



ISLAAH FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Maida Ayyaz

The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) held its third EconFest in Islamabad, featuring a panel discussion focusing on the topic of "Improving Public Administration."

Public administration is fundamentally managing public programs and policies to ensure their effective execution for society's benefit. In Pakistan, the administrative system has its roots in two centuries of British rule, which significantly altered its structure to serve colonial purposes. During the British era, the East India Company which was a trading company and had its board of governors exerted control in a manner that kept local residents subdued and disengaged from their desires. This allowed the British to exploit national assets and land without significant resistance. The flaws and strengths of the current administration in

Pakistan are inherited from the colonial era. The country's administration and civil services suffer from the incompetence of politicians and bureaucracy, an unfair recruitment system, and a lack of comprehensive accountability, all of which have hindered efficient service delivery to the public.

When talking about civil services and public administration in Pakistan, few questions always come to mind.

Why is a career in civil service a lifetime commitment?

In Pakistan when any civil service is employed, it serves its relative department for many decades. This is a custom that has prevailed in the country since forever. There's no need for Civil Services jobs to be permanent but rather based on yearly contracts that can be renewed

periodically. There is no justification for a government-employed person to remain in his position for 3 to 4 decades. For instance, if a teacher is hired in civil service today, after 40-50 years, they will likely have the same skill set they started with. Therefore, either find a way to phase them out or provide continuous training to ensure their skills meet current requirements and needs.

What is the job description of civil services?

Civil service job descriptions also encompass aspects like understanding government objectives, identifying necessary reforms, and implementing policies in society. Previously, civil officials or bureaucrats were dedicated to their roles, contributing significantly to building infrastructure and policies for betterment of society. However, today, it appears that civil service bureaucrats are more focused on serving politicians, excelling in this role instead. Every department should have a detailed job description for civil service roles, clearly outlining the objectives, responsibilities, and expected contributions to governmental goals and societal reforms. This ensures accountability and alignment with departmental and national priorities. By doing so, civil servants can be more effectively evaluated and directed towards meaningful and productive work.

What is the role of Parliament in public administration?

The parliament can play a major role in public services by engaging in quality discussions about necessary issues that need to be solved in society. In the absence of a functioning parliament, politicians contest for seats primarily to secure ministerial positions and appoint bureaucrats of their choice. This is what is happening in Pakistan. There is a lack of political determination to introduce reform agendas aimed at enhancing public administration or making the private sector more appealing to stimulate job growth.

What are the much needed reforms to restructure public administration?

This system of grades in civil services has not been working anymore for decades now. This needs to be changed. On federal level, provincial level, and departments within institutions need to have their own pay grade.

Jobholders cannot all be compensated on the same scale due to the vastly different job requirements for each role. Civil service positions vary greatly in terms of skills, expertise, and responsibilities. Pay scales should be adjusted to reflect these differences, ensuring fair compensation based on the complexity and demands of each job. Incentives for employees should differ based on their productivity. Those who do not work should only receive their basic pay without any additional perks until retirement. If an employee is not working or there is no work available, they should stay at home. Former Provincial Minister for Finance and Health, KP, stated that **employees earn not from their salaries, but by**

simply showing up at the office. If they stayed home, they would face financial loss.

Accountability among civil service employees is crucial for expertise and transparency in government. A survey of Pakistan's public administration highlights the focus on departmental inquiries for accountability, but systemic corruption significantly hampers effective management. Recruiting skilled and qualified individuals is essential, yet the system's long standing failure to deliver results highlights the dire state of public administration. Thus, restructuring civil service reforms is necessary to enhance outcomes and credibility in public services.

The Central Superior Services (CSS) Exam, administered by the Federal Public Service Commission, is the entry point for grade 17 government positions, offering various perks and privileges. This civil exam enrolls a studious student well-versed in bureaucratic matters, intending for them to contribute towards policymaking and the country's development. However, they often veer towards personal interests and upholding the status quo, rather than prioritising the welfare of the people. However, many bureaucrats prioritise elite status over the job's responsibilities. Also, there's only a few candidates out of thousands securing positions due to limited availability, there is a need to either eliminate the exam or thoroughly reform its criteria.

Pensions constitute a significant portion of political capital, funded by the taxpayers of the country. There is a need for restructuring reforms related to pensions. We must find a way to provide compensation that does not overburden taxpayers while still supporting retired employees.

In Pakistan, the civil service is viewed as the key part of the administrative system, reflecting the country's management and organisational structure. Although public pressure has led to occasional amendments, the overall structure, performance methods, and procedures of the civil services and administration have largely remained unchanged. The main reform should aim to transform the rigid and oversized bureaucracy into a more citizen-friendly, responsive, and efficient civil service. Culture is also a crucial factor in restructuring the current system because new changes often face resistance. In Pakistan, there is a culture of rent-seeking, corruption, and traditional work practices that must change for institutions and public services to function properly.

The author is a Research Assistant at Pakistan Institute of Development Economics.