

# From Colonial Roots To Decentralization: The Evolution And Coordination Challenges Of District Administration In Bangladesh

Dr. Md. Shahriar Firoz Dewan<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(Joint Secretary, Government Of Bangladesh, Bangladesh)

<sup>2</sup>(Minister, Bangladesh High Commission, Canberra, Australia)

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## Abstract

### Background:

The District Administration in Bangladesh has a long history, starting from the time of the Gupta period and greatly influenced by British colonial rule. Originally, it focused on collecting taxes and maintaining law and order. But over time, especially in the 20th century, it began to focus more on development projects. Even though there have been times of military involvement in Bangladesh's administration, the district administration continues to be very important.

### Methods:

This research, which looks at historical records and talks to government officials and others involved, highlights how crucial the district administration is for Bangladesh's bureaucracy and society.

### Results:

Over time the District administration changes its structure and function with the desire of the state policies of the incumbent government. Nowadays, its main focus is on development and welfare, following the government's policies. However, this shift has brought challenges. Implementing these policies requires good coordination among different groups.

### Conclusion:

The District Administration of Bangladesh has undergone a gradual evolution spanning nearly 1600 years, serving as the operational apparatus of the central bureaucracy. However, it is now facing numerous challenges in coordinating its functions effectively over time. District Administration encounters various obstacles in implementing policies of the government of Bangladesh, coordination became one of the factors in addressing them.

**Keywords:** District Administration; Bureaucracy; Revenue Collection, Law and order, Judiciary, Development, Government Policies, Coordination

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## I. Introduction

Bangladesh is a competitively new independent country in South Asia that has a long past of administrative history. In its administrative tiers district administration is one of the major components. The present form of the district administration of this country evolved through a long historical process. The ingredients of the present district bureaucracy were brought into present form through the culmination of the Gupta, \* Pala, † Sena, ‡ Mughal, § and British rule in India where Bengal was a part of it.

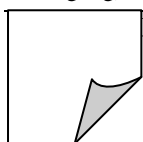
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\* In the 4th century AD Bengal came under the Imperial Guptas.

† The Pala Dynasty governed Bengal and Bihar for approximately four centuries, starting in the mid-8th century AD. Established by Gopala, the dynasty's rule experienced several ups and downs, spanning eighteen generations of kings.

‡ The Sena Dynasty held sway over Bengal for slightly more than a century, from 1097 to 1225. Rising to power at the end of the 11th century AD, they succeeded the Palas in Bengal.

§ Mughal rule was established in Bengal after the defeat of the Daud Khan Karrani in 1576 at the hands of Khan Jahan. With Khan Jahan's victory over Daud Khan, the Mughal made determined and sustained efforts to establish their authority over Bengal, till ultimately in 1612, Islam Khan Chishti, the *subahdar* of Jahangir, brought the whole of Bengal (except Chittagong) under the Mughal control.



### **District Administration during the Pre-British Period**

If we look back at the ancient administrative history of Bengal, we may find different administrative tiers. Among these tiers, we find the shadow of district administration. Due to the paucity of evidence, it is difficult to reconstruct very clearly the administrative history of ancient Bengal. The more we look back to the early periods that is the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD when Bengal came under the imperial *Guptas* the more, we get obscurity. From the period of the *Guptas* onward we get written records in the form of epigraphs and literature which contain information on the history of Bengal.<sup>1</sup> During the *Gupta period*, the administration of Bengal was segmented into many tiers, those were *Bhukti*, *Visaya*, *Mandala*, *Vithi*, and *Gramas*.<sup>2</sup> *Bhukti* was the largest unit of administration and was governed by a deputy of the king. It was like the modern Divisional administration of Bangladesh.<sup>3</sup> From contemporary epigraphic records, we know the names of two *Bhuktis* in Bengal those were *Pundrabordhana* and *Vardhamana*. The *Pundrabordhana Bhukti* was situated in the Bogra district of Bangladesh. The *Vardhamana Bhukti* was situated in West Bengal India. The *Bhuktis* used to be governed by an officer who was directly appointed by the emperor. His title was *Uparika*.<sup>4</sup>

The next hierarchical tier of *Bhukti* was *Visaya*, which was like the modern district administration of Bangladesh. It was a significant tier of administration of the *Gupta period*. In the earlier and later *Gupta periods*, the officer in charge of a *Visaya* was known as *Kumaramatya* or *Ayuktaka*. Generally, the *Uparika* of a *Bhukti* appointed the *Kumaramatya* or *Ayuktaka* of his *Visaya*. From the contemporary copperplates, we get some names of the *Visaya* of Bengal those were *Kotivarsavisaya*, *Khatapara*, *Panchanagari*, *Varakamanda*, and *Audamvarikavisaya*. Among those *Visayas* *Kotivarsavisaya*, *Khatapaand*, *Panchanagari* were under the *Bhukti* of *Pundrabordhana*.<sup>5</sup>

The Damodarpur Copperplate<sup>6</sup> inscriptions shed light on the administrative structure of the district during that period, highlighting the significant authority held by the district officer and the crucial role of record-keepers in land transactions. While the inscriptions mainly focus on land matters, the responsibilities of the district officer of the headquarters probably extended beyond this domain, encompassing broader governance functions.

These inscriptions reveal that the officer-in-charge of the *Kotivarsa Visaya*\*\* was supported by a 'Board of Advisers', comprising representatives from key interest groups. These members included the *Nagara-Shrestha* (the President of the various guilds or corporations of the town or the rich bankers), the *Prathama-Sarthavaha* (the chief merchant representing perhaps the merchant class or the various trade guilds), the *Prathama-Kulika* (the chief artisan representing perhaps the various artisan classes) and the *Prathama-Kayastha* (the chief scribe representing the *Kayastha* as a class or acting as a state official in the capacity of a Secretary of modern days)<sup>7</sup> suggesting a system where diverse economic stakeholders had a say in governance, influencing policies and decisions relevant to their sectors. The ultimate authority, however, rested with the *Visayapati*. The Faridpur Copperplate of *Dharmaditya* further illuminates the administrative structure, indicating the presence of a significant assembly of *Visaya-Mahattara*, alongside other individuals of lesser importance.

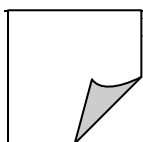
The presence of advisory bodies in district administration underscores the active participation of local people and adherence to democratic principles. This suggests a system where representatives from various strata of society have a voice in decision-making processes, contributing to a more inclusive and participatory form of administration. Additionally, Gupta inscriptions mention the presence of record-keepers within the *Visayadhikarana*, further emphasizing the comprehensive nature of district governance during that era. After the end of the *Gupta Dynasty* and the death of *Shashanka* Bengal witnessed one hundred years of a chaotic situation which is identified as *Matsyanyayam*†† it ended with the rule of the *Pala Dynasty*.

During the *Pala* rule, Bengal witnessed for the first time a stable government of almost four hundred years. However the administrative historian, unfortunately, does not possess a detailed account of the *Pala* administration due to the unavailability of materials. This time the units or tiers of administration were like the *Guptas*'s. They follow the *Guptas*' pattern of *Bhukti*, *Visayas*, *Mandalas*, and others. However, after the end of the *Pala rule*, we do not find references to district administration before the *Mughal* rule during the short rule of *Sena*.

Before *Mughal* here in Bengal was the *Sultani* administration. They were independent rulers of Bengal. Historians identified this period as the medieval period of Bengal. The administrative units/provinces during the medieval period were known by the names of *Iqlim*, *Mulk Arsah*, and *Diyar*. Each province was placed under an officer having the title of *Sar-i-Laskar Wazir*.<sup>8</sup> From the title it appears that the unit governors were both financial and military heads, there were checks on them, and the sultan could dismiss them according to his will.

\*\* A territorial division, itself part of the wider administrative unit of *Pundravardhana Bhukti*, which had *Mahasthangarh* as its capital.

†† The condition of Bengal in the century following the death of *Shasanka* and before the rise of the *Palas* (c 750-850 AD) has been described as *Matsyanyayam*.



For administrative convenience, the provinces were divided into *Mahals*, *Shiqs*, and villages. *Shiqdar* and *Jangdar*, two important officers of the *Mahals*, oversaw collecting revenues and controlling soldiers respectively. The civil affairs and the supervision of religious endowments were preserves of the provincial *Qazis*.

During the *Mughal* period, India was divided into several *Suba*. These *Subas* were known as the provinces. Bengal was one of the *Subas* of the *Mughal*. The *Mughal* government had main four functions viz., maintenance of law and order, the dispensation of justice, collection of revenue, and defense of the country. There were three sets of officials to look after those responsibilities. The *Nawab Nazim* was responsible for law and order, and he had his subordinates spread over districts, cities, and villages: they were known as *Kotwals*, *Darogas*, and *Faujders*. The *Dewan* was responsible for the collection of revenue and revenue cases and suits. Under him, there were *Krories* as Collectors with assistant *Kanungos* as record keepers.<sup>9</sup> Akber, the Great *Mughal* Emperor developed a highly organized and efficient system of administration and bureaucracy. He divided his empire into *subas* (provinces) each of which was, in turn, split up into “*Sarker*’ (districts).<sup>10</sup> Todarmal was his minister of revenue who created a very efficient revenue administration in India.

After the death of Aurangzeb, the vast *Mughal* Empire fell into pieces and began to degenerate rapidly. The elaborate administrative organization of the Akber disappeared rapidly. This wrecked and decayed administrative system of the *Mughals* helped the British to take control of Bengal as well as India.

### **District Administration during British Rule**

After the *Battle of Plessey*, the East India Company acquired the *Zamindari* of the districts of 24 Parganas, and later in 1760 they became zamindars of three more districts those are Burdwan, Midnapore, and Chittagong.<sup>11</sup> The Company got its next administrative experience in Bengal in 1765 when Lord Clive secured *Dewani* (the power of collecting revenue from the emperor of Delhi after the *Battle of Buxer*) from the emperor of Delhi. In the beginning, the Company was not interested in the matter of revenue. Rather it was satisfied to remain to supervise the collection of revenue and to further its trade and commercial activities. For this reason, the Company appointed Mr. Reza Khan as *Naib Dewan* (Deputy Dewan) for revenue administration in Bengal. He was an employee of Nabab. Reza Khan administrated the same revenue system as the Nabab of Murshidabad. Mr. Khan continued the previous type of *Zamindari* system of Nabab to collect revenue. Murshidabad was the head quartet of Mr. Khan.

Harry Verelst, the next governor of Clive went on to introduce a new administrative system in Bengal. He wanted to collect more information about rural Bengal and its socio-economic conditions. He felt that the residents of Murshidabad were not in a good position to manage the revenue system. So as per the advice of Richard Becher, a resident of Murshidabad, he appointed English Supervisors in the *Dewani* districts.<sup>12</sup> It was the first attempt of the Company to get first-hand information about the actual condition of rural society and economy of Bengal. The young supervisors had to prepare a summary history of every district of his jurisdiction. His information included the general condition of a district. It also included trade and commerce of Bengal. However, the position of the supervisors was not welcomed by either the *Naib Dewan* or the *Zamindars*. Mr. Khan persuaded a lot to recall the Supervisors from the district of Bengal. Subsequently, Becher, on the insistence of Naib Dewan advised Verelst to withdraw the supervisors from their respective districts.<sup>13</sup> And thus the supervisors were withdrawn from the districts.

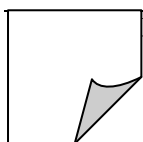
Lord Warren Hasting became the Governor General of India in 1772. He divided Bengal into 19 revenue districts.<sup>14</sup> Collectors were appointed in every district as the administrative head. All the appointed Collectors were European. They were employees of the East India Company. The Collectors were assisted by native *Dewans* in revenue matters. The Collectors have also been appointed as the judges of *Dewani* (civil) courts. There were two types of courts in a district one was *Dewani* (civil) and the other was *Nizam* (Criminal). The *Nizam* (Criminal) court in a district was presided over by *Qazi* and *Mufti*. Collectors had to supervise their work. In other ways, the Collectors of a district are used to control both the courts and the districts. Hasting shifted the revenue headquarters from Murshidabad to the then capital of Bengal, Kolkata.

The Collector was responsible to the Board of Revenue<sup>††</sup> on the matters of revenue. For judicial purposes, he was responsible to *Sadar Dewani Adalat* of Kolkata. Governor General of India used to preside over the *Sadar Dewani Adalat*. In this way, the Collectors in Bengal came under direct control over the Governor General of Fort William in Kolkata. They became the most powerful person in the districts by performing both the Judicial and Revenue functions. The functions of Collectorship laid the first foundation stone of the modern administration in Bengal. This way Hastings wanted to introduce a different type of land administration in Bengal.

In 1772 Lord Warren Hasting introduced a new system of land administration. The Land of Bengal was farmed out for a period of 5 years by a public auction to the *Zamindars*. It was completely a new type of

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<sup>††</sup> Board of Revenue was set by Warren Hasting compromising himself (Governor General) and the members of his council.



land administration in the administrative history of Bengal. Various Zamindari were auctioned for 5 years. The highest bidder was entitled to collect the revenue from the Zamindari. But this type of public auction was unsatisfactory and disastrous. Zamindars emerged as a new class in society. They became the middleman between the state and the tenants. They were an alienated person from agricultural production. The highest bidder who became Zamindar collected more land tax from the tenant but deposited less amount to the state exchequer as was fixed earlier. With a few exceptions, Zamindars did not bother for the benefit or the betterment of the tenant.

It was found that those new classes of Zamindars were interested in gambling, *Baizis*<sup>§§</sup>, unnecessary expenses, inflicting injuries on others, and many other unnecessary unproductive activities. Moreover, they mercilessly oppressed the cultivator to extract as much as possible during their auctioned tenure. The cultivators or tenants got protection and assistance in the Dewan (civil) court presided by the Collector.<sup>15</sup> The Collector tried to voice the oppressed cultivator to the government. However, they were ignored as they were newly recruited and inexperienced in the administration of the East India Company in India. They were young officers and just arrived from the UK. Governor General sneered at those as they did not have the real experience to make a correct judgment of a situation as they held the post as 'boys'.<sup>16</sup> Collectorship witnessed a change due to those conditions.

The post of the Collectors was abolished in 1773 just one year after its creation as their services received scant recognition from the higher authority. At his time some administrative changes came into being. Bengal was divided into six zones each under a provincial council responsible for the supervision and management of revenue administration. The administration of civil justice was then transferred to the local *Dewans* called *Amil*. And the local *Fauzders*<sup>\*\*\*</sup> were trusted with the supervision of the police.<sup>17</sup> Thus Company withdrew itself from the formal information source regarding the administrative and revenue system and the cultivators lost their protectors.<sup>18</sup>

In 1781 Hasting reorganized the administrative system again. He abolished the post of *Fauzdar* of the six Provincial Councils of Revenue. A Committee of revenue was set up at headquarters and a Collector was appointed again in every district. However, the Collectors were not given adequate power. They were merely figureheads and were not trusted.<sup>19</sup> They exercised their doubtful authority over fiscal divisions.<sup>20</sup> From the writing of two Collectors of Bengal in 1783 we get the picture,

There is nothing but confusion; there is no Kanungo to be found, he has fled the country; rayots want to withhold their payments; the farmer (Zamindar) seizing everything he can lay his hands upon and swelling up his demands by very artifice .... No pains shall be spared on my part to get the truth although' it is wading through a sea of chicanery on both sides...<sup>†††</sup>

"has repeatedly flogged those who preferred any complaint to me....in the last ten days numerous bodies of ryots from all quarters have beset me on every side, uncommonly clamoring for justice. Their complaints exhibit an almost universal disregard and setting aside of their *Pottahs*, an enormous increase exacted from them, etc<sup>†††</sup>

The above report of the Collectors of Rangpur and Purnia districts portrayed the helpless condition of the Collectorship of the Company in the early days of experimentation of the district administration of Bengal. The two young Collectors of Bengal wanted to rescue the tenants from the oppression of the Zamindars. But the authorities were not interested in heeding them.

Hastings' district administration system in 1781 was over-centralized. It 'placed secretariat theories before district experience'.<sup>21</sup> Most members of his Governor General Council were not in favor of his idea of district administration. Subsequently, Hastings resigned in 1785 as he was not on good terms with the Court of Directors.

In 1786 officiating Governor General Macpherson decentralized district administration again and it was reorganized into regular fiscal units and the Collector of each district was entrusted with the task of settling and collecting revenue. At the same time, the Committee of Revenue was reconstituted and renamed the Board of Revenue. The duty of the Board was to control and advise the Collector and to sanction their settlement. In this way, district administration began to take shape.

### **Changes in the District Bureaucracy during British Rule**

In 1786 Cornwallis<sup>§§§</sup> became Governor General of India. To Spear,<sup>22</sup> he introduced a new spirit into British Indian administrative affairs which was never again wholly lost. In June 1787 Collector became judge

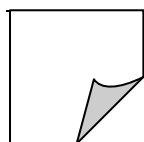
<sup>§§</sup> Baizi are female dancers. They with her bands entertain wealthy people by singing and dancing

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Aumil and the Fauzders were originally employees of the Nawab

<sup>†††</sup> Jhon David Patterson, collector of Rangpur written on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1783, Quoted in Ramsbotham, Cambridge History, p. 428

<sup>†††</sup> William Rooke, collector of Purnia wrote on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1783, Quoted in Ibid. 428

<sup>§§§</sup> Cornwallis was the first governor general who did not start a career at East India Company. He was a personal friend of the then UK Prime Minister Pitts. He was in a position to take the initiative.



and magistrate of the district. At the same time, he got control over the police. Collectors were given authority to try civil (excluding revenue) and less important criminal cases.

In 1790 *Mal Adalat* (revenue court) was created in the district to try revenue cases. The Board of Revenue usually takes more time when they try the same kind of cases. The collector was empowered to preside over the revenue court or the *Mal Adalat*. To Penson,<sup>23</sup> the union of revenue, judicial, and magisterial authority to the Collector gave unprecedented power. By 1790 Collector became the bottleneck of a district through which all lines of control must pass to the government. But such concentrated power lasted for a few years.

After the announcement of the Permanent Settlement in 1793, a new type of administrative system was introduced in Bengal. It was known as the "Bengal Regulation of 1793" and generally it was known as the "Cornwallis Code". This Code separated the offices of the Collector and Judge. The new post of District Judge was created to preside over the *Dewani Adalat* (civil court) in every district. The *Mal Adalat* (revenue court) was abolished from the district. District Judge tried all the revenue-related cases in his jurisdiction. The Collector was also deprived of magisterial power and the power to supervise the police. It was vested in the hand of the district judge. The Collector was related to the revenue affairs. Cornwallis introduced this type of administration as he was influenced by John Locke's Whig Philosophy.<sup>24</sup> This type of district administration was known as the Cornwallis School of District Administration. Apart from Cornwallis School, another type of district administration was found in British India that was known as Munro School of District Administration.

The Munro School was strongly in favor of the concentration of power in the hands of a single person. Bentham's utilitarian theory influenced them. They wanted to make the Collector the sole representative of the government in a district. They were in favor of concentrating all the powers in the hands of the Collector. Munro School of district administration was everywhere in India other than Bengal. This was common in Indian district administration even in the tenure of Cornwallis. Locke's Whig philosophy of district administration of Cornwallis in Bengal changed after a few years.

By 1820 the Collector of Bengal was given some judicial power. In 1831 during the time of Lord Bentinck, the office of the District Magistrate and the Collector united again and it was identified as the office of the Collector. Collector was given the power again to control the police force of a district. But in the second half of the 1830s with the departure of Bentinck from the post of Governor-General, the Munro School became weak again. The followers of Cornwallis school held important posts in the Fort William of Kolkata. They wanted to separate the office of the Collector and District Magistrate again. However, the new Governor General Auckland was not in favor of this type of change.

The conflict between the Cornwallis School and Munro School prevailed up to 1858\*\*\*\*. After the great event of 1858, the government of India concluded that a close relationship should be developed between the executive arm of the government and the people<sup>25</sup>. The government at that time believed that such a close relationship would enable the executive arm to know the redress without much difficulty of the grievance of people on one hand and let the people know about the policies and intentions of the government on the other. It was believed that a simple and expeditious system of personnel administration and reliance on and faith in the ability the integrity of officials should solve many problems<sup>26</sup>. This type of close relationship was not possible due to the complicated procedure of rules and regulations. Munro school of district administration was necessary to implement this assumption. Due to, this the office of Collector and District Magistracy have merged into a single one again. From 1859 this type of district administration continued to prevail in Bangladesh up to 2007.

At the early stage of British administration, the main functions of the Collector were to maintain law and order, collect revenue, and administrate the general administration in a district. But from 1920 rural development became one of the important tasks of the Central government.<sup>27</sup> A Resolution of 1944 of the Government of British Bengal, which was known as Rowland's Report, classified the duties of the Collector.

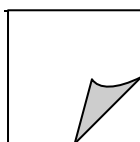
The report classified the duties are,

- a) maintaining law and order
- b) collection of revenues
- c) development,
- d) civil supply (this was a temporary function warranted and caused by the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War),
- e) service (this group of functions was usually called general administration.)

After the formulation of Rowland's Report, the British Government existed for a few years only. In 1947 British India became independent and divided into two independent states, India and Pakistan.

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\*\*\*\* This year rebellion sprouts in the whole of India. Karl Marx as the First War of Independence of India. But the British Government identified it as a "Sepoy Mutiny"



### **District Administration during the Pakistan Period**

After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the district administration was the same as it was during the British Government in India. The Pakistani bureaucracy witnessed a great shortfall of officers in the beginning until the fresh recruitment. It runs the district administration officer appointed by previous the British government until new recruiting. Like the previous regime, the Collector was the administrative head of a district.

From 1947 to 1960 Collector was variously known in different places in Pakistan. He was known as a Collector, District Magistrate and Collector, Deputy Commissioner, and Political Agent.<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> He was the sole representative of Pakistan's Central and Provincial governments in several provinces. To Mr. Muhit<sup>28</sup> 'he is a miniature governor'. The whole administration of the district revolves around him... His importance increased in a district with the launching the various development activities at the district level.

The Pakistani government enacted the first five-year plan (1955-1960) in the mid-50s. The plan did not change the charter of duties of the Collector or Deputy Commissioner as was classified in the Rowland Committee report. This classification of duties remained valid till the end of the 1950s. In Pakistan, development functions were intensified to a considerable extent in 1960. Due to the intensified development activities, the Provincial Administration Commission classified the functions of the Collector again. According to this new classification development function they topped the list of the Collector. Law and order and the revenue functions received second and third positions respectively.<sup>29</sup>

Development was declared the prime administrative function of the government of Pakistan. To implement those development activities in a district all the representatives of the Directorates of the Provincial Government were posted to the district. The collector was placed in the district as the coordinator among those departments. The departmental heads of the important Provincial directorate were as follows.

- a) Superintendent of Police (SP)
- b) District Education officer
- c) District Inspector of Schools
- d) Civil Surgeon
- e) Executive Engineer (Roads)
- f) Executive Engineer (Buildings)
- g) Assistant Director of Agriculture
- h) Assistant Director of Industries
- i) District Controller of Food.
- j) Settlement officer
- k) Assistant Resister of Cooperative Societies
- l) Assistant Director of Storage
- m) Assistant Labor Commissioner
- n) Superintendent of Jail
- o) District Fishery officer
- p) District Fire Officer
- q) Assistant Engineer (Public Health)
- r) District Animal Husbandry Officer.

The Collector was the only representative of the Central Government of Pakistan in a District. Other than all the departmental heads of the district were the representatives of the Provincial Government. Every department in the district had its directorate in the Provincial Government. The collector was almost equal in rank to all the provincial heads of the directorates. But his position was usually lower than that of the heads of the Directorates of the Central Government of Pakistan<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>.

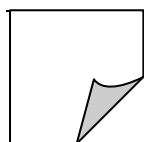
All the officers at the district level were under dual control. They were controlled by the Collector of the district and at the same time, they were controlled by their respective higher authority. Though tension used to crop up at times in such a situation it was indispensable for coordinating their activities<sup>30</sup>.

The heads of the district-level departments had no direct contract with either the Secretariat of the Central or the Provincial Governments. If they needed any type of communication with the secretariats, they were supposed to contact their respective directorates or the collectors of a particular district. In the same way, secretariats used to communicate with the departments through the directorates or by the Collector. That means

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<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> In Bangladesh before 1961 he was known as District Magistrate and Collector except for Chittagong Hill Tracts and Sylhet, in each of which he was called Deputy Commissioner. In the three districts of West Pakistan, those are Zhob, Lorali, Sibi located in the tribal area of Baluchistan he was called a Political Agent

<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> Warrant of Precedence of 1963. Notified in the Pakistan Gazette 7<sup>th</sup> March 1963.



the Collector was the sole channel of communication between the departments of the district and the secretariat. This type of communication channel remains in the district-level bureaucracy to date.

There was no separate or special directorate to control and supervise the functions of the Collector in the district. He was the direct representative of all the secretariat and departments. All the secretaries of the Central and Provincial Government sent necessary instructions regarding respective departments to the Collector of the district. Though the Collector had direct contact with all the ministries of the government he was required to deal frequent contact with those following ministries or secretariat. Those are,

- a) Establishment Division/Service and General Administration (S &GA),
- b) Ministry of Home
- c) Ministry of Local Government
- d) Ministry of Revenue and Planning.<sup>31</sup>

The promotion and transfer of Collectors were controlled by the Establishment and S& GA departments respectively.<sup>§§§§</sup>. The other officers and departmental heads of the district were controlled and transferred by their respective directorates. The head of the S&GA department was the Chief Secretary of the Provincial Government. He was the Provincial head of all collectors of the then East Pakistan.

Thus the Collector<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> or the Deputy Commissioner (DC) acted as the most important linking agent from the village to the central cabinet. He was the principal officer of the government and head of all the government administration in the district. The government used to maintain contact with the general people through the DC. He used to implement the policies and programs of government among the people on the one hand he carried the views and the problems of the people to the government on the other. That is why he was frequently and variously called the 'eyes', the 'ears', the 'arms', and the 'tongue' of the government.<sup>32</sup> He is even regarded as "the hyphen and joins, and the buckle that binds the government and the people."<sup>33</sup>

### **Functions of District Bureaucracy in Pakistan**

#### **Law and order**

The District administration or the district bureaucracy always played a vital role in criminal administration. Pakistani bureaucracy in the district was the same as their British predecessor. The DC as District Magistrate played a vital role in the district law and order. District Magistrate or DC is the head of the criminal administration of the district.<sup>34</sup> A District magistrate exercised his power in two-fold. First, he had control over the police force operating within his jurisdiction; second, he was the direct head of all Magistrates in the district.

#### **DC and Law and Order of District**

It has been mentioned earlier DC was the sole representative of the Central and Provincial Governments of Pakistan. He was responsible for the law and order situation of the district. The police force plays a very important role in controlling the law and order system in a district. The British government enacted the Police Regulation in Bengal (PRB) in 1943 for the administration of the police department. PRB is still active in Bangladesh

The Superintendent of Police (SP) was the executive head of the police force in a district. The PRB made SP subordinate to the District Magistrate.<sup>35</sup> For maintaining the law and order of a district it was very necessary. For this reason, the SP and his force were under the command of the District Magistrate.<sup>36</sup> Though SP was subordinate to the District Magistrate, he had no authority to interfere the matters concerning the internal administration, discipline, and training of police.<sup>37</sup> The SP used to take charge of those matters and he used to submit periodical reports on crime situations and investigation reports on serious crimes to the District magistrate. The tour dairies and traveling allowance bills were submitted to the District Magistrate for approval.<sup>38</sup> District magistrate initiates the ACR (Annual Confidential Report) of SP in a district.

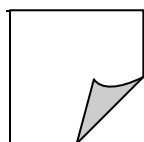
From the beginning, police officers were very jealous of the supremacy of the District Magistrate. They usually complain that this type of supremacy is completely unnecessary and causes delay and interference with the normal functions of the police. This type of hostility remained even during the time of British rule. The British government strictly followed the rules and regulations. So the District Magistrate could exercise control over the SP and police force. However, after the partition of 1947, all types of governments began to depend more on the police for the aggrandizement of their policy.<sup>39</sup> The party in power always used police force against the opposition. As a result, the police gained importance to the government and became more powerful.

During General Ayub's martial law regime in 1961, Mr. Zakir Hussain, former Inspector General of Police (IGP) of East Pakistan, assumed the role of Home Minister in the central government of Pakistan. Mr.

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§§§§ The Establishment Division is located in the central secretariat and doesn't come into direct contact with the Collector. Its Counterpart in the Provincial Secretariat is the S. & G.A. Department which directly deals with matters concerning public service and general administration of the district administration.

\*\*\*\*\* From now Collector would be identified as the DC (Deputy Commissioner)



Zakir advocated for the withdrawal of the District Magistrate's authority over Annual Confidential Reports (ACR). Despite this, PRB remained unchanged, leaving the responsibility of maintaining law and order in the hands of the District Magistrate.

The withdrawal of the ACR authority posed a significant challenge for District Magistrates in ensuring law and order within their districts. With the SPs no longer obligated to follow the instructions of the District Magistrate, maintaining harmony in district administration became difficult. In 1973, in Bangladesh, recognizing the need for better coordination and harmony in district administration, the ACR authority of the SP was reverted to the DM. This change aimed to address the challenges faced by District Magistrates in maintaining law and order effectively. Additionally, with the restoration of ACR authority, District Magistrates resumed performing other administrative responsibilities, ensuring more cohesive governance within the districts. During another martial law regime, this system was changed again in Independent Bangladesh.

### **Revenue administration**

The role of the Collector or DC in revenue administration was paramount, especially during the Pakistan period, surpassing its significance in previous regimes. Initially created by the British Government to collect revenue from land, the Collector's role evolved significantly over time. In Bengal, the Zamindars held considerable sway in land administration until the Estate Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950, which abolished the Zamindari system in East Pakistan. This legislation brought tenants into direct contact with the state, eliminating the intermediary role of Zamindars.

As the chief revenue officer of a district, the DC and their subordinates assumed the functions previously carried out by Zamindars. In addition to traditional law and order and revenue functions, district administration encompassed various miscellaneous and diversified activities, largely stemming from the partition of India. These included food control and supply, rationing, rent control, refugee rehabilitation, civil defense, government publicity, census operations, and campaigns against anti-social activities.

The DC, in collaboration with relevant departments, oversaw the implementation of these programs, reflecting the evolving and multifaceted responsibilities of district administration in response to the changing socio-political landscape.

### **Development Function**

Development functions for district administration become comparatively new phenomena in the realm of district bureaucracy. The concept originated consequence of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. In the late 1940s and the 1950s the British Colonial Office, the US International Cooperation Administration (ICA), and the United Nations Organization (UNO) encouraged underdevelopment countries to take an interest in community development.<sup>40</sup> As a result development functions began to emerge as a common phenomenon worldwide particularly in underdevelopment countries like Pakistan. The Pakistani Government tried to implement community development projects in East Pakistan through District administration. So the District Bureaucracy of East Pakistan was required to undertake the new responsibility of community development.

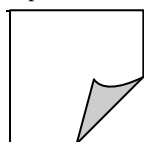
The community development program namely V-AID<sup>††††</sup> was first introduced in 1953. It was considered the means of bringing better living standards and a new spirit of hope and confidence to the villages.<sup>41</sup> This time more than 90% of the total population of East Pakistan lived in the villages. The primary aim of the V-AID Program was to foster effective people's participation in rural self-help projects in the fields of agriculture, health, and sanitation, adult literacy, primary education, cottage industries, minor irrigation and reclamation, secondary road construction, cooperative societies, village social and recreational activities, etc.<sup>42</sup> the DC played a very important role in the V-Aid program. He was made chairman of the district V-AID committee almost all the members of this committee were government officers. He was made responsible for the successful implementation of the V-AID program within his jurisdiction.

In 1958 General Ayub Khan captured the state power of Pakistan with the help of Martial Law. General Khan followed the structure of the previous V-Aid system. In 1959 he incorporated 50% BD (Basic Democrat)<sup>†††††</sup> members in the district committee along with the government officials of the district. During the whole Pakistan period, DC remained the chairman of the district V-Aid committee.

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<sup>††††</sup> V-AID means Village Development program. It was based on the recommendation of Sufi committee. a group of 5 member headed by Mr. Sufi a deputy secretary of Food and agriculture ministry visited USA and spent 4 months in 1951. This program was financed by the Ford Foundation of USA

<sup>†††††</sup> Basic Democracy was a peculiar type of democracy invented by military dictator Ayub Khan in which where there were no provisions for the direct franchise. people could elect a person as a member and the members would elect the best representative.





### **District Administration and Judiciary**

For many years, the District and Session Judges held a position equal to that of the DC in rank. Unlike other district-level officers, they operated independently, under the supervision of the High Court of East Pakistan. Typically, members of the CSP were appointed to this post, coincidentally from the same service as the DC. While the DC and his team of magistrates handled less significant criminal cases, the Session and District Judges presided over more serious criminal trials. They also served as the appellate authority for 1st Class Magistrates and Additional District Magistrates, who were directly subordinate to the DC.

Despite the relatively small number of magistrates under the DC, they often faced a high caseload, leading to a lower rate of case disposal. Moreover, magistrates were frequently involved in administrative functions, prompting demands from East Pakistan's political leaders to separate the judiciary from the executive. In response to these demands, the Provincial Government of East Pakistan introduced an experimental judiciary system in seven districts. Under this system, magistrates were divided into two groups: executive and judiciary. Judicial Magistrates worked exclusively on criminal cases, while Executive Magistrates handled administrative duties.<sup>43</sup> Although considered a step towards judiciary-executive separation, this system was short-lived.

Following Bangladesh's independence, a similar separation was introduced in metropolitan areas, where magistrates known as Metropolitan Magistrates operated independently from the DC. Both Metropolitan Magistrates and DCs belonged to the BCS (administration) cadre. Bangladesh finally achieved complete separation on November 1, 2007, when magistracy was entirely dissociated from the BCS (administration). This separation, implemented by the army-backed Caretaker Government of Bangladesh, removed BCS (administration) cadre members from the trial of criminal cases.

### **Martial Law and District Administration**

The traditional district administration, established during British rule, underwent significant changes during the unconstitutional martial law period in Pakistan after 1958. Upon assuming state power, the military swiftly targeted the civil administration, with General Ayub appointing army officers to oversee daily operations at district headquarters.

This marked a departure from previous practices, as military bureaucracy showed a clear preference for its own over civil bureaucrats, often subjecting them to harassment. For instance, military authorities prohibited the hosting of the national flag at the residence of the DC, signaling a shift in protocol.<sup>44</sup> Even the army officers did not hesitate to take action against senior officers like the SP in a district on a petty matter.

### **District Administration in Independent Bangladesh**

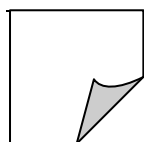
Bangladesh got a new type of district administration after its independence in 1971. All the officers of the district level as well as all the officers of this state were sons of this soil. After the partition of India in 1947, the officers in civil administration were few, and Bengali officers both in civil and military bureaucracy in Pakistan were very few.

It should be mentioned here that many civil and military bureaucrats were killed during the Liberation War in 1971 by the occupied Pakistani army. After the military crackdown on the night of 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971, the occupying army soon fanned out to districts subdivisions, and other administrative units of Bangladesh. One of their first tasks was to arrest the top civil officers of the particular administrative units. They arrested DC, SP, SDO (Sub Divisional Officer), and SDPO (Sub Divisional Police Officers), for interrogation due to their sympathy for the Liberation movement. During this time of so-called interrogation, Shamsul Haq, DC of Comilla, Nurul Amin DC of Faridpur, Shamsul Haq, SP of Chittagong, Mamun Mahmud SP of Rajshahi, with many other civil officers were killed.<sup>45</sup> Some officers escaped to India and joined the Mujibnagar exile government.

### **District Administration during the War of Liberation**

In 1971, Bangladesh fought its Liberation War to break free from oppressive colonial rule. The Planning Cell of the Exile Government of Bangladesh, also known as the Mujibnagar Government, published a report outlining the objectives of district administration in the future of Bangladesh.<sup>46</sup> According to the report, the purposes of district administration included maintaining law and order, administering justice, collecting revenue, promoting the welfare of the people, and facilitating development functions. To achieve these objectives, the report proposed a framework comprising various government agencies operating at the district level.

These agencies included the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and their subordinate revenue and magisterial staff, the Superintendent of Police (SP), the District Judge and subordinate judges, field representatives from development and other departments, district boards, community development personnel, municipalities, union boards, village panchayats, and other local authorities.<sup>47</sup> Each agency was assigned specific functions to perform within the district, with the expectation that coordination among them would optimize government actions in terms of cost, time, and impact.



The report emphasized that effective coordination among these agencies should be primarily facilitated by the DC, who served as the chief official representative of the government in the district. Following Bangladesh's independence, the district administration was structured to align with these goals and objectives, aiming to foster development, ensure justice, and enhance the overall well-being of the people.

### **District Administration 1971-75**

Upon its inception, Bangladesh inherited 19 districts from the previous Pakistani administration. It marked a significant shift as, for the first time in the country's history, all district bureaucrats were native Bengalis, reflecting the aspirations of the masses for a more representative bureaucracy.

Maintaining law and order emerged as a primary objective of the district administration. Accountability and a harmonious relationship between the District Commissioner (DC) and Superintendent of Police (SP) were deemed essential for achieving this goal. In 1973, to ensure accountability, the DC was once again empowered to write Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) for SPs<sup>48</sup>. This move made all officers of the district-level administration, except the District and Session Judge, accountable to the DC.

In 1975, the district administration of Bangladesh underwent a significant transformation with the introduction of the BAKSAL<sup>§§§§§</sup> system. As part of this overhaul, District Governors were appointed in every district on June 21, 1975, marking a departure from the previous District Commissioner (DC) system.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, all subdivisions were upgraded to district status, increasing the number of districts from 19 to 61. This restructuring positioned the district as the primary administrative focal point of the government.

Under the BAKSAL system, District Governors wielded greater executive power compared to the previous DCs. They served as the chairpersons of the District Administration Council, with the DCs acting as council members. In the absence of the Governor, the DC assumed their responsibilities. Among the 61 District Governors, 14 were appointed by civil and military bureaucrats, with 9 selected from the CSP cadre, 1 from the Army, and 4 from other high-ranking civil bureaucratic positions. The remaining 40 governors were political appointees.<sup>50</sup>

District administration became the cornerstone of BAKSAL's administrative framework, with decentralized functions and decision-making authorities. Governors exercised significant administrative powers, particularly in revenue and general administration, while refraining from involvement in the judiciary. Their primary role was to control and coordinate various departments within the district.

However, this system was short-lived due to the tragic assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975. Consequently, the BAKSAL system was abandoned, leading to the decommissioning of the newly upgraded subdivisions and a reduction in the number of districts from 61 to 19.

### **District Administration 1975-82**

The Mujib government was thrown out by the military coup d'état. He along with all his family members and his political associates who led the Liberation War from exile was brutally assassinated by a group of the unruly military junta. The spirit of the Liberation War was averted from every tier of government administration. Just after 4 years of independence, Bangladesh witnessed an undemocratic martial law administration.

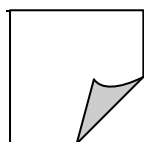
At the end of 1975, General Zia captured the state power of Bangladesh with the help of Martial Law. He ruled Bangladesh from 1975 to 1981. During his regime, Bangladesh witnessed a different type of district administration than the previous regime. This time power and authority of the DC were curtailed. Generally, the DC held a superior position in a district by position, status, and salary from the launching of district administration in 1972. But this situation was brought to change in 1978.

This time the salary of the SP and many other district-level officers were made equal to the DC.<sup>51</sup> From the commencement of district administration Collector or DC acted as a coordinator among the various departments in a district. His post and position were superior to any other officers of district administration. Apart from the point of salary the ACR authority of DC was withdrawn. During 1976-80 some Army officers in the rank of major were recruited directly as SPs bypassing the Public Service Commission of Bangladesh (BPSC)<sup>52</sup>. There were rumors in the air that SP and other army officers would be recruited as DC in districts.

Due to these reasons, district administration faced problems with coordination. Since inception of district administration DC was in charge of coordination among the departments of the district administration. Without the control of ACR and equal salary structure, the heads of other departments usually remained absent in the coordination

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<sup>§§§§§</sup> Bangladesh Krishok Sromik Awami League (BAKSAL) was a political thought presented by the Father of the nation of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The hypothesis included a series of reforms in the three pillars of a state: administrative, judiciary, and legislative systems. The reforms were enacted through the fourth amendment of the constitution of Bangladesh.



meeting presided over by the DC<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>. It created a problem in the coordination of the tasks of a district and maintaining law and order as well.

The lack of coordination appeared as a considerable problem for district administration So General Zia appointed the DDC (District Development Coordinator) in every district in 1880. The members of the parliaments (MP) were appointed as DDC. Their status was determined as equal to the Deputy Minister of Bangladesh. The functions of the DDC were to coordinate and help to implement development programs in the district. They were supposed to heed the masses and make a bridge between the people and the bureaucrats. However, the DDC failed to be effective.

They were interfering much in the district administration. Due to this in their training session in 1980, they were forbidden not to interfere in district administration. They were instructed to keep themselves engaged only in the matters of agricultural development, family planning, and literacy movements.<sup>53</sup> From the work distribution of DDC, it is presumed easily coordination among the various departments of district administration was not their charter of duties. DC was then still coordinating with district administration. It was very difficult for him/her to coordinate as he had no control over the other departments. DC also faced problems in maintaining the law and order of the district.

Metropolitan Magistracy was introduced in 1979 in the metropolitan cities of Bangladesh<sup>54</sup>. Initially, it commenced operations in the capital city, Dhaka, with a magistracy that operated independently of the District Magistrate or DC. Metropolitan Magistrates, akin to DCs and their magistrates, were members of the BCS (administration) cadre. However, while DCs and their magistrates were under the direct control of the Cabinet Division and Ministry of Public Administration, Metropolitan Magistrates fell under the purview of the Ministry of Home. In metropolitan areas, the introduction of the Metropolitan Police marked a shift towards an independent policing system, separate from the jurisdiction of the respective District Magistrate or DC.

Following the assassination of Zia in 1981 by a group of unruly army personnel, Vice President Justice Abdus Sattar assumed the presidency of Bangladesh. Sattar continued to implement the same administrative system as Zia. However, Sattar's presidency was short-lived as he was ousted by a military coup led by the then army chief, General Ershad.

### **District Administration during 82-90**

After the regime of Zia, Bangladesh witnessed another spell of martial law imposed by Gen Ershad. Like the previous martial law administrators, he deputed army officers in each district as Martial Law administrators to monitor the daily administration of the district. The Martial Law Administrators like their predecessors usually harassed the civil bureaucrats of the districts. Like Zia, Ershad also recruited some army officers to the post of SP and Deputy Inspector General (DIG) bypassing the BPSC. Apart from police departments, he recruited defense personnel to many posts of civil administration. He had also a plan to reserve 10% post of civil administration for the retired military.<sup>55</sup>

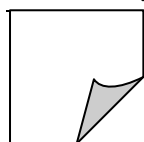
Like Mujib, Ershad wanted to decentralize administration. By 1983 he raised the number of districts from 21 to 64 by upgrading every subdivision into a district. He also introduced the Upazila system upgrading the thanas in Bangladesh. This was a miniature of district administration in Upazila. Upazila was a unique system of administration in Bangladesh. Upazila was the next administrative tier of the district administration.

For coordination at the district level, Ershad appointed a Chairman to every Zila Parishad. The status of the Chairman of Zila Parishad was given equal status to that of a Deputy Minister. Except for the judiciary and the law and order, all the officers in the district were brought to the supervision of the chairman. The main duties of the Chairman of the Zila Parishad were to coordinate the departments of a district that were transferred to Zila Parishad. Other departments were not transferred to Zila Parishad known as retain departments. DC as the representative of the Central Government used to exercise those functions at the district level. Thus, coordination appeared as a big problem. All the Chairmen of the Zila Parishad were members of the ruling party who were not elected rather they were nominated.

Gen. Ershad was overthrown by the popular mass uprising in December 1990. After the general election of 1991 democracy was restored in Bangladesh again. Begum Khaleda Zia, widow of Gen. Zia became elected prime minister of Bangladesh. She abolished Zila Parishad and Upazila Parishad after taking power. DC was again empowered to coordinate the functions of the district. This time a minister was appointed as the District Minister<sup>†††††</sup> to every district. hi was to advise district administration on their functions. In most cases for important decisions, DC has to take instruction from the District Minister. Like the Chairmen of Zila Parishad, the District Ministers were the members of the ruling party. So the ruling party always got a chance to

\*\*\*\*\* The researcher observed it personally in the District Coordination Committee meeting and other meetings in the Rajshahi district. He was informed this situation prevailed almost in all the districts in Bangladesh

††††† There are no references to the District Minister in the Rules of Business of the Government of Bangladesh. This post was created by an administrative circulation



interfere and influence the daily administration of a district. In 2006 the Supreme Court of Bangladesh abolished the District Minister system by one of its judgments.

At the beginning of 2007, Bangladesh witnessed an army-backed caretaker government. The caretaker government system was introduced in Bangladesh in 1996. The main function of the caretaker government was to conduct national elections neutrally and independently within 90 days of taking the oath. All the previous caretaker governments, before this one, followed the constitution. But the Caretaker Government of 2007 ruled the country for 2 years. In the initial stage of the army-backed caretaker government posted military officers to every district to observe the activities of the district-level bureaucracy. Though the military officers were not de facto authority to supervise the district they usually did it. Like their predecessors, they harassed many district-level officers in the name of the anti-corruption operation. The military-backed government changed the century-long district-level judiciary of Bangladesh.

### **Judiciary and District Administration**

The history of the judiciary at the district level in Bangladesh is very much related to District Magistrate or DC. Apart from a few exceptions District Magistrate was responsible for criminal judiciary since the time of the East India Company.

The demand for separation of the Judiciary from the Executive was very popular among lawyers and judges. They wanted the judiciary to separate from District Magistrate or DC. The judicial service members lodged a writ petition to the Supreme Court on this issue. Supreme Court gave the verdict in favor of them in 1998. The government of that time took the initiative to separate the Judiciary from District Magistrate. But they could not take finalise the process. After the tenure of the elected government in 2001, the Caretaker Government headed by the former chief justice came into power.

During the short tenure of the Caretaker Government of 2001, they tried to separate the judiciary. However, the elected government that came into power in 2001 did not allow the process. It was the army-backed caretaker government of 2007 that separated the judiciary from the executive. This was implemented on 1st November 2007. District Magistrate lost control over the judiciary they used to control for almost 200 years.

### **Coordination in District Administration**

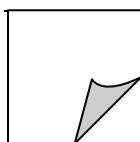
During the 20th century, many national building ministries and departments were introduced in the Central Government of India. They had their representatives in the districts of those departments which were specialized in nature. That means those departments were launched to implement for a special purpose.

At this time the Collectors of India were overloaded with various functions. Among them, some were very technical. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was felt that the Collector or DC should be relieved of those functions which were of a highly specialized nature, and they should be entrusted to the officers having technical or specialized knowledge. The government established many new departments in the third quarter of this century at the district level. Those various departments of the district had their respective heads of directorate at the provincial level.

However, there was no clear-cut system of control and coordination of those departments. The Directorates or the Collectors are used to control the functions in the district. G. Campbell, the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal felt the hazardous condition. In 1872 he mentioned<sup>56</sup> 'the local officers of districts have for some purposes had too many masters'. He felt that the district officers should not have so many masters and they should be under the control of a local authority rather than a provincial or central authority. He wanted to make Collector or DC 'the real executive, chief, and administrator of the district'. To him, the provincial head of directorates was a very bad master. They should only aid, counsel, and guide their respective local officers without exercising absolute authority over them. In this way, the authority and supremacy of the Collector or DC are established over the district administration.

But over time local officers of the district gradually became eager to gain independence from the direct control of the Collector or DC. At the same time, the directorates gradually began to exercise more and more direct control and supervision over their representatives in the district. Thus the growth and fissiparous tendencies of these departments gradually began to affect and change the pattern of district administration. In 1909 the Royal Commission upon Decentralization in India<sup>57</sup> noted the position of Collector or DC should be recognized over the other special departments in a district. The Commission also felt the necessity for a unifying influence over the various branches of government in the individual district. But in reality, the special departments of the district tried to continue their efforts to bypass Collector as far as possible.

At the beginning of the 1920s, the political and constitutional reforms resulting from the Montagu-Chelmsford Report affected district administration in various ways. Many important departments (mainly nation-building departments known as transfer departments) were placed in charge of ministers responsible to the Legislative Council in which majority members were elected<sup>58</sup>. Those ministers had less control over the Collector than their respective officers in the district. The collector as a representative of the Central



Government was under the control of the Governor of Bengal. The office of the Collector was reserved or retained department of the Central Government. So the ministers were inclined to rely more upon their representative in the district than Collectors. As a result, the importance of officers of other departments became important in the district. The Collector was responsible for the reserved or detained departments of the district only. As a result, the Collector got less opportunity to influence the policy than it was in the previous days.

However, the Government of India Act of 1935 abolished the diarchy system in districts and provinces. The provinces became autonomous by this Act. From April 1935, the provinces became self-governing. The Collectors of Bengal came under the control of the newly created Minister of Home in Bengal.<sup>59</sup> Usually, the Chief Minister of Bengal held that Ministry. So, the Ministry of Home was more powerful in the Cabinet of Bengal Province. At the same time as the previous system, the Collector was under the control of the Governor. Provincial autonomy also reduced the authority of the Chief Secretary and Governor whose support and backing had been a very important source of the Collector's authority and influence.<sup>60</sup> Due to this, Collectors became less powerful in the district.

### **The problem of Coordination after the Partition of 1947**

After the partition of India, in 1947, more national buildings department were introduced in the district in Pakistan than in the previous British regime. It was like mushroom growth. Almost all the new departments were technical. The head of the technical departments believed that the DC or the general administrator did not have the necessary specialized or technical knowledge to perform his role as the coordinator of those national building departments. They also felt that DC should only be concerned with the administrative, economic, social, and political aspects of planning. He should not interfere in the technical and specialized aspects of their work. So, the DC was in a problem with coordination and control of various specialized departments in a district. Moreover, the political hostility, military intervention, deteriorating caliber of CSP officers, and the departure of British ICS officers were major causes of the lack of confidence of the generalized officers. Those conditions help the specialized officers to raise their voices.

### **The Problem of Coordination in Bangladesh**

It became very difficult to perform the role of coordination for DC in a district in Bangladesh. In newly independent Bangladesh major portion of the leaders of the ruling party, had a glorious role in the War of Independence. On the other side, the maximum bureaucrats did not take part in that war. The leaders of political leaders usually raised questions in this regard. The then-ruling party appointed a governor in the districts to coordinate and supervise. Among the 61 governors, all but 14 of the governors were members of the ruling party.

After 1975 the ACR of other officers was withdrawn from DC. The salary structure of other heads of the departments e.g. SP. District Agriculture officer, Civil Surgeon, Executive Engineer, and many other departments, were equivalent to DC. That created problems for him/her in coordinating and controlling the district. Apart from that separation of the judiciary from the District Magistrate or DC was one of the main problems for the DC in supervision and control over the other departments in the district.

Leaders of the ruling party were entrusted to the members of the ruling for coordination in the name of DDC, Chairman Zila Parishad, and the District Minister. Apart from the political party military also deputed their officer in the district as Martial Law administrators. All those initiatives were taken to make DC less important in the district. Despite all those causes DC performed the coordinating role. He is the Captain<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> of a district. To Rahman,<sup>61</sup> in coordination, DC has horizontal control over the other departments in a district, not the vertical one.

At present, more than 46 ministries and departments are working in Bangladesh. Almost all of them have representatives in every district. Their control and coordination are done at the district level. Regarding control and coordination, Smith<sup>62</sup> classified field administration into 3 categories. Those are,

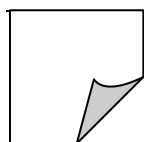
- a) functional system;
- b) integrated prefectorial system and
- c) Un-integrated prefectorial system.

In a functional system of field administration, representatives from various departments operate independently in their respective functions. Central government representatives, such as the DC, have limited control over them.

Conversely, in an integrated system, the Prefect or central government's representative in the field holds the highest authority. Officers from different departments are subordinate to them. In an un-integrated

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\*\*\*\*\* Muhit mention him as captain of the district. See A.H.M. Muhit, C.SP., The Deputy Commissioner in East Pakistan, (Dkaka: NIPA,1968)p.26



system, the Prefect serves as the head of the territory, but specialists in the field maintain direct connections with their headquarters. While there might be regular interaction between the Prefect and field officers, they are not under the Prefect's direct authority. Similarly, the Prefect does not assume the role of the chief executive of the local government.

Azher<sup>63</sup> Bangladesh started with an integrated type of field administration. With the growing significance of development activities and the establishment of numerous district offices, the DC's authority over other departments gradually diminished. Following liberation, the country's field administration swiftly transitioned towards the un-integrated system.

## II. Conclusion

The district administration stands as the pivotal unit in Bangladesh's governmental administrative structure. Its roots trace back to the governance systems under the East India Company in 1772, which themselves inherited elements from the Gupta, Pala, and Mughal regimes. During this era, district administrators held various titles, appointed by sovereign emperors or their representatives to oversee administrative affairs alongside their associates.

Initially, the East India Company appointed supervisors in Bengal districts in 1769, later known as the Collectors or the District Magistrates tasked primarily with revenue collection and maintaining law and order. The SP and their force were under the DC's command, aiding in these functions.

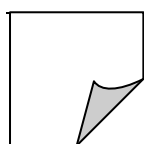
Following the Indian uprising of 1858, the British Parliament assumed control, introducing ministries and departments for governance, with various departments established at the district level during World War II. The DC served as the coordinator and controller of these departments on behalf of the central British government. After Pakistan's creation in 1947, development projects brought specialized departments to the districts, with department heads often resistant to the DC's coordinating role.

The War of Liberation led to Bangladesh's independence, driven by aspirations for freedom from misrule and exploitation. To reduce the authority of government officers in districts, ruling parties began appointing party members to oversee district administration, a trend continued by successive governments.

Military interventions in governance have weakened bureaucratic control in districts, as illegal seizures of power tend to diminish civil bureaucracy's authority. This reduction poses challenges for DCs in effectively controlling and coordinating district functions

## References

- [1] S.V. History: Banglapedia
- [2] S.V. Administration, Op.Cit
- [3] See, Op.Cit
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