

Personnel Management Reform in Singapore: Can Developing Countries Draw Lessons from it?

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Abstract

Personnel management reforms initiated by Singapore in 1995 were designed to ensure due "executive" responsibility in its civil service personnel management system. The goal has been to achieve a condition of 'unity of command' and 'unified direction' under a 'hierarchical' central civil service organ, i.e. Public Service Division (PSD), located in the Prime Minister's Office. Under the post-reform arrangement, the PSD was assigned to regulate the national civil service. Handling matters of 'general' civil service management include policy oversight and coordination of the newly created 31 personnel boards, staff development and training, service conditions of the Schemes of Service, and pay and related research. Again, coordinating and supervising personnel management functions within individual ministries include coordination of annual graduate recruitment programmes and departmental promotions. Top line managers in individual ministries have been especially encouraged to treat personnel management as a key function. They have been called upon to adopt henceforth a hand-on pro-active approach towards managing the personnel. In short, the declared policy intent of reforms put into effect is that those directly responsible for carrying out the task of public service must be left free to judge the adequacy of the temper and the quality of the tools to be employed in that job. However, such independent bodies as the Public Service Commission and the Legal Service Commission have been retained primarily to deal with selective senior level appointments and promotions, employee appeals and discipline, and to act as watch-dogs in maintaining merit system and employee rights. Although the reformed personnel management in Singapore has distinctive features of an improved new system, developing countries like Bangladesh interested in emulating the system must wait until its efficacy is proven in operational terms.

Introduction

Macroeconomic indicators of development in Singapore in the decades since 1960 clearly show remarkable country performances. From what was merely a centre of entrepot trade,

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dependent much on its nearby neighbours for economic viability, the first generation leaders (1959-1990) of independent Singapore transformed this island-state into one of the four newly industrialised economies (NIEs) in Southeast Asia. Modern Singapore is also adorned by such other labels as "Little Tiger", "Mini dragon" or a "High-performing Asian Economy" (HPAE). In one of the study reports of the World Bank, released in 1993, on the achievements of the eight HPAEs – in policy management and economic growth in particular, Singapore was referred to in glowing terms as a case of "East Asian Miracle" (World Bank 1993, 1).

More specifically, anyone probing Singapore's development indicators in US dollar terms, over the years from 1960 to 1996, can find out that its GNP per capita increased more than 15-fold from \$1,973 in 1960 to \$30,550 in 1996, while the average annual growth rates of GNP per capita were 6.7% between 1960 and 1969, 6.9% (1970-79), and 6.1% (1980-1993). Economic growths during the early 1990s in particular were remarkable. Propped up by an annual average growth rate of over 8 percent, Singapore's per capita income grew from US\$12,462 in 1990 to US\$20,415 in 1994 (Soon and Tan 1997, 258), thereafter to US\$30,550 in 1996 (Asian Development Bank 1997, 239). Thus, Singapore then ranked fourteenth worldwide in terms of its per capita income, ahead of Italy and the United Kingdom and just below Canada. This achievement was recognized by a decision made in 1996 by the OECD¹ to graduate Singapore to developed country status (Soon and Tan 1997, 259).

There are reasons to believe that the "miraculous" economic growth in Singapore stems partly from its growth-oriented leaders' realistic strategy and intelligent policies and partly from the institutional mechanisms they created to implement such policies. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's People's Action Party (PAP), in government since 1959, could foresee in right perspective the pressing development needs of the country. The PAP government attached top-most priority to create secure institutional environments for private investment that led to very high levels of private sector-led growth. The PAP leaders also felt the need for retaining much of the colonial bureaucratic structure to implement their policies. But they made it quite clear to the civil servants that high standards of performance were expected. Corrective measures immediately followed this veiled warning aimed at revitalizing the

existing system of administration in place since the colonial days. The implementation of such measures began appointing increasing number of younger and highly qualified Singaporeans on merit, replacing the seniority system hitherto practiced by the British colonial government. The government placed particular emphasis on attracting people with technocratic-managerial skills and introduced a scholarship system to ensure a supply of qualified young graduates to the civil service (Soon and Tan 1997, 243). Indications have it that the pace of revitalization, set in by the first generation leaders (1959-1990), continued to gain momentum beginning in the early 1990s, notwithstanding that the reins of government was taken over by the second generation leaders in November 1990, led by a new prime minister, namely Goh Chok Tong.

This article focuses on the structural reforms introduced in the 1990s in Singapore with a view to improving on the existing system of civil service personnel management. In particular, the article will highlight those changes made to devolve much of the personnel management responsibility of the Public Service Commission to the Public Service Division (PSD), a 'hierarchical' central personnel organ located in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), on the one hand, and to the individual ministries headed by the cabinet ministers, on the other. This article will also ascertain the remainder what role the Public Service Commission (PSC) has been playing in the aftermath of the personnel management reforms. No elaborate discussion will be made on the presently defunct two commissions, namely the Education Service Commission and the Police and Civil Defence Services Commission, which had been established in 1990 in pursuance of an amendment incorporated in the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore. Moreover, the scope of this study excludes the existing Legal Service Commission (LSC), which is also a constitutional body meant for dealing with the personnel matters of all officers in the Singapore Legal Service (The Republic of Singapore 1992, Article 114).

The article consists of five main sections including this introductory note. The section that follows this note probes the structural organization of the Singapore Civil Service, one of the main components of the public services in Singapore. The next describes the system of public personnel management in Singapore in light of the country's legal-constitutional framework. The fourth section highlights the main features of the

personnel management reform introduced in Singapore beginning in the year 1995. The fifth is the concluding section that includes in the main an assessment on the newly introduced civil service personnel management system in Singapore and its heuristic aspects. The system of personnel management in Bangladesh is also briefly described in the fifth section to see whether the present state of structural-functional arrangements of the Bangladeshi system warrants any need of emulating in some form or other the new Singaporean system. However, the remainder of this introductory note includes a brief general discussion on Singapore, its history, people, and the system of government.

Singapore is basically an island-state located at the narrow point of Strait of Malacca off southern tip of Malay Peninsula, consisting of the main island and 58 islets, with a total area of about 648 kilometres. Of the country's little over 3 million inhabitants, about 77 percent are Chinese, 14.1 percent Malay, 7.3 percent Indian, and 3 percent others. There are mixtures within this mixture, however. Singapore is both multireligious and multilingual, as well as multiethnic in that its inhabitants include Buddhists, Christians, Moslems, Hindus, and their children are required to learn in schools one of their mother tongues - Malay, Tamil, or Mandarin Chinese. One of the unifying factors is the English language, selected as the medium for educational institutions and for its use as the official language. Diversity along linguistic, cultural and religious lines portends though a constant threat to stability and social order, Singapore's government has consistently been pursuing policies towards establishing a multiracial nation state, to promote social harmony and fraternity. Most observers find indications that the government has succeeded well in achieving such goals (Kim 1985, 13-24).

Historical records indicate that the area now known Singapore had prospered as a centre of entrepot trade in the seventeenth century. European powers were trying to set up outposts in Southeast Asian region throughout the eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, the British East India Company established a trading base in Singapore, and in 1867, along with Penang and Malacca, it came to be recognized as a British Crown colony. Singapore fell to the Japanese army during World War II, and at the end of Japanese occupation, it became a Crown colony again until the attainment of its internal self-rule in 1959

(Joo-jock 1991, 3-15). The island joined the Federation of Malaysia for a brief period (1963-65), but eventually withdrew and became an independent state in 1965 (Kim 1985, 3-13).

Singapore was proclaimed a Republic in December of 1965 with a governing structure patterned on the British system of parliamentary government. Legislative power is vested in a unicameral parliament with 83 members (as of January 1999) who are elected for a term of five years. The leader commanding the majority in Parliament is appointed prime minister by the president. In January 1991, the Constitution was amended to allow for the election of a president by the citizens for a fixed term of six years. Unlike in a parliamentary system, the president in Singapore is empowered to veto government budgets and appointments to high public offices (Singapore Government 1997, 50-51). The Constitution stipulates that the executive power is vested in the hands of the president; in actual practice, however, such authority is exercisable subject to the constitutional provisions by the prime minister and his cabinet (Article 23).

The cabinet led by the prime minister is responsible for all government policies and the day-to-day administration of the affairs of the state. It is collectively responsible to Parliament, and is comprised of a number of ministers appointed by the president on the advice of prime minister from among the Members of Parliament (MPs). Each minister is allocated a portfolio of one or more ministries by the prime minister. The ministers are considered to be the political heads of their respective ministries, in charge of all functions of policy-making and administrative directions; of course, who are assisted by the permanent secretaries and other senior officials (Articles 24-34).

Judicial power in Singapore is vested in the Supreme Court and the Subordinate Courts. The Supreme Court consists of the Chief Justice, the Judges of Appeal and judges who are appointed from time to time. There are special provisions in the Constitution to safeguard the tenure of office and the independence of the judges of the Supreme Court (Singapore Government 1997, 15-16).

Singapore Civil Service

Article 102 of Part IX of the Constitution refers to the public services in Singapore as comprising (a) the Singapore Armed Forces; (b) the Singapore Civil Service; (c) the Singapore Legal Service; and (d) the Singapore Police Force. Clause (a) of Article 103 however provides a clarification that "public service" does not include service otherwise than in a civil capacity, and it also excludes the persons who hold appointments to constitutional posts (e.g., Chief Justice, Auditor-General, Public Service Commission Chairman and Members), including a police officer below the rank of Inspector and the daily-rated employees.

The origins of the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) can be traced to what seemed at the outset a skeleton administrative functionaries that had to be improvised by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (founding father of Singapore) soon after he assumed the charge of the East India Company's newly founded trading outpost in Singapore in 1819. The functionaries were to perform such specific functions as 'general administration' and 'regulation and promotion' related to shipping trade at the outpost. As Raffles was then a 'covenanted' servant of the East India Company in London, the administration of the island at that time was largely carried out by the Company's local authorities based in Calcutta of India. Almost all instructions necessary for central control and coordination of the administration in Singapore came from the Calcutta-based authorities, then responsible for the East India Company's local administration in whole of India and in the Straits Settlements. Singapore was subsequently linked with the Company's other settlement in Penang to form the 'fourth' Presidency after the three other Presidencies formed earlier in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay in India (Meow 1985, 93-103).

However, the rule over Singapore by the East India Company finally came to an end in 1867, beginning from which year the British Crown itself took over full control of the Straits Settlements. The period of British rule in Singapore from 1867 to 1949 (except for the interlude of Japanese occupation of the island from 1942 to 1945) can genuinely be regarded an epoch in its administrative history in that a system of civil service, reflective of features of the Weberian style of bureaucracy,

developed during this period, together with many of the structural arrangements and bureaucratic practices, which seem to have still been persisting in the civil service of modern Singapore (Quah 1996, 62-69). 1867 was also the year when the Singapore branch of the Straits Settlements Civil Service was formed (Quah 1978, 417).

As of January 1999, the Singapore Civil Service (SCS) was organized to man 21 ministries and organs of state, including the President's Office and the Prime Minister's Office, and the departments under them. The ministries and organs of state were to be categorized then as 'economic and infrastructure development', 'security', 'social and community service', and 'general'. At that time the SCS had a total of 65,641 employees, or roughly 5% of the total workforce in Singapore, with 626 Division I Superscale officers, 22,759 Division I Non-Superscale officers, 19,619 Division II officers, 16,123 Division III officers, and 6,514 Division IV officers. In addition, about 35,000 officials and employees were also working in a number of statutory boards. Thus, altogether a little over 100,000 civil service and statutory board staffs constituted the magnitude of total public sector workforce of Singapore in 1999ii (Republic of Singapore, 1995: 75-85).

Members of the SCS can be divided into four distinct categories based on the nature and responsibility of the work they perform. These four categories are: first, the general services; second, the professional services; third, the departmental services; and fourth, the uniformed services. Jobs in the general services are broad in scope. Officers who are appointed to a general service may be posted to different ministries in the course of their careers. An example is the Administrative Service (AS), the officers of which hold key positions in ministries and departments and are responsible for formulating and implementing government policies. They work closely with ministers, advising them on possible options for the development of Singapore, and are responsible for ensuring that the policy chosen is properly implemented. An AS officer's work seems exceptionally challenging, varied, and rewarding as well. (Public Service Commission 1994, 4)

The category of professional services encompasses jobs for professionals, such as accountants, doctors, engineers, and teachers, as well as jobs for other candidates with specialized qualifications. A

qualified accountant can, for instance, join the Accounting Service or the Audit Service. In the Accounting Service, his principal role would be to provide accountancy expertise and to service the government administrative machinery. On the other hand, in the Audit Service, he could be involved in different aspects of government auditing, such as examination of financial transactions, accounts and systems and assessment of whether programmes are cost-effective (Public Service Commission 1994, 4).

A number of jobs in the SCS are focused on specific and well-defined areas of concern, and are confined to one ministry or department. Jobs in this departmental services category include those in the Labour, Library and Welfare Services. A Labour Officer's functions, for example, include providing conciliation services to employee unions and management, enforcing Labour Laws and helping in the formulation of labour policies (Public Service Commission 1994, 4).

Jobs in the uniformed services include the Police, Police (Narcotics Branch), Police (Prisons Branch), Civil Defence, Customs and Immigration Services. Apart from law enforcement, officers in these services also may undertake such other types of work as 'organization of resources', 'education and research' (Public Service Commission 1994, 4).

The four categories of services referred to above include a number of schemes of service³ constituted under law comprising only of Division I and Division II level officers belonging to distinctive occupational groups. While a very few of these schemes of service, such as the Administrative Service, Accounting Service and the Auditing Service, are confined to Division I only, the remainder (e.g., Information Service, Foreign Service and Labour and Welfare Services) have both Division I and Division II branches. The schemes of service for the Executive Officers, Audit Officers, and Technical Officers, and so on, are confined to Division II exclusively (Public Service Commission 1992, 1-144).

Division II grades of the category of general services are occupied by executive officers of various levels of seniority, while the Division III grades are made up of clerical and technical officers. Those in Division IV grades are manual workers, office attendants, cooks and drivers (Quah 1996, 67).

Division I grades in the categories of general as well as non-general services are divided into 'superscales' and 'timescales'. But only for the AS and the AS (Foreign Branch) in the category of general services, five additional apex grades called Staff Grades I-V are available. AS officers in the Staff Grades and Superscales are the permanent secretaries and deputy secretaries, while the officers in the non-general services are directors and deputy directors who can climb the promotion ladder up to Superscale C at best (Public Service Commission 1994, 98).

An appendix is provided which illustrates in tabular form the service grades including the corresponding pay scale of each service grade, arranged vertically, of four specific Division I services of the SCS, i.e., the Administrative Service, Engineering Service, Education Service, and the Medical Service. This shows how distinctively is elevated the position of the Administrative Service, in terms of its service grades and salaries, vis-à-vis the positions of three other services of the professional category.

In general, the minimum academic requirements for entry into the services of Division I grades are a second class upper honours, or a second class honours, or simply a bachelor pass degree, depending on the varying entrance requirements provided in the relevant schemes of service. Minimum requirements for entry into the services of Division II grades are an honours or a pass degree, or a polytechnic diploma, or GCE passes at 'A' level, and so on (Public Service Commission 1992, 6-10). The entrance requirements to get into a Division III service are secondary III qualifications or better (Hiok 1980, 447).

Indications have it that the SCS has since the country's independence been playing key role in its economy, prosperity, and stability. Under the direction of the political leadership, the SCS formulates and implements government policies and programmes in various areas: security and international relations; economic and infrastructure development; and social and community services. Of course, the dividends for all of these development-friendly activities have been substantial, for the policy makers of the country seem considerate enough in their decisions to increase from time to time the salaries and benefits of the Singaporean civil servants; in effect, to bring them broadly in line with those of the private sector executives (Republic of Singapore 1994, 8-10). One study by the World Bank thus commends: "Not surprisingly, Singapore, which is widely perceived to have the region's most competent and upright

bureaucracy, pays its bureaucrats best" (The World Bank 1993, 179).

The government also sought to ensure that the competent civil servants would not feel frustrated with the implementation of policies and programmes devised by its policy level leaders. It involved the civil servants actively in the formulation of policies and accorded them high status, particularly to the AS officers (Soon and Tan 1997, 234-35).

By far the most important of the services in the SCS is the Administrative Service to which an official government brochure refers in glowing terms: "The Administrative Service is the premier Service in the Civil Service" (Public Service Commission 1994, 15). Another official brochure put on the government website focused the AS in far more shining words:

A career in the premier Administrative Service puts you at the heart of government, working closely with Ministers to shape and implement policies. Administrative Officers hold key positions in government ministries and major statutory boards. The 250-strong Administrative Service provides leadership for the Civil Service. The top civil servant in each Ministry - the Permanent Secretary - is an Administrative Officer. Many of the CEOs in the major statutory boards, for example, EDB, IRAS, HDB and LTA, are Administrative Officers. Administrative Officers are professionals in the business of government. As leaders in public sector, Administrative Officers actively think ahead for the future, anticipate and analyse problems, and assist the elected government in ensuring the security, survival and success of Singapore. The job calls for more than just intellectual ability; it also requires good people, skills, imagination and initiative, sound judgement, a capacity to think clearly and act decisively amidst the uncertainties and complexities of real life, and a deep desire to see to the well-being of Singapore: Thinkers and Movers and Singaporeans⁴.

To get into the AS, one must have a first or second class upper honours degree in any discipline, consistently good academic record and proven leadership qualities. The salary package offered to a fresh AS recruit ranges from \$33,600 to \$43,000 (without NS increments) and from \$38,700 to \$49,400 (with NS increments), excluding performance bonuses, special bonuses, market adjustment component and allowances, and so on (Public Service Division 1998, 4).

The System of Personnel Management

This section focuses on the system of personnel management in Singapore, in particular, its formative phase and development, including an overview of the structural-functional arrangements of two key central personnel agencies in existence in today's Singapore. To begin with, however, it seems appropriate to clarify the concept of a 'central personnel agency'.

A central personnel agency may be defined as an organ which deals with personnel functions having government-wide implications. Based on this definition, one may however identify several central personnel agencies in a country. For example, apart from certain specialized personnel organizations (i.e., public service commission and public service division, establishment office, personnel or civil service department), agencies such as the president's office, prime minister's office, cabinet office, finance department or treasury, or planning department, are also found in many countries dealing with some aspects of central personnel administration incidental to their assigned government-wide functions. But the agencies in the latter category are involved in central personnel administration only to the extent of ensuring concerted action in the overall policy process of resource allocation, coordination of business, and monitoring of policy implementation throughout the government machinery. By contrast, a central personnel agency's involvement in personnel administration constitutes its primary responsibility (Ahmed 1984, 289-93). To substantiate this point by an instance, managing centrally the civil servants which constitutes the primary responsibility of the PSD in Singapore may be cited. According to an official year book, titled Singapore 1997, the PSD is responsible for:

- determination of policies and central coordination in relation to the functioning of all the thirty-one personnel boards constituted in 1995 and thereafter;
- management of Schemes of Service and service conditions of the civil servants;
- planning and management of personnel development and training;
- conduct and monitoring of pay research and related studies;

- development and dissemination of professional information and organisation of related programmes;
- improvement of service quality in the public sector; and
- central oversight of social integration of new Singaporeans and social development (Singapore Government 1997, 52-53).

The PSD's own annual report of 1998 describes more precisely its tasks: (i) to shape a capable, forward-looking and effective public service, based on the principles of incorruptibility, meritocracy and impartiality, for a dynamic, successful and vibrant nation of excellence; (ii) to ensure the continuing availability and development of superior public service leadership; (iii) to look over the national talent pool to assure social and economic progress in a safe, secure and stable environment; and (iv) to operate itself with excellence (Public Service Division 1998, 3).

True it is that, traditionally, the individual ministries and departments in many countries have been the sole controlling authorities for employees placed at their disposal for carrying out their respective functions. But post-World War II developments indicate that the departmental control for personnel management of employees has increasingly been limited by the transfer of that authority to one or more central organs of civil service. One such organ is commonly known as 'public' or 'civil' service commission; while the other located more often than not within the executive hierarchy is known as Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions in India; Establishment Division in Pakistan; Ministry of Establishment in Bangladesh; Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs in Sri Lanka; Public Services Department in Malaysia, and Public Service Division in Singapore (Siedentopf 1983, 78-80).

Public service commissions in most countries with a British heritage are constitutional bodies, and they discharge their functions remaining outside the executive branch in most of these countries. They are organs for limiting or qualifying the degree of control of civil servants exercised by the executive agencies (Raksasataya and Siedentopf 1980, xi-xii).

The PSD as a central personnel agency in Singapore is not a very old institution. It came into being in 1983 almost thirty-two years after the establishment of the Public Service Commission (PSC). The PSC in

Singapore was first established in 1951 in accordance with provisions made in Public Service Commission Ordinance No. 55 issued in 1949 (Quah 1972, 20-128). A brief summary of the formative phase, composition and functions of the PSC follows.

Public Service Commission

The Singapore (Constitution) Order in Council of 1958, in pursuance of which Singapore attained its internal self-rule in June 1959, did include provisions for the establishment of a PSC, consisting of a chairman and four other members in place of the existing three-member commission formed in 1951. As in most other countries of British heritage, the PSC in Singapore was also accorded an advisory status, and was assigned with functions in relation to appointment, promotion, and transfer from one Division in the Service or from one class or grade to another, termination of appointment, dismissal and disciplinary control of every public officer in the state. In addition, the PSC was also assigned to play an important advisory role in matters of appointment to certain high government offices (Public Service Commission 1959, 1).

Part IX of the Constitution in operation in today's Singapore (as of January 1999) includes fairly detailed provisions relating to the PSC. Article 105 provides for a Public Service Commission consisting of a chairman and other members not less than four and not more than fourteen, including the appointment of one or two deputy chairmen from among the members of the PSC. They are to be appointed by the president for a term of five years, and for additional one or more terms, on the advice of the prime minister. But, except the members appointed from among the university teaching staff, a member (including the chairman) leaving the commission on completion of his term of office would be ineligible for any other appointment in the public service. A member (including the chairman) may be removed from the commission for any proven cause only in such manner as specified in the Constitution. The terms and conditions of service (salary, allowances and other privileges) of the chairman and other members are regulated by law passed in the parliament or, until such law is enacted, by an order of the president (Article 108). A senior officer of the public service is appointed as Secretary to the PSC by the president on the advice of the PSC's chairman (Article.109).

The constitutional provisions relating to the PSC's composition in Singapore seem distinctive compared to the relevant provisions in other countries of British heritage. More specifically, the constitutions in most other countries provide that the PSC's chairmen and members be appointed for certain fixed terms, extension in exceptional cases only, and they must leave the PSC on reaching the age limit specified in the constitutions; for example, 62 in Bangladesh (Ahmed 1990, 86-88). Moreover, the constitutions in most of these countries stipulate that certain number of senior civil servants be appointed as members of the PSC. The Constitution of Singapore seems to contain no such provisions⁵. What seems more unique is that the PSC chairman has been accorded a higher status vis-à-vis other high office holders in the government of Singapore. The Table of Precedence, released in 1998 by the Prime Minister's Office, shows the PSC chairman's rank number as '11(b)', which is higher to that of the judges of appeal, i.e., '12(a)', deputy speaker of Parliament, i.e., '13', and the head of civil service, '17' (Prime Minister Office 1998).

Until the constitutional amendment aimed at restructuring drastically the system of personnel management in Singapore, effective from January 1995, the PSC was empowered to (a) appoint, (b) confirm, (c) emplace on the permanent or pensionable establishment, (d) promote, (e) transfer, (f) dismiss, (g) exercise disciplinary control over all public officers, except the ones in the judicial and legal service, police officers below the rank of Inspector, and daily-rated employees. The PSC was (and still is) responsible for the planning and administration of scholarships and bursaries provided by the Singapore government, foreign governments, local and foreign organisations and foundations⁶ (Public Service Commission 1994, 8-14).

However, the PSC's advisory role that was originally granted in matters of appointment and promotion to certain high government offices seems to have remained unaffected by the amendment referred to above. These include the offices of permanent secretary, auditor-general, clerk of parliament, attorney-general, director of education, commissioner of police, commissioner of civil defence, and so on. Besides, the chairman of PSC presides at the Presidential Election Committee's meetings to

which the Constitution has entrusted the function to verify the qualifications of the candidates seeking election to the post of the country's president (Article 18); one member of the PSC is nominated by its chairman to the Council of Presidential Advisers, to advise the president on certain matters specified in the Constitution⁷ (Article 37B).

The Constitution of Singapore provides in Article 116(3) that the PSC may delegate any of its functions specified under Article 110(1) to persons or boards both in and outside the commission. In fact, this provision was envisaged by the constitution-makers apprehending the possibility that the PSC might over times become over-burdened with its constitutional duties and that it might then opt for delegating part of its functions. One must, however, point out that the process of delegation of authority by the PSC in effect began since the early years of its reorganisation in 1959 (Public Service Commission 1959-60, 2-6). The PSC reported in its annual report of 1994 that, to improve the effectiveness of personnel administration in the SCS, it had over the years delegated to permanent secretaries and heads of department the authority to:

- a) confirm officers in Divisions I to IV, except administrative officers (wef. 25 Sep 63 for Division I, III and IV officers and wef. 1 Apr 83 for Division I officers);
- b) extend the probation of officers in Divisions I to IV, except administrative officers (wef. 1 Apr 83);
- c) recruit Division III and IV officers (wef. 1 Apr 83 for Division IV and wef. 1 Sep 92 for Division III officers);
- d) renew temporary appointments for officers in Division I and II pending availability of permanent posts (wef. 1 Jan 90);
- e) re-employ re-retired Division II and IV officers whose normal retirement age is 60 years, up to the age of 65 (wef. 1 Jan 90 for Division IV officers and wef. 1 Sep 92 for Division III officers);
- f) transfer officers in the former "common-user" Services such as the Clerical Service, from one Ministry to another where there is no change in grade of appointment (wef. 1 Jan 90);
- g) promote officers within Division IV (wef. 1 Jan 90); and

promote Division I, II and III officers from the basic recruitment grade to the first promotional grade in 42 Services (wef. 1 Jan 92) (Public Service Commission 1994, 12-13).

But, to ensure that standards were maintained under the delegated authority, ministries and departments were asked in clear terms to comply with standard procedures and eligibility criteria spelt out by the PSC under each delegation listed above (Public Service Commission 1994, 13).

However, the fact remains that 'delegation of authority' is the discretion of the PSC. Therefore, theoretically, the government cannot force the commission to delegate certain 'authority' unless the latter itself agree to it. Probably, the urgency of a matter might have at times prompted the government to resort to amending the state constitution, thereby to slash the authority of the PSC. But the success of such extreme course of action depends on the extent of government's control in the parliament.

In Bangladesh, and elsewhere in the subcontinent, the government is empowered, under provisions made in the constitution, to exclude perforce any matter from the purview of the PSC; of course, after due consultation with the latter. In fact, the inclusion of provisions to this effect is indicative of a willingness of the country's constitution-makers to recognise at the very outset the ultimate responsibility of the government for the proper management and control of the civil service. From a general point of view, this approach seems consistent with the principle that those who are directly responsible for carrying out the task of public services must be left free to judge the adequacy of the temper and quality of the tools to be employed in that job (Bapat 1956, 54-56). Interestingly, the Constitution of Singapore includes no provisions as such.

Creation of the PSD

Introductory paragraphs of this section of the article include references to the PSD, its responsibility in managing the civil service in particular. Established in 1983 as part of the executive hierarchy, the PSD then got

attached with the Ministry of Finance, taking over functions formerly discharged by the Personnel Administration Branch of the same Ministry. But one must look further back to trace the genesis of the PSD.

Prior to 1972, the PSC shared the personnel functions with the Establishment Division of the Ministry of Finance, which was traditionally responsible for both "operational" and "developmental" aspects of civil service management, not included within the purview of the PSC. This pattern of "dual" management changed after 1972, when personnel management functions were handled until the early eighties by three separate organizations. First, the PSC remained as usual responsible for recruitment, selection, promotion, training, transfer, disciplinary control and dismissal. Second, the Establishment Unit of the Prime Minister's Office was charged with the functions of career development and training of Division I officers of the SCS. Third, one newly created unit called the Personnel Administration Branch (PAB) in the Budget Division of the Ministry of Finance took over the functions of job classification and terms and conditions of service (Hiok 1980, 442-443). In April 1981, the function of career development and training of Division I officers was transferred from the Establishment Unit to the PSC (Quah 1996, 496).

In fact, reforms to improve the existing personnel management system were begun in 1980, to correct perceived problems in turnover, morale and commitment in the SCS and to give civil servants the opportunity to develop themselves to the fullest of their potential, thereby to contribute more to the country's development efforts. The government acknowledged that for the SCS to be effective it had to be able to attract and retain capable officers. A study of incomes of Singaporean graduates sponsored by the government revealed however a wide disparity in the pay of those in the SCS and those in the private sector. The salaries of the civil servants were therefore revised in 1982 to correct this disparity. The next step was to improve the personnel management system to ensure that those being recruited and retained by better pay would be developed to their fullest and assigned to jobs that best suited their capabilities (Lian 1985, 315-17).

In April 1982, the government announced the adoption of a new management philosophy for the SCS. To see how this new management philosophy put into practice, a committee called Personnel Management Steering Committee (PMSC), led by the PSC chairman, was appointed in March 1982. The PMSC, with the consultancy help of the Management Services Department, probed in-depth the various aspects of the system of personnel management operating in Singapore since the pre-independence days, including some studies on the personnel management systems of other countries and of the Shell. Its study on Singapore traced the problems of staff turnover, low productivity and morale, lack of commitment and dedication in the SCS to the inadequacy of the existing system of personnel management. Particularly, it found that the persons in charge of management within the governmental structure lacked real authority to manage such important personnel functions as recruitment, promotion, training, and disciplinary control (Lian 1985, 320-21).

The PMSC therefore paid special attention to find out ways in restructuring functional arrangements in regard to recruitment, training, career development, and matching the right person to the right job. Many of the reforms it supported aimed at long and integrated approaches, and at letting the civil service managers have more say in certain important personnel functions. Among its major recommendations, the most important one was that a separate central personnel authority be created to be known as Public Service Division (PSD), charged with the functions of formulating and reviewing personnel policies in the SCS and ensuring that such policies implemented consistently in all the ministries and departments. More specifically, the proposed PSD would be made responsible for appointment, promotion and disciplinary control of the SCS, including all personnel policy matters concerning performance appraisal, transfer and posting, training, career development, schemes of service, service conditions, and employee welfare. It would also provide such central personnel services as conducting pay research and administering the holiday bungalow scheme. In other words, these

suggestions when implemented might have an implication that the PSC's existing role would be relegated to that of a 'watchdog body' – confined to the task of ensuring 'merit' and 'impartiality' in regard to appointment, promotion and disciplinary control of civil servants (Quah 1996, 497).

On 3 January 1983, the PSD was created as the third division within the Ministry of Finance along with the existing Budget Division and Revenue Division. However, the PSD was finally brought under the direct control of the prime minister as a major constituent unit of the Prime Minister's Office in June 1994. Under the new structural arrangement, the PSD headed by a permanent secretary was specifically charged for performing a wide range of tasks that pertain primarily to managing the "region's most competent and upright bureaucracy". To accomplish these tasks the PSD was organized (as of January 1999) consisting of three major units: policy group, services group, and development group – each headed by a deputy secretary-level officer. Each major unit was again divided into a number of sub-units all reflective of a rationally structured functional arrangement (Public Service Division 1998, 5-7).

Reports have it that the new structural arrangement was envisaged then as a deliberate measure to ensure that the PSD, attached with the chief executive's office, encounter no difficulty to work on the government's plan to devolve much of the personnel management functions from the PSC to the executive agencies (Traits Times 1994, January 23).

Be that as it may, the PSD's location in the Prime Minister's Office in Singapore seems consistent with the structural arrangements made in most countries of British heritage for managing the civil services⁸. This arrangement has two distinctive advantages: first, a central civil service organ attached to the highest level of executive authority enjoys a position of prestige and government-wide authority; second, this arrangement ensures strict adherence to the civil service rules and 'merit' principle by all the agencies in the public sector (United Nations 1961, 3-7).

Personnel Management Reforms

The formative phase and development of the system of personnel management in Singapore described in the preceding section seem to indicate features distinctive in cross-cultural context. Up until the 1995-personnel management devolution, the PSC as a central personnel agency in that country had since its inception been enjoying fairly a strong constitutional status. Its role in civil service personnel management had been both broad and wide-ranging. The Constitution vested in it the power to (i) appoint, (ii) confirm, (iii) emplace on permanent or pensionable establishment, (iv) promote, (v) transfer, (vi) dismiss, and (vii) exercise disciplinary control over all public officers, except those in the judicial and legal services, police officers below the rank of Inspector, and the daily-rated employees. What seems most distinctive is that the Constitution endowed the PSC with an important advisory role in relation to appointments to some high offices - permanent secretaries and others, and to participate in deliberations of two key constitutional committees, namely the Presidential Election Committee and the Council of Presidential Advisers. Moreover, the PSC's chairman and members have since the early 1960s been responsible for the planning and administration of a number of prestigious scholarships and bursaries, although the Constitution included no provision whatsoever specifying this function for the PSC. In other words, the PSC in Singapore seemed fit to be categorised as a "commission with broad power"⁹.

Thus, it was more likely for the PSC in Singapore, initially consisting of 3 members only, to get bogged down with heavy workload as times went on (Quah 1996, 493-504). Since the Constitution made no provision for the government to be able to exclude perforce any matter from the purview of the PSC, like in most other countries of British heritage, the latter itself took the initiative right from the beginning to solve its ever increasing problem of workload; initially involving the departmental representatives in recruitment and other personnel management processes (Public Service Commission 1959, 3-12), thereafter gradually delegating part of its authority to the permanent secretaries and departmental heads in pursuance of a provision made in the Constitution

(Public Service Commission 1994, 8-10). But what remained a fact that the PSC continued to act as the final authority for approval of whatever decisions the permanent secretaries and departmental heads were making in all matters delegated by them. The Constitution provided no scope for complete transfer of any of its powers by the PSC to anyone in the executive (Article 116).

Indeed, the creation of the PSD in 1983 was the demand of the time, for a separate central civil service organ within the executive branch - regulating the civil service, controlling and supervising 'internal' civil service management, and handling the problems of 'general' civil service management, which are generally considered to be the appropriate business of the executive hierarchy (United Nations 1969, 3-15). But the idea for a separate central civil service organ (i.e. the PSD) at the initial stage was primarily floated to address the exiting system of personnel management fraught with such defects as 'divided personnel policy directions and responsibilities', 'ambiguous definition of role and authority of the various commissions/executive agencies', 'duplication of work', and 'inadequate coordination and inefficient use of manpower' (Management Development 1982, 33-56). There was in effect no suggestion that the newly created PSD should eventually take over the PSC's constitutionally mandated powers. Rather, an institutional device as such was thought then to provide for an effective functional link between the PSC on the one hand and all the executive agencies on the other. Hence the problem of the PSC's workload lingered on.

ESC and PCDS

The government moved in once again in 1990 to the aid of the PSC, in which year two additional commissions, namely the Education Service Commission (ESC) and the Police and Civil Defence Services Commission (PCDS), were established (later abolished in 1998) after due amendment made in the Constitution. The ESC had been empowered under provisions made in the Constitution to appoint, confirm, emplace on permanent or pensionable establishment, and promote all officers in the Education Service (approx. no. 25,000), except the Director of Education who was to be appointed and promoted

by the PSC (Article 110A). On the other hand, the PCDSC had been vested with the authority to appoint, confirm, emplace on permanent or pensionable establishment, and promote all officers in the Police Service, Police Service (Prisons), Police Service (Narcotics Branch) and Civil Defence Service, and to transfer officers between these Services, except the Commissioner of Police and the Commissioner of Civil Defence Service who were to be appointed and promoted by the PSC (Article 110B).

Although the 1990-amendment had allowed the PSC, under provisions made in Articles 110A(3) and 110B(3), to retain its authority to dismiss and exercise disciplinary control over officers in all the services placed under the ESC and the PCDSC, both of these newly created commissions were subsequently made fully independent in respect of all matters of personnel management of the services placed under them in pursuance of another amendment made in the Constitution in 1994 (Public Service Commission 1994, 4-7).

Nevertheless, the amendment referred to above ensured for the PSC to represent adequately both in the ESC and the PCSDC, for it was stipulated that the chairman of each of these two commissions would either be the chairman or the deputy chairman of the PSC and of the other four members in each commission, the deputy chairman and another member would be PSC members nominated by the chairman of the PSC. Moreover, the Secretariat of the PSC was to provide all necessary secretarial services to both of these new commissions. The chairmen and members of the ESC and the PCSDC were all appointed by the president on the advice of the prime minister (Public Service Commission 1990, 9). Therefore, it was more likely for someone to get an impression that the establishment of two additional commissions in 1990 was actually a measure of institution-building that rather enlarged the membership of the existing PSC.

There were indications, however, that the creation of the ESC and PCSDC helped the PSC get somewhat relieved of its workload. But on comparing the workload cleared by the PSC with that of what were cleared by the ESC and the PCSDC, in terms of selecting candidates to

the SCS during the period from 1990 to 1993, one finds that the PSC handled most selection work (i.e., 71.3%), followed next by the ESC (25.3%), and thereafter by the PCSDC (3.4%) (Quah 1996, 550).

Personnel Boards

1994 was indeed a significant year in the history of the SCS. The Constitution was amended in August this year (Amendment no.2) which envisaged devolving much of the PSC's powers to 31 personnel boards to be formed in the ministries effective from January 1995. Prior to this amendment, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong informed senior civil servants attending the Administrative Service Dinner, held on 22 April 1994, that the government would be soon restructuring the existing personnel management system, to enable the SCS to compete more effectively with the private sector organizations, to attract and retain as well talented personnel. He began his "historic" speech delineating first the dysfunctional features of the existing civil service personnel system, and thereafter explained the rationale of the personnel management reforms that his government would soon be implementing. Selective parts of his famous speech are reproduced below in verbatim: In these circumstances, the civil service personnel management system has serious shortcomings. The basic problem is that the civil service separates authority from responsibility. This contradicts the basic management principle that managers should be given the wherewithal to accomplish their mission.

(Unlike the management situation in any superior private organization), in the civil service, permanent secretaries have no final authority over recruitment, promotions, deployment or advancement. PSC and PSD, which do, are not responsible for the performance of individual ministries or the government. This separation is meant to safeguard the integrity of the service, but goes well beyond what is necessary for this purpose.

The grave consequence of this fundamental flaw is the continuing loss of talent to the private sector. The member of the PSC ... is private individuals who have come forward to do public service for very little

personal reward. They have volunteered to take on an onerous responsibility, filled a key role in the personnel management system. Commission members attend an average 100 sessions a year. Some have served for than 20 years. The Government is grateful to them for their dedicated work and appreciates their sterling service. But, despite the best efforts of all those involved in the civil service personnel management, the result are not satisfactory because the system itself has been found wanting (Goh 1994, 7-11).

Prime Minister Goh assured the audience however that the personnel management system would be reformed "without compromising the high standards, integrity and impartiality of the civil service". Referring to the successful experiences of decentralizing the personnel management systems of the civil services in Britain, Malaysia and Hong Kong, he recommended that Singapore should follow their examples by decentralizing personnel management in the SCS by devolving authority from the PSC to the permanent secretaries and ministers. He concluded his speech by reminding the senior civil servants that decentralization meant "giving more responsibility to line managers, faster promotions for good officers, but also swifter retribution for those who underperform" (Goh 1994, 11).

To implement the changes announced by the prime minister, the first step was to amend the Constitution to enable the president, acting on the advice of the prime minister, to devolve specified powers of the PSC to a hierarchically structured personnel board - consisting of civil servants, to appoint, confirm, promote and transfer officers over which the boards will have jurisdiction. The constitutional amendment was passed by the parliament on 25 August 1994, and thereafter the president issued two separate orders, namely the Public Service (Special and Senior Personnel Boards) Order 1994 and the Public Service (Personnel Boards) Order 1994, specifying in particular the composition and functioning of 31 personnel boards to be formed in the ministries at three levels (Republic of Singapore 1994).

More specifically, on 1 January 1995, from which date the Presidential Orders referred to above came into effect, the functioning of the

personnel boards became operative. There were, as of January 1999, three levels of Personnel Boards: 1 Special Personnel Board, 6 Senior Personnel Boards, and 24 Personnel Boards. The Special Personnel Board took charge of Superscale officers up to E1 and timescale officers in the Administrative Service and in the Administrative Service (Foreign Service Branch). The Board was chaired by the Head of Civil Service with Permanent Secretary (Prime Minister's Office) and three other appointed Permanent Secretaries as members. Their appointments were made by the president, on the advice of the prime minister, subject to the discretionary veto powers of the president (Public Service Division 1997, 1).

There were six Senior Personnel Boards; each took charge of Division I officers in a group of ministries, except timescale officers in the Administrative Service and officers in the Auditing and Parliamentary Services. Each board was chaired by an appointed Permanent Secretary. Permanent Secretaries of the ministries under the jurisdiction of a particular Senior Personnel Board were members of that board. The chairman and members were appointed by the president on the advice of the prime minister, subject to the discretionary veto powers of the president (Public Service Division 1997, 1).

Each ministry had at least one Personnel Board to take charge of Division II, III and IV officers, although a ministry with a large number of officers was to have more than one Personnel Board. As of January 1999, there were as many as 24 Personnel Boards for Division II, III and IV officers. A Superscale Officer in a ministry chaired its Personnel Board. There were in all three members, including one PSD representative. The chairman and members were appointed by the Permanent Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office (Public Service Division 1997, 2).

It should be noted, however, that the constitutional amendment stipulating the personnel boards to take over functions of the PSC also provided that an officer aggrieved by the decision of a personnel board may submit an appeal to an appellate board stating the grounds of appeal. To give effect to this appeal provision, the president issued on 2nd

December 1994 the Public Service (Personnel Boards and Appeals Board) Regulations 1994, specifying in detail the appeal and review procedures, including the formation of an appellate board, namely the Appeals Board (Republic of Singapore 1994, 1563-1568).

The members of the Appeals Board were appointed by the president on the advice of the prime minister, subject to the discretionary veto powers of the president. Should the Appeals Board turn down the appeal and the appellant confirms in writing that he/she wishes to further appeal against the decision of the Appeals Board, the Chairman of the Appeals Board shall have to refer the case to the PSC. The decision of the PSC on an appeal shall be final (Republic of Singapore 1994, 1566-1568).

Thus, it appears that from 1st January 1995, on which date the 1994-constitutional amendment became effective, the PSC in Singapore was left with the following functions:

- recruitment into the Administrative Service, Parliamentary Service and the Auditing Service;
- promotion of officers in the Parliamentary Service and the Auditing Service;
- promotion of officers to Superscale D and above; and
- dismissal and exercise of disciplinary control over public officers under its purview.

The PSC was also to serve as the final appellate board to consider appeals against the promotion decisions of Personnel Boards for all the services under its purview. And the PSC continued as before to advise the government as regards the appointments to certain high offices, including the planning and administration of a number of prestigious scholarships and bursaries (Public Service Commission 1997, 3-5). Table 1 illustrates in tabular form the 4-tier civil service personnel management system introduced in Singapore effective from January 1995.

Table 1: 4-tier Personnel Management System

Agency	Responsibility
Public Service Commission (PSC) [Constitutional Body: Members, minimum 5 and maximum 14, including the Chairman; the Chairman is appointed on a full-time basis, but the other members are not]	PSC has remained responsible for recruitment into the Administrative Service (AS), Parliamentary Service and the Auditing Service; promotion of officers in the Parliamentary Service and the Auditing Service; promotion of officers to Superscale D and above; and dismissal and exercise of disciplinary control over public officers under its purview; the PSC also serves as the final Appellant Board to consider appeals against the promotion decisions of all the Personnel Boards
Special Personnel Board (SPB) [SPB is chaired by the Head of Civil Service, 4 other members include the Permanent Secretary (PS) of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and 3 other PSs, all appointed by the President on the PM's advice for a term of two years]	SPB has jurisdiction and power over the class of officers under its purview to appoint, confirm, promote and transfer officers. It takes charge of Superscale officers up to E1 and timescale officers in the AS and the AS (Foreign Branch). It also acts as the Appeals Board to receive petitions from the aggrieved officers under its own purview, including from other officers placed under the purview of six Senior Personnel Boards and 24 Personnel Boards. If an aggrieved officer wishes to further appeal against the decision of the Appeals Board, Chairman of this Board shall refer the case to the PSC.

Six Senior Personnel Boards [Each Board covering a group of ministries is chaired by a PS, other members include PSs of ministries under a particular Board, all appointed by the President on PM's advice for a term of two years]	Each Senior PB is invested with the power to appoint, confirm, promote and transfer the class of officers under its purview. The Board takes charge of Division I officers in a group of ministries except timescale officers in the AS and officers in the Auditing and Parliamentary Services
24 Personnel Boards (PB) [one PB in each ministry is chaired by a Superscale officer of that ministry, 3 other members in a Board include one PSD representative, all appointed by the PS of the PMO for a term of two years]	Each ministry has at least one Personnel Board to take charge of Division II, III and IV officers: to appoint, confirm, promote and transfer officers under the purview of that Board. Ministries with large number of officers may have more than one Personnel Board

Conclusion

It seems appropriate in conclusion to assess first of all the post-1994 system of decentralized personnel management in Singapore before indicating its heuristic aspects. The preceding two sections of the article sought to probe in particular the pre-reform personnel management system and thereafter the constitutional measures aimed at devolving much of the PSC's powers to the senior civil servants in the executive agencies. The rationale of the measures is clearly perceptible. Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong did rightly point out that "permanent secretaries have no final authority over recruitment, promotion, deployment or advancement. PSC and PSD are not responsible for the performance of individual ministries or government" (Goh 1994, 9). Most likely that an outside observer of the system will not disagree with what the Prime Minister said.

Indeed, the framers of the Constitution in Singapore conferred upon the PSC wide-ranging personnel management powers over the civil service. Article 110 of the Constitution provides in clear terms that "it shall be the duty of the Public Service Commission to appoint, confirm, emplace on the permanent or pensionable establishment, promote, transfer, dismiss and exercise disciplinary control over the public officers". And there is no indication that the powers so vested in the PSC are of advisory in nature, as in most other countries of British heritage. This notion is reinforced by an observation of a Singaporean author: "Today it is a fully executive constitutional authority independent of the government" (Hiok 1980, 447). Truly, the PSC's position as such in Singapore seems to be unique in relation to most of the other Commonwealth countries. Presumably the constitution-makers in other countries were wise enough to pay due heed to a cautionary note sounded by Secretary of State Sir Samuel Hoare in his famous speech in the House of Commons while piloting the Bill of the Government of India Act 1935:

It is the definite view of my advisers both here and in India, that the Public Service Commissions had much better be advisory. Experience goes to show that they are likely to have more influence if they are advisory than if they have mandatory powers. The danger is that if you give them mandatory powers you then set up two governments in a Province and two governments at the Centre, and there is everything to be said against a procedure of that kind. From many points of view it is much better that they should be advisory (House of Commons 1935, 858).

Thus the constitution-makers in countries in the subcontinent recognized duly the ultimate responsibility of the agencies in the executive hierarchy for the proper management and control of the civil services. The constitution-making approach in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh inwith the generally accepted management principle that those who are directly responsible for carrying out the task of public services must be left free to judge the adequacy of the temper and the quality of the tools to be employed in that job (Bagat 1956, 57-58)

But the executive agencies in Singapore seemed much handicapped prior to the introduction of personnel management devolution because the Constitution in that country included no provisions as to authorizing the executive to exclude perforce appointments and other service matters from the purview of the PSC. In fact, there are several arguments in support of this authorization. First, it is most likely that there are many posts of such a nature that the responsibility for making selection for appointments thereto should be placed on the shoulders of the government, and it is inappropriate that the government should always consult an outside body in selecting the appointees. Second, it might well be unnecessary, as well as impracticable, to seek consultation with the commission in respect of a large number of low grade posts which are mostly filled by semi-skilled or unskilled personnel. Third, the government more often than not has to take the initiative to find personnel with high technical qualifications and offer appointments to them on special service conditions, for such persons do not normally apply for jobs and appear for interviews before the commission. Fourth, there might be times when genuine emergencies arise and immediate appointments have to be made, leaving no time to consult the commission (Bapat 1956, 54-58).

Most probably the arguments that prompted the Singaporean legislators to have recourse to a constitutional means to devolve the PSC's powers to ministries were in essence the same as those referred to in the preceding paragraph. As a matter of fact, the legislative action as such was especially demanding in that: "Governing Singapore has become an increasingly complex task. The Government is not able to manage a sophisticated economy alone, but must also develop and implement social, educational and security policies to match the rising aspirations of Singaporeans" (Goh 1904, 8).

Be that as it may, however, the extent of "devolution" seems to have stretched out fairly far. Reports have it that there were prior warnings even inside the parliament well before the legislative proposal to decentralize personnel management was to be put on the table. Parliamentarian Loh Meng See, warning of dangers and pitfalls ahead, said the move might lead to intense competition and friction among the

ministries and departments. Stressing the need for stability and security of the tenure in the civil service, he asked: "Are the civil servants mentally prepared for the culture shock that will be brought about with the changes?" (Straits Times 1992, January 17).

Nobody knows it for sure whether the civil servants in that country had to bear the brunt of the 'culture shock' after the "devolution" was put into effect. But one eventuality seems certain that the senior civil servants involved in the decentralized personnel management system have to remain preoccupied with the recruitment processes most of their working hours at the expense of their far more important 'policy management and implementation' functions. Moreover, the newly introduced system of recruiting personnel by the various ministries is bound to create some practical problems both for the recruiting authorities and the job applicants. First, each ministry will try hard to recruit the best of the available lot, thereby giving rise to intense inter-ministry competition and friction. The whole process will lack a coordinated central supervision. Second, it is most likely that a job seeker will move from one ministry to another in search of a job. And it is not unlikely that he or she might eventually get frustrated.

Probably the best course of action would have been that the law makers had rather taken a decision to vest in the executive the power to exclude perforce appointments and other service matters from the purview of the PSC. And thereafter to take appropriate measures to strengthen the structure and functioning of the existing PSC, to appoint full-time PSC members, including the appointment of certain number of members from among the senior civil servants.

Notwithstanding the foregoing weaknesses of Singapore's newly introduced personnel management system, one should not be oblivious of a fact that the civil servants of that country contributed much to its development and prosperity. They indeed played a positive role in initiating remarkable socio-economic changes in the country (Quah 1983, 216). Considered what they have so far contributed as members of "the region's most competent and upright bureaucracy", it is most unlikely that they will breach the trust reposed in them. The new system must therefore be allowed to have trial for some times.

However, it is too early to say for sure that a developing country like Bangladesh can draw some lessons from the newly introduced civil service personnel management system in Singapore. While the system of 'public' and 'personnel' management as it operates today in Bangladesh developed as an integral part of Pakistan's governmental polity (1947-1971), its actual genesis dates centuries back (Ahmed 1997, 338-368). The following brief summary on the Bangladeshi system pinpoints its basic features in structural-functional terms.

From a purely formal-legal perspective, the entire framework of personnel management in Bangladesh is a unified process. Structured hierarchically, the Ministry of Establishment (central personnel agency) of the government of Bangladesh is attached to the highest level of executive authority (prime minister). Its official head (the Establishment Secretary) is responsible to the prime minister. The Ministry of Establishment (MOE) lays down the broad policies, principles and regulations for managing the civil bureaucracy and initiates measures for employee welfare and for improvement of procedures and techniques relating to personnel management. It is also responsible for initial recruitment to all the cadre services (i.e. the schemes of service in Singapore) and for disciplinary action and welfare in respect of all senior officials in the ministries (collectively called the secretariat) and the departments attached to the ministries but located outside the secretariat (Ahmed 1986,:224-275).

Although the MOE initiates and develops policy guidelines in respect of all major personnel matters and oversees their implementation by other ministries, its jurisdiction in routine management of the civil servants is not all-pervasive. MOE directly manages the Administration cadre of the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) and senior-level promotions of all the BCS cadres. The respective ministries control other service cadres, such as Audit and Accounts, Customs and Excise, Taxation, Education, Agriculture, and Public Works. Yet, there is a persistent pattern that the general rules and regulations governing the civil servants emanate mainly from one source, that is, the MOE (Ahmed and Khan 1990, 28-29).

The Public Service Commission (PSC) in Bangladesh is a constitutional body. It is the other central personnel agency with a constitutional responsibility to conduct tests and examinations for the selection of certain categories of civil servants and to act as "watchdog" on the government's dealings with civil servants and their conditions of service. In essence, the powers and functions of the PSC in Bangladesh are advisory based on the tradition and pattern followed and adopted in most countries of South Asia (Ahmed 1990, 87-147).

Although the overall responsibility for managing the government's personnel functions lies with the MOE, the actual operation of such functions seems complex since the MOE shares this responsibility with other ministries. The Cabinet Division attached to the Office of the Prime Minister, for example, heads several key committees; indeed the Cabinet Secretary, much like in the UK, is the de facto head of civil service. The PSC also plays a major part since it has the constitutional authority for selecting the fresh recruits into most of the BCS cadres. The Ministry of Finance (MOF) too is involved; in conjunction with the MOE and the line ministries it ensures complementary control, and through its financial-cum-budget monitoring operations the MOF also has an important role in determining the compensation package and size of the civil service. In addition, the administrative aspects relating to non-civil service jobs are dealt with directly by the individual ministries in which the non-civil service personnel are deployed (World Bank 1996, 142).

The "real world" personnel management situation described in the preceding paragraph indicates much of a loosely defined system of shared responsibility which often leads to fragmentation and causes delays in decision-making. Recruitment of new staff is the most time consuming and frustrating task in government; it can dissuade even the most zealous reformers (World Bank, 1996: 141).

In the final analysis, one of the priorities for reforming Bangladesh's personnel management system should be to strengthen the MOE, in structural-functional terms, along the same lines as what have been adopted in regard to the PSD in Singapore. However, anyone conversant

with the system of personnel management in Bangladesh – its recruitment process in particular, knows it well that dysfunction resulting from "job scarcity" has remained both widespread and persistent ever since this country gained independence in 1971.

To speak more specifically, one should take note of a fact that public sector employment in Bangladesh has considerable attraction for increasing numbers of educated, skilled, semi-skilled persons. The main reasons are greater job security, wider promotion prospects, guaranteed retirement benefits, and also what seems to be a 'charm of elitism', especially in the higher echelons, in public sector employment. But persons seeking such employment in Bangladesh far outnumber the positions available. Jobs are far scarcer in the private and other non-government sectors. By far the most common dysfunction resulting from the scarcity of available jobs is that personnel recruitment processes in Bangladesh bear the brunt of such evils as nepotism, favouritism, and political "pull". Hence the existence of an independent PSC, with its constitutionally guaranteed role in recruitment and other important service matters, seems warranted in Bangladesh to ensure that the evils which interfere with the proper functioning of personnel management are kept under control.

APPENDIX

Service Grades and Pay Scales of Four Divisions I Services of the SCS

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE

Grade	Pay Scale	
Permanent Secretary		
Senior Administrative Officer Grade Staff V	Staff Gr V	\$51,155 pm
Senior Administrative Officer Grade Staff IV	Staff Gr IV	\$43,865 pm
Senior Administrative Officer Grade Staff III	Staff Gr III	\$36,570 pm
Senior Administrative Officer Grade Staff II	Staff Gr II	\$31,710 pm
Senior Administrative Officer Grade Staff I	Staff Gr I	\$26,845 pm
Senior Administrative Officer Superscale A	Superscale A	\$22,935 pm
Senior Administrative Officer Superscale B	Superscale B	\$19,340 pm
Administrative Officer Superscale C	Superscale C	\$16,065 pm
Deputy Secretary		
Administrative Officer Superscale D1	Superscale D1	\$13,635 pm
Administrative Officer Superscale D	Superscale D	\$12,365 pm
Administrative Officer Superscale E1	Superscale E1	\$11,465 pm
Administrative Officer Superscale E	Superscale E	\$10,570 pm
Administrative Officer Superscale F	Superscale F	\$9,720 pm
Administrative Officer Superscale G	Superscale G	\$8,875 pm
Principal Assistant Secretary		\$6,405-7,555 pm
Assistant Secretary		\$4,940-5,905 pm
Senior Administrative Assistant		\$3,930-4,700 pm
Administrative Assistant		\$2,450-3,430 pm

Entry Qualifications

A First Class Honours or Second Class (Upper) Honours degree is the most elementary requisition. Apart from good academic qualifications, Administrative Officers must possess integrity, judgment and commitment to the nation. Other requisites are a clear analytical mind, an ability to grasp issues quickly and to formulate sound policies. Administrative Officers should also be self-assured, innovative and adaptable.

Education Service

Grade	Pay Scal
Senior Education Officer Superscale C	\$16,065 pm
Senior Education Officer Superscale D1	\$13,635 pm
Senior Education Officer Superscale D	\$12,365 pm
Senior Education Officer Superscale E1	\$11,465 pm
Senior Education Officer Superscale E	\$10,570 pm
Senior Education Officer Superscale F	\$9,720 pm
Senior Education Officer Superscale G	\$8,875 pm
Senior Education Officer Superscale H	\$8,030 pm
Senior Education Officer 1A	\$5,470-6,345: 6,635: 6,930 pm
Senior Education Officer I	\$4,235-6,050 pm
General Education Officer IA	\$3,645-5,395 pm
Senior Education Officer IIA	\$1,715-5,140 pm

Entry Qualifications

Honours or a Pass degree plus a Postgraduate Diploma in Education or equivalent is required.

ENGINEERING SERVICE (CIVIL)

Grade	Pay Scal
Engineering Service Officer Superscale C	\$16,065 pm
Engineering Service Officer Superscale D1	\$13,635 pm
Engineering Service Officer Superscale D	\$12,365 pm
Engineering Service Officer Superscale E1	\$11,465 pm
Engineering Service Officer Superscale E	\$10,570 pm
Engineering Service Officer Superscale F	\$9,720 pm
Engineering Service Officer Superscale G	\$8,875 pm
Engineering Service Officer Superscale H	\$8,030 pm
Engineering Service Officer Grade I	\$5,175-6,340: 6,635: 6,930 pm
Engineering Service Officer Grade II	\$4,350-5,760 pm
Engineering Service Officer Grade III	\$3,500-4,855 pm
Engineering Service Officer Grade IV	\$2,040-3,840 pm

Entry Qualification: A University degree in Civil Engineering

MEDICAL SERVICE

Grade	Pay Scal
Medical Specialist/Medical Administrator Superscale D	\$12,365 pm
Medical Specialist/Medical Administrator Superscale E1	\$11,465 pm
Medical Specialist/Medical Administrator Superscale E	\$10,570 pm
Medical Specialist/Medical Administrator Superscale F	\$9,720 pm
Medical Specialist/Medical Administrator Superscale G	\$8,875 pm
Medical Specialist/Medical Administrator Superscale H	\$8,030 pm
Senior Registrar	\$5,175-6,340; 6,635; 6,930 pm
Registrar	\$4,350-5,760 pm
Medical Officer	\$2,695-4,885 pm

Entry Qualifications: A Medical degree registrable with the Singapore Medical Council. Candidates must have completed 1-year housemanship.

Source: Public Service Commission, *Careers That Count*, Singapore, 1994. Each service grade's scales of pay shown in this appendix are what the PSC reported in 1994.

Notes:

- i OECD (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development) is now comprised of thirty member countries, including the largest economic powers. Originally established in 1960 with twenty member countries, with its headquarters based in Paris, OECD shares a common commitment to help its member countries promote economic growth, employment, and improved standards of living through the coordination of state policies of the member countries. It also helps promote the sound and harmonious development of the world economy and improve the lot of the developing countries, particularly the poorest (The New York Times Almanac 2001, 499-500).
- ii Division-wise staff figures of the Singapore Civil Service (SCS), including total staff figures of the statutory boards, were collected directly from the Public Service Division (PSD) in the Prime Minister's Office through the administration of a questionnaire,

which was used partly as an interview schedule and partly as a data collection sheet during the field research conducted by the author in Singapore from November 1998 to January 1999. The figures so collected from the PSD were compared minutely with the figures of public sector employment reported in the Budget of the Financial Year 1995-96 (See Republic of Singapore 1995, 75-85).

- iii A scheme of service in Singapore means a service in the SCS which has been constituted under law with a number of positions, a distinct hierarchy, and well-defined positions for each step in the hierarchy. A particular scheme of service includes such detailed provisions as entrance requirements, salary scales, promotion prospects, and pension benefits of that service (see Colony of Singapore 1953, 1-8). The field research revealed as many as 120 schemes of service of the SCS which were constituted as of January 1999.
- iv The official brochure of the Government of Singapore on the website can be accessed by visiting at "Public Service Division" <http://www.gov.sg>. The abbreviations EDB, IRAS, HDB and LTA referred to in the brochure stand for Economic Development Board, Internal Revenue Authority of Singapore, and Land Transport Authority, respectively.
- v The constitution-makers in Pakistan argued that they should leave no scope whatsoever for the government to develop a sort of "ingratiated relationship" by way of offering extended membership to the commission's members, with the motive of influencing their functions in recruitment and other matters of civil service management. In addition, they also thought the presence of senior civil servants in the commission would ensure "accrued expertise" in dealing with many civil service matters of quasi-judicial nature (Pakistan 1954, 115-179).
- vi Each recipient of an undergraduate or a postgraduate scholarship or bursary, however, is required to give an undertaking that he or she would serve the government for certain years on successful completion of his/her studies (Public Service Commission 1994, 8-14)

- vii The functions of the PSC relating to appointments and promotions to high government offices and its advisory role in the conduct of presidential elections and of the Presidential Advisory Council in Singapore are hardly to be found in other countries of British heritage. The governments of Bangladesh, Pakistan and India in particular have retained full control over matters of appointment and promotion to most posts one grade above the recruitment grades in the civil services (Ahmed 1990, 60-100).
- viii In England, a full-fledged central civil service organ called Civil Service Department was created in 1968, but later in 1981 was replaced by the Management and Personnel Office located in the Cabinet Office (The Economist 1981, November 14). The Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions in India was established based on the recommendations of the Indian Administrative Commission of 1970. This separate ministry headed by a cabinet minister took away the civil service personnel management functions from the Ministry of Home Affairs, which had since the British days been in charge of these functions (Sharma 1981, 60-66). In the United States, the hundred-year old U.S. Civil Service Commission (USCSC) was finally abolished in 1978. The defunct USCSC was replaced by two newly created personnel organizations, namely the Office of Personnel Management, an executive arm of the U.S. President, and the Merit Systems Protection Board, an independent body outside the executive branch, to protect the interests of the federal public personnel (Macy and Cambell 1979, 59-65).
- ix For further details on the structure and functions of a “commission with broad power”, see United Nations 1969, 35, 65-70).

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