

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION : CHANGES & CHALLENGES

District Administration as an institution provides the bedrock for governance – good or otherwise – in India. Because of this, it is both appropriate and necessary that we take stock of the challenges it faces in the New Millennium with the UN having announced the Millennium Development Goals. With India's 11th Five Year Plan beginning in April, 2007, well into the second half of the first decade of the 21st Century, looking back becomes important for hazarding guesses about what directions we may be heading in and the problems likely to arise in moving towards these goals.

In West Bengal a major change came into being post – 1982 with the emphasis on the District Magistrate functioning as the Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad and the BDO as the E.O. of the Panchayat Samiti, with the statutory provision for their removal in case of a resolution to that effect by the ZP or the PS. One of the case studies in this volume provides a graphic documentation of the type of impasse this can create. The DM, who was primarily a creature of the Home Department - later of the Personnel & Administrative Reforms Department – now became answerable more and more to the Panchayat & Rural Development Department. His accountability to the Land and Land Reforms Department receded into the background as the new post of District Land & Land Reforms Officer & Collector came into being. A telling instance of this change is provided by the government order issued by the Chief Secretary in 2002 restricting the number of committees involving the DM to 23 (these were more than 80 at one time) in order to prevent avoidable expenditure of time. It was issued not from the P&AR but from the P & RD Department.

The Administrative Training Institute, Government of West Bengal, organized a seminar on 10th March, 2007 on challenges and changes in district administration in collaboration with the West Bengal Regional Branch of the IIPA. In organizing this its Joint Secretary, Prof. Ashok Mukhopadhyay, played a major role. The seminar, held in Darbhanga Hall of Calcutta University, included papers by former and existing BDOs, DMs, a Divisional Commissioner and some interested academics.

This publication brings together the seminar papers and presentations with minimal editing in order to preserve the authors' outlooks. The *Probationer's Training Diary* published by the ATI will supplement these as it provides a worm's view of the working of district administration in the early 1970s in the context of the Bangladesh liberation war which put an unprecedented strain on the resources of district administration in the border districts of West Bengal.

