. International financial agencies, especially the World Bank and the IMF, consider these reform measures as performance criteria, and often use them to praise or demonize various regimes in developing countries without analyzing the impacts of such public sector reforms on poverty, inequality, unemployment, living standards, public entitlement, and national sovereignty. It is these long-run economic, social, and political ends or outcomes rather than the short-run policy means or strategies, which should be used as the eventual benchmarks to measure the performance of a government and its public service.

In addition, in exploring the public perception of and satisfaction with specific public sector services, one needs to carefully examine which organizations or individuals conducted the surveys or opinion polls, which groups of respondents were interviewed, what sources were involved in financing these studies, and what objectives or agendas were pursued in undertaking such surveys and polls. The findings on perception, satisfaction, and performance may vary significantly depending on whether the surveys or studies were financed by market-friendly business firms or state-biased government agencies, whether the findings were reported by a conservative agency like the World Bank or by a relatively liberal institution such as International Labour Organization, and whether the respondents were from the educated upper class or from low-income groups. Thus, any objective analysis of the people's perception of the public service, their satisfaction with its performance, and their reaction to its recent business-like reforms, has to take this note of caution into account. Such a cautious and critical perspective in studying these public service issues is more important today due to the current transitional and turbulent atmosphere of public governance in almost all countries, including Bangladesh, South Korea, and the Philippines.

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