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Today's Newspaper Editorial

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BREAKING NEWS : 106-kg gold bars seized, Biman Engr held <> PM asks SAARC officials: Make sincere efforts to implement political decisions <> A young man found shot dead in Laxmipur two days after abduction from Dhaka <> 3 youths beaten to death in a Sreepur village of Gazipur

Post-Louge



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Public Service Innovation (PSI)

→ Mohammad Navid Shafiqullah



Innovation is now a buzzword in the development literature. It is derived from the Latin word "Innovatus" which means to renew or change. According to Oxford Learners Dictionary, innovation means introduction of something new. It can be defined from various perspectives. Innovation is new, usually novel and aspires to change the way an organization operates and delivers service to the public. From the governance viewpoint, it relates to new forms of citizen engagement and democratic institutions. Generally speaking, innovation is solving a problem in a new way. The problem may be existing or a new one. A service that reduces cost, time and hassle is innovative. Its ultimate goal is to create public value and social justice.

Although innovation has long been an important concept in the private sector and business organizations, it is relatively new in the public sector. Public Service Innovation came in the forefront in 1996 when the Ford Foundation, a New York based globally renowned private foundation working for human welfare encouraged innovations in State and Local Government Awards Programme. Besides the US President Bill Clinton during 1990s promoted innovative ideas, programmes and approaches as a major component in reinventing the government.

Mr. Bill Gates, the renowned US business magnate investor and philanthropist and also the former Chief Executive and current chairman of the Microsoft Company in the G20 Summit in November 2011 said, "Innovation is the most powerful force for change in the world." Indeed the role of innovation that suits the country's context is widely accepted as essential. These development innovations can take many forms. It may be IT based such as mobile based banking, health services, new funding mechanism such as microfinance, better conduit for service delivery such as one stop service points, alternative medicine formulation such as oral saline for diarrhoea, new organizational set up such as milk producers' co-operatives etc. These innovations are applied involving indigenous technology and knowledge etc in a particular country or community in a new way.

To meet the increasing demands and expectations of the citizens and also to address multifarious challenges of the day, innovation needs to be institutionalized in the public sector. There is a common perception among people that civil services across the globe lack the innovative spirit in delivering public services. This notion is not always true. The Internet and the World Wide Web (www), two of the world's most profound innovations of the last 50 years came out of public organizations. The internet was invented by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) while the World Wide Web is the outcome of CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research. There are some glaring examples of social innovation in Bangladesh such as micro-credit, oral saline, high yield varieties of rice, EPI programme which earned worldwide reputation.

PSI usually takes place either in response to a crisis, or if some individual or a small group of individuals champions it. In both cases, the benefits of innovation are limited. Once the crisis is over or certain individuals responsible for the innovation moves on, the organization is left with no lasting capacity for innovation. Therefore to nurture innovative culture within organizations and also to achieve the outcomes of innovation, an enabling environment, strategic leadership and openness through effective communication is essential. Innovations are associated with risks. Therefore selecting innovative ideas require careful analysis. Innovations are likely to end up in failure if they are not clearly defined.

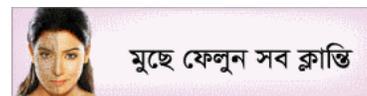
Role of Governance Innovation Unit (GIU) in promoting PSI in Bangladesh

Today's rapidly transforming world characterized by globalization, information super highways, fiscal pressures due to economic downturn have made the role of the states ever more complex and challenging. It has paved the way for enormous changes in the socio-economic, political, cultural and organizational milieu and made new modes of life possible, and more conveniently accessible to all. Consequently, citizens' expectations from public servants too have increased, as have their expectations for the quality and timeliness of services delivered by the government. To confront these challenges and also to make the best use of scarce resources effectively and efficiently, enhancement of the quality of service is inevitable. It is only possible through frugal innovation.

An effective public sector essentially nurtures innovation and encourages qualitative changes to its work culture. To ensure fast,

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TODAYS VIEW

efficient and cost effective services to citizens, civil services of the United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and some other developed countries have created independent innovation units in the Prime Minister's office. A similar Governance Innovation Unit (GIU) has been established in the Prime Minister's office, by the government of Bangladesh in 2012. GIU's goal is to ensure that benefits from the Government's priority tasks and reforms are delivered to citizens in a timely and systematic way. Though many public servants of Bangladesh generate innovative ideas in delivering public services, their efforts are not properly disseminated and recognized. Besides, due to lack of encouragement, motivation or patronization, these initiatives often get bogged down. The GIU intends to overcome these obstacles through innovative approaches.

Though Bangladesh achieved significant improvements in almost every indicator of human welfare over the last few years, improvement of service delivery through innovations was long overdue in the public sector. GIU is the first ever government entity in Bangladesh to provide an enabling environment for the public sector employees to undertake and foster innovative initiatives. Since inception, this Unit has been assigned to re-invent the public sector by improving citizen satisfaction with services. It works as a catalyst for innovation by taking into consideration local contexts and challenges for replication and scaling up. GIU's stated vision is to be the government's think tank on public sector reforms and innovation. Its mission revolves around four thematic areas namely Research, Liaison and Outreach, Capacity Development and Implementation. The GIU fosters an innovative culture among public servants to encourage qualitative changes that are Putting Citizens First. It ensures public servants have a clear understanding of the importance of:

- * Cutting red tape;
- * Improving service delivery;
- * Engaging public sector employees; and
- * Getting results for citizens.

The writer is Director, Governance Innovation Unit, Prime Minister's office.

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