

Implementation of Administrative Reforms Measures in the Government of Assam

REPORT OF THE ADVISOR

PART- I

Immediately after assuming charge of the Advisor on 23-02-2015, I requested all the Administrative Departments of Assam Secretariat vide my letter dated 26-02-2015 to let me have write-up on initiation of Administrative Reforms measure during the period 2005-2015 highlighting measures taken for prompt disposal of administrative matters of the department as well as prompt disposal of public grievances etc. I asked for these information to educate myself about good governance practices prevalent in the Government. Till end of April, 2015 only 2 or 3 Departments responded to my request and sent the write-up. I then decided to interact personally with the Departments and requested the Addl. Chief Secretary / Principal Secretary / Commissioner & Secretary heading different Departments to depute the Nodal Officer (handling reforms measures in the department) to meet me so that I could have some ideas about functioning of the Departments. All the Departments deputed their officers who were Joint Secretaries / Deputy Secretaries. In cases of PWD Roads, Mines & Minerals and Agriculture, the Commissioner & Secretary / Secretaries came for discussion.

Some of the Nodal Officers who came to meet me handed over the write-up I requested for. Very few Nodal Officers could properly explain about the functioning of their Departments highlighting good governance measures including e-governance, but most of the Nodal Officers were ignorant about good governance practices. Some of them even could not tell properly about functioning of their Departments and some of them did not know about existence of the Manual of Office Procedure Secretariat which should be the handbook for every officer. This is definitely not a desirable state of affairs and this needs immediate remedial measures.

Assam Administrative Reforms Commission (2005) made specific recommendations in this regard in chapter II of the final report. AARC suggested that extracts of the relevant provisions of the Manual of Office Procedure Secretariat should be printed in a handy booklet form and should be made available to secretariat officers / staff for easy reference. The high powered Committee constituted by the State Government for implementation of AARC's recommendation also decided to implement this recommendation on priority basis, but it appears nothing has been done in this regard in last 11 years. **As this booklet has not been produced and distributed, I decided to compile this booklet and made arrangement for printing and distribution through Secretariat Administration Department.**

Regarding training of officers posted to the Secretariat, AARC recommended for orientation training for such officers to acquaint them with relevant rules, procedure, manual etc. In fact the State Training Policy of Assam 2012 has emphasised the need of equipping all functionaries of the Government with adequate knowledge and skills, bringing about positive attitudinal changes and building their capacity to enhance performance at individual as well as organisational levels with a view to promote good governance. It

appears no such training has been organised covering all the officers. **In view of the above situation regarding training, as a short term measure I suggested to Administrative Reforms and Training as well as Secretariat Administration Departments to take urgent steps to organise induction training for officers posted to Secretariat including the officers who are working in the Secretariat** without such training. This training may be organised in the Secretariat itself with the assistance of Assam Administrative Staff College, Khanapara. The training could be arranged for 10 to 15 working days daily for one hour say 3.30 pm to 4.30 pm. I also spoke to the Director of Training to take early action in this regard. Commissioner & Secretary, Secretariat Administration Department is initiating steps to organise the training as advised by me. **For initiating good governance practice the aforesaid training is of immediate importance.**

While interacting with officials of different Departments, I personally feel that **the following two important departments need system study for restructuring with the help of information technology.** Both these departments are revenue yielding departments needing stream-lining. Moreover Forest and Environment department is a fairly big department having large number of employees and different important sectors to cover.

1. Mines and Minerals Department.

I have already requested Addl. Chief Secretary in charge of the department to consider my aforesaid suggestion.

2. Forest and Environment Department.

I have shared my concern about functioning of the department with the Secretary and requested him to take necessary actions on the points raised by me.

For the interest of good governance, urgent steps should be taken to examine my suggestions regarding functional study of both the aforesaid departments.

Most of the departments wanted to have IT facilities for transacting official work. At present though almost all the Departments are having Computers, but the Computers are used only for typing. When I interacted with Commissioner & Secretary IT Department as well as with M.D AMTRON. I was given to understand that LAN connections are completed in the Secretariat connecting all the Departments, but the system could not be made operative due to inadequate supply of electrical energy for which additional transformer need to be installed. It is not understood how buildings constructed in 2000 AD, did not foresee the requirement of power for IT which is a very important input for functioning of the Government.

This problem needs immediate solution

While interacting with the nodal officers of some important Directorates, it could be learnt that though some of the Directorates are doing good work in respect of use of IT in transacting official work, but they are facing difficulties for lack of such facilities in the administrative departments in the Secretariat. **This gap needs to be bridged at the earliest.**

The Technical Departments of the State Government viz. PWD, Irrigation, Water Resources, Public Health Engineering etc. have no arrangement for Induction Training for fresh engineers recruited to the Departments. As per recommendation of AARC, this Induction Training is most important for good governance. I have already advised PWD (Roads), PWD (Building & National Highways), Irrigation and Water Resources Departments to introduce the Induction Training for fresh engineers. Engineers of aforesaid Departments are posted in the Secretariat as Under Secretary / Deputy Secretary. Such officers are ignorant about Secretariat procedures regarding disposal of official work. Therefore it is essential that Engineers of appropriate level of these Departments should be given a brief orientation training to acquaint them with office procedures and such matters.

Technical Departments should immediately introduce both the aforesaid trainings with the help of Assam Administrative Staff College.

After interacting with the officials of Secretariat Departments, I started personally interacting with the representatives of the Heads of the Departments. Some of the Directorates are doing fairly good work in respect of use of Information Technology for different office work including delivery of services to public. While interacting with them I highlighted the following matters.

1. Need of Website for each Department, incorporating Mandate, Organisational chart etc.
2. Introduction of Citizen Charter.
3. Organisation chart.
4. Job Chart.
5. System for redress of public grievances.
6. System for delivery of services to the public.
7. System for meeting Audit objections etc.

Most of the officers coming from different Directorates were enthusiastic about initiating Good Governance Practices in their Directorates and started working accordingly.

While discussing with the officials regarding initiation of good governance practices in the Directorate, I could know that many important posts in the Directorates are lying vacant for fairly long period creating dislocation of administrative work which in turn has affected the interest of public service the Directorates are mandated to offer. Concerned departments may perhaps initiate urgent steps to fill up such important senior vacancies without further delay.

I have noticed that many recommendations of Commissions / Committees / Experts were accepted by the State Government, but unfortunately most of such recommendations were not implemented for want of accountability of the concerned Department. I have already drawn the attention of the Chief Secretary to this lacuna and requested him to set up some accountable arrangement with monitoring system for timely implementation of such recommendations.

For Good Governance Practices, the Departmental Secretaries who are heading administrative departments in the Secretariat should be made accountable and this must form an important ingredient in his/her KPA and his/her performance should be assessed accordingly.

On the basis of my personal interaction with officials of Secretariat Departments, Heads of Departments as well as write-up collected from different Departments, I have prepared a STATUS REPORT as on 31st July 2015, which is placed below.

I have also collected information from Deputy Commissioners (though out of 27, only 10 responded). These information are also incorporated in this report.

I would also like to mention that the Assam Administrative Reforms Commission recommended strengthening of the office of the Divisional Commissioner for bringing governance nearer to people. State Government accepted the recommendation and in fact Hon'ble Chief Minister announced publicly that through this process, the Divisional Commissioner's offices would be empowered to function as Mini Secretariat at the Divisional level and people would not be required to come to Dispur for all sorts of their government related work. Though the High Powered Committee set up in 2004 initiated action in this regard, but unfortunately the matter was not followed up. Recently the State Government have set up a Task Force to work out modalities for empowerment of Divisional Commissioners.

It can be said with confidence that my efforts as narrated above have created a new sense of urgency among the officials and staff for promotion of good governance practices in the Government. If this tempo could be maintained, it would go a long way to develop an efficient administrative system for the benefit of the people of the State.

In the sphere of e-Governance, Government of India have introduced several programmes covering different aspects of public administration. These programmes aim at enhancing the efficiency of administration to render quality services to the public. State Government should take advantage of such programmes so that people of Assam could be given quality services in different sectors.

I have mentioned earlier that to sustain this tempo, the Departmental Secretaries must take personal interest in this matter and he/she should be made accountable for any lapse in this regard. There should be periodic review regarding implementation of good governance practices in the departments by the Addl. Chief Secretary in charge of the group of Departments. Half yearly review meetings may be arranged by the Chief Secretary, and Hon'ble Chief Minister may be invited to preside such half yearly review meeting.

Before I conclude, I would like to highlight the important role the Administrative Reforms and Training Department of the State Government need to play for initiation as well as sustenance of Administrative Reforms measures in the Government. Assam Administrative Reforms Commission (2005) submitted the first part of its report to Hon'ble Chief Minister in the beginning of 2004. Cabinet accepted the recommendations contained in the Report

and Chief Minister set up a High Powered Committee under the Chairmanship of the Chief Secretary for implementation of the recommendations. From the records, it appears that the High Powered Committee had two sittings on 01.03.2004 and 06.07.2004 respectively and took several decisions on quick movement of file, Desk Officer system, streamlining of workflow, publication of booklet on Office Procedures, Training, Effective Redressal of Public Grievances, etc. But unfortunately most of the major decisions taken by the High Powered Committee were neither implemented nor any follow up actions were taken. Similarly decisions taken by the Secretaries Committee regarding Good Governance practices were not followed up. In fact the Administrative Reforms and Training Department which should be the responsible department for this subject, did not do anything in this regard. **Without a vibrant and reforms oriented Administrative Reforms and Training Department, nothing could be done to initiate Good Governance Practices in the Government.** This department must act as catalyst and must constantly interact with defaulting departments, to maintain the tempo in this regard. Moreover new concepts of public administration are emerging every day along with progress of Information Technology, Administrative Reforms and Training Department must keep track of such development and take immediate step to initiate new ideas in the Government.

Government of India have started transactions of all financial matters as well as important administrative decisions "online". Unless the State Government is geared up to take advantage of such 'online' transactions, the State would stand to suffer. In view of this situation, it is imperative to have some foolproof system to follow up such development so that our State could compete with the other states of India.

August 26, 2015



(Jatin Hazarika)

Enclosed: Points to Ponder

Points to Ponder

While interacting with officials representing different secretariat departments it has come to my notice that majority of them are willing to adapt to the demands of time and look for necessary guidance and support as they realized the emergence of a new order or a new service delivery techniques controlling the administrative machinery and thereby bringing in transparency, speedy disposal of things and efficient delivery of services. Their willingness to embrace the new system emanates from the fact that their taking pride in being a part of the administration and a sense of belonging in becoming a catalyst of change in transforming the society into a new socio-economic order.

In this endeavour the following few observations might help the departments to put the things in place and make way for a plausible road map ahead.

1. Practicing the secretariat office manual 1981 in letter & spirit and following the guidelines as laid down in AARC Report 2005 by the officers and staff in the secretariat departments would certainly cover up the deficiencies and pave way for a new dawn in state's administrative scenario before long. A handbook incorporating the important provisions of the Secretariat Office Manual 1981 and a booklet containing highlights of Administrative Reforms Commission 2005 Report have been printed and being circulated among the officers and staff of the secretariat to acquaint them with the basics and standardized norms to follow in day to day office works.
2. To make use of the technology available to optimize a result oriented administrative machinery. e.g. the role of NeGP as enunciated by the Government of India through Department of Information & Communication Technology and availing the benefits accruing in time could be the a platform to shift to a higher plane. For necessary guidance IT Department of the state government should be approached. NeGP's new avatar styled and named 'e-Kranti' could be the key to a new beginning for the aspiring departments in the days to come. Necessary guidance, help and support could be availed from State e-Mission Team (SeMT) under It Department.
3. Dedicated and professional approach on part of all officials of the state government departments while coordinating with the Web Development Cell under IT Department in fulfilling its mission of developing a standardized platform (assam.gov.in) for web portals of all state government departments.
4. Departments like Agriculture and Panchayat & Rural Development having the reach to the large populace of poor living in the state, should avail the various online services offered through CSCs and other similar stake holders under Digital India initiatives of Government of India.
5. All relevant departments involved in the process of planning, and for implementation and execution of development activities need to bring in the expertise that make possible the advantages of imagery of projects and schemes using Geographic Information System(GIS) and Remote Sensing (RS) technology. This has become a necessity to ensure balanced and equitable distribution of socio economic overhead other assets created in the development process. Use of GIS and RS in planning and monitoring would also remove the chances of duplication and other vices inherent in traditional systems. As a modest beginning setting up of the Space Based Information Kiosks (SBIKs) at the department offices and related agencies could serve as a harbinger

of the much needed impetus in introducing the space based technology for development planning. In this regard North East Space Application Centre (NESAC) at Borapani in Meghalaya could be contacted for details. Departments like Planning & Development, Science & Technology and Soil Conservation have already completed necessary formalities to set up the Kiosks at department headquarters. This programme can be implemented by the state government without any financial implications.

All the above measures are generic and applicable to all departments, which are expected to help in defining a course of action to phase out the old and to usher in an atmosphere of hope and assertiveness.

In the subsequent pages while placing the reports received from the departments, I take the opportunity to record my department specific views wherever felt necessary.

In our pursuit to find a yardstick to position the departments based on their performances, a few indicators of good governance have been identified. A table showing these indicators of good governance is placed at the end of this report for a quick self appraisal of the stakeholders and their standings as on date.