

Recommendations of the Special Committee on Foreign Affairs

We publish the first instalment of the recommendations of the Morshed Committee on reorganising the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a view to generating a public debate on the subject. The report has been submitted to the Prime Minister. Before any final decision is made on the issue, we feel that an open discussion should take place so that the public can participate in the process of policy making.

We, therefore, invite our readers to send in their views and suggestions on the recommendations, which we will publish in our paper.

should only proceed after finalising the Bangladesh position on conference agenda through inter-ministerial consultation. Delegations on return should submit comprehensive reports highlighting their contributions. The concerned Ministries should also hold necessary de-briefing sessions in respect of our participation in major conferences.

Economic Coordination Wing

(a) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Missions abroad should play an increasingly crucial role in enhancing our economic objectives through use of diplomacy, including promotional and marketing activities. This calls for appropriate reorganization of the MOFA as well as our Missions abroad. It is recommended that an Economic Coordination Wing/Division within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should be created with a senior officer of the level of Secretary as the head, and required number of officers and staff as suggested in the organogram (Appendix 7C). The proposed set up will strengthen the present Economic Affairs Wing as it will also have the responsibility for coordinating bilateral economic matters, matters relating to Joint Economic Commissions/Joint Commissions and issues relating to trade, investment, aid, labour, environment, etc. in addition to multilateral economic work. An 'environment cell' has been included in the new set up and coordination work for all environmental conferences, treaties etc. will be performed in this cell.

(b) Economic diplomacy can be better pursued by officers of BCS (FA) cadre with more training and experience in economic matters. The Committee in this context, feels that the foreign service officers should have the opportunity to serve in the development Ministries. The Committee recommends

that provisions should be made for at least four posts at the level of Director General/Joint Secretary and seven posts at the level of Director/Deputy Secretary and Assistant Secretary for foreign service officers in Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Labour & Manpower, Ministry of Industries, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, ERD, EPB, BOI and BEPZA as part of their home posting, to familiarise them in the activities of the Government in these Ministries and organizations. It is further recommended that BCS (FA) officers when posted in these Ministries/agencies should serve there for at least 2 years out of their 3-year period of home posting (Para 14.18).

External Publicity Wing

The Committee was of the view that external publicity is an integral element in the conduct of foreign relations (Para 16.40 to 16.44). The Committee therefore strongly recommends that the External Publicity Wing which was earlier a part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs until 1985 should revert to that Ministry along with its press set-ups in our Missions.

Research & Policy Planning Wing

(a) It has been pointed out in Para 10.6 that foreign policy of no country can simply be reactive. Advance information and analysis of events and preparation of options to deal with evolving situations will give maneuverability in the conduct of our foreign policy. Research and policy planning, though a vital re-

quirement for advance policy making does not exist at present in the MOFA. The Committee therefore recommends creation of a separate Wing for Research and Policy Planning with adequate staff as shown in the proposed organogram (Appendix 7C). One of its purposes shall be to keep close liaison with institutions like BISS, BILIA, BIDS, large number of independent research groups, universities, NGOs, think tanks who are engaged in important work in different sectors that can be effectively utilized by the Government in Foreign Affairs. The present gap between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the research institutions and academia could be successfully bridged by this Wing if it is properly organized. In this context the Committee also recommends that for better coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and BISS and for functional effectiveness, the post of Chairman should be redesignated as Executive Chairman and filled by a retired senior foreign service officer of the level of Ambassador/Secretary. The statute of the Institute should be changed accordingly.

(b) Research needs an atmosphere of unhurried and quiet scholastic environment far removed from the din and bustle of daily activities in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A general tendency within our bureaucracy to attach little importance to jobs connected with research has led the Committee to reach the opinion that the effectiveness of a Research and Policy Planning Wing would be enhanced if it is headed by a retired (rather than a serving) Foreign service officer. The Committee, therefore, recommends appointment of a retired senior Ambassador to head this set-up as an Adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on contract. The wing will have a policy planning cell where the experience of senior retired officers, academicians, eminent

finding the right persons to man the posts in Legal Wing. The Committee considered the odds against finding suitable candidates from among successful lawyers immediately for the job of Legal Adviser/Deputy Legal Adviser as it offers little attraction in terms of emoluments and career prospects.

(c) The Committee further recommends that the MOFA should develop in-house capacity in the legal field from among officers of BCS(FA) having legal background and experience, and training them on the job while they will remain in the mainstream of the cadre. In-house specialisation should include sub areas like laws relating to human rights investment, international rivers, law of the sea (LOS) etc. If necessary, the Ministry may request the Public Service Commission (PSC) to give consideration to legal educational background in selecting some officers for BCS (FA) cadres.

Inspectorate General of Missions

The current review of the structure and functions of the MOFA and our Missions abroad brought to light a very important issue — that is the need for periodic review. Bangladesh seems to be the only country in our region where no system exists for periodic inspection of the diplomatic missions. It has been pointed out in this report (Para 21.1 to 21.15) that work of our Missions abroad need to be kept under periodic review so that we can respond to changing circumstances and take appropriate administrative, financial, budgetary and other decisions accordingly. Viewing from this perspective, the Committee considers an Inspection Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the Inspector General of Missions at its head as a vital necessity (vide organogram at Annexure 7c).

The Inspector General of Mission will be expected to provide an independent assessment of our Missions for policy decisions on matters like opening/closing and relocation of Missions as well as immediate action on many important administrative and financial matters. It is accordingly recommended that the post of an Inspector General of Missions be created at the level of Secretary and filled by a senior career foreign service officer to perform the duties enumerated in Para 21.14. It will be one of the major responsibilities of the IGM to exercise check on the use of our scarce resources and to ensure that resources are not dissipated through irregularities specially in respect of house rent, contingent expenditures, medical and other allowances. It is recommended that the post of IGM for the purpose of continuity should be made a tenure post for a period of 5 years. A serving officer appointed against this post should continue to complete the remainder of the fixed term if he attains the age of super-

annuation earlier.

Audit and Pension Cases

(a) The Committee has noted with grave concern that officers are often unable to get their gratuity and monthly pension promptly on retirement (Para 21.10). This unfortunate state of affairs causes serious hardship to the officers and negates the commendable initiative taken by the present Government in easing the pension regulations for the benefit of retired officers. In this regard, the Committee strongly recommends that (i) the onus of settling all the audit objections at least one year before the officer would go on LPR will be on the audit office; (ii) if the audit objections remain outstanding due to the fault of the officer himself, the amount in dispute (and not the entire amount of the TA Advance) should be kept in suspension pending settlement; and (iii) the gratuity and monthly pension should be promptly paid to the officer immediately on retirement irrespective of whether or not there are audit objections in suspension.

(b) The Committee is greatly concerned that the TA Bills of officers have remained unadjusted for years (sometimes decades) due to various shortcomings of the audit offices (Para 21.4 to 21.10). The Committee recommends that (i) the audit objections should be disposed by the audit office within one year of submission of reply by the concerned officer/office; (ii) if these could not be disposed of in one year, these should automatically lapse; and (iii) once audit objections have been met, new areas of audit objections on the same bill can not be raised again.

(c) The Committee recommends setting up of a Standing Committee on audit and pension with the IGM as the Chairman. The Committee will comprise of a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Director Mission Audit (who will represent the CAG) and the CAO. A representative of Ministry of Finance not below the level of Joint Secretary should also be a member of this Committee. Until the post of IGM is created an Additional Foreign Secretary will preside over the meetings. The Standing Committee will meet once a month and report progress to the Foreign Minister, Foreign Secretary and the CAG with copies to officers concerned. Outstanding audit objections relating to retired officers should be considered on top priority and be resolved within three months of the first meeting as these have remained unresolved for many years. The Committee further recommends that this Standing Committee will consider and resolve all outstanding objections in a realistic manner keeping in view the conditions prevailing in different countries where Bangladesh Missions are operating.

(d) The Committee noted (Para 21.5) that certain financial rules and regulations have become antiquated and have lost relevance. The Committee, therefore, recommends a review of these rules and procedures in order to abolish those which are archaic and update the others.

(e) The audit and pension sections in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which have to play a strong role in effectively handling the audit objections must be strengthened with adequate number of efficient personnel.

Office of the CAO (FA)

The Committee feels strongly that the Office of the Chief Accounts Officer (Foreign Affairs) should be re-organized with a view to removing the dichotomy in administration, finance and operational control of this office (Para 21.11). With this in view, the Committee recommends that (i) this office should be departmentalized under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs answerable to the Foreign Secretary who should sign/countersign the ACRS of all the officers in this office; (ii) this office should be located within the premises of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; (iii) the audit and the accounting functions should be separated.

Foreign service academy

(a) Importance of proper training of our officers who will be called upon to perform in a highly comparative international environment and to deal with extremely complex issues has been stressed by all. The closure of

Foreign Affairs Training Institute (FATI) by the past regime was a blow at the very root of human resources development by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Para 11.5 to 11.6). The Committee recommends immediate restoration of FATI and its renaming as Foreign Service Academy. It should set a high academic standard and if possible, passing out of the Academy should be linked to the award of a degree that will have some relevance to an officer's career. The courses will be carefully designed to give adequate bias to the study of economic issues and institutions by career foreign service officers. The overall set-up of the Foreign Service Academy should be of international standard to

help the BCS (FA) officers acquire area, functional, and language specialization.

Missions

A Diplomatic or Consular Mission of Bangladesh should be a single unified unit under the overall command of the Head of Mission. The administrative and financial control of the Head of Mission over the entirety of our operations in the country or countries of his/her accreditation has to be firmly established. The present practice of different Ministries setting up their own wings and a tendency to administer them independently of the Heads of Mission has become a major obstacle to the integrated approach to diplomacy. The

Committee feels that in enhancing better coordination within the mission, the concept of wings should not exist. As such the Committee recommends that all wings should be abolished.

The personnel strength of missions abroad should be optimum and rational in terms of cost-effectiveness. For reasons of economy and better utilization of existing resources the structure of the Missions should be reviewed. The personnel strength can be rationalized/abolishing/relocating posts in missions as and where necessary. The exercise being complex and lengthy may be undertaken separately, taking into consideration the principles outlined in Para 24.19.

In view of the consensus that the main thrust of our diplomatic efforts should be in economic fields, the Committee is of the opinion that the existing complement of officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in most missions should perform all functions including political, commercial, economic, labour etc. except in cases where workload and special expertise may demand deployment of additional officers (Ref. Para 15.4 to 15.5). In this context the Committee recommends that the following principles may be kept in mind in undertaking the review:

(i) Economic diplomacy demands prime attention of the Head of Mission. The Committee is of the view, that most of the economic and trade work should be carried out under his/her direct supervision and control.

(ii) In countries where volume of economic, trade and other work of technical nature is high, the Ambassador may require assistance of officers at field level. These field level officers may come on secondment from other Ministries. These officers should be of mid-level and field oriented and should not hold rank higher than that of counselor. In exceptional cases, where interaction with the host government is required at higher level, an officer of higher rank may be posted.

The committee examined several options in recommending the structure of the missions abroad. In this regard the following options were discussed:

(i) all technical posts should be absorbed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be manned by BCS (FA) cadre officers. The absorption should be at the rate of 10 percent each year so that on completion of 10 year transition period there should be no need to post officers in

our Missions from Ministries other than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Committee noted that this integrated approach is practised by many countries of the world.

(ii) some technical posts in missions abroad could continue to be manned by officers from other Ministries on the basis of secondment to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although the first option has merits in terms of better coordination and economy of resources the Committee for practical reasons recommends the second option, that is, the officers selected by the other Ministries for filling up the technical posts in the Missions be seconded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with their budget. For the duration of their secondment, these officers will remain under the administrative and financial control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (para 15.5 to 15.8) The Committee further recommends that these officers should undergo a 3 month course in the Foreign Service Academy (after its restitution) at the beginning of their secondment to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

After having examined in depth all the proposals for a single integrated structure for our Missions abroad, the Committee recommends the following:

i) A Diplomatic or Consular Mission of Bangladesh should be a single unified structure under the overall command of the Head of Mission. The administrative and financial control of the Head of Mission over all activities of the Mission in country or countries of his/her accreditation has to be firmly established.

ii) A Mission will no longer be fragmented into wings but will be a composite unit. A single consolidated list containing the names of all the officers serving in the Mission in order of their rank must be drawn; and

iii) In the Diplomatic list the functions of the officers should be mentioned against their diplomatic ranks such as Counsellor (Political) or First Secretary (Commercial), etc.

The Committee is of the view, that Defence Attaches will be posted to those countries only with which Bangladesh has substantial cooperation in defence matters and where their presence might be justified. The Committee observed that the relationship between the Defence Attaches and their Heads of Mission is being governed at present by directives from diverse sources which are sometimes contradictory. As noted earlier, for reasons of better coordination and harmony within Missions, the Head of Mission should have overall administrative and financial control over all officers including the Defence Attaches and Advisers. The Committee recommends that wherever there is a departure from this practice it should be rectified. Defence Attache and functionaries of other Agencies forming part of a Mission shall remain accountable to the Head of Mission. All reports emanating from them should be shown to the Head of Mission. The Committee further recommends that in conformity with diplomatic norms, no Mission or sub-Mission should be headed by an officer posted against a cover post.

The Committee noted that at present different Wings in the Missions have independent arrangement in matters of separate support staff, budget, transport and office equipment. This system leads to wasteful use of resource, duplication of common services and (what is most regrettable), internal discord and disharmony. As a result, the work atmosphere in some of our missions is often not at all congenial for team work which is really the key to productivity. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommends that all logistics and organizational set-ups in the Missions should be immediately streamlined and common services should be pooled and run under the supervision of the Head of Mission. This will result in considerable economy both in terms of personnel, finance, office equipment and transport.

ii) Bangladesh Missions abroad should be given clearly specified goals or targets wherever applicable, in political, economic, trade, investment, manpower export, and other relevant fields. Such target should be realistic and fixed carefully through inter-ministerial consultation and in consultation with the respective Heads of Mission.

To be concluded tomorrow

Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman

prepare our diplomats to function effectively in the highly competitive world of today. The curriculum should include, among others, courses on etiquette, art of contemporary living etc. for overall grooming of the officers.

(b) The Foreign Service Academy should be utilized to train all officers and staff, including those of the other Ministries/Agencies, before they proceed to our Missions abroad on posting. Staff courses, mid-career refresher courses, seminars, lectures by eminent personalities from home and abroad may also be arranged by this Academy. As a part of training, probationers and mid-level officers should undertake extensive tour of Bangladesh, be attached to development Ministries and familiarize themselves with the activities of the nationally important NGOs and private sector bodies (e.g. FBCCI, DSE, etc).

(c) The Foreign Service Academy may have the organogram as suggested in Annexure 7C. The Committee recommends that the Principal of Foreign Service Academy should be a foreign service officer of Secretary level with requisite qualification and experience. He should be appointed for a tenure of 5 years. If considered necessary, a senior retired Ambassador may be appointed against this post on contract.

Area/Functional Specialization

The Committee was informed that many countries provide training to their foreign service cadre officers with a view to give them area/functional/language specialization. Area specialization increases the officers' efficiency and output since expert knowledge of the region allows them to take advantage of cultural, historical, economic, social and other peculiarities of the region. Language skill assists officers to gain greater access to the host country government machinery and enhances interaction with local people. Similarly functional specialization trains officers to perform better in certain areas which requires specialized skills. The Committee noted that neighbouring countries like India and Pakistan have made substantive progress in training their foreign service officers in area and functional specialization as well as language skills. The Committee noted that at present the MOFA does not have a planned training programme for such specialization. The Committee, therefore, recommends that necessary action should be initiated

to be concluded tomorrow



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