# Second Meeting of SAARC Cabinet Secretaries
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**Bangladesh Position Paper on Best Practices in the Areas of:**
      **a. Administrative Reforms and Governance;**
      **b. Capacity Building;**
      **c. Improvement in Service Delivery; and**
      **d. Performance Evaluation and Management.**

The emergence of Bangladesh as an independent State against the legacy of colonial repression and socio-economic injustice has driven the policy framework of the new nation to a statehood which is people-centric and wherein the affairs of the government are responsive to the needs and demands of the citizens. The administrative structure of the government of the independent country needed to embrace comprehensive reforms to cope with the aspirations of the people commensurate with the vision of freedom from all types of exploitation and unjust treatments, a vision that was built upon the popular participation of citizens in the people's war that earned the independence of Bangladesh. Beyond this historical imperative, the socio-economic realities of the new nation necessitated a state policy of development keeping poverty reduction at the heart of all national efforts. Against this backdrop, drastic reforms were required to overhaul the administrative structure for ensuring good governance at all levels. Accordingly, the country has undergone several stages of administrative reforms in different spheres starting from policy formulation to devising strategic options for the implementations of projects and programmes drawn upon a changed framework.

1.2    Having a unitary form of government at the centre, administrative reforms and subsequent governance framework initiated in Bangladesh could be transmitted to implementation level through different ministries/divisions and agencies with differentiated but appropriate modalities based on the specific functions and responsibilities of implementing agencies. The administrative reforms in different ministries/divisions and agencies have significantly added to the capacity of public sector service providers in executing their duties and responsibilities and also featured new and innovative systems of service delivery. The impact of the reforms brought to the structures and functions could be visibly appreciated through a changed scenario of government activities in different areas of national development.

**Common Features of Administrative Reforms of Bangladesh**

2.1.    Some common features of administrative reforms may be summed up as promulgation of new laws, rules and regulations, creation of new positions and organisations

to ensure timely and focused service delivery, formulation of policies of human resource management, introduction of grievances management system and development of citizen's charters. Some other features of reforms include application and deployment of ICT, automation and digitisation of the business process, online service delivery provision, instant acknowledgement of citizens' queries and applications, decentralisation of service points, initiation of virtual meetings through video conferences, and ensuring hassle-free access of citizens to information on government activities by promoting transparency and enhancing openness.

2.2     Given the nature and volume of works done, some ministries/divisions have created thematic groups for sharpening their knowledge and skills and ensuring timely execution of their programmes and projects. Some other ministries/divisions have introduced the process of knowledge sharing as part of their administrative reforms as well as capacity building where officials of the ministries/divisions disseminate the knowledge and experience gathered through participation in meetings, seminars, symposium as well as trainings at home and abroad. In addition, some of the ministries and divisions have engaged multi-party audit teams to resolve audit issues having significant financial Implications. All ministries and divisions as well as agencies have launched their websites as part of their administrative reform programme which enhance access and transparency. Electronic means of communications have been put in place by all the ministries/divisions not only for transforming internal business process, but also for easing interaction with clients and external stakeholders.

2.3            Based on the nature of the services provided, some ministries/divisions as well as agencies have introduced one-stop service centres. Some important ministries/divisions have set up these centres at the district level, where citizens can submit their applications for any type of service demanded from such offices. In order for addressing special needs of specific groups of citizens, new and specialised services have been introduced in some ministries. The one-stop crisis centre, National Forensic DNA Profiling Laboratory, National Trauma Counselling Centre and National Helpline Centre for Violence against Women and Children have been introduced by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs as part of administrative reforms and capacity building for offering better service delivery. Additionally, some ministries have introduced online service delivery and activity monitoring systems to ensure accountability and improve governance at the field levels.

2.4     E-procurement and e-tendering systems are two important features of administrative reform. Many of the ministries/divisions and agencies have resorted to these systems to

enhance competition and ensure transparency, accountability and openness in public procurement as well as overall development activities.

**Reforms Brought to Specific Services**

3.1 Land management is one of the essential functions of the government. Many administrative reforms have been brought about to improve this traditional business of the government. The significant ones are designed under a digital land management system which would strengthen the governance and management of land, enhance access to land property rights of all citizens, complete the digitisation of land survey, record preparation and preservation, improve the land administration and ensure a better service delivery.

3.2 Reforms initiated in the area of disaster management include a people-centric, interactive, voice-response-based early warning system which ensures sufficient time for preparation in the wake of disasters. This system has deployed mobile communications to disseminate information on disasters and hazards as well as daily weather forecast, rainfall, flood and landslides.

3.3 In the health sector, administrative reforms have created new services and opportunities for citizens and service providers. One of the important features of such reforms is the provision of community clinics that have expanded health services to the grass-root level. Citizen's access to health services round the clock has been enhanced by introducing mobile-phone-based health services at sub-district level hospitals. An SMS-based complaints and suggestions box has been introduced to ensure accountability of government hospitals. For providing specialised health services to rural people, telemedicine has been introduced in a number of hospitals.

3.4 Significant reforms have been brought about in education sector with increasing uses of ICT. Emphasis is given on innovative ideas and new initiatives for improving the delivery of services in this sector. Now all activities at Education Boards are completed through customized ICT applications; these include registration of students, submitting filled-in examination forms, obtaining results of public examinations and applying for re-examination or examination of scripts. In addition, public universities have introduced online admission systems. 3.5 A unique feature of reforms and innovative service delivery on the part of the Ministry of Education has been the introduction of e-book. A dynamic website has been designed where PDF versions of all textbooks at primary and secondary levels are being uploaded since the beginning of 2010. With the assistance of A2i programme of the Prime Minister's Office, all the pre-primary, primary and secondary textbooks uploaded to the website have been converted into attractive and easily usable e-books. Additionally, all types

of teaching and learning materials are available on the website of National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB).

3.5    Distributing textbooks free of cost has been a flagship innovation and service delivery in the education sector. To prevent the rate of drop-outs and facilitate the children to complete education, textbooks are distributed by the Government free of cost to students of primary and secondary levels on the very first day of the academic year falling on 1st January. This is a very challenging and epoch-making step taken in the history of education in Bangladesh.

3.6    Introduction of School Feeding Program and Informal Stipends mark the Government's innovative efforts to ensure inclusive education system by preventing apprehended drop-outs. To create opportunities for the under-privileged children and keep them in classrooms, the Government has made efforts to provide them with mid-day meals through various projects. Informal stipends have been introduced to increase enrolment and prevent drop-out. These programmes have also social impacts toward preventing child-marriage, enhancing women empowerment and increasing participation of women in socio-economic activities. Poor and meritorious students from class VI to class XII are given stipends through five projects under the Ministry of Education. Reforms have been also initiated in the area of education administration which are aimed at capacity building and quality enhancement of the teachers and simplifying service-related issues including welfare and retirement benefits.

3.7    The primary education sector has seen major overhaul with innovative programmes of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education that have built capacity of the service providers and enabled them to deliver better services. Among the many areas of reforms, the important ones include printing and distribution of textbooks, increase in the number of teacher recruitments, introduction of primary school completion certificate examination at national level, introduction of diploma of primary education courses for primary school teachers and institutionalisation and extension of extra-curricular activities up to national level. To ensure better service delivery, specific initiatives have been taken under newly introduced School Level Improvement Plan (SLIP) and *Upazila* (sub-district) Primary Education Development Plan (UPEP). SLIP and UPEP have been designed to address a decentralised and bottom-up planning process with the participation of the stakeholders to bring all children to schools and ensure quality education for them with the involvement of the local community. This is a unique planning and management system introduced in recent years which is expected to address the issues of good governance as well.

**Reform Initiatives in Skills Development**

4.1    In Bangladesh, a comprehensive National Skills Development Policy has been formulated and adopted which will guide skills development strategies and facilitate improved coordination of all elements of skills training and the parties involved. The Skills Development Policy is expected to contribute to the implementation of other national economic, employment, and social policies so that Bangladesh can attain the status of a middle-income country by 2021.

4.2    Skills development depends on many different actors, including the private sector, non-for profit actors, NGOs and civil society and a large number of government ministries delivering skills-based education and training. , The adoption of Skills Development Policy has been a major initiative to improve the coordination and delivery of skills for enhancing national capacity and productivity as a whole. This policy also extends and builds on other major government policies such as the Education Policy, the Non-Formal Education Policy, the Youth Policy, the National Training Policy and the National Skills Development Council Action Plan. One of the important agenda of the Skills Development Policy is its specific focus on the issues of skills development for overseas employment.

4.3    To oversee and coordinate the activities envisaged under various objectives and agenda of the Skills Development Policy, a National Skills Development Council (NSDC) has been established which is headed by the Hon'ble Prime Minister as its Chair. The NSDC is the apex approval authority on skills in the country and the supreme body for national skills development agenda. To implement the initiatives and attain the objectives of Skills Development Policy, an NSDC Secretariat has been formed under the Technical & Vocational Education and Training Reform Project.

**Reforms in Public Finance Management**

5.    Far-reaching reforms have been initiated in financial sectors with adherence to international standards of public finance management and budgeting process aided by an increased use of ICT. As part of the reform programmes, Medium Term Budget Framework (MTBF) has been put in practice for all ministries/divisions. For developing the capacity of the officials, a specialised institute called Financial Management Academy has been established by the Finance Division. On a regular basis, the Finance Division undertakes research works in the areas of fiscal management, poverty and inequality, inflation, wage and employment, GDP, debt management, and microeconomic situation. Officers and activities of the Finance Division are networked via LAN and WAN which have promoted

functional networking of the Finance Division with other ministries and divisions and specialised agencies.

**Deployment of ICT in Public Service Delivery**

6.1     With a target of establishing a 'Digital Bangladesh' as envisaged in 'Vision 2021', all sectors of the Government have undertaken deep-rooted reforms initiatives for developing and enhancing the capacity of the ministries/divisions and agencies so that they can deliver better and hassle-free services. There is a long list of such reforms and innovations which have strengthened the capacity of the ministries/divisions concerned and produced innovative service delivery matrix.

6.2     Some targeted programmes and projects under the Access to Information (A2I) programme undertaken by the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Division have cross-cutting impacts on the reform initiatives of the Government. These have enhanced the capacity of Government agencies towards creating new modalities of service delivery with hassle-free access of citizens to service provisions in different areas of day-to-day life and livelihood. The Union Information and Services Centres established at the lowest tier of local government have created new opportunities for the rural people to benefit from ICT-enabled services.

**Promoting Integrity in National Life**

7.1     Improving governance has remained at the centre of the Government's overall reform policy and programme. With strong adherence to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), Bangladesh has formulated and adopted a National Integrity Strategy (NIS) as a comprehensive mechanism for creating an enabling environment to uphold integrity in national life and manage public resources in a transparent and accountable manner through coordinated initiatives to prevent corruption and promote integrity in all spheres of national life. NIS aims at preventing corruption and promoting integrity by analysing the context, identifying the challenges, setting goals and making recommendations for short, medium and long-term measures to achieve them. The NIS Action Plans chart time-bound performance indicators and specify the responsibility of implementing agencies against possible interventions needed to achieve the goals and implement the recommendations.

7.2     NIS covers all State institutions and organisations operating under the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary and also major Constitutional and statutory entities functioning independently. The non-State institutions covered by the NIS include political parties,

businesses, the civil society, NGOs, educational institutions and the media. The Executive organ of the State particularly the public administration is expected to play a pioneering role in implementing the NIS. Accordingly, National Integrity Advisory Council has been constituted with the Prime Minister in the chair, whereas the Executive Committee of this Council is headed by the Minister for Finance. Ethics Committees have been formed in all Ministries/Divisions and concerned institutions with the purpose of promoting integrity and good governance. Initiatives have been undertaken for formulating individual action-plans in those organisations.

**Innovation in Governance: Putting Citizens First**

8.1     To address the increasing expectations of the citizens for quality and timely services from public servants, the Government has established a Governance Innovation Unit (GIU) in the Prime Minister's Office and tasked it with re-inventing the public sector to encourage the concept and practice of *Putting Citizens First* by improving citizens' satisfaction with services. The main focus of the GIU initiative has been on innovation in governance to encourage new forms of citizen engagement, transparency and accountability. The GIU has created a better understanding among the public servants about the progressive transformations in service delivery through innovation. One of the major impacts of such innovation has been identified as preventing delays of red tape by encouraging innovative ideas and good practices beyond the traditional business process with appropriate application of ICT.

8.2     As part of its efforts for building capacity of the Government functionaries towards bringing new ideas and changes in the functions of the Government, the GIU has trained about 1,500 officials from different government agencies on innovation concept, stakeholder analysis, service process simplification and case study analysis. There have already been innovations in the works of some ministries and the GIU has identified and recognised these as Pathfinders. One of the important areas of the activities of the GIU is to work with such pioneer ministries in order to disseminate and replicate such innovation and also generate new ideas among all ministries/divisions.  For this purpose, innovation teams have been set up in every ministry/division and the activities of these teams are monitored, supervised and coordinated by the Cabinet Division.

**Personnel Management and Performance Evaluation System**

9.1     In the field of personnel management, the Ministry of Public Administration has undertaken several reform programmes and initiatives that include formulation of the Public Service Act, introduction of Civil Service Award, and formulation of and updating the Human

Resources Management Policies and Reform Road Map. For capacity building of the civil officers, the ministry has formulated Public Administration Training Policy under which different levels of officers are trained in the various fields of national development with special focus on citizen-centric public policy, governance and service delivery. Formulation and introduction of citizen's charter has been an innovative effort initiated by the ministry which is being implemented across government agencies.

9.2     A significant initiative of the Ministry of Public Administration in the area of reform and improved service delivery has been the Managing at the Top (MATT) programme. The Performance Improvement Projects (PIPs) undertaken in this programme have generated new ideas and innovation in the sphere of civil service at the policy level. Many innovations conceived through the PIPs have been put to real life implementation level improving efficiency and quality of public services rendered through new delivery structures.

9.3     For the reform agenda to be implemented with full capacity of service providers and to reach to the ultimate destination of citizen's satisfaction, setting standards and monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the officials are intrinsically important. The performance evaluation and management system has remained a fundamental and central feature of the Bangladesh Civil Service. Till now, the officials' performances are evaluated through an annual confidential report (ACR) which is based on a number of parameters ranging from personal traits to the volume and quality of work performed; this leaves a scope for subjective evaluation often influenced by individual value-judgment. An objective structure of performance evaluation system has been formulated and styled as Performance-based Evaluation System. This, when put in practice is expected to improve the performance evaluation system towards more objective measurement of officials' performance and quality.

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