

INTRODUCTION

In India, the search for good governance has been continuing since the ancient days even prior to Ramayana and Mahabharata. Arthasastra, magnum opus of the c. 4th century B.C. political scientist and statesman Kautilya is a landmark in this direction. According to Kautilya, to ensure good governance there must be a properly guided public administration, where the ruler should surrender his likes and dislikes in the interest of his subjects, and the personnel running the Government should be responsive and responsible. Kautilya further emphasized that for citizen friendly good governance there should be uniformity in the administrative practices as well as competent ministers and officials possessing qualities of leadership, accountability, intellect, energy, good moral conduct and physical fitness, capable of taking prompt decision without allowing things to drift.

At the time of independence, India inherited a very well knit administrative system, though the system was designed at the dictate of colonial regime. After independence, there had been a significant endeavour to bring about structural changes in administration to fulfill the aspiration of people and Committees and Commissions were set up by the Union Government to examine and advise the different aspects of public administration. In 1949, N. Gopalswami Ayyenger suggested improvement in the method of transaction of Government business, and Government of India created Organisational & Method Division in Central Government set up in pursuance of Ayyenger's recommendation "to keep continuous watch over the performance of the administrative system and to improve the standard. Then came A.D. Gorwala's Report (1951) pointing out that clean, efficient and impartial administration was the first condition of the success of democratic Government and therefore the administrative machinery needed reorganization to ensure greater speed, effectiveness and responsiveness. In 1953 and again in 1956, Pandit Nehru, the First Prime Minister of India commissioned the renowned American expert of Public Administration Paul H Appleby to advise Government of India for reforming Indian administrative system. Similarly, Asok Chandra Committee of 1954, T.T. Krishnamachary Committee of the same year as well as K. Santhanam Committee (1964) examined different aspects of public administration and made recommendations to the Union Government.

In 1966, a high powered Administrative Reforms Commission was set up under the Chairmanship of Morarji Bhai Desai, a stalwart of Indian politics to give consideration to ensuring the higher standard of effectiveness and integrity in public service, making public administration a fit instrument for carrying out the social & economic policies of the Government and achieving social and economic goals of development and also one which is responsive to the people.

Administrative Reforms Commission of 1966 during the tenure of 5 year (1966-70) submitted 20 Reports on different aspects of Public Administration and on the basis of the recommendations of the Commission there were many major changes in the Central Government including setting up of Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms. The Desk Officer system as well as performance budgeting was introduced in Central Government as recommended by the Commission.

In 1983, the Economic Administrative Reforms Commission under L.K. Jha indicated the need for accountability so that greater importance was given to performance than mere adherence to rules and procedure.

In recent years increased thrust has been given to administrative reform and the conference of Chief Secretaries held in November 1996, discussed at length regarding effective and responsible administration in the states. This conference was followed by a conference of Chief Ministers in May 1997 where it was recognized that governance has to extend beyond conventional bureaucracies and to involve actively citizens of all levels to empower and inform the public and the disadvantaged groups so as to ensure service delivery and programme extension through autonomous elected local bodies.

Government of India constituted a Group in December 2002, under the Chairmanship of Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Surinder Nath former Chairman UPSC to review and make recommendations with regard to present system of performance appraisal, promotions and lateral movement in respect of All India Services and other Group 'A' services. The recommendations of the Group are in two parts, the first relating to the system of performance appraisal and the second, to promotions and placement in the Central Government under the Central Staffing Scheme.

In 2004 the Government of India constituted another Committee to examine the whole gamut of Civil Service Reforms covering All India Services and

organized Group 'A' Central Services; under the Chairmanship of Shri P.C. Hota IAS (Retd.), former Chairman UPSC. The Committee submitted the Report highlighting the areas where reforms are necessary.

The **Synopsis of Surinder Nath Committee Report** as well as Main Recommendations of **P.C. Hota Committee Report** are appended to this Report.

While outlining the development strategy for the Tenth Five Year Plan, the Planning Commission stated that an important aspect of redefinition of strategy that is needed relates to the role of government, and this redefinition is necessary both at the Central and State Government level. It is generally recognized that government in the past tended to take on too many responsibilities, imposing severe strains on its limited financial and administrative capabilities and also stifling individual initiatives. This is not to say that government has no role to play or only a minimalist role in promoting development. On the contrary, government has a very important role indeed, but a different one from that envisaged in the past. There are many areas like social sectors, infrastructure development etc. where government role may have to be expanded and restructured.

Planning Commission has also emphasized the need of governance reforms for successful implementation of development programme, as the government require adequate fund, appropriate policy framework, formulation of suitable plan schemes and effective delivery machinery. To a large extent the task of the development administration would become easier if steps are taken to make available information as a matter of right to the citizen. Other aspect of the reforms must cover civil service reforms, reforms in fiscal sectors, introduction of e-governance as well as radical improvement of transparency, accountability, efficiency, fair play and honesty procedural reforms for public-government interface.

Planning Commission highlighted that Good Governance is perhaps the single most important factor in achieving the objectives of the Tenth Five Year Plan.

It has been realized all over the country that public service capacity to deliver services to citizens has declined considerably, and the causes of decline have been identified as –

- a. Resistance to reforms

- b. Inexperience in bureaucratic leadership management and facilitation of change
- c. Weak management decision-making
- d. Managers are not prepared to take decisions
- e. Civil service is input focused and therefore, not result oriented
- f. Public service managers including top bureaucrats heading the Government Departments are held not accountable for performance
- g. Management system is either inadequate or ineffective (in some areas 'nil')
- h. Appointment of wrong people in critical positions

These causes coupled with poor skill base, corrupt behaviour, negative image of the public service and culture of blame have made the government delivery system ineffective, and without any responsiveness.

No Government can afford to allow such state of affairs in public administration to continue, as this would jeopardize the relevance of public administration in people's esteem. The public service reform comes in this context to attain efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of public goods and services.

The purpose of administrative reform is to make government more responsive to society's needs. People want Government that does more and costs less. Much of current reforms is an effort to meet society's needs by providing better, faster and more services from government. In the face of changing society, the government's role in society is also changing. Government is becoming just one player among many, seeking to represent and serve the public. While still playing a privileged role, the loss of the government monopoly on services means that the government service faces greater competition, needing behavioural change and capability to give service with quality assurance to the citizens with structural changes fostering leadership, innovation, flexibility, pro-active mindset and accountability.

Since fifties a number of State Governments initiated reforms in their respective state administration by constituting Administrative Reforms Commission/Committee from time to time.

In Assam, an attempt was made in this direction in 1984 when an Administrative Reforms Commission was set up with prominent politician, and ex-Minister (who resigned from Assam Civil Service and joined politics) Md. Omaruddin as the Chairman. However, the untimely death of Md. Omaruddin and subsequent change of State Government sealed the fate of the Commission.

Administrative Reforms are continuous processes for improving the quality of governance. World Bank has defined governance, as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic & social resources for development and Good Governance is synonymous with all round balanced development. In broader sense, the term 'governance' encompasses all aspects of the way a country is governed, including its economic and social policies as well as regulatory framework.

One of the basic responsibilities of public administration is to provide services to the citizens. To satisfy the imperatives of good governance, administration is required to thrive for improving services it provides to citizens, making it easier for the citizens to gain access to government, simultaneously providing citizens with information about processes that involve them.

Again, there are three important elements of good governance. They are: accountability, transparency and contestability.

Accountability means decision makers accept responsibility for their decisions. Transparency relies on a presumption of access to information about how the Government works, i.e. transparency means operation in a manner that is open, honest and able to be questioned because there is ready access to information. Contestability is about using competition to achieve value for money in service delivery.

The pragmatic agenda for reforms and renovation of public administration should include:

- Replacement of cumbersome administrative procedures with more simplified and transparent ones
- Reduction of red tape and corruption
- Quick redress of public grievances
- Streamlining and better defining the mandates and functions of Government Departments and institutions as well as redefining the functional roles of Government Officials
- Rationalizing organization structure of Government Departments and agencies
- Raising the quality of public officials
- Modernizing the public administration system through computerization and e-governance initiatives
- Improvement of the financial management mechanism

Keeping the above objectives in view the Government of Assam constituted Assam Administrative Reforms Commission vide Notification No.AR.38/2003/13 dated 13-06-2002 for the purpose of taking concrete steps to tone up efficiency, responsiveness and accountability at all levels of administration and to ensure transparency in Government businesses.

The members of the Commission are:

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| 1. Shri Jatin Hazarika, IAS (Retd.) | Chairman |
| 2. Shri Tapan Lal Barua, IAS (Retd.) | Member |
| 3. Dr. Nirmal Kumar Choudhury | Member |
| 4. Dr. Pabitra Kumar Choudhuri, | Member |
| 5. Dr.(Smt.) Bharati Sarmah | Member, |
| 6. Shri Mahadeo Jalan | Member |
| 7. Commissioner & Secretary
Personnel Department, Government of Assam | Member |
| 8. Commissioner & Secretary
A.R. & Training Department, Government of Assam | Member Secretary |

The following officials functioned as Member Secretary of the Commission for the periods as shown against each of them-

- Dr. Prem Saran, IAS from 13-2-2002 to 7-9-2002
- Dr. Ajay Kumar Singh, IAS from 8-9-2002 to 18-5-2004
- Shri Sameer Kumar Khare, IAS from 19-5-2004

The tenure of the Commission initially fixed for one year was extended till June 12, 2005.

The terms of reference as notified is given below:

- i. Examine the ways and means of creating an environment wherein the officers and staff will respond to the people with courtesy, service-mindedness and a spirit of understanding; provide to the people, at any

level of interaction, adequate information about the Government policies and programmes and rules and regulations to generally accelerate the process of decision-making.

- ii. Suggest policy to make the administration accountable and responsive.
- iii. Examine the ways and means of evolving simplified procedure for Government machinery for implementation of various plans and programmes of the Government without undue delay.
- iv. Revamping of Delivery System for effective implementation of development programmes dovetailed with effective monitoring and evaluation system.
- v. To examine the quality of life of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities and people living in the geographically isolated areas viz., Char, tea gardens and Border areas and suggest suitable measures to improve the government delivery system therein.
- vi. Reviewing the process of collecting fair and justifiable charges for the services rendered and facilities provided by the government to the public.
- vii. Examine the process of bringing transparency in administration for elimination of corruption.
- viii. To examine the need for decentralization of powers and decision-making process.
- ix. Measures for creation of work culture with sense of direction where performance and result orientation is given topmost priority.
- x. Areas from which Government can withdraw from direct involvement so as to focus on core sectors of Governance.
- xi. To formulate policy for entrusting identified programmes to NGO's and private sectors, which could be implemented by them.
- xii. To examine the extensive utilization of information technology in Government administration.
- xiii. Organizational restructuring and consolidation of Departments: for this purpose carry out the functional reviews for selected departments including the –

- a. Rationalizations of activities between various departments, so as to reduce overlapping of functions, streamline activities and reduce redundant posts.
- b. Abolition of schemes that are redundant and have not achieved the required objectives and merger of schemes that are similar in content.
- c. To examine the multiplication of committees at district and sub-district level and suggest suitable measures.

Though the Commission was notified in June 2002, the Commission could function in a regular manner from August of the year, as preliminary infrastructures required for Commission's functioning were not available.

The first meeting of the Administrative Reforms Commission (to be referred to as Commission henceforth) held on 10-07-2002 decided to invite suggestions from the public and constituted the following three sub-committees to prepare background papers on the subjects allotted to them :

- i. Sub-committee on Information Technology : Co-ordinator : Dr. N. K. Choudhury
- ii. Sub-committee on Human Resource Development : Co-ordinator : Dr. P. Saran, IAS
- iii. Sub-committee on Selected Government Departments : Co-ordinator : Shri T. L. Barua IAS (Retd.)

Public notice inviting suggestions on the terms of reference was published in all leading newspapers. The Commission also launched a website '<http://assamgovt.in/aarc/>' for the aforesaid purpose. However, response received was far from encouraging.

Similarly, the Principal Secretaries/Commissioners/Secretaries to the Government of Assam and Heads of Department as well as Deputy commissioners were requested by the Commission to put forward their views/suggestions on different topics incorporated in the terms of reference, but unfortunately except a very few no such views/suggestions were forthcoming. The Commission interacted with several Secretaries to the Government of Assam as well as Heads of Departments who made presentation to the Commission detailing the activities, performance and achievement of their respective departments.

Commission had also written to a large number of people connected with NGOs and such other activists for advice to make recommendations in respect of ToR 10 & 11. Commission interacted with some of them for

valuable inputs to formulate recommendations in respect of ToR 10 relating to areas wherefrom the State Government can withdraw from direct involvement so as to focus on core sectors of governance and formulation of policies for entrusting identified programmes to NGOs and private sector for implementation. The Commission interacted with leading personalities to obtain their views on public administration set up of the State.

The Commission interacted with Commissioners of Divisions/Deputy Commissioners/Sub Divisional Officers to acquaint with the problems and difficulties faced by the field level officers.

The Commission visited the offices of the Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup and Morigaon and interacted with the district level officers of different departments to examine the functioning of the office of the Deputy Commissioner, as well as district offices of important departments

The Commission visited the office of the Sub-Divisional Officer, Rangia, Circle Offices, Kamalpur and Boko; Block Development Offices of Kamalpur and Boko to interact with the field officers to find out the working of the field-level officers.

The Commission interacted with the elected representatives of Morigaon Zilla Parishad and the CEMs/EMs of the Tiwa Autonomous Council at Morigaon.

The Chairman accompanied by Dr. A.K. Singh, the then Member-Secretary to the Commission visited Chandigarh to study the various administrative reform measures undertaken in the States of Punjab and Haryana. They also interacted with officials of Government of India in the Ministry of Personnel and Administrative Reforms, Director and Faculty Members of IIPA, New Delhi, Senior officials of Department for International Development (DFID- a Government of UK organization with office in New Delhi) etc. Chairman interacted with officials of the West Bengal Government to exchange views on different aspects of State Government administration including functioning of Zilla Parishad, as well as delivery system of health care services recently introduced by the Health & Family Welfare Department of West Bengal.

The Commission also interacted with leading personalities to obtain their views on public administration set up of the State.

In addition to the terms of reference already notified, the State Government consulted and obtained the views of the Commission on specific issues.

Hon'ble Chief Minister indicated that the Commission should give priority to the following administrative issues and submit its recommendations accordingly.

- i. cutting down stages of movement of files in the Secretariat
- ii. proper grievances-redressal mechanism at the Secretariat level
- iii. single window clearance system for industrialists, entrepreneurs and investors.
- iv. improvement of work culture, change of mindset of State Government employees for efficient performance and result orientation

Accordingly, the Commission took up the above topics for consideration on priority basis and after due deliberations submitted the recommendations to the Chief Minister on 22-04-2003 in its first interim report.

The Government requested the Commission to undertake functional study of various Departments under ToR 13 and suggest recommendation. The Commission took up functional study in twelve selected departments of the Government, accordingly. Functional study of five departments viz. Education, Health & Family Welfare, PWD, irrigation and Personnel was done by the Commission with active help and assistance of Consultants of Asian Development Bank (ADB), who has been implementing Assam Governance and Public Resource Management Project in the State. Functional study of other departments were taken up by the Commission with the help of selected State Government officials. Summaries of the recommendations made in respect of aforesaid five Government departments on the basis of functional study are incorporated in this Report.

At the request of the Chief Secretary, the Commission prepared a list of “Dos & Donots” for the officers as well as other categories of government employees as shown in the Annexure to this Report

The Commission also undertook a survey for finding out the Departments of the Secretariat where number of visitors daily came to sort out their grievances/pending matters etc. and on the basis of the survey, the Commission took initiative to set up a Reception-cum-Facilitation Centre in the Gana Sewa Bhawan and introduced the system of issuing computerized secretariat entry passes with photographs of the visitors.

As desired by the State Government, the Commission examined and made recommendations on the issues like Creation of high level Estate Office for the Sachivalaya, Delegation of power to Departmental Secretaries for local

purchase of stationary articles, Creation of new Secretariat Departments for Commercial Taxes, Agricultural Marketing etc., Prescribing eligibility criterion for the Lady Member of APSC, Appointment made to State Government job on compassionate ground and number of other issues.

The Commission made the recommendations incorporated in the Report taking into account the core management principles of public administration under which the administration must direct itself to, firstly achieve efficiency, and effectiveness in the operations of public organisation and secondly, the public administration gearing itself to coping with the challenges of economic liberalization, political and social plurism, as well as rapidly changing technologies. To achieve the aforesaid goals, public service organizations must adopt mission driven result oriented management practices with the objective of meeting the needs of the citizens.

The Commission had in all 30 meetings, besides a series of meetings of the sub-committees as well as meetings with Departmental officials, public representatives, representatives of Asian Development Bank etc. The Commission submitted 6 (six) interim reports on following dates:

- (i) 1st Interim report on 22-04-03 containing recommendations :
 1. Quick movement of files, Desk Officer's system,
 2. Employee motivation and proper work culture,
 3. Effective redressal of Public Grievances and furnishing information to the visitors to the Secretariat,
 4. 'Single Window' facility for investors / entrepreneurs,
 5. Rationalization of Government Departments

- (ii) 2nd Interim report on 20-08-03, containing recommendations :
 6. Rationalisation of District/ Sub-Divisional level Committees,
 7. Utilisation of Information Technology in Government Administration (E-Governance),
 8. Decentralisation of powers up to Divisional level vis-à-vis strengthening of the role and powers of Divisional Commissioners,
 9. Compilation of Annual Administrative Report by State Government Departments,
 10. Mechanisms for Monitoring & Co-ordinating Self-Employment Opportunities in the State, and Redefined role for Employment Exchanges.

- (iii) 3rd Interim report on 14-07-04, containing recommendations :

- 11. Revamping of Delivery System,
- 12. Vigilance Set up for the State,

(iv) 4th Interim report on 19-11-04, containing recommendations :

13. The areas from which Government could withdraw from direct involvement so as to focus on the core sectors of governance and what should be the Government Policy for such withdrawal.

(v) 5th Interim report submitted on 4-5-05 containing recommendations:

14. To examine the quality of life of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities and people living in geographically isolated areas viz. Char, Tea Gardens, and Border Areas and suggest suitable measures to improve the government delivery system therein

(vi) 6th Interim Report submitted on 9-5-05 containing recommendations:

15. Abolition of Schemes that are redundant and have not achieved the required objectives and merger of schemes that are similar in content.

16. Notes on-

- I. Accountable and Responsive Administration in Assam
- II. Highlights of Good Governance
- III. Capacity Building for Administrative and Civil Service Reforms

Two more Notes viz. Civil Service Reforms in the State of Assam and Modernisation of District Administration have been added to this Report.

The Prime Minister delivered a very illuminating and inspiring address at the District Collectors' Meeting held on May 20, 2005. The Address has been incorporated in the Report along with the Notes.

In the final Report, the serial of the topics mentioned above has been re-arranged as shown in the contents, along with addition of supplementary materials wherever found necessary.

The Commission is grateful to Shri Tarun Gogoi, Chief Minister, Assam for his keen interest in administrative reforms and his vision for a people-friendly, transparent, efficient and corruption-free Government. The Commission is happy to note that the State Government have accepted the

recommendations given in the interim reports Part I and Part II and constituted a high-power monitoring committee under the Chairmanship of the Chief Secretary to work out modalities and also to monitor the implementation of recommendations.

The Commission is confident that if the recommendations incorporated in this Report are implemented, a new era of citizen-friendly responsive and effective public administration could be ushered in our State.

*“There is nothing more difficult to arrange, more doubtful of success,
more dangerous to carry through than initiating changes.*

*The innovator makes enemies of all those who prosper under
the old cover, and only lukewarm support is forthcoming
from those who would prosper under the new.*

*Men are generally incredulous, never really trusting new things
unless they have tested them by experience”*

- Nicholas Machiavelli,
The Prince, 1513

May 31, 2005



Jatin Hazarika
Chairman

