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Civil Services Reforms and the PTI Government

ABSTRACT

Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaaf (PTI) government decided to reform the civil services to ensure de-politicisation and better service delivery to the common people. It is not the first time that an incumbent government announced to take such an initiative. Rather, one notices that it is recurrent phenomenon in the history of Pakistan and not without good reasons. Civil Services, indeed, any institution, need to adapt itself with changing times. As soon as an institution loses the touch of reality, it becomes irrelevant and dysfunctional. Thus, reforms are necessary for proper dispensing of the desired functions of any institutions. However, reforms require both sufficient understanding of the past, adequate grasp of the present conditions and foresight to envisage unfolding of the future events. Civil services of Pakistan went through reform process for many times, yet the quality of public services delivery deteriorated after each reforms program. The reason is quite simple; with exception of reforms introduced by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and for some time Musharraf's, all other reforms, not favorable to certain cadres in bureaucracy, were either not implemented or resisted by bureaucracy. The incumbent government is keen to make the process of public service delivery smooth and efficient. It believes that civil services in their present condition cannot be relied upon to achieve this goal. Hence, there is need to reform the system. Keeping in mind the past experiences, one becomes wary of reforms and their outcomes and feels compelled to question whether civil services reforms under Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaaf (PTI) government are on the right track. If the reforms' process is déjà vu exercise done by the previous governments, it is bound to fail. Any meaningful civil services reforms must address the specialistgeneralist question, relation of provincial and All Pakistan Services (APS) and be in harmony with post-18th amendment provincial autonomy. The present paper is an attempt to analyse how far the PTI government is taking steps to reform Civil Services to make the institution work for the benefit of the state and the common people.

Civil Services Reforms of PTI Government

The PTI government decided to constitute a task force to reform the civil services under the chairmanship of Dr. Ishrat Hussain, adviser to the Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms and Austerity. The Task Force initially comprised 19 members including the chairman. Twelve out of nineteen members are Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS) officers, either serving or retired. Later in January 2020, officers from Federal Board of Revenue and Police Service of Pakistan were added to the Task Force.

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¹ Notification No.F.4-2/2018-Cab., Government of Pakistan, Cabinet Secretariat, Cabinet Division. available at http://irc.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/Notification%20(Task%20Force%20on%20Civil%20Service%20Reform.pdf (accessed May 13, 2020).

² Notification No. F. 4-2/CM/2018-Cab., Government of Pakistan, Cabinet Secretariat, Cabinet Division. available at

http://irc.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/Notification%20(New%20Member%20of%20the%20Task%20Force).pdf (accessed May 13, 2020).

The Task Force was assigned the tasks of reviewing all the material available, reports and recommendations, on the subject to recommend changes for the structure of civil services at all three levels of government namely federal, provincial, and local. Moreover, it was to recommend policies regarding personnel and human resource management right from recruitment, training, placement through promotion, career planning, and performance measurement to compensation and post-retirement benefits. One major concern of the government is to attract persons of skill and talent to public sector. For this purpose, the government required Task Force to suggest whether current Basic Pay Scale system was adequate or not. The Task Force was to devise a monitoring mechanism to review that approved action plan is implemented.³

The Task Force, in its first meeting, was apprised of the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan and the chairman emphasized that recommended reforms had to conform to that vision of effective and efficient public service delivery to the masses and particular attention must be paid to the marginalized segments. The Task Force decided to focus on federal level services only keeping in view the sensitivity of post 18th amendment scenario and political questions that need to be addressed before implementation of any strategy of civil services reforms.

The Task Force identified the following major problems in its early sessions: over-centralization leading to ineffectiveness of middle and lower tier of civil services, concentration of power in the office of secretary, lack of skill mix required for rapidly changing domestic as well as global economic environment and technological advances, lack of tenure security, problems in recruitment process, issues in training, posting and transfer policies. ⁶

The guiding principle for the reforms included among others, taking all stakeholders on board to address their apprehensions and concerns. It was decided to consult both federal and provincial civil servants from all services groups, cadres, ex-cadre, and non-cadre officers. As result of these consultations, the Task Force was able to receive feedback from various groups of civil servants who were supportive of civil services reforms with certain reservations. Their apprehensions were regarding apportionment of positions between All Pakistan and provincial officers, disparity among different service groups with regard to promotion opportunities, inconsistency of allowances among various groups of civil servants, limited promotion opportunities for technical cadres, time scale promotion for junior positions, and proposed National/Provincial Executive Service.

It is necessary to keep this milieu in mind in order to address the question whether these civil services reforms are on right track or not. After the long process of consultation, following civil services reforms were proposed by the Task Force. As for May 2020, following reforms have been either notified or implemented⁹:

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³ Notification No.F.4-2/2018-Cab.

⁴ MINUTES OF THE TF ON CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS (1st Meeting), Government of Pakistan, Institution Reform Cell, Prime Minister's Office,1. Available at http://irc.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/1st%20Meeting%20-%20CSR(5).pdf (accessed on May 15, 2020)

⁵ MINUTES OF THE TF ON CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS (1st Meeting), Government of Pakistan, Institution Reform Cell,2.

⁶ MINUTES OF THE TF ON CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS (1st Meeting), Government of Pakistan, Institution Reform Cell,2-3

⁷ MINUTES OF THE MEETING TF CIVIL SERVICES REFORM (2nd Meeting), Government of Pakistan, Institution Reform Cell, Prime Minister's Office, 2-3. Available at http://irc.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/2nd%20Meeting%20-%20CSR.pdf (accessed on May 15, 2020).

⁸ MINUTES OF THE MEETING TF CIVIL SERVICES REFORM (3rd Meeting), Government of Pakistan, Institution Reform Cell, Prime Minister's Office, 2-3. Available at http://irc.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/3rd%20Meeting%20-%20CSR.pdf (accessed on May 15, 2020).

⁹ INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS: PROGRESS REPORT MAY 2020, Government of Pakistan, Institution Reform Cell, Prime Minister's Office. Available at

http://irc.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/Framework%20for%20Institutional%20reforms%20-%20May-converted.pdf (accessed on May 16, 2020).

- Training of civil servants including ex-cadre and non-cadre specialists by their respective Divisions (implemented)
- Promotion Rules (Notified)
- Career Progression (announced by Prime Minister)
- Internal Accountability Mechanism (Rules Notified)
- Compensation and Benefits (Pay and Pension Commission formed)
- Appointment of Technical Advisors to Ministers in 14 technical ministries (one Technical Advisor appointed)

Following is the detail of proposed and announced civil services reforms.

Induction

The Task Force was of the view that the huge number of candidates applying for CSS exam is becoming increasingly unmanageable. It adds pressure on Federal Public Service Commission to take steps to implement the system for the written test of all the applicants. So, in order to lessen the burden on FPSC and make sure that only promising candidates appear in the written test, a proposal for the introduction of screening test has been approved. It is hoped that apart from reducing the burden of FPSC, it will also shorten the procedural selection time of CSS. ¹⁰

Training

Another major transformation is brought about by the Cabinet by approving mandatory training for specialists and experts, the ex-cadre or non-cadre officers to upgrade their professional know how and skills. They often had been neglected in training, career planning and promotion which, hitherto, had been limited to cadre officers only. Additionally, Mid-Career Management Course and Senior Management Courses have been split to create a right balance of generic training at Specialized Training Academies and National Institutes of Management. The objective is to create right balance of generic and domain knowledge and skillset. ¹¹

Promotion Rules

New Promotion Rules, titled Civil Servants Promotion (BPS-18 to BPS-21) Rules, 2019, have been notified in 2019. Establishment Division conducted the last CSB according to these rules in January 2020. These Rules have equitably distributed the evaluation criteria among Performance Evaluation Reports, Training Evaluation Reports and with the Central Selection Board. Prior to this, no rules for the promotion of the civil servants to BPS-20 and 21 existed. To evaluating the officer, Establishment Division and CSB would notify the policy guidelines or chart out the criteria. Under these rules, collective judgement has been given more weightage and is now equal to Training Evaluation Report in terms of quantification i.e. each contains 30 marks. 40 marks are allotted to Performance Evaluation Reports. Similarly, the promotion of the civil servant will be deferred if he fails to submit asset declaration forms for last five years.

Performance Management

It was decided that present Management Evaluation System is highly subjective and needed modification or replacement altogether. A new Performance Management System that has been devised and approved by the

¹⁰ PROGRESS ON INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS, MAY 2020, , Government of Pakistan, Institution Reform Cell, Prime Minister's Office,4. Available at http://irc.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/IRC%20Performance.pdf (accessed on May 20, 2020).

¹¹ PROGRESS ON INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS, MAY 2020, Government of Pakistan, Institution Reform Cell, Prime Minister's Office, 4.

The Gazette of Pakistan Extra Ordinary, December 5, 2019, 2694. available at http://establishment.gov.pk/userfiles1/file/Civil%20Servants%20Promotion%20(BPS-18%20to%20BPS-21)%20Rules%202019.pdf (accessed on May 20, 2020).

¹³ The Gazette of Pakistan Extra Ordinary, December 5, 2019, 2694, 2690.

Cabinet. It is decided that the Prime Minister would enter into an agreement with his cabinet members / minsters on the goals and objectives of their respective ministries. It is against these goals that their performance would be evaluated. The performance goals of the federal government officers working under each ministry will be derived from and aligned to these performance contracts. ¹⁴ Set of objectives/targets agreed between the officer and his/her supervisor would be the criterion of Performance evaluation for the year. Measurable and verifiable key performance indicators would be used to determine success in achieving the agreed goals. Moreover, with respect to the ranking of officers at the time of evaluation, it is decided that each division will have the right to rank:

- 20% as 'Outstanding',
- 30% as 'Very good',
- 30% as 'Good',
- 10% as 'Average', and
- 10% as 'Below Average'

Officers performing outstandingly would receive twice as much in the terms of annual merit increase in relation to those placed in lower categories. Below average Officers will receive no merit increase. Likewise, while allocating government houses, the top 20% would be preferred to others. 15

Retirement Rules

The Civil Servants (Discretionary Retirement from Service) Rules, 2020 have been notified to enable the Government to retire corrupt and incompetent officers after due process. Incompetent officers also include those who have completed 20 years' service but consistently failed to perform satisfactorily. 16 Government can also retire those who have unbecoming conduct or have been superseded by Promotion Boards or Committees. The goal of these rules is to weed out the corrupt and deadwood and ensure that the Government retains only the best performing officers of integrity.

Appointment of Technical Advisors

Posts of technical advisors in 15 different federal ministries have been created to assist the Ministers in-charge of technical ministries and to provide technical, specialist expertise in advising federal ministers. Few ministries have already completed the process of hiring technical advisors and others are to complete the hiring at the earliest. 17

Reduction in Cadre Posts of PAS

According to news, Task Force has recommended rationalization of posts reserved for PAS in provinces and reduced the number of seats from 1900 to 1300. 18 These posts now will be available to provincial officers in their respective provinces and to specialists in federal secretariat.

¹⁴ PROGRESS ON INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS, MAY 2020, 4.

PROGRESS ON INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS, MAY 2020, 5.
 PROGRESS ON INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS, MAY 2020, 4.
 PROGRESS ON INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS, MAY 2020, 4.
 PROGRESS ON INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS, MAY 2020, 5.

¹⁸ Ansar Abbasi, "Govt takes away 600 cadre posts of most influential PAS", *The News*, February 17, 2020. https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/615091-govt-takes-away-600-cadre-posts-of-most-influential-pas (Accessed May 28, 2020).

Rotation Policy

To make sure that no officer of APS stays for too long in any province, a rotation policy has been introduced. According to this policy, first posting of the officer will be made outside his/her own province for 5 years for male and 3 years for female. It will be a pre-condition for their promotion to 19 Grade. Likewise, 2 years' service in hard area is mandatory for promotion to grade 20, though not applicable to female officers. Further, no officer can serve more than ten years continuously in a single province or in Islamabad. 19

Analysis of the Reforms

It is pleasant to note that the Task Force has proposed such reforms as tenure security, promotion rules, and rotation policy, performance management and other related reforms. Such reforms are crucial for any honest officer to perform optimally. However, when observed from an outsider perspective, one realizes that the scope of all these reforms is limited to already privileged and well entrenched groups of civil services. The decades old issues are not addressed. These issues include among others role of government in public service delivery, separation of functions of civil services, ensuring right balance between generalist and specialists, sharing of posts between Provincial services and APS, over centralization, and strengthening of provincial services especially in the aftermath of 18th amendment that devolves many responsibilities to the provinces.

The Task Force was presented with two approaches to reforms by the chair; an all-encompassing simultaneous approach and the other was sequential or phased approach. For the first approach, the chair feared that there would be tough resistance from those who would lose their entitlements and privileges. ²⁰ It is evident that the chair alluded to the officers of APS especially those of PAS. Since majority of the members of Task Force belonged to these services, it is no surprise that they opted for incremental approach that focused on issues like security of tenure, processes of appointments, promotion and placement with minimum political involvement, and reforming of value chain of Human Resource policies and management practices.²¹

Thus, it is observed that from the very beginning the idea if comprehensive reforms is compromised. It must be noted that some members, not from civil services, showed their concerns and were of the view that without deeper structural changes real would not be possible. ²² In a note to the Chair, Nadeem ul Haque wrote that

> too many people are complaining that there is a larger number of civil servants and that too from the PAS than there are outside members of the committee. Other service groups are complaining on their 'exclusion.' Perhaps the chairman can tell us what was the thinking behind this design? And how will we prevent the view of one group among the CSS from dominating this TF's deliberations?²³

APP, "Govt to reform decades old Civil Service structure", The News, February 16, 2020. https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/614718-govt-to-reform-decades-old-civil-service-structure (Accessed 28 May, 2020).

²⁰ APPRAOCH PAPER, Government of Pakistan, Institution Reform Cell, Prime Minister's Office. Available at http://irc.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/2nd%20Meeting%20of%20Task%20Force%20on%20CSR-%20Approach%20Paper.pdf (accessed on May 15, 2020).

²¹ APPRAOCH PAPER, Government of Pakistan, Institution Reform Cell, Prime Minister's Office.

²² MINUTES OF THE MEETING TF CIVIL SERVICES REFORM (2nd Meeting), 1.

²³ WORKING PAPER (1) FOR THE TF ON CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS, Government of Pakistan, Adviser to the Prime Minister on IRA, Prime Minister's Office, 4. Available at

 $[\]underline{http://irc.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/TASK\%20FORCE\%20ON\%20CIVIL\%2}\\ OSERVICE\%20REFORMS\%20AN$ D%20INPUTS%20FROM%20MEMBERS.pdf (accessed on May 16, 2020).

Likewise, in the first meeting, Dr. Sania Nishtar also pointed to problems like federal and cadre dominance in reform process, federal dominance over provincial services, cadre politics, and culture of political allegiance in civil services among others.²⁴Interestingly, these observations are not entirely new.

PAS, successor of Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP), who in turn were successor of Indian Civil Service (ICS), takes pride in the fact that this service had contributed a lot to the strengthening of newly created state of Pakistan. And that is correct as Chauhdry Muhammad Ali observes that civil servants of that period "placed all the resources of his knowledge and all the energy of his body and mind unreservedly at the service of Pakistan." It was owing to their services that "helped make the nation a viable entity." Francis Mudie, George Cunningham, and Frederick Chalmers Bourne were all ICS officers who, after independence, became governor of Punjab, North West Frontier Province, and East Pakistan, respectively. Malik Ghulam Muhammad and Chauhdry Muhammad Ali were also civil servants before partition. However, with the passage of time, too much power was concentrated in their hands especially when state decided to engage herself in industrial and economic development, a domain of private enterprise. It started soon after independence and peaked during Ayub era. As Emajuddin Ahmed points out

Apart from the crucial positions held by the bureaucratic elites, the key policy making institutions of the country such as the National Economic Council, the Central Secretariat, the Planning Commission, the important public corporations, were dominated by them. The National Economic Council (NEC) was practically the 'highest policy making body' in the economic sector... as the National Economic Council was not able to meet frequently, two Committees – the Committee for Co-ordination of Economic Policies and the Executive Committee – were formed to discharge its responsibilities. The Committee for Co-ordination of Economic Policies consisted of the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, the Secretary of the Ministry of Industries, the Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Secretary of the Minister of Finance and the Secretary of the Economic Affairs Division.²⁷

Bureaucracy soon began to feel that it was natural if they command the power. "In seizing this unusually large policy role, the bureaucracy did not act from any inherent wickedness", writes Hassan Habib, "It merely filled the vacuum of power resulting from the debility and progressive decline of the political process and institutions in the country. Power, we know, abhors a vacuum." Their influence was "far disproportionate to their numbers." 29

However, despite this much acclaimed performance by CSP, it failed to win the favour of many commissions and committees set up to reform the civil services especially when committee was not presided by/ or lacked majority of civil servants. Reports of Rowland Egger, Bernard Gladieux, Justice Cornelius bear the witness to this fact. The fate of Egger and Gladieux reports are discussed by Khalid Bin Sayeed as follows

as an elitist group in Pakistan Bureaucracy the CSP wields tremendous power and influence. Indeed during the parliamentary regimes (prior to Martial Law), it was able to

²⁵ Chaudari Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 249.

²⁴ MINUTES OF THE TF ON CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS (1st Meeting), 3-4.

²⁶Zarina Salamat, *Pakistan 1947-58: An Historical Review* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1992), 145.

²⁷ Emajuddin Ahmed, *Bureaucratic Elites: In Segmented Economic Growth Pakistan and Bangladesh* (Dhakka: The University Press Ltd., 1980), 40-41.

²⁸ Hassan Habib, *Public Policy: Formulation & Review with Particular Reference to Pakistan* (Lahore: Wajid alis, 1976), 22.

²⁹ Ralph Braibanti, Research on the Bureaucracy of Pakistan: A Critique of Sources, Conditions, and Issues, with Appended Documents (Durham: Duke University Press, 1966), 97.

prevent the publication of two reports (Egger and Gladieux) which were adverse in their comments on its role and efficiency.³⁰

Likewise, an organized campaign was launched by the CSP officers against Justice Cornelius' Pay and Service Commission report. Even to the date, he is considered a man of anti-CSP views as shown in the writings of currently serving PAS officers like Amna Imam and Kiran Khurshid.³¹

It is not to deny the crucial role played by the officers of Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP). Rather, the purpose is to demonstrate how a particular cadre has been able to manipulate the process of civil services reform for so long. The same service group worked enthusiastically to implement the reforms that suited them as shown by Mohammad Mohabbat Khan.³² Indeed, the same author show that Ishrat Husain, the current chairman of the Task Force, was among those officers who actually wrote research articles in National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA) journals to challenge the assumption of this commission.³³ Ilhan Niaz shows that there was never a corruption free Golden Age of bureaucracy.³⁴ Similar views are presented by a former civil servant Tasneem Ahmad Siddiqui who believes that deterioration of bureaucracy had started during the Ayub period when "senior officers, would go to any length to please their superiors in order to remain close to the seat of power."35 This is self-evident and has been acknowledged not only previous commissions and committees but also by this Task Force that present structure of the civil services cannot perform thus needs reforms. Indeed, nothing sums it up better than the comments made by Gladieux 65 years ago with substituting the decades for years that "the present corps of administrative leaders (CSP) must also bear the onus for failure to implement or even take very seriously the many reforms and improvements recommended by various official commissions over the years."³⁶

As mentioned above, it was discussed in the second meeting of the TASK FORCE that all stakeholders will be taken on board. However, this is not the case. Provincial Management Services officers registered their protest their exclusion from the process. Holding consultation session and being member of the TASK FORCE are two entirely different things. They even showed their concerns with the TASK FORCE during consultation sessions. Their major concern was that ratio of seats reserved for PAS officers to actual number of PAS officers is too much high i.e. 8:35. This ensures that every PAS officer retires in Grade 22 while hardly few PMS Officers reach to Grade 21.³⁷ They even accused that TASK FORCE has been deceived.³¹

Proposed reforms did not sit well with PAS officers also. A committee of former chief secretaries urged government to revoke the decision of rationalization believing it would cause dissatisfaction among the junior

³⁰ Khalid bin Sayeed, *The Political System of Pakistan* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), 155-56.

³¹ Amna Imam affirmatively quotes Kiran Khurshid's view about Justice Cornelius in her book *Democracy and* Public Administration in Pakistan ((Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2014), 50.

³² Mohammad Mohabbat Khan, "Ruling Elite and Major Administrative Reforms: The Case of Pakistan Civil Service," The Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 41, No. 4 (December 1980), 744-47.

³³ Khan, "Ruling Elite and Major Administrative Reforms.

³⁴ Ilhan Niaz, "Corruption and the Bureaucratic Elite in Pakistan: The 1960s and 1970s Revisited," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. 24, No. 1 (January 2014), 103.

³⁵ Tasneem Ahmad Siddiqui, *Towards Good Governance* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11.

³⁶ Khan, "Ruling Elite and Major Administrative Reforms," 737.

³⁷ Ziullah Niazi, "PMS Officers Show Reservations on Civil Service Reform Process," The News, February 24, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/619025-pms-officers-show-reservations-on-civil-service-reform-process

⁽accessed on June 2, 2020).

https://nayadaur.tv/2020/03/provincial-officers-reject-civil-service-reform-proposals/ (accessed on June 2, 2020) and https://twitter.com/pmspunjab?lang=en (accessed on June 2,2020).

officers.³⁹ They also opposed lateral entry of technical experts citing the reason that it would disturb "structure, seniority and promotion prospects of officers belonging to one unified cadre."40

Conclusion

It is clear from the above discussion that reforms made so far assume that present civil service structure do not need much overhauling. Rather it would be sufficient to amend such and such rules to make it autonomous and insulate from political interference. Another assumption is that, and it is very crucial, that once a candidate passes the CSS exams, he achieves an irrevocable intellectual and professional excellence that can only grow further and not diminish at all. And the case of those who fail to do so is other way round.

Modern practices of Public Administration call for specialization. Developed countries have specialized services to administer public services delivery, monitoring evaluation, building large infrastructure, and play regulatory functions. It is sad to observe that all the proposed reforms on decentralization of administrative power and authority, and creation of specialized services or empowering of specialists have been sidelined as the process of reforms gathered pace. Whatever progress is made on this front is already opposed by those who are going to lose their entitlements. The Reforms under PTI Government are on right track with only suggestion of addressing concerns of the PMS.

Recommendations

- Appointment to supervisory and senior posts should be open to competition.
- Public Service Commissions both at the federal and provincial level should be strengthen in terms of statutory authority as well as manpower so that these can take exams for these posts.
- For short term, ratio of post reserved for Provincial and All Pakistan/Federal Services must be revised
- In the long term, it should be decided that joining other services would require both appearing in the exams and resignation from the officer currently working in.
- Specialized services must be created
- Training of specialist in management and leadership should be mandatory to enhance their administrative capacity
- Government may enter into agreements with other governments, international institutions, and multinational companies for the training of its outstanding officers from all the services cadres
- There must be a timeline for the formulation and execution of the reforms.

³⁹ Mansoor Malik, "Ex-bureaucrats for incentives to officers for efficient service delivery", *The Dawn*, February 7, 2020. https://www.dawn.com/news/1536850/ex-bureaucrats-for-incentives-to-officers-for-efficient-service-delivery (accessed on June 2, 2020).

40 Mansoor Malik, "Ex-Bureaucrats for Incentives to Officers for Efficient Service Delivery".