

Public Administration Reforms

by Mohammad Siddiqur Rahman

Needed Deconcentration of Power

With so many Ministries, Divisions, Departments and agencies under PM's direct responsibility, is it really possible for the Prime Minister, however genius he or she may be, to go in-depth into the administration, operational management, policy formulation and efficient and timely disposal of files and business?

PUBLIC Administration Reforms Commission has recommended a number of measures to make the administration 'dynamic, accessible and accountable to the people' as reported in The Daily Star of November 11, 1997. One of the main recommendations is that every ministry/department/autonomous body must give the final decisions on any query or grievances brought up to any official of the government within one month (as against 15 days as per the existing Secretariat Instruction). If there be any exception, permission of the minister must be obtained. If it is not possible to give a decision within 15 days, an interim reply has to be sent to the petitioner.

joint secretary and the additional secretary on the same day. It was an example of real efficiency and dedication. But nobody questioned as to why the file was pending with him for the last four months. Is any action taken against an official for not putting up the file within the time limit prescribed (3 days for section officers two days for deputy secretaries and one day at higher level under the Secretariat Instruction). Delay in the decision-making process and impediment in the implementation of projects is perhaps the worst disease in our administrative system and style of governance. Unfortunately the Public Administration Reform Commission has remained silent about this fundamental malignancy in our administration.

lay emphasis on decentralisation of powers and delegation of authority, but people in authority are adverse to such ideas and deconcentration of power is a far cry in our country. Let us have a look at some aspects of deconcentration of powers at the various levels. Lessening the Burden of the Prime Minister: The Prime Minister is the head of the government and head of the Cabinet but is still the Minister of Cabinet Division Establishment Ministry, Prime Minister's Office, Defence Ministry, Armed Forces Division, Special Affairs Division, and the Departments of Anti-Corruption Bureau, Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority and NGO Affairs Bureau. Prime Minister is also the leader of the House and is responsible for steering all issues that is raised in the Parliament. She has to give considerable time on protocol, meet the people, see local and foreign dignitaries, and various functions and ceremonies.

Minister works for 24 hours a day as a superman. Why not share the responsibilities with the Cabinet colleagues in the spirit of collective responsibility of the Cabinet. Suggestions: Prime Minister may keep one or two Ministries besides Cabinet Division and Prime Minister's office and all the other Ministries/Departments/Offices should be allocated to other relevant Ministries/Divisions. What is really important for the Prime Minister is to act as the Head of the Government and keep a watch over the activities of the other Ministries to see where the government is performing or failing. Prime Minister should have a strong Monitoring/Evaluation and Inspection Cell headed by the Principal Secretary to find out what is going wrong in the government and take account of those who cannot provide the services to be given to the people and those who cannot implement the policy decisions and development project efficiently and timely. Prime Minister is not only to give strictures and punishment but also give guidance and directions and leadership for good governance.

the level of the Minister or other appropriate levels concerned. The Prime Minister can always call for a file or review any decision taken by any Ministry if she finds it necessary in public interest. The Prime Minister is to steer the course of the government, be the captain of the ship to give directions and to over-see how the others are performing the responsibilities given to them rather than take over their functions. Ministers should be given no powers for approval of development projects to reduce processing time: Although the line Ministers are responsible for the preparation and implementation of development projects they have no authority at all to approve such plans and projects although the minister or the state minister in-charge of the ministry of planning has powers to approve development projects of all ministries up to the value of Tk 10 crores. The projects costing more than 10 crores Taka has to go to ECNEC and the Prime Minister for approval.

Taka may go to the ECNEC for approval. Approval of TAPP (Technical Assistance Project Form): Presently the Minister of the line Ministry can approve technical assistance projects up to the value of Tk. 1 crore. Project above Tk 1 crore is approved by the Planning Minister. Why should the Minister be so powerless in approving TAPP, whereas the Planning Minister can approve TAPP for any amount. Suggestions: The TAPP should be examined by DSPEC headed by the Secretary of the line Ministry with the member concerned of the Planning Commission/Chief of Division and the Secretaries or their representatives of the concerned Ministries (i.e. ERD, Finance, IMED, Establishment etc) as members. On the recommendation of this committee, the Secretary of the line Ministry should be authorised to approve TAPP up to the value of Taka 5 crores and the Minister concerned should be authorised to approve TAPP's up to the value of Tk 20 crore. The project should however be in conformity with the list of projects endorsed by the ERD, the Planning Commission (PC) and the Planning Minister for external collaboration.

Minister of the line Ministry has the authority to approve appointment of consultants costing up to Taka 2 crore only. All cases above the cost of Taka 2 crore is approved by the Cabinet Committee for purchase. As the line Ministers are already authorised to approve purchases up to the value of Taka 25 crore. Why his powers should be limited to Taka 2 crore only in respect of appointment of consultants. Suggestion: In this case the power of the Head of the Department may be raised to Tk. 3 crore, the Secretary of the Ministry may be given powers up to Taka 5 crore and the Minister may be authorised to approve all cases above the value of Tk 5 crores. All the cases must however be processed through the Departmental Special Project Evaluation Committee (DSPEC), headed by the Secretary of the line Ministry with member concerned of the Planning Commission/Chief of the Division and the concerned Secretaries (ERD, IMED, Finance etc), or their representatives as members. The donor's representative should also be invited to present their views in the committee to avoid protracted correspondences on differences of opinion.

privileges of the ministers in many cases. Suggestions: No cases of operational and personnel matters in which the departments, subordinate office and bodies are empowered to take decision should be called by or submitted to the ministry except in case of an appeal against the decision of the Head of the department or organisation. Violation of such rule should be treated as an offense. Like wise the heads of departments and autonomous bodies should also decentralise their powers to the lower-level officers within their organisation and to their subordinate/field offices. Decentralisation is essential for Good Governance: Deconcentration of powers and delegation of authority is an essential necessity for good governance and speedy conduct of business of the Government. It enables the government to take decisions at appropriate levels without unnecessary delay and a prolonged process. Decentralisation of power and delegation of authority is necessary to enable the people to have access to the decision making authority both in terms of physical distance as well as distance in terms of bureaucratic hierarchy and make the government more responsive to the actual needs of the people.

Tom and Jerry



Tom and Jerry



Tom and Jerry



James Bond



James Bond



Rainmaker

DRUUGHTS in west Africa over the past 20 years may have been caused by the destruction of rainforests in countries such as Nigeria, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire and further deforestation in the region 'could cause complete collapse of the west African monsoon', says Xinyu Zheng of the Centre for Global Change Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, US.

Little Hearts

The New Scientist reports that Indians are more prone to heart diseases based on a study done in UK, which says that people from the sub-continent have narrow arteries. A cardiology team from Birmingham Hospital examined the angiograms of 27 cardiology patients from the sub-continent and 59 white patients. The average coronary artery diameter for Indians was 24.32 millimetres as compared to 26.15 mm for the Whites.

TV Teaches Best

Children absorb more information in terms of retention by watching TV than reading, says an article in the New Scientist. In a study done by Juliette Walma van der Molen and Tom van der Voort of Leiden University in Netherlands, five news stores according to interest were given to 152 children aged 10-12 yrs.

Getting Efficient

A new programme has been developed by IBM that can help people browse the Web more efficiently. It's called WebWise and is another Web browser, such as Netscape and is free. The software goes by the name Web Browser Intelligence or WBI - pronounced Webby. Webby tests the speed of links between sites and works out the fastest way to get to a page. It even remembers all the pages you have visited and allows you to search through them for pages you didn't want to read at first but now want to read. It can be downloaded from http://www.almaden.ibm.com/cs/user/wbi/

HERE and THERE

Zonta Club IV By Staff Correspondent Zonta Club IV of Dhaka in a general meeting observed 'Rokeya Day,' the birth and death anniversary of Begum Rokeya Shakawat, yesterday in city. Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria said in the city yesterday that newspapers always play a pivotal role in flourishing democracy and develop economy, reports BSS. He said the mass media play a vital role to root out corruption from society through creating public opinion and atmosphere for development. The minister was speaking as the chief guest at the launching ceremony of the Daily Probat at a hotel. Eminent litterateur Showkat Osman inaugurated the ceremony. Post, Telecommunications, Housing and Works Minister, Mohammad Nasim, State Minister for Information Prof Abu Sayeed, Awami League president member Amir Hossain Amu, Workers Party General Secretary Rashed Khan Menon, Awami League central leader and chairman of the editorial board of the daily Mojaffar Hossain Paltu and chief editor M R Akhter Makul also spoke on the occasion. Kibria said many important events of the nation were taken place within a short time including introduction of proper system of voting, ouster of autocracy and attainment of independence. 'We must uphold our achievements with the spirit of independence' he said. He said the nation has to take some more important decisions in political and economic sector. The minister said that Bangladesh has emerged as a rapid developing country in South Asia.

President's Parade held

The President's Parade marking the commissioning of the gentlemen cadets of 37th BMA long course, other special courses was held at Bangladesh Military Academy (BMA) at Bhatary in Chittagong, reports UNB. Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Muhammad Mahubur Rahman reviewed the smartly turned-out parade and took salute at the impressive march by the passed-out gentlemen cadets, including a group of 21 Bosnian and 75 Sri Lankan cadets. President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed who was scheduled to review the ceremonial parade as chief guest could not fly from Dhaka for inclement weather. Battalion senior Under Officer Dewan Mohammad Monjur Hossain was adjudged the best all-round cadet and was awarded the coveted Sword of Honour. Sergeant Mohammad Arefur Rahman received the Chief of Army Staff gold medal for the best performance in the military subjects while Sergeant Mohammad Mohiuddin was given the Osmani gold medal for the best academic feat. Meanwhile, the Jahangir Company retained the BMA colour for the winter term. Speaker visits Shawkat Ali at CMH Speaker Humayun Rashed Chowdhury yesterday went to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) to see Col (ret'd) Shawkat Ali, the ailing member of parliament, reports BSS. The speaker enquired about the condition of Ali and prayed for his early recovery. Later, Chowdhury also visited police sub-inspector of Brahmanbaria sadar Kazi Rafiqul who was seriously injured in a terrorist attack and undergoing treatment in the CMH.

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Gold, medicine worth Tk 19 lakh seized at ZIA

Customs personnel at Zia International Airport (ZIA) recovered gold ornaments and banned medicine worth about Tk 18.75 lakh in the last few days. Airport sources said Customs officials searched the bodies of two passengers of a flight from Singapore on Monday night. They recovered gold chains worth about Tk 5.35 lakh hidden inside the shoes of one passenger. Gold chains and gold bars worth about Tk 6.76 lakh were recovered from another passenger of the same flight. These were hidden under his belt covered with scotch tape. Besides, gold ornaments and seven hard disks of computer valued at about Tk 2.90 lakh were recovered from a passenger of a Thai Airlines flight Tuesday afternoon.

Bangladesh wins tafseer contest in Iran

A Bangladeshi has secured the first position in the International Tafseer competition held in Iran, reports UNB. Afir Uddin Maruf of Kishoreganj bagged the gold medal in the competition, defeating more than a thousand competitors who took part from 33 countries. Maruf was awarded with a 50-tola gold cascade and three lakh Iranian rial for securing the first position, said an Islamic Foundation press release yesterday. Mohammad Nurul Alam of Lohaganj thana in Chittagong secured the third position in Hezful Quran and Mohammad Azharul Islam of Bangladesh Air Force was placed sixth in Kirat competition. Iranian President Mohammad Khatami inaugurated the competition on November 28, while Iranian spiritual leader Ayatullah Ali Khamenei distributed prizes among the winners.

Work on gas line between Narsingdi, Siddhirganj begins

Work on the 41-kilometre-long Narsingdi-Siddhirganj gas transmission line began yesterday, reports UNB. Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Lt Gen (Rtd) M Noor Uddin Khan formally inaugurated the work at the Narsingdi gas valve station of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company in the morning. The 20-inch pipeline is being laid under the Third Natural Gas Development project. The entire project aimed at modernising the Titas Gas system, will cost Tk 308.57 crore, including a foreign exchange component of Tk 152.75 crore. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF) of Japan are the co-financiers of the project. Under the project, 26 kilometres of 20-inch gas transmission line from Monohardi-Narsingdi have already been constructed and became operative from June 14 this year. The new Narsingdi-Siddhirganj gas transmission line will have a capacity to transmit 250 million cubic feet of gas per day. This will help build up an appropriate gas transmission network for supplying gas to power plants and mills and factories in the greater Dhaka region. Under the project, 423 kilometres of new gas distribution line will also be installed and some 1.28 lakh connections will be given to consumers. About 35 per cent work on the project has already been completed and the rest is expected to be completed by June 1999, said an official handout. Creating awareness about HR stressed Speakers at a seminar in the city yesterday underscored the need for creating awareness among the people about their human rights in society, reports UNB. 'It may not be possible to lead the human rights movement towards success if the people cannot be made aware of their rights', State Minister for Land, Air and Water Transport Md Mosharraf told the seminar at the Caritas auditorium. Bangladesh Human Rights Commission (BHRC) organised the seminar on the occasion of the 49th International Human Rights Day yesterday. Human rights activist Father W Timm presented the keynote paper at the seminar chaired by BHRC chairman Kazi Abdur Rezzak.

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Maldives minister meets Abul Hasan, Mozammel

Women and Social Welfare Minister of Maldives Rashidha Yousuf called on State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury at the latter's office yesterday, reports UNB. The Maldives minister apprised the state minister of the socio-economic condition, education system and tourism sector of her country and expressed keen interest about the activities of Gramen Bank. The state minister enquired about the Bangladesh nationals working in Maldives and requested her to help arrange for more job opportunities for Bangladeshis there. Another report adds: The visiting Women and Social Welfare Minister of Maldives, Raashida Yousuf, called on State Minister for Social Welfare and Women and Children Affairs Dr Mozammel Hossain at his office yesterday.

NSU admission test results

Results of the North South University (NSU) admission test held on Nov 28, have been announced. As many as 943 students appeared in the test for admission into undergraduate programmes starting from Spring 1998. Only 187 students came out successful. 4 students with adequate TOEFL and SAT scores were accepted for admission, says a press release. Test pass numbers are as follows: 4 6 12 17 25 32 33 46 50 54 77 87 91 96 97 98 102 104 109 110 112 113 118 124 127 137 144 155 169 176 198 205 221 222 224 226 228 230 231 236 237 241 244 252 253 254 255 268 272 287 288 298 300 305 306 307 308 312 313 314 316 331 332 333 334 336 352 354 356 361 362 372 378 379 380 381 384 385 404 406 421 427 429 430 431 432 433 434 440 444 445 458 459 474 501 504 506 509 510 527 538 539 540 542 552 559 571 574 575 578 585 594 597 599 619 622 634 638 641 656 645 646 651 660 664 668 674 676 683 684 686 689 690 692 700 701 714 715 728 732 742 752 763 767 776 788 792 797 800 801 804 818 819 822 826 829 834 836 838 840 842 843 847 849 854 857 859 860 864 869 881 883 884 889 893 899 905 906 912 914 923 932 934 935 936 939 941 1682

Metropolitan

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